

BETH ANN FENNELLY

The Mommy at the Zoo

I used to sleep better I used to
be smarter remember for example words
and remember when I learned them

there was a word for example
for the way a snake loves
a tight place a crevice a chink in rocks

now the word won't answer
though my daughter knocks
the python sleeps tight in his glass hut

the word has slipped
my mind between a rock
and a hard place

Mr. Snake you
you are a . . .
a something-o-phile

O you sneaky . . .
something-o-phile . . .
I rummage

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but the word
is nowhere no
where in my diaper bag

among the handiwipes and gummy bears
sippie cups of Juicy Juice
crayons slinky and cow-that-goes-moo

before I was a mommy
say four or five years or
decades ago I could think in complete

sentences remember all
my favorite words like the one
about loving the tight fit which I did

in the French Quarter
where the hot rain rained down
in the alley beside the bar

where I was bolted against the iron gate
by Tommy's hard cock
hot rain falling on my upswung face

each vertebra fenced
in the tic-tac-toe grid
each vertebra X-ed

on a treasure map
bezel set what a night
for a girl forged of carbon

all bone and saxophone
notes bouncing to her
through the hot drops of rain

who was she
that fresh-squeezed girl
merely temporarily out of her mind

if it's true as they say
that I am now
that same she

the word I seek
would come slithering
find a chink and wriggle in

like my child up ahead
darting through scissors
of grown-up legs

her silhouette
in red exit light
slow down I'm coming wait

wait up