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It takes a Lesbian

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It takes a Lesbian

Abstract

The weather's changed, Lost species, You say that the World, Under my eyes, All right, call them and If you agree

It Takes a Lesbian

THE WEATHER'S CHANGED

The weather's changed.
 All the days
have become
 simple and sunny.
In my forty fourth year
 my lover came.
Hereafter, what can alarm us?
 Even
to time and to ordinary
 death
we shall merely say,
 'We lived.'

LOST SPECIES

Henri Rousseau
'The Equatorial Jungle'

Once it so happened that an intrepid naturalist stumbled upon a tribe of exotic creatures. They looked a bit like rabbits and a bit like piglets, but they might have been apes or possibly hyenas. 'Aha!' said the naturalist, 'A find, a veritable find! I shall be famous.' He took a number of photographs — for which they posed perfectly obligingly albeit a little bashfully — and then dashed back again to civilization. He wanted the millionaires to equip an expedition. But the millionaires looked dubious. 'What are they good for?' they inquired cautiously. The naturalist felt silly; he had forgotten to ask. He returned to the monkeys, or perhaps they were piglets, and said to them, 'What are you good for?' But they just looked bashful and said nothing at all. The naturalist got impatient. 'What I mean is, is your flesh good to eat? Is your fur warm?' 'No,' they murmured, smiling deprecatingly, 'no, no good at all.' 'Well then, your jungle? Surely something in this mass of luxuriant green must prove useful?' By this time he was very indignant, but the piglets could only look perplexed. They smiled anxiously, they would have liked to have been helpful. 'Well, who are you then?' the naturalist screamed. 'What do you do?' 'Oh, we're poets,' they said happily and eagerly, glad at last to supply an answer. 'We do nothing useful.' So the naturalist left never to return, and to the best of my knowledge the purposeless pandas, or perhaps they were pangolins, still prosper.

YOU SAY THAT THE WORLD

You say that the world struts and parades
and that the human animal raised
to consciousness by an unlikely chance
is less than malicious and more than a fool.

You say that your son will be different,
raised without a father, the first, perhaps,
of a new species. But I say that they like
killing, that they kill with a simple
and unconscious arrogance. And they wish
to die. Therefore they take appalling risks.

‘The world will change,’ you smile. I smile back.
Behind your head I check the windows,
the bolts on the door. I try to calibrate
which way exactly the world is rolling,
the percentage of risk. At night you are nervous,
but you explain nonetheless, ‘It’s the
penniless young. They are unemployed. Therefore
they steal.’ I nod, I agree, but still feel
angered — let them eat cake. Aloud I say,
‘Well, I’ll go look. Should anything happen, call
the police.’ I bare my fangs, reveal,
as it were, my lack of teeth. But the potential
is there. It was always there. Slowly —
under your eyes — I change. Try not to see.

UNDER MY EYES

Under my eyes

— though I cover them with my fingers —
she turns into a tiger.

Do I stare? or dare?

I hear her complain;

I dream the jagged flare
of black on sand.

The memory of her jaws lingers.

If the crowd could see,

they'd jeer, they'd attack, though they're warmongers
every one;

and cowards anciently declared.

It's true I bolt my door;

they're known. And feared.

The tiger comes.

Her head's in the spread of my fingers.

She turns back into my lover.

'Were you afraid?'

'I thought of the crowd.

How they would call you maneater.'

It is timely. We circle the bed.

In lesbian lands

I am supple and brave.

Like this, every midnight, I've stayed
to catch the blaze

of black on sand; of the creature
whose creature I am,

under her lips, her hands.

ALL RIGHT, CALL THEM

All right, call them another species, throw off nouns with a categorical clink.

A tiger, a woman and a man are different. A lesbian is the fourth. A man says, 'Only I am human.' His woman says, 'Yes, but I am human too. Perhaps not quite as human as him or you, but very human too.' There is no difficulty. But the lesbian and the tiger do not speak — not to the man. In his kingdom they're a threatened species. They speak to the woman. She listens for a while, is charmed and enthralled, but then they're overheard. She runs to her man. 'Serpents,' she hisses. She spits and she cries. 'You've got it all wrong,' the lesbian mutters, the tiger is pleading. But in the patriarchal skies there's death and destruction. They retreat to the forest and discuss logic.

IF YOU AGREE

If you agree not to play pedant, I'll agree not to play poet. So we can begin in the middle.

Tigers, women, men and lesbians are all different, you say.

Sure. But a masquerade is sometimes in order — we need the relief — and a reconnaissance mission is never out of order if one's bent on survival.

Look at it this way. Tigers prey anyhow, given no other option. Whether it's their nature or not, who can say? But it's clear their digestive tract dictates it. As for women — well — better to be eaten than to eat: it's a question of morality after all. And men, being more interested in muscle than morality (there's a principle at stake) take what they can get: tigers, women... each has its purpose.

But lesbians. Now. There's phenomenon. The digestive tract has no special distinction. Some parts of the musculature are more developed than we might have expected; but taken overall both muscle and morality leave them disinterested. Tigers they admire; men they find puzzling, but hardly relevant; and women they merely desire.

So which of the four is most human?

Tigers, no doubt you'll say, finding no fault with the dictates of the flesh.

Still, I must argue, it takes a lesbian to see it how it is.

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