

## 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.