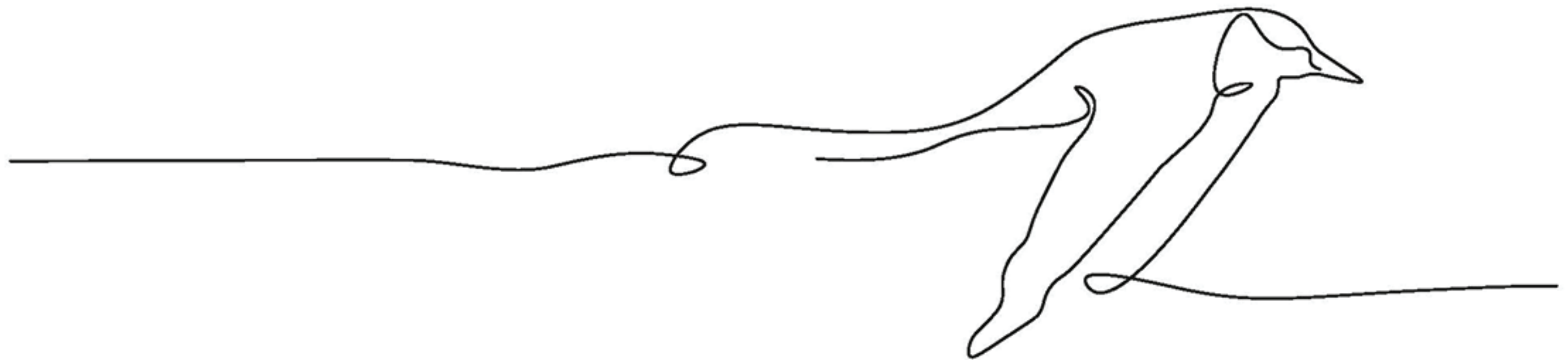


ANJULI RAZA KOLB

UNFLOCKED
HEART



We thought
for nine generations
egg-tooth cogitating
mealworm contemplating
hollow preening
dust stomping
water tossing
spring bathing till
we fell dizzy with hunger
lights
grief
eternal day
crowding up from the
world and its cities

An unflocked heart
is a bad sovereign—
scatters after unseen prompts—
emissary of moon dust
entourage of star secrets
retinue of jealousy

OK, Saturn has a hula hoop
a stiff tutu
dangling ring for a caged canary
hinged swing for a virgin girl
in diaphanous gray
enfolding unlikely knowledge—
but no other planet
has any toy or swing
call it rococo
call it sad
call it birderonormative

rainbow prism oil slick
murder mud
deepwater
no horizon

From the back of the Uber
the fledging lesser goldfinch
lobs a sarcastic
inquiry

Planets should be the same
stay the same, ya think?

The Portland Audubon
asks the public to please
not do that
But the goldfinch
fell out
the nice man on the phone said
just fell right out
of the sky
and I'm too drunk
to drive him in

The first Uber driver thought
it was too weird
the second Uber driver
was a woman
The only noise was the chirping
she said
I turned off the air conditioner
and he seemed happier

This shared color is an open sign
I am god's equal or equivalent
thought the finch
from inside the bird box
With darting bird eye
gold celerity
sees it clearly
as the suburbs
reel off in the windows
spent
tiny
filigree
under a jeweler's loop
Planet will selfrule
the world without us
cold and beautiful
autoseminal

He let a feather float down through the air
And rumors of its fame spread everywhere
just get me to the vet
on time
just blinder
till we make it
just row in the bath
just don't let the entity

The heart we do see
unflocks
and the albatross drags behind
and drags the others
raising concerns
registering complaints
in her shrill way
She is a bird with qualities
 nag
 fool
 truth sayer
 alarmist
 bell ringer
 siren
 feather ruffler
 indolent companion of travel
when travel has
no point of arrival

They expect us to gather at the wintering grounds
rake up frost
core ice with chisel beaks
pull data with investigator tongues
permahold the cold wind
we huddle out

I'll always be at the middle
the tern intones
like a statute
My body will freeze
I have no blood in my eyes
or face
Can't go to the cold place
It's an absolute no
from me

Roseate spoonbill
protests
The blush
will go off
my cheeks and collar
frail racing stripes fade
in the polar
absence
no astaxanthin
gregarious waders
can't lose
their highlight
we strobe

Wingbeat and gliding
the albatross shouts over the descending flock
It's not up for debate!
We're conferencing
 submitting
 colloquing
 symposing
 roundtabling
 paneling
plane and tundra
seed and spore
disseminar
Socratic method
for tree planting
shrub tracking
grassland expansion
meadow extension
murmuration over
old growth Amazon
to grow the basin
root down in it

The unflocked heart
is heterogeneous in the extreme
here a piper there a hawk
oriole and piper
egret and warbler
This is no kind of flock I know
she thinks—
too many behaviors
too many different tucking places
for seed and egg
 wingpit
 talon
 bird brow
 breast tress
 tail gusset
 flight train
 avian lace
 chiffons in lime
 and lilac
 studded
 in arctic seed
 cloud seed
 snow milk
 ice slicks
something hidden in the quickness
how every bird turns
her head and tilts it
toward the cannibal
future

She casts
her eye down
over the glacier
across the wintering grounds
unperceived directions
to an answer
in the ice
the sparkling
motes of morning
the vapor of greatest chill
the thought of stratospheric clouds
 skating rink
 arena of stamping bird dressage
 on Saturn's frigid rings

She commissions a dark clear night
and as tides of stars commune in
the sky to focus their light
bands of glittered cream
microbe and rhizome
rail feather to feather
leap onto the surface
energetic
turn and turn
ready the soil

Red winged blackbird and crane
One-eye screech owl prepare the others unknowing
to flap so hard
 over the Svalbard
 seed bank
 it erupts
 a preverdant volcano
 hard iron is mere water
 after all
 dispersing like a dream
 impalpable

And in the explosion
roots will furl through
calamus and vane
every plant we've
known to know
will marry
feathered undercroft
transmute
the cold
carry it South North
tropicalize it
outbreaks of
carried ice
carried years
held future
silent
frigid
spring
resow
the earth

The chastened spirits of these birds
crumbled like powder
in a forgotten compact

Their sovereign all along
the icy irrational flock
irresponsible
chaotic
unable to follow
the plan
golden spiral
diving into the sea
dividing sweets in half
until only a crumb
of raindrop
is left
luminous
and trembling
on the lip
of a saucer
botanical
porcelain
handpainted
on a white
thigh
a rolling
bead
of human
glass

after she
came and
was gone
the birds of
every land
were still
her shadows—
think
and understand

To magnify
celestial light
use it
like a sun
to heliotrope
the goldfinch
without

warming
without
conditioned
air with
heart
unflocking

Libretto for

RYAN MORITZ'S

Important
Bird Opera