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All Fur and Bones

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All Fur and Bones

An Honors Thesis

presented by

Kevin Wesley Tyler

to

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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In the beginning

nothing has names & in a tree lives
a thing like an alligator I call *Dog*
& all day *Dog* is productive
collecting fruits for the *Fall* I call it
because when he's far away & in it
his tongue falls out like the dead thing

Dog & I found floating bit by some other
Dog but there is only one & one *Dog*
who crawls now like a beast to drink the red water
while I sleep in his empty tree & go hungry
because I made thoughts & realize
there is a thing I call *Father*.

Rabbit's Morning

Rabbit woke all fur and bones whistling saint
of sunny murder folks say Fox found wrung-out in the jaws

of an angry grist-mill pushed into the mix by a big-eared
shadow said witnesses Possum's children shaking under

safe mother's skirt tsk last week's grisly accident wasn't
enough? now here comes Rabbit early birding on down

the road big feet dirty the sky and good morning whistle
like nothing happened and what a good day it was!

Louis Moreau Gottschalk in Brazil

Tonight in Rio, the famed composer combs his hair,
And, stepping out hatless into warm, malarial air,
Wipes his forehead with a handkerchief and thanks God
That mountain is still there. Did he see me all in black
Peering from the balcony? Wasn't it me on the train,
Turned away from the window? If his hand could stretch
Beyond the peaks, into the jungle, he would grab a tiger
And tie her to the piano. See her sleep below the music,
See how her eyelids dance! American papers say
He stepped on her tail and was eaten in the spotlight.

It's Nothing Sinister, Listen

Once I saw a man, full-grown, abandoned by the road, some brute
Of a bird picking his pockets with a black beak. Some place
Else (older) I saw a picture of a sleeping calf, or dead, and thought,
That man was an animal, meaning, not strictly a man. So I was wrong;
The devil never had anything to do with it.

It can happen standing in the smiling light. Darkness is every day
Misunderstood (it never fooled anybody) — I'm hearing soft Spanish
Guitar from the neighbor's, right now, I follow a strain of difficult
Melody into his backyard, where nothing's visible save the outlines
Of shed and woodpile, two trees.

My two hands, says almost anyone looking for an out. I doubt
I would know what to do with my breath were I caught here or trapped
In the hull of a sinking ship, meaning, drowning. Some babies are born
With watery lungs, dangerous if the doctor that day doesn't catch it
And the baby goes home not knowing, happy.

Evening in July

The moon is a plain donut I said;
I never said anybody bit it.

*In a minute the sky grows seasick
And shrinks into another hemisphere.*

As the wind stole a dollar
From a hole in my wallet,

*It is fate, the purple streaks
Of dying light on the horizon.*

I said, who furnished this, blissfully
Arranging a picture of the planets.

*Great clouds push on; the moon
Is gone, somebody hid it.*

Up, Down, Left, Right, Again

When I am 42, bungling the sign of the cross
in front of the men's room mirror because my hand,
a dispirited planchette, stutters and stops, will my father's
unshaven ghost laugh and launch from the faucet
to offer me his hand and sound advice between
spurts of laughter and freezing holy water
until my head feels like a flower brushing its
teeth before a dew so heavy it nearly breaks
my neck?

My neck is greener than the day
I was born, when my optic nerves shivered
in the illusion of color while my body struggled
to support the newness of a head, like the book
of Saints that in my childhood gathered an air
of shameful solemnity, sitting on the shelf, unread.
Could it be George, blood-stained, statuesque, standing
always in the way of my half-hearted approaches?
I have done nothing is something I would say
out of the side of my mouth to an imaginary
commuter whose eyes are fixed on some beautiful
object in her purse, maybe a picture of her daughter.

Food Is Changing Him

Our waiter is heavy with chicken tenders
And feels cow pain when we chew our burgers,
And sweaty from the sun of every table's candle,
Shakes and spills our thirsty water
All over and another thing:

He falters during the daily special.
Eyes hidden in his childhood,
Hands reaching for mother,
He stammers *swordfish is a flaky whitefish*,
But longs to be a catfish in the Mississippi

Wrangled by an old man with a mustache
Who guts him and throws out his bones,
Prepares rice to cradle his flesh,
And scares the children with his lifeless
Fish head as hungrily they sit to digest him.

Delayed

when the train hasn't arrived
I can't rule out somebody's suicide
& the dead one appears to me
as bits of turtle on a summer road
almost a melon, crushed, even up close
& the dead's family appears to me
but they are happy, home
& do not know

& the great-great-grandfather appears to me
remarking in my language of the past
how steam transformed velocity
& suddenly you are being, everywhere,
pulled to atoms by the blur of eyes
unadjusted to the inconsequential
green & blue & red like
crushed, somebody's being

The Empiricist

An oak is never two oaks,
even when it's cut down
right down across the middle.

Sawing across, there is the stump oak
and the leafy, branchy oak
but I tried glue and for one moment
you could see it completely
leafy, branchy, and the stump.

Experimenting with broccoli,
I made a mess of dinner.
An oak forest tasting
of broccoli soul.

Outside the Radio Station

Buzzy me, I'm note for note struck
by notes no concrete clef contains

and choked up check
for what strange cathedral
reverberates my unknown tones.

Radio, it's radio rattling
with stained glass inside
its monophonic soul, a prayer
to towering transmitter God.

And now I see the prophet
seated alone in the far room,
bearded, in his Sunday finest
t-shirt, his lids heavy with music,

and I, dumb animal, pause,
interrupt (a sin) to flatly confess
I am filled with
I love this song.

A nod, a recognition
of the sublime
pain of like-mindedness.
Thirty-five years of static prayer
and today, he tells me, his birthday.

How It Sounds

I gently stole the sound of shore
but going home broke
the bottle,
screaming,
the fish fall out and fins on pavement
drum along. Echoes say
this is not a fish place,

and why was guilty I
poking at the sounds of things,
never considering, you are intricate
instruments, and loud.

Sorry, fish, it seemed
important, your home
on my shelf, how the place,
really lights up
when you're here.

Australopithecus in a Suit

I see him hunched over a cool gazpacho,
standing on his chair by the front window.
His head is swallowed by some man-sized
hat as he tries in vain to grasp the spoon
and bridge the gap from bowl to mouth.
Trapped under all that hair he releases
an agonized scream, inhuman, halting
lunch completely, and for a moment
I am ripped back to the haze
of an uncertain morning on a rocky plain
where dozens of forms crack open hard
fruits with stones and run for caves as the sun
turns to lightning and thunder scatters them
like the soup now strewn across the floor.
Like the bone and blood of an ancient kill,
the white shards bathe in tomato broth; in his eyes
appears a distance too large to measure.

Halfway Through A Movie

The action hero is old enough
that I can see the dead guy
in him trying to get out.

And if I read every label
in the supermarket I would starve
before I made it to produce.

And it seems smart to say in the future
we won't have flying cars or robots
but really it just makes sense.

And sometimes you leave someplace
so unexpectedly you might as well be
in two places at once.

Or maybe you've got one foot
in the attic, while the rest of you
floats in the bottom of the pool.

Now I'm hovering in five theaters,
and I see that all this noise at once
can make you forget your lines.

It happens all the time:
I told the ticket-taker *you too*
when he said *enjoy the movie*.

A Cosmos

Son, when you wake up there will be orange juice
and scrambled eggs for you to pepper and eat
and a poem "Breakfast" that goes:

*I dream a splapdash cartoon
of big-schnozzed pigeons sharing air with you and me
in that one Central Park
in the heart of old Manhatto...*

Last night while you slept I doodled
a vision of "Breakfast" for you to laugh at
if it strikes you funny, yes,

I was up late with the sounds of the heart
and the house breaking when the if you died
cycle begins again nearly puddling me,

so I filled up on jazz and sketched a bit
and tucked in the juice and eggs
before the usual morning takes us away.

Widening Deaths, Father Out for Season

In the fountain park I collect newspaper
Scraps until the real headline appears,

And always relieved by its ambiguity I think
It would be too much to hear the world speak!

Sighing across the street to the museum,
I relax and admire the frames.

This is history, the people moving about,
All these thoughts spiraling into nothing, don't

Ask me how I know, but the moment I
stepped outside, I knew I was in for it.

In Frames

Four silhouetted sisters rise
Young to old above the stairs
Which lead to books and rooms
Once shared —
The Caliph's daughter stolen
Away on a flying horse, terrible
Adventure like something broken —
The curtains are open and again
Shadow play ends in violence.
Laughing under covers, darkness surrounds,
But they are almost never lonely, still —
And one by one they go.

West Highland White Terrier on Chair

This dog from 1934 has eyes
which wander from master
to window and worry
that crows fly without him.

The subject doesn't know it,
but there is barely chair, only
rough shapes of comfort,
four legs, a favorite spot.

*Do not forget caw
and the colors,
this cushion impression
on my chair, if these words were mine...*

Noon chimes, the daily
barking dutifully commences
as Mr. Aldin surrenders
and squints at well-penciled lines.

A Town in New England

I. Ghosts

First a scrimshaw cane leading
The crooked whaler, bent by the hunt,
His jacket golden buttons brown. Immune
To winter he passes closed up shops and keeps
Going till the road turns to sand
And the snow eating ocean is all,
everywhere. Like whales' eyes, biblical.

By the rocks, another freezes:
White, the breath
Of the vanishing Indian,
Swaddling armfuls of wampum.

II. Cars

I drive by the sea
And see a splash too far out
To be a drowning.

Island And The Moon

The island is home to a single animal,
a rabbit-eared mouse and a rock
for two weeks I thought was a sleeping
armadillo. I too sleep like an armadillo rock,
most nights, unknowingly transformed by a moon so big
I swear it could come down and kill us all,

even that man I often find devouring fruit,
my fruit, amidst the suffocating darkness
of the island's most inhospitable region.
Detecting no rabbit-ears, and knowing
there are no mirrors here, I begin the chase

through deafening river caves, past vines
that snarl and snap at my back
like a pack of nightmare dogs until at last
I find myself breathless by the shore
kneeling down before the sky,
praying that there is more to know
than this island and the moon.

Giles County

Desiring a glimpse of the country's
more authentic corners I surrender
to the crackling call of "John the Revelator,"
spinning on the player in slow, revelatory circles,
regular as the breathing of a heavy summer sleep.

And in my pocket are a map and keys
to the car and county, or as much of it
as a half-tank can show me. Dusty, tired,
the car sputters and spits me out on a road
snaking across my map through miles
of land blank as the sky ahead.

Its name is Bayou Road. Where's that
three-legged dog? And that guitar
hidden in a hollow log? Here's a man,
old grief himself, digging a hole for "Old Blue."

He'll be sleeping here tonight, it's too late
for moving on. I'll watch, won't say a word.
I'm here, but far away, sleeping
somewhere too late for history.

One Day, Twice

And we were, asleep, I think, the shower, running.
To work — at first glance, the headline accused me
like an inky finger, nope. She likes flower photos,
petal posing, a shout amidst the fountain's sigh,
around, a splash, or in it. He dreams of stampeding —
stems bend to the golden like words in the furnace, furnish,
finish I said, *hurry this is important*, it does
not deliver.

And we shiver, in step, I think, showers, coming.
Clouds look askance at the mainland to amuse me.
Lift or linger? Nope. She likes powerful photons,
metal. Losing sight of the mountain's side,
a sound, lightning — He dreams of completing —
Then wend to the cold and burn in the furnace, first this,
I said curse this, *hurry this is impotent*, it does
not deliver.

My City

This place is a refrigerator painted
like night, a big box filled with cold citizens
playing dress up with colorful clothes.
This bright building is a phony building;
I could melt it with a human touch.
Strange weepy people populate my city.
Not quite strangers, not quite friends,
they are just a bit off, like the woman
with a rabbit face weeping over a black
stroller, standing by a parked Cadillac.
Two men smoke and strike their empty
heads together but can't stop feeling
in the way of something about to happen.
I walk into the warm bookshop but all the words
are my words and the dust is suffocating.
Through the front window I see the street
lights dim while the shopkeeper taps his foot.
This must be the part where I go home.

New People

Under a marvelous red sunshine
two invertebrates flailed shoreward.
Without lunch or tablecloths
or discernable mouths they languished sandy,
flattening until, mistaken for sand dollars,
they were bestowed upon the Beauchamp children
by their ever-loving father. Thriving in the comfort
of their four-bedroom home, the newcomers grew
eyes enough feet enough hands enough
to present the family with a barely human
mélange of eggshell omelet with raw bacon.

Shuddering, tearful, the Beauchamps
assumed seats at this inhuman feast
and, fearing mutant retribution, swallowed
the cold gristle of otherworldly meats.
Wobbling approval-seeking rings around the table,
the new people received only a coughed up
“de—lightful” from the man of the house.

Overcome with half-developed sympathy,
the people moaned and collapsed, crushed
by gravity and the muddled depression
of an unintelligent design. Disguised in oversized
sweaters, socks, and sneakers, they crawled away
from clocks and streets and ever-smaller houses, back
to the salt of cruel mother ocean.

Now, amidst the blanket warmth of familial laughter
the Beauchamps hush, overcome with the presence
of something strange and new and far away.

As A Child

Backseat:

I remember the bug
at the gas station, green
on the red pump, big
red eyes look at me
saying, *I will eat you*, but
I remember the window,
safe.

I remember the passing
telephone poles, the invisible
creature that, in the sunshine,
skillfully walks the wires
and covers the world's eyes
with its large hands at night.

In bed:

I don't remember the getting here.
There is a whirring, a bird, water
running. But the mirror suggests
something beyond sleep, beyond
being carried somewhere tomorrow.