

Fable Of The Alicanto

by John Olson

They say there is a bird in Chile that seeks food in veins of gold and silver, that it lives in small caves between hills containing metal, that its wings shine during the night and that its eyes emit a strange, unearthly light. That when it finds a vein of precious metal it feasts until it is too heavy to fly, and that the flicker of its wing-light entices prospectors to their doom.

But why doom? Must the quest for wealth always lead to doom? Why is beauty and beautiful things always so doom-laden? Perhaps there is something in this story that cannot be said. Something defiant. Something beyond human perception. Something scandalously fantastic. Something oracular and divine. Is it the gold, or is it the bird? It is the gold that is lewd, the bird that is elusive. Some seek the bird. Others seek the gold. Who can say which is the wiser?

We might imagine such a bird as an apology for our limitations, as an art emancipated from empirical reality. We might imagine an art that serves no aim other than beauty, and craft it in metal, where light has been hammered into a bud, a bloom of incendiary words. Feathers like knives. Feathers in a flame of maniacal gold.

No crocodile is equal to its hunger. No appetite is equal to its satisfaction. The groan of a cello is an incentive to translucence. Heat cannot keep a secret. Beauty is brightest where analysis fails.

There is nothing so obscure it is not enhanced by talking, nothing so dull it cannot be coaxed into brilliance, nothing so deep it cannot be dug from an abyss and brought to the surface in paroxysms of red. All that it means to be red. A sweet oblivion gliding through the blood in a swoon of sudden blue. There is nothing that a consonant cannot dangle from a vowel. Nothing that cannot be imagined. Nothing that cannot be mined. Nothing that cannot be invoked. Nothing that cannot be called from nothingness and given a shape and a name and a fringe of color.

Nothing.

Imagine a jewel so dense and intricate it begins with lips and ends with wings. Imagine a wing that is an epitome of light. A drop of light given life in a piece of curious metal. The presence of meaning tattooed to a wall in a pirouette of broken smoke and shadow. A moment of cherubs in the mind of December. A tangle of sound in a ladle of wax.

Imagine a weld. And the smoke from that weld. The formation of wings. The flood of feeling that loves the oblique. The angular. The careful and intricate. The inexplicable. The contradictory. The tangled and weird. A reverence for metal, a piercing desire, and a strange, unearthly light.

