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ZOO TOUR

We move through the park in a forced circuit,
an eclipse, making everything in front of us dark:

experienced rabbits freeze
grown apes tear the hair off their hands
birds feel our eyes on them and flee
giraffes fold their tongues in blue fists
perch-bound eagles drop their lunch of guts
elephants can't tell we're near until

it's too late. We have no smell.
They have no escape.

We walk away and flies float
like satellites around our heads.

No one comes when we call.
We won't say their names.

NIGHT KEEPING PARADISE

I am an invert Eve
wandering her night Eden
the animals name me

the tiger burning bright
patrols concrete in the mixed light
of half moon and vending machine

wolves whistle back train
and ambulance
to an ancient edge on the Sunset Hwy

tundra swans drift pinioned
in the bathwater
of mallards and rats

moving through this starlit park, a gunnite garden,
I am faithful with a radio,
a flashlight, a fistful of single keys

I've sent the chimps to bed
checked orangutans sleeping
under blanket boxes

let crocodiles undo their eyelids
slip into the pool
to take snapshots of tilapia

but the elephants wait until midnight
their swaying gray shades
hypnotize my attentions and I find

their trunks more serpentine
than the boas and pythons
on the hill, these trunks light in my ears

whispering, hungry
with the wet air of their ideas
they tempt me to let go

of my shadowless grappling
for keys hanging cold
on the gatehooks of language

FIELD NOTES: APES

Gorillas sit all afternoon in deep green,
digesting, turning leaves
toward the long dreams of trees.

First thing in the bright-fingered morning,
orangutans take figs and roses
from my front yard.

Prone to bipedal fits of beauty and rage,
the hairless solve so much with matches and fists,
touching everything, and migratory, like a stain.