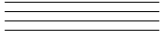


S T I N G R A Y P E T T I N G Z O O



J U S T I N J A N N I S E

I never would have guessed they were so pushy,
shoving each other at the edges of their tank

as if our outstretched, soap-washed hands
could turn them over to face the stars.

I think I saw one smirk before he splashed my nephew
with a magician's well-rehearsed sleight of . . . fin?

Wing? Cape? What is the world
hiding with its moon-dark flank

and ciliated underbelly?
Even I who still live

by the fingertips that caressed the creature's
slippery-slick bone because – how can I explain this? –

it told me I had better,
else the guiding voice

cold-shoulder us
to a plunging misapprehension of space

behind the wheel, or in the glass tunnel
where the sharks bare their glassy teeth . . .

I've been known to circle the block,
having failed to recognize

the climbing ivy, shutters and terra cotta shingles
of my own house.

Am I obligated to pay dearly
for my lack of planning? I watch

hours of traffic sink like sediment
and harden into bedrock.

Bladder full, I squirm and curse and try to catch
a truck driver's eye of sympathy, but no use.

I belong miles below, and miles behind
the overnight world. Overnight, yes –

it is in this way, I am told,
I cannot be expected to change.