

The Eyes of the Animals

Linda Hogan

Looking into the eyes of the elephant
I am looking also into the eyes of the great land tortoise
with its life more than a hundred years
and I see the sand, the salt water from those eyes, the mouth,
claws, flippers, hoof, trunk on the way to any water,
across a changed world
where nothing is familiar.

And looking into the eyes of the mountain gorilla infant
holding green bamboo with her black hands
and fingernails so perfect,
the eyes look back at me
so unwillingly gentle and alive,
so unable to say, take me out of the fur
as the turtle cannot say, take from me the great shell
or the elephant its tusk or hoof.
It would say I am light, kind.
I am the same as you.

I see the red eyes of the tree frog,
climbing with yellow webbed feet
hanging on, calling out for rain.

Dear life, let's you and I talk
about the orangutan surrounded by shining fur
all amber jewel, golden eyes
copper arms stretched thin,
open and reaching, holding the emerald plant
and the shining light of morning.
A diamond cutter could not make anything so great

so needed
so needy
so desired and desirable
as this red ruby of a child. So,
dear life, protect this world.

Llife, look into the eye of the whale. There are no words
a man can speak so great as theirs.

And then there are the eyes of the wolf.
A god was named for them
And when you see any of these you know
all they want is to live
to survive, to care for their playful young
just as we do.

And the panda just now waking there on what looks like trunk
the shining eyes,
the optical nerves that go to the brain with the damned
to their knowing
god is not who or what
or anything but all this, Life,
even the circle of fern unfolding,
the eyes of the universe
look back at you
with the true knowledge of what you are
and saying,
human, woman, man, child, savior
this world, even your self
you must learn to love.