

RACHEL RINEHART

Epithalamium for a Feral Child

They have listened at your throat for root sounds,
sought the Ur-language in your heaving grunts
and sharp barks, but you are only
a corn farmer's unsanctioned experiment,
your teeth rotted and rank with bitch's milk.

Once they kinned you to a boy, needle-boned and reared
in his father's aviary. Seeing you, he winnowed and chirruped
for his finch mother, his robin aunts.
They tore you from his neck in a spray
of inexplicable feathers.

Yet you charmed the youngest anthropologist
with your lean haunches and swinging breasts,
the way words glance off your shoulders.
There is, of course, shame in it—the wanting
what nature has not prepared for want—

and in his furtive pleasure at your messes, your spine bowed,
your quiet straining in the corner.
During the ceremony you chew nuptial lace,
swallow seed pearls like pill bugs, and sniff at the preacher's crotch,
your hackles subdued in a froth of taffeta.

You will not be the first to enter the bridal chamber
on your knees, your nails clouded and clicking the tile,
nor the last to nestle afterwards at the foot of the bed.
This will become your routine, nightly the splitting of thighs,
monthly the measuring of your dark, estral skein.

Though you prefer raw things, things steaming still
with life, he would wither you on greens.
Though you can skin a rabbit with your eye-teeth,
he will prod you to radishes. You will slink into the yard at night,
fatten instead on worms and frogs,

and once an eyas, storm-blown and keening
for its mother. When you cease returning for suppers,
he will cease to let you out. For days you will sleep
dizzy on stacks of field notes until you wake one morning,
your nostrils thrumming with the scent

of his jugular. When it is over, they will find you in the yard
crouched behind rusted scales, jawing your husband's skull,
sucking, greedy, his white-shined bones. When, out of fear,
they abandon a leather muzzle by your mat-thick head, know this:
it will be worth the belly full of buckshot.