



***Beautiful Animals, by Lawrence Osborne***  
***Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, January 2018***

*Beautiful Animals*, Lawrence Osborne's psychological thriller, is set in Hydra, one of the Greek Saronic Islands. An enchanting jewel in the Aegean Sea, the island was bankrupted by the financial crisis: "On the island it was mostly the foreigners who had remained solvent....First the poets and writers renting fishermen's houses...then prosperous middle-agers...then entrepreneurs with a taste for art...all as barbarian intruders."

Indeed, Hydra is depicted as a playground for the idle rich. Jimmie Codrington, a wealthy British art collector, owns a lavish villa near the mountains and now lives there with his second wife, Phaine. He had named his retreat "Belle Air," after the airline he once owned. The Codringtons spend their summers at Belle Air, splitting the rest of the year between their London townhouse and a villa in Rome.

Naomi, Jimmie's daughter from his first marriage, who detests her arrogant stepmother, often visits their Greek villa. A lawyer in her mid-20s, Naomi has time to spare. In a case defending a Turkish restaurant owner in London against an assault charge, Naomi used witnesses who were known to her client: "It was an instinctual call on her part; she wanted to defend a Muslim." When a scandal resulted, however, Naomi's law firm dismissed her.

An American family, the Haldanes, comes to Hydra for the summer, renting a villa. Samantha, the college-age daughter, is known as "Sam." Her father Jeffrey, a retired journalist, and his social-climbing wife, Amy, had inherited family money. Sam, envisioning a boring summer with her parents and younger brother, is ready for an adventure. When Sam meets Naomi, she immediately is drawn to the sophisticated young attorney. Together, the two entitled young women explore the island by day and party in evenings.

One afternoon, Naomi and Sam come upon a Syrian refugee, who is hiding from the authorities. The man, Faoud, exhausted and hungry, survived a perilous

journey across the sea. Naomi concocts a plan to help Faoud escape to the mainland, rationalizing that she's "atoning for coming from money that I didn't earn." At first, Sam is skeptical. She, unlike Naomi, has never kept secrets from her parents. However, wanting to keep Naomi's favor, Sam agrees to Naomi's scheme which leads to unforeseen consequences.

Lawrence Osborne, a master of suspenseful pacing, skillfully infuses the idyllic serenity of Hydra with a sense of impending doom. Beneath all the beauty, darkness lurks. Early in the novel, Sam muses, "What beautiful animals we are, as beautiful as panthers." Compliment or fateful prediction? It's up to readers of this enigmatic novel to decide.