

The Loneliness of Animals · *David Rigsbee*

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.