you are parading your private animal
among all the animals in cages.

i am digging through the remains of fatherhood
left not to me but near me.

you are squaring your shoulders
so you can feel like something that protects
your private animal, though you aren't.

i am holding the shell your animal placed in my hand
against my ear. i hear only my own breathing,
the ocean long gone from here.

i cannot look my small self in the eyes anymore.
you are dragging your private animal from cage to cage

barred sight an amusement. i am writing letters to a bird
who cannot read. i am asking a boy in flight to give me things
i know he won't relinquish. control. accessibility. ease.
movement.

words that fit in his hands, not mine. i am pulling meaning from a
dried well. i am pulling a concept of self
from where the past buried it. dirt clings to what remains.

you are walking like you own the world
in a way you do.

i am swallowing fire from lit matches
cracking them between my teeth.

i place what does not belong inside my body
in my mouth. i tell my body to adapt. i teach a song
to my caged bird, but i've never heard him sing.