

## ZOO

The animals of this planet are retreating into this cave now,  
two by two, like Noah's Ark in reverse;  
because this time the ark is the only thing that won't float,  
won't tip over in the unstoppable river of commerce.

There is no longer a home for them to return to.

They do not feel love for us for saving them.

They are like the remaining nerve cells  
in an emaciated, bloated body.

Something prior to language passes between  
the eye of the jaguar and the sloth;  
at the top of the hill, in its outdoor cage,  
an eagle rustles in the wind like a flag.

## **HURRYING**

(for Ward Stone)

Last night my father and I  
went together to hear the speaker.  
The opening slide was the great horned owl.  
Still powerful, even in death;  
even after the slides have stripped away  
all but bone and brilliant muscle.  
The chemicals in its tissues  
called by strange names and letters  
as though language itself was mutating.

Found in tremors on the shore of Lake Ontario,  
the owl is so poisoned  
that the state in its wisdom declares it  
an official piece of hazardous waste.

Owls, snapping turtles, mink: “Peaks of the Food Pyramid,”  
and death swells up slowly beneath them.  
I don’t think they’re reading the leaflets.

“I’m 48.” (the wildlife pathologist, at the end of his talk)  
“It takes 5 years to track down a single carcinogen.”

## **PARENTS' WEEKEND**

In his keenly anticipated guest sermon  
the theologian told the story  
of the famous incident  
in which to his astonishment  
a simple working person had taught him something about faith,  
and he got an excited ovation  
from the freshmen and their parents,  
and if memory serves me correctly  
he peppered the encore with self-deprecating jokes.

## **SIERRA LAKE**

My father and I still-fishing in a rowboat.  
Our lines spiral down in complex parallels.  
We lean on the thick-painted tan gunnels in the dusk -  
facing each other silently like figures on a fountain

The heavy clothes feel beautiful on us.

One of our lines begins writing  
slowly, slowly in the water.

## **IN THE CHECKOUT LINE**

When I turned around, someone had cut in front of me.  
I don't remember who it was.  
Maybe someone rich, oblivious, smug.  
Maybe someone poor, distracted, damaged.

I thought how it hurts to be wronged,  
even in little ways. Then I thought about  
the times someone has let me in ahead of them.  
I thought about those who have looked out for me  
in little ways again and again  
for no reason at all. I thought about those  
whose names I've forgotten or never known.