

VISIT TO THE ZOO

Wendi Lee

It must have seemed strange:
procession of five sisters
bellies brimming against strollers,
more children toddling
like ducklings down a crooked line.

I was one of those ducklings,
downy and mutely pleased
by polar bears, belly-sliding into water
murky with shit and leaves.
The monkeys scandalized me,
shiny pink buttocks
raised to the sun like petal-plucked
flowers. An aunt hurried me
past the cages.

My own mother, belly flat but hands full
of stroller, stopped the parade
in front of a cage labeled:
Attraction to Come. Her sisters saw
grass overgrown with feathered seed,
silence stretched like a sigh
between barb wired fences.
There was nothing there, they said

but my mother's fingers let go
of the stroller. She began to climb, legs
awakening to the trees of girlhood,
fragrant branches lifting
her higher and higher toward the sky.
My mother hesitated
at the barbed wire, then scuttled over,
landing in soft grass gone to seed.

She was on the other side now,
no children, no strollers
no sisters jangling with nerves and hormones,
just her, alone
zoo animal free to do as she pleased.
She plucked a peacock feather
from weeds and slid it through
the chain links, to me.
It lay fluttering
like silk against my small hands,
the dark plum eye catching light,
winking.