

Four Poems by Lorna Uher

Animals of Spring

You want to take them in,
let them sleep in your bed,
purr on your kitchen counter.
You dip your hand in honey.
Tongues lick your fingers,
tickle your palm. You feed them
cubes of sugar, milk from an eye dropper,
you tie ribbons in their hair.

These are the half-formed,
the helpless, some are blind.
But soon they take their shape,
eyes open, listen to the voice
that stirs inside them. It says
wind, snow. It says meat, mate,
hunt, marrow.

They grow to fill your house
as goldfish fill the space they live in.
But these are not goldfish
trapped in a bowl. These are the
animals of spring, the ones you found
playing in the forest, the teddy-bears
you take to bed, the kittens you tease
with skeins of wool.

One day
when you honey your fingers,
offer the sweetness to be licked,
your hand will disappear.

Animals of Summer

The animals of summer lie in the coulee's dip,
the cool shadow. Delicately with their teeth,
lips curled back, they pluck berries from branches.
You watch them from the hill. You are not afraid.
Their teeth pick berries, chew ripe flesh, the stone.
They rise, stretch their legs straight in front,
open mouths, yawn. The animals of the lengthening day
move slowly, they survived the winter, the young
wrestle at the mouth of the cave.

They could be house-cats, they could be dogs.
But you watch them from the hill, know you are there
because the wind is kind — it blows your smell
behind you. Know you are there
because it's summer and it's morning. In moonlight
the animals change their shape, remember blood
remember bone, sniff the spot where you sat.
Lips pulled back, their teeth burn like stars.

Animals of Fall

These animals you never see.
They are yellow like leaves they are red.
They wait behind the bones of trees,
hear your feet break the fallen
as you see nothing ahead
keep looking behind
fear the breath
on the back of your neck
teeth in your calves.
They wait behind the trees,
know you will tire, miss
the slashes the one before you
cut into bark.

The animals of fall
you never see
wait for you to reach
the centre of your circling
where the cache of food is gone
and there is no word
to tell you where to go.
Only the fall wind's rattle,
the days' withering into winter.
Across your skin their yellow eyes
flick, they flame.

Animals of Winter

The animals move with snow
past the tree-line, the wood-pile, up
to the house. White, silent as frost
they lie under the window, listen to the warm
sounds of your sleeping. By morning
you think they have faded to dreams.
You scrape night from your window.
They stretch on the doorstep like dogs.

After years of wandering
through ice and hunger
the animals return to this place
where memory is smell
and the sound of your footsteps
behind the grey walls.
When you look closely
you see their skin
encloses an emptiness
larger than hunger
you circle inside
the white eyes.