

ALICE JONES

E

Breath sealed inside a breath, held in salt
on a rubber cord, the echo inside yourself of those

who died before, whose place you took inside
the four directions, the 28 lunar mansions, the dipper mother,

sailing out underneath the orange gate, flood tide
buoy bell marker. The ghost in parquetted halls,

barbed fences, flung window, persimmon tree, an ocean
where you found a voice speaking, a protea flowering

for the first time, solstice wobbling in. We sew and unsew,
the dangled thread, the dish ran away, happenstance

and not, the docked loons, waving reeds, for many moons
we waited for the arrival of the silvered creature

whose word would open the unopened. A Taoist belief—
writing is based on unstable energy existing before matter—

talismanic—The Shrine of Numinous Response (repose).
We floated, fool, trouble fuels memory, not empty/not full,

the in-between place, lost, unfounded, assumptions of grandeur,
enjoy the delusions. Elevation desired and sinking, the crash saves you.

You flew away into yourself, ruffled feathers, getting under
someone's skin. "Since they take no credit success remains with them."

Procession of immortals (mistakes, minerals) pay homage
to the primordial. Always. There isn't any. On the wing, flying off

into everyday madness, mired, mirrored, long spoons, purple trees
leaving, the black cat lost, goodbye, only one sphere,

edges melding, peripheral and silly. "The value in water
benefits all things and yet it does not contend." Reach

for dark orange, the rose in full leaf, green beach grasses, dawn,
the zeeing bats, urgent sun won't sit and wait like an egg:

a beak pecks through, fractures, and then the struggle
of wet feathers begins in earnest. Breathing aims so much

life, molecular pulse, no, aspiration aeration, the sleeves
rolled up and the nape soaked in its own sweat.

Change—the moon goddess lives in a great cold palace, trigrams,
dragons, chanting such as “Abnormal—in the shape of pigs, cats,

dogs or all those who eat their own young. . .” The value
in a mind, a square jar, only island. Bird gyre—swoop and beak—

the fine-feathered exit, swallow-tailed blue, smooth and riparian.

I

The terrible mind and how it wanders, automatic gestures,
a built-in push away from contact, or the eagerness to hold

like a heat seeking missile. Air to ground. Flash of lightning
can rearrange your ventricles forever, just one bolt, never the same.

Standing around in the whereabouts of some magnetic field,
Did you say “love” and where do we go from here? Waiting

you’ve outlasted everyone. Lost gold or ashes? The sweep, the arc.
Ocean’s white light, web of sight, invisible intersecting pieces of sun.

Hot flashes, uncontained thermal episodes when shame spills
out and over and you’re cooked, old goose. Is this over the hill

or prime-time? What ever it is is going too quickly, unraveled
like the ball of time, a free-fall mind, catch as catch can, the list,

recitations, the sovereignty of reason—how could you? Did you
really say that? To her regal face? Flip slip of the tongue in its wishiness,

the glitch, perfect error, fateful overlap of the said with the truly meant
splashes out to surprise. Inky squid. Clear cartilage. Sauté with wine.

On the platter she saw his heart and penis, with two lungs arranged
on the side, puffy and white and she thought they should be honored,

buried and thought of the back yard, cedar-shade, hawthorn dropping
its whiteness—that would be the place—she looked at the plate again.

Gone. Then she felt an old-meatiness in her mouth, organ taste,
dried blood and thought “I’ve eaten them” and the dream went on.

Here we go again, learning to excuse quite a lot, because we have to.
Sorry all day. The precious engagement watch, gone. Omega to alpha.

Is that a poached egg? Ab ovum over and over. Humbling, the fall
into a sack of bones, slack-jawed, chicken-necked, wrung. My mother

used to watch the chickens circle after the cook had wrenched the heads off,
hence the saying as we always said. She never learned to cook until we left,

then, heaven upon a plate, ceramic discs growing larger and larger, like
the necklace wars perpetrated with her sister, the biggest beads, heavy and

laden with value. Once I watched her try on hollow hammered golden ones
the size of golf balls. No sale. Does she want to be buried in them?

Now everyone talks about their reflux. Autoimmunity becomes you.
Fortnight lilies reseeding themselves at the curb. So easy to fly, it's falling really,

falling with a bit of horizontal glide thrown in, to give that illusion you love.
Genius of waiting, time runs infinite laps, you poise, pre-leap, that swan dive

you never mastered. Try harder. Maybe wishes can make your shoulders
sprout a little something. You hover at that volcanic rim where others take heart

and leap into some solidness you can't envision. Each toe wonders what
it has come home to, one mud, soles' tough pads scuffing the unlofty edge.

Sometimes Y

Lip of the world, exchange, air-sacs, gill-rakes claim
the needed element from what surrounds, the nothing

that feeds. Invisible yes. The unseen, that's your mother
who named you, lost feet, webbed limbs, swimming and flailing,

breath that could hold, too frail, breath that doesn't hold
but passes through, sustaining, zephyr, a young minute,

next to nothing, one membrane, no knot but a film, sliding
the fleet and the viscous. Past solstice, reddening sky, frost

in the shade, which never happens here, phone-call, find
an acquaintance dead at 58, knee surgery, embolus, end.

He didn't know how little of this year he'd see. Barely light
your breath pulsing, wavelets, the mornings left, how many?

Who wanted you? They all did. Who called? No one. Says who?
As you were. OK. The long black veil, star's aura pierced by light,

the skin, the nails, whirl of universe, nebulae, it's milky,
in China it's called the Silver River. His hoarse old voice failing,

miles to Mexico, did you ever go there with the jacaranda trees
in flower? No. He said purple, purple. The eyes you wanted,

the robe, a voice that issues out of nowhere, sibyl's song, groan,
shriek, she fell backwards and the words came forward, traveling

in opposite directions, body rifts itself, voice and echo,
teeth and tongue, heart and lungs, guts and spleen, lobed pairs.

You forgot and forgot everything you had helped to remember,
all that arose you killed unkindly. Incense smoking from the grave

after all the mourners leave, leaves flapping, blacking in the rattling
air, swallow, you know you're hungry, you know the wings

are only folded, red papillae taste the air, the sea, the ever after,
yesterday afternoon's flat reach, no suddenness, the dream, 6 dead,

you can't name them. Her voice wasn't right, you wanted
that "Oh." Gone. Wherever it goes-- the nothing no one knows.

Black oolong, orangey scent of elsewhere, they found teacups
at the bottom of the sea, blue on white Ming porcelain

beside the bones of some young woman, cook? slave? sunk
inside the ship's hold, all those treasures auctioned off

on e-bay, bid for an ancient paperweight to sit beside the egg-yolk
yellow vase, after all those centuries below, let's drink.