The animals in that country

By Margaret Atwood

In that country the animals have the faces of people:

the ceremonial
cats possessing the streets

the fox run politely to earth, the huntsmen standing around him, fixed in their tapestry of manners

the bull, embroidered with blood and given an elegant death, trumpets, his name stamped on him, heraldic brand because

(when he rolled on the sand, sword in his heart, the teeth in his blue mouth were human)

he is really a man

even the wolves, holding resonant conversations in their forests thickened with legend.

In this country the animals have the faces of animals.

Their eyes flash once in car headlights and are gone.

Their deaths are not elegant.

They have the faces of no-one.

Margaret Atwood, “The animals in that country” from Selected Poems 1965-1975. Copyright © 1974, 1976 by Margaret Atwood. Used by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.

Source: Selected Poems (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976)