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THE HORRIBLE THING HAPPENED

and I thought about colors. It helped. I remembered
emberglow, phlox, bamboo, quarry.
I organized the colors like they were
different emotions. I didn't
identify the emotions because that would remind me
too much of the horrible thing. Instead, I arranged them
according to the shape my eye took
under their influence -- sleepy eye, alert eye, relaxed eye,
filbert-shaped eye. Every time I blinked,
I would have to start over.

The horrible thing happened and I thought about
my rights. I had a lot of them, thanks to my predecessors:
civil rights, women's rights, human rights, the right
to remain silent. Every person is entitled
to fundamental rights, simply by the fact
of being human. This makes me feel valid,
sterling. What about you?

The horrible thing happened and it was a good time
to pick out my power animal. I chose bluebird
because I felt bad. They're cute, but you wouldn't want one
to protect you. Such is the case with friends
in emergencies. I thought, could I be
a true friend?

The horrible thing happened and ten years later
people asked me, where were you on 9/11?
So I asked, where was god? I once thought that
god was love. Then I realized it was impossible,
since love made me feel larger
than I really was. On some days,
I'm 69 inches. On other days,
I live in a tree and sings songs
about getting through.



THE DAY I BECAME A BIRD

The day my beak grew
I wanted you to notice it. You didn't
even have to touch it. Maybe you were scared.
Maybe you were hoping
I would get surgery. I imagined you volunteering
to pay. It's on me, you would say. Take care of yourself,
while looking at my hair instead of my face.
Maybe you'd have been waiting for me
in the nougat-colored aftercare room
with the bouquet of geraniums. Perennials,
you'd say, we're in for the long run.

The days my wings developed,
holding court behind my shoulders,
I wanted you to ask me about them. Could you fly,
you could've said, like a kite or a bee? And I would've said,
like a superhero. We could have talked all day
about the things we would do differently
with superpowers.

The day my feathers grew
I wouldn't have even minded
if you shaved them. I would've
forgiven you. We would've been lost
in the flux of plume and down and laughed
until it felt like every sound coming out
of us had a fracture.

The day I stopped being human
we could have done it together. I waited for you
in the hospital. I collected a pile of sticks,
just in case.