The Loneliness of Animals

David Rigsbee
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The ambulance arrives and three medics, two men and a stocky girl roll the stretcher up the walk to the door: stomach-stopped old lady.

The cat appears at the corner of the porch and neighbors emerge bashfully from their houses and stand at the distance misfortune grants to curiosity.

Dogs pour from the bushes and one disappears behind the ambulance’s back tire, comes out sniffing, illness and street-smell mixed in his head.

There are whispers: How could this happen to our Estelle? And gravely, ceremoniously, the screen door slams back, and the back of one man clears the threshold pulling the stretcher.

Strapped in, mortified, Estelle rolls down the walk, the focus of every gaze (the squirrel halts on the branch) and is inserted in the van.
The small crowd goes home, considers how the day trimmed its blessings back.
They know, by extension, the terrible certitude of doubt, of which rescue is a sign.

In this absence the cat climbs and strands herself on the roof’s edge.
The dog, a pug, whirls in the grass until tail-biting gives way to the pack.

And the squirrel barks from the highest limb, hurls green shells in a fury on the driveway and yard, for the loneliness of the animals is almost more than they can bear.