

Field Guide to Gentleness

A man sits the last four years
outside the gorilla cage watching
the eldest male swing between
branches of pale, uprooted trees.

The gorilla sits with his back
to the man who sits with his back
to me, every day on his folding chair,
every day the roar of tourist voices

reverberating off cinder walls,
every day his friend behind bars.
When the ape dies in early summer,
and the man stops coming to the zoo,

he explains for the radio:
now I am the one in the cage.
How he is able to wake
each morning when even the trees

are holding their breath,
remains a secret I will never know.
Like all great loves,
this one ends in death.

Charlotte Matthews