

## DEBORAH BURNHAM

### *The Woman Who Loved Small Animals*

After the man left, carrying the child and his clothes and the child's,  
Her footsteps puzzled her. Sometimes they pushed her ears  
Like doors slamming, sometimes she couldn't hear them and would kick  
A shoe before her as she walked.  
Her rare visitors were like sounds, a cup slipping from the hook.  
But soon no more than mice chewing plaster.  
Feeling out of season, her guests stopped;  
The animals moved in. Or had they been there?  
She didn't know, but felt their tails on her face,  
Like wisps of cold shot through a warm lake.  
She'd always known shadows were tails,  
hiding the slim beasts that wore them; she knew  
Doors close like sleepy jaws,  
That thin drafts weasel through the air, curl on her feet.  
Ice thawed, like claws ticking at the glass.  
She watched, found no spoor or shadow, but laid down bread for them.  
And they came, smooth and clean as otters.  
When she danced at night, a weasel's snake-shape grew from her hand.  
She stroked the walls, drew out soft bodies that lay  
Like stiff fingers, then curved and moved with her.  
If you come, you'll find only the rush  
Of small things through the air, see the wall shift  
Like small ribs breathing. You'll feel your eyes water,  
Stung by a soft tail, and you'll run  
Like a deer that tries to leap from the arrow in its flank.