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Suicide Note, California Condor

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Trumpeter
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California Condor
there is no place for us in a world like this.
Soon we will be joining your ancestors
and the world you have known
for fifty million years
and the world I have known for twenty
will wipe us from its memory forever.
But in these final moments
as we wait to die, incredulous and defeated
I will try for us both to remember our lives.
Magnificent bird
your vast obsolescence
rode in from the lumbering Eocene
already archaic when loping man
was straining to rise from all fours.
The death pangs of the dinosaurs
meant nothing to you -
the birth pangs of the molten continents
too, within your vast embrace.
In a changeless world
where time was measured in millions of years
you were perfect -
in ponderous retreat from the slow encroachment of
glaciers
or the ponderous regaining of ground in the million
year
melt
equally you thrived
right on into history
until the Spanish and the Yankees voices
sounded in the sun-scoured canyon
with the bullets and bulldozers
poison and snares
that are driving you into extinction.
Now,
as I sit and watch
this terrible programme on TV
there are twenty five
California Condors
alive on this planet
and all of them
held in a cage at the San Diego Zoo.
This year
is the first in fifth million
in which a new California Condor

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has not been born to the world
and the future of the species
is vested
in twenty five feeble vultures
too old, confused and weary
pampered by desperate people
in a chicken wire hutch in the desert.
They have come
from perfection to obsolescence
in a microsecond of their massive history.
And here am I, writing poetry.
It seems so little, so poor.
And indeed I am defeated.

I cannot bear to live
in a murdering world
whose only civilization is death
whose only culture, destruction.
And I cannot bear to live
in a world without the California Condor
torn down from the sun
like a ripped banner
a ragged black cross
of its own unbearable absence
wrenched from the heart of its soaring skies.

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