

Her Body Among Animals

Paola Ferrante

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Elegant and arresting, the eleven modern fables in Paola Ferrante's *Her Body among Animals* thrum with a desperate, racing pulse as they capture the everyday horrors women live with and the sacrifices—of personhood, opportunity, and safety—their ordinary lives require.

Various narrators run the modern gauntlets of mental health crises, procreation, professional ambition, and apocalyptic dread while navigating the ethics of their own survival. Animals—real, human, and fantastical—become objective correlatives for anxiety, depression, relational abuse, abandonment, and physical assault. In “The Underside of a Wing,” the metaphorical extension of an “albatross around the neck” allows a doctoral student’s mental health crisis to take form as a literal albatross, which functions as a second self. In “Cobwebs,” a woman becomes a spider in order to navigate the demands of her nature versus the demands of her husband.

As these women attempt to claim their one precious life, social models for fulfillment battle with modern crises that are felt on a personal level but can’t be solved individually. From a new mother with postpartum depression worried her daughter might inherit a desolate earth to an AI-cum-sex robot whose inner world is filled with illicit longing she’s unable to voice, lives unfold under a shadow.

Hiding in this shadow is the existential dread of ecological collapse, whether that ecosystem is the intimate world of a relationship or the planet itself. Throughout, the stories fuse natural facts with linguistic play; the result is rich, complex, and underlines humans’ presence in the world as its animal parts, even when they are persistent in their resistance to admit so.

In the face of uncertainty, it’s the act of observation that “change(s) a thing completely.” When seen from *Her Body Among Animals*, the glaring dysfunction undergirding humanity’s stutter-step toward an uncertain future couldn’t be more clear.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (September / October 2023)

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