

Eating in the Dark (Raised By Raccoons)

Deep in the night we eat. In the shadows, in secret. Feeding the animal, our nature, our dark, shadow-self. Feeding the wild animals in this way creates a ritual space, the dark makes it sacred as well as secretive. Like that piece of cake, gobbled at the sink when no one was looking. It is an offering to the gods of the wilderness, those feral beings who have no truck with shame or guilt. Feeding the beast(s) offers safety, they won't reveal my secret; my silent companions devouring, unashamed and without judgment. Alice and Persephone learned the hard way what it costs to partake of the charmed delights offered in the Underworld. The refusal to eat, and denial of the pleasure of eating gives power to the powerless. I never quite understood what this meant, but I think the denial of pleasure, refusing not only to feed our bodies but also to nourish our souls, relates to the mother and the role mothering has played in our lives. If we were refused that nourishment, if our physical bodies were controlled in every other way, then not partaking, as an anorexic adolescent and also as an orthorexic adult makes one powerful, even super-human, judging ourselves and lording it over the rest. But cake; cake is also something powerful, with an alchemy of its own. Cake is eaten in celebration, in ceremony, it marks a liminal space of enticement, pleasure and magic. It is filled with butter, sugar and wonder. It is no surprise that Wonderland runs on petit fours, tea parties and heady, giddy, madness. It is a place where abstinence is exchanged for decadence and hedonism. The push and pull of these polarities makes us who we are: the blessed perfectionists and the pathetic rejects embodying the sacred and the profane at once, disembodied saints and ghouls alike. I have always liked animals for their honesty, they don't shame and pain us sensitive ones as humans do. They offer safety and sanctuary. So why not feed them? Isn't it good to honor and support them as they have done for me? I have spent many hours observing animals in the wild and in domesticity; they have been my greatest teachers and offered some of the parenting I did not receive early on. More than anything they taught me to accept chaos and embrace the loss of control. To give up the fear of what others would think and to, in fact, chase down my fears just as instinctually as they hunt their prey. To follow curiosity and fun above all, and finally to just know I am fine and perfect the way I am, and sometimes failure is my friend.