

The Animals

Cary Fagan

Book*hug Press (Oct 4, 2022)

Softcover \$20.00 (152pp)

978-1-77166-764-7

Cary Fagan's *The Animals* is a gentle burlesque in which bureaucratic whims alter the downward trajectory of a nondescript, struggling tourist town.

After the brief defiance of a semester spent studying architecture, Dorn succumbed to his grumpy father's low expectations and his own niggling doubts. As a college dropout, he makes a local name for himself constructing precise miniature models of the village's businesses. Everyone is a customer—within the town's boundaries. Dorn lives alone, rides an adult-sized tricycle, and looks forward to his casual coffeehouse encounters with Ravenna, who abandoned Olympic dreams to become an elementary school teacher. He sometimes indulges in wishes for more.

A government program that encourages people to host wild animals in their homes upends Dorn's steady existence, though. His reclusive neighbor is mauled to death; a family and a bear move in next door. Water fowl and otters appear in windows and backyards. Simultaneous to these odd developments: Dorn's younger, less upstanding brother implores him to take custody of a mysterious box; and the village's misanthropic, Nobel-nominated writer-in-residence releases an unusual project. As Dorn's habitual existence is jarred by these changes, he tries to summon the courage to initiate one more interruption: he hopes to reveal his deep feelings to Ravenna, fears of rejection be damned. But the new village animals have alternate plans.

Fagan's novella distills enchantments from the ordinary while treating the forces that corrupt ordinary life (including religions, governments, and the bored rich) with sardonic incision. Each scene proffers a surprise, strung together to form a sometimes baffling, always delightful whole. Though Dorn may require a true disaster to be compelled toward change, his inertia is endearing. The book's final "maybe" is its own indecisive reward. *The Animals* is a winsome novella about a makeshift artist's delayed, sideways coming-of-age.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2022)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.