When the Species Comes

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When the species comes,
our cortisols will rise,
our vessels clench, hearts hammer
in the clutch of epinephrine,
hamstrings bunch with that primal choice:
the fight, the flight—
we shall be poised
for the starting gun,
the leap into unsought destiny.

A few of us will genuflect,
prostrate as though before a risen god—
though not the beloved, thundering, vengeful lord
made in our image; here is grace
of another order…
genus…species…
this is huge, remote,
an astounding riff on our reptile-mammal frame,
with cephalic bulb, ribbed thorax, four extremities,
and a hint of peculiar function
in that strange arrangement of digits—here is a skewed sublime,
ranked immeasurably before us,
eyeing us with unambiguous eyes.

When the species comes
we will turn our gaze amongst ourselves
in desperate solidarity,
each seeking resolution
or rebuke: “You err: no hulking masses have arrived
to steal our birthright. This is earth,
which nursed us into being; this is earth,
our sovereign state—
See where our silos rise, laden with grain;
where cities facet the sky
and nuclear reactors squat, thrillingly mundane
with boundless power. See how they spew—how factories spew
in glad abundance;
how delicate bottles of vaccine
spin by the millions down their labyrinthine channels
into their cartons;
how the cattle climb,
numberless,
up through symmetrical walkways
into their slaughterhouse;
how feathers fly, euphoric,
up from the forty-thousand-occupancy barns,
out of the cages high
on wind-spied eighteen-wheelers;
how the seals bleed by the thousands
on the ice. —See the profusion,
the seething, glittering saturnalia of our reign.
No one decreed a terminus;
no one can countenance this thing.”

When the species comes
we will wake
to stricter circumstances,
all of us constrained.
The few will be in zoos,
scratching their beards;
others scrambling headlong through walled parks
riven by unseen missiles;
others languishing in coffin-size stalls
and lightless crates;
countless others jostling, ten to a cage,
branded, tagged, with genitals excised.
When the species comes,
millions of us will live our lives
in chilled antiseptic,
waiting for fascinated fists to lift us forth
and lay us wide;
for curious hands
to shock us and submerge us,
dexterously injure us,
plague us with innumerable blights
and gauge our pain.

Our sacrifice will benefit the new, sovereign breed.

We will not suffer
in vain.