

bon iver fights a bear
by douglas williams

characters

justin / bon iver

bear

*justin should be played by a woman or non-binary actor with a very cheap fake beard on their face and does NOT have to be played by a white actor (there should be no intention to actually make the actor resemble the real justin vernon at all, beyond the fake beard and maybe a flannel shirt)

*bear is identified in the play as “he” but can be played by any woman / man / non-binary actor

Bon Iver Fights A Bear was developed as a part of the FringeArts Festival. Much of the text and action of this piece was generated through devised workshops led by director Maura Krause, designer Cat Ramirez and creators / actors Emily Schuman & doug greene.

the woods

trees

snow

a small, empty, rundown cabin in the corner

a bear enters on all four and wanders through the trees and into a small clearing

he sniffs around, growls

walks off to one side

a microphone sits on a wooden stump

the bear approaches, and sniffs it cautiously

the bear slowly stands on his hind legs, as if threatened by the object

the bear reaches out and in one quick motion, takes the microphone and relaxes his stance

stands like a normal human

bear i'm about the fucking die right now
 it's gonna happen real soon
 argg i can feel it. arrgggggggg

bear tries to catch his breath

i feel like shit.
 you might not even recognize me
 the beginning of this winter i was a different creature
 a different bear

god what the fuck happened
 i was strong, and plump and
 and fucking *hot*
 i was such a hot bear.
 now look at me...

skin and bone

i don't like to think about it

bear looks around

you know everyone makes it out like redwoods are the jam
because they're real tall and their name makes 'em sound important
well i met some redwoods on my trip
they're *assholes*
fucking assholes, i'm serious

i'd take my wisconsin hemlocks anyday
i'd take y'all anyday, i'm not just saying that

anyway, i said i'd be back and i'm back

we don't have to do anything special

bear goes to sit down somewhere

yup, this is really all i want

bear sits

15 years is pretty good for a bear

but shit hemlocks, you guys are like 400 years old

my life is like a drop in the bucket for you

you might not remember me for very long
but i wanted to let you know you've all been really incredible to me

it was nice looking after each other...

i'm sorry i've been away these last 30 days
i thought maybe if i traveled west i'd finally find something to eat

but no

nothing

i did a lot of thinking walking all the way west and all the way back again

and i realized that none of this would have happened
if it weren't for that human who came through a ruined my life

the bear looks around at his trees

then turns his gaze to the small, crappy wooden cabin in the corner

that fucking cabin

i would have torn it down or
like
pooped in it if had known he was gonna move in

him and his fucking folk music

if you never really understood what folk music was
because *i* didn't until this guy showed up

folk music is like
you know how on some subconscious level we don't mind the smell
of our own shit?
okay *you* don't know maybe
you don't shit, you just stand there in the woods
but i can tell you from a bear's perspective, that other bear's shit
smells horrible. but when it's *my* shit, i don't mind it
and then even sometimes? again, totally subconsciously
you sorta
you sorta *like* the smell of your own shit?
i'm not like "oooo wow smells great"
i don't even notice it usually
but maybe like one in a hundred times i'll catch myself
and be like, whoa my shit smells pretty alright
so that. the embodiment of *that* ?
that's folk music.
it's just
i don't know how else to describe it
it's like smelling your own shit

anyway, this human
when he showed up earlier this winter i was already in sorta bad shape

i hadn't eaten in five days

justin enters. he loads some of his things into the cabin as the bear speaks.

came up from eau claire, he told me later
he was all sick and fucked up and broke
broke means he had no money
humans call it that because they feel, like, broken without money?
confusing...

and so he was here to cry and be a depressed
human or something

only brought a few things

softly a bright beautiful tone starts to fill the space, we don't notice it at first but it grows and grows

clothes
a computer, which is like a magic box that solves problems
a guitar which is thing that makes sounds

and yeah
and that was sorta all he had

the tone grows, justin is making the cabin a home

he sits in a corner and stares straight forward

hardly heard him make a peep that whole first week

the sun slowly sets

you wouldn't even know someone was living in there

justin turns on a small lamp

if it weren't for the dim lights on at night time
honestly, i sorta felt bad for him

justin picks up his guitar

until he started wailing away like a total asshole

justin starts to play some music, it doesn't sound like bon iver, it sounds kinda like a shitty country song

justin love is a journeyyy
 love is a journeyyy

the bear covers his ears

 ugghhh jesus!!
 is that a fucking hootie and the blowfish cover? i mean, christ!

justin tries a verse over again

he knows it sounds shitty but he's trying to barrel through it

 the wallflowers called and asked that you kindly stop ripping off
 their shitty music and go die somewhere

justin puts his guitar down

 after a few weeks of this i finally realized

 that if this kept up
 i was gonna have to do something
 take matters into my own paws

 if this kept up
 i'd have to fucking eat this guy

the bear looks at justin

lights down on the bear

three weeks.

justin sits in front of his computer. he's watching northern exposure and drinking beer.

it's the end of episode 10 of season 5

the sound is amplified for us

computer oh the snow the beautiful snow filling the sky and earth below. over the house tops and over the streets, over the heads of people you meet. dancing flirting skimming along. oh the snow the beautiful snow how the flakes gather and laugh as they go. whirling about in their maddening fun it plays in its glee with everyone. chasing laughing hurrying by it lights on the face and sparkles the eye. and even the dogs with a bark and a bound snap at the crystals that eddy around. the town is alive and its heart in a glow to welcome the coming of beautiful snow. it's happening people, say hi to the flakes.

the bear enters and starts addressing the trees, naming them

he picks up small feathers and sticks he finds in the woods and places them on a type of alter he has constructed

from inside the cabin, as the dialogue from the show continues justin swigs from his beer and burps

heyyy bon hiver!! hahaha.

bon hiver hank

he drinks again and burps again but this time is sounds like a fake burp. he fake burps again.

the fake burp sort of turns into a tone. it's like a half growl, half burp. he tries again.

he goes to take another swig of the beer, but the beer is empty. he holds it up to the light and sees that it's empty.

wow.

bon hiver maurice.

bon hiver shelly.

justin rolls on the floor over to a paper bag. he tosses the beer into the bag and it clanks against other beer bottles.

justin peers into the paper bag. he pulls out an old coffee can. he looks at it. he burps into it.

he does his fake burp tone growl thing into it.

he does a very long fake burp tone growl into the coffee can.

bon hiver doctor fleishman! look, it's all better!

justin rolls onto the floor

with the coffee can on the ground he leans over it and does a very long fake burp tone growl and it sounds really cool and spooky.

if you say so.

bon hiverrr!!

it's nice. bon hiver o'connell.

bon hiver fleishman.

the episode ends.

the lights flip on in the cabin.

justin's dad stands before justin holding a bag of groceries.

(the dad is played by the bear with a flannel on over his fur and a winter cap on his head)

dad hey buddy.

justin screams and leaps up from the floor

justin ahhh. hey dad. didn't
see you there.

dad i called but you didn't
pick up

justin sorry
 my phone died

dad i brought some stuff

justin cool thanks.

dad what were you
 what are you doing?

justin nothing.

dad were you burping into
 trash?

justin yeah, err
 recycling

dad oh
 interesting

justin's dad puts the away. justin gets up from the floor.

dad how's the liver?

justin i don't know.
 fine.

dad you shouldn't be drinking beer
 but i got you some anyway

justin i think it's fine
 gonna pretend like it's fine
 high life, whoo

dad and i got some eggs
 and some bacon and some other stuff

justin great

dad just don't forget to
 eat

justin i'm fine

dad mom also had me bring
 some movies?

justin's dad pulls out some dvds out of the paper bag

justin oh sick

justin goes over and grabs them

justin northern exposure, season 6 and 7
 i just finished season 5

dad that's great. good for you. been hunting
 at all?

justin not yet

dad one deer would set you up for
 a month, maybe more
 not sure how long you're planning
 on staying, so

justin maybe i'll go hunting tomorrow

justin turns on his computer. he puts it on the table and sits in front of it.

dad how long are you planning on staying?
 like for a while, or

justin um, unclear
 to be honest

dad it's been three weeks so

justin unclear, dad

dad you're not bored i guess

justin i sort of
 came here to be bored

a ch-ching sound emits from the computer

dad comes around and looks at what justin's doing

dad oh cool
 call

justin i was gonna

dad is this for real
 money?

justin yeah

dad damn
 that's cool
 you're looking for
 the straight

justin yeah

dad i'd call

justin clicks on the computer

dad aw shit

justin fuck

dad the river got you
 that's what it's called
 right?
 i watch on ESPN sometimes

justin yeah, the river
 fuck
 i don't know if real poker players call it that though

dad stupid straight draw
 i'm not great at poker
 i sorta
 hate it actually

justin yeah me too

dad how much was that?
that you lost

justin thirty bucks

dad oh
not that bad

justin well for me it
sorta is

dad you can play for free
you know

justin i know

justin's dad picks up the coffee can and burps into it

dad i dont get it

oo! i ran into mr. peel at the rotary club
he says hi but
'member that song you made for
his biology class?
the photo-whatsit?
synthesis!
remember the one?

justin yes

dad what was it called

justin ...sunlight synthesizes my soul

dad yes! that's some of your best work, slugger
you should work that into your gigs a little more

justin yeah maybe

dad you and bradley working
on anything?

justin no dad, they kicked me
 out

dad what?

justin brad kicked me out of
 the band

dad oh. oh my god. but deyarmond
 was *your* band i thought

justin yeah

dad can they do that?
 you sang, you were like *the* guy

justin i know

dad did you play them sunshine freezes my soul?

justin no

dad you guys were together
 for like, really long

justin ten years

dad ugh wow
 oh justin i'm so sorry
 time, you know?

 so are you working on
 anything solo?

justin yes. no. i have a few
 sketches on here i've been
 messing with. it's nothing
 really.

dad can i hear
 something?

...

justin are you spending
 the night?

dad no no
 i need to get
 back to your mom.
 actually, if you could
 call her that would be good

justin shit, yeah

dad she's been asking

justin no i will

dad she's worried you're
 not eating

justin i am.

dad and she's worried about
 you liver infection

justin yeah

dad and your mono

justin i know

dad and your general
 depression and anxiety so
 it would be really great if
 you just called her

justin i will. i'm okay.

dad yeah. that's what
 i tell her. actually.

justin's dad walks over, takes out his phone

dad smile bud

justin smiles and his dad takes a photo

dad nice
 good one
 she'll like that

justin can i see it?

dad shows it to justin

justin fuck
 i look like hell

dad yeah....skin and bones
 you need to
 eat. one deer and you'll
 be fine. your beard game is on
 point though

justin dad where in the hell
 did you hear about 'on point'

dad hey
 i can be cool

later that night

justin exits the cabin and starts collecting kindling and wood

he walks through the woods and finds more over by the bear's alter

while justin's back is turned, the bear enters and sneaks up on him

the bear leaps out at justin and growls

bear roar

justin screams his fucking head off, drops the wood and races back inside the cabin

the bear laughs, then sighs

justin gets inside and catches his breath.

the bear kind of kicks some dirt, shit i probably fucked that up

bear takes the microphone and speaks to us

bear okay confession time

bear sort of takes a deep breath, this is really really important

we've known each other for a while
and now that i'm about to fucking die i feel like i can confess this to you all

two things...

first, i've never really been the best, um, hunter
maybe you've noticed

bear waits for the shame from the trees, but it doesn't seem to come

i mean i'm horrible
which is really embarrassing

because a bear is supposed to, like, *rule* at hunting
i mean look at me. i'm a fucking killing machine.

i'm *built* to be a killing machine
but instead it's like

justin is now holding his guitar

from inside the cabin he plays a few chords that underscore the following

it's like i don't even get to hibernate?
ugh
to just *admit* that is

like, you don't know what it's like to not hibernate
but it's a big BIG deal
in the bear community. like, there's nothing worse than to not hibernate
all my bear bros are chilled out in some badass cave right now
some plush cave, living it up
and i'm out here hungry as hell because i'm stupid slow and a bad sneaker
i can't sneak!
sneaking in addition to being fast are like two really important traits for being
a good normal bear
god. it's really
there's real shame there, you know? and i'm trying to work through it

so...thank you for being with me, in this moment

i'm telling you this because, on top of all that shame shit

the bear looks at justin

justin starts playing a song very loudly and sadly

justin i came face to face with a bear!

bear *this* mother fucker was further blowing up my spot

justin shoulda seen it
 shoulda seeeeeeen it

bear by acting loud as fuck. try imaging hunting right now!
 here, look, i'll hunt

bear crouches and gets very quiet, waits for prey

the bear stands from his admittedly bad hiding place

justin sings

justin sara sara sara sar!
 wish you were here!
 wish you were here!

bear can't sneak with that!
 this part of my woods right now, which was like a damn zoo with all the
 yummy snacks that used to live here, was now totally vacant!

justin cause only our love was really cool!
 making love and kissing youuuuu!

bear vacant means empty. they're no animals here anymore and it's
 really killing my vibe

 he had me eating berries. sticks.

 sheesh

 okay, second thing
 i sort of have, um, digestive problems?
 like severe digestive problems

 so sometimes i'll finally catch something
 and then i eat it and i wanna die!

 my tummy is just killing me and
 it's horrible
 i should be able to eat anything
 eat everything
 i mean, i'm a bear

 so although i might have *wanted* to eat this mother fucker

 i didn't know if i
 if i *could*

 it might just kill me

i don't know
because to be honest i'd never eaten a human before

but it'd been nineteen days,
without any food

so it didn't look like i was going to have much of a choice

the bear looks over at justin

lights down on bear

time passes

justin watches the season finale of northern exposure

the episode ends and he closes his computer

the bear addresses his wilderness, picking things up, howling to them, placing them on his alter

justin hears the bear's howling

justin exits the cabin and hides, peeking around the corner to see the bear

the bear picks up the centerpiece of his alter, a large pinecone

as he holds it the pinecone starts to glow and emits a tone

the bear raises it to the sky and howls a beautiful howl

justin sees this

he tries to howl with the bear imitating him

the bear stops

hears justin

the bear slinks toward justin

they meet face to face but are frozen

the bear growls something quizzical

bear rrrr - hm?

justin tries his own bear growl

justin roar

the bear growls back

justin's like, damn this is cool we're buds now

the bear lunges at justin

justin narrowly escapes back into the cabin

he rests on the couch and tries to catch his breath

the next night

the bear has the microphone.

justin is in the cabin on his computer

bear then one night
 the human justin plays a card game on his magic computer again
 even though he sucks at this particular card game

justin plays poker

bear and on this night there is exactly three hundred and seventy one dollars
 in his bank account
 i have no concept of what these numbers mean because i am a bear
 but i have been told that that is a very embarrassing amount of money
 to have in your bank

he gets dealt two of the j cards
 which they call "getting hooks" i guess because j's look like hooks kinda
 humans are stupid, they see little patterns and jokes everywhere
 hooks. okay whatever.

the dealer turns over a four, a k card and a ten with black shovels on it
 so yeah so he still has just the two j cards but he raises thirty dollars
 this is his real money
 as you may remember his dad asking

i'm sort of giving away my story
 by saying that
 you might be able to guess what happens here

then the computerized dealer turns over another j card
 and holy shit justin freaks the fuck out
 that's three j cards. that's like really good
 so justin bets *one hundred dollars*

i'm leading this too much
 you already know
 he loses it all

the bear looks at justin who is still playing the game, excited

he's about to lose all his money but he just doesn't know it yet

because he's got the hooks
and he has a really hard time seeing that far out in front of himself

it had been twenty two days since i'd eaten...

the bear walks away

justin is alone playing poker

we see him get really excited

and then get really really nervous

he stands on the chair as the cards are turned over
and he's lost

justin no
 what?
 how in the fuck can

oh my god...

justin stands there

he has no money

the bear is in his own space

bear in terms of context and all that
 if you're wondering what the big fucking deal is about this whole thing

you see
 money is very important to humans
 it's just paper and metal and sometimes i'm told it's just a number
 on the screen of one of those magic boxes
 but humans lose their fucking minds about this shit
 especially people who sit in cabins and pretend to make art

justin reaches for a bottle of whisky

but for the next day and half he didn't sit in his cabin and make art
 he sat in bed
 and at night he drank heavily
 sometimes in the morning too

even though his liver was pumping poison through his body

time passes

justin drinks heavily

he finishes the bottle

he stands and recycles it, while standing he spots some old action figures in a book shelf

a barbie

and the rancor from return of the jedi

justin picks them up and holds them in front of him

the action figures do battle

oh nooooo!

he starts smashing them into each other, creates voices for the barbie and the rancor

BRAHHHH

blocked! take that! right in the liver!

gahhhhhh not my liver!

justin?

...yeah?

i've been thinking
about you
a lot
and i tried calling you but you didn't pick up

oh well i've been up at my dad's
cabin, and my phone is dead
and i'm trying to be bored and find my voice
as an artist

justin?

yeah

is that the cabin you took *me* to
last winter

...yeah
you still think about that?

justin?

yeah

remember the poem you wrote for me
at the cabin?

yeah of course how could i forget

well i read it again
and i miss you
and i want you back

i dunno
i have a lot going on in my head right now

oh please?

i dunno
i lost all my money playing poker a few nights ago and

oh justin i always told you not to play poker
you're just not very good at it

yeah i know but i just really like poker, just gimme a break
god!

justin roars like the bear

he roars in the face of the barbie doll and then tosses the action figures aside

he stands in a drunken fury and barges outside

he tries to growl for the bear but the bear is gone

he's growls to the sky like where are you! come and get me!

but nothing

justin spots the bear's alter

he sees the pinecone

he gets near it and a bright tone emits from it

justin holds it and the pinecone starts to glow

justin puts the pinecone under his flannel and darts back inside his cabin

once inside he looks at it and examines it.

in the distance he hears the howling again.

he hides the pinecone somewhere and makes sure the doors to the cabin are locked.

the howling sounds like it's getting closer. justin turns off all the lights in the cabin and hunkers down.

the bear sounds super fucking pissed off. is it coming for him?

justin grabs something, a frying pan maybe, to defend himself.

the bear is bearing down on him from somewhere. the walls are closing in. the tension is rising, until suddenly:

the lights in the cabin flick on, justin's dad stands there.

dad hey buddy

justin jesus dad

dad sorta smells in here

justin stands and tries to shake off the nerves.

dad i got the goods. you still
 like fruit roll ups?

justin yeah duh

dad strawberry.

dad unloads the groceries

dad you look a lot better slugger

justin thanks dad

dad color's returned to your face
 sorta
 how you feel

justin i don't know

dad well, i'll tell your mom you're feeling
 better anyway

justin is on his computer as his dad puts things away in the cupboard.

dad oh no, not poker
 again

justin no, i gave up on poker
 this is something else

dad comes around to see what he's doing

dad oh cool! video games
 i love video games
 can i play?

justin it's a one person game

dad who's that

justin that's me

dad that's not you
 wait what is this

justin it's called the sims

dad sim city

justin no. yes. it's different.

dad sim city was boss. i was so good.
 i could never figure out
 the plumbing though, you know?
 it doesn't look
 like you

justin dad

dad you didn't do such a great
 job. it doesn't look like you

justin it's healthy me. it's like
 a vision board.

dad except not.
 how do you win?

justin you don't. you just play and
 live. you build a house and
 hang with other sims
 around town.

dad i don't get it
 you can't win?

justin it's just for passing time

dad that's not a video game
 who's that, a bad guy?

justin there are no bad guys
 she's just a character
 that i made

dad she's hot
 for a sim

justin yeah. thanks

dad what's
 she do

justin i don't know.

dad what's
 her name?

justin it's
 i didn't give her one yet

dad wait it says
 right there
 it says

sara, no h
wait--

justin i didn't
 that's a mistake

dad whoa. justin
 you made a sim of your
 ex-girlfriend?

justin it just came
 with the name!

dad oh my god, i see it now
 you turned sara into a sim!

justin dad, please.

dad that is very very
 why did you make
 sara a sim, justin?

justin it was subconscious.
 i wasn't like actively trying to--
 i was absently making a sim and
 it turned out to look

dad like sara. like, exactly like sara

justin and so i gave her the name.
 no big deal. she's just another
 sim in my sim town. we don't
 even interact
 that much.

dad are your sims
 friends?

justin it's just a game

dad this is creepy justin

justin shuts his computer

justin it's fine. it's like
 it's normal
 like when you hear a song that
 you and someone you dated
 used to listen to. and you hold them
 in your mind for just a moment
 you stretch out and are with them
 for just a second

dad okay

justin for just a moment
 you're both back sitting on
 the fire escape
 with your asses all wet because
 everything was covered
 in snow
 but you didn't care
 you were both escaping
 the party inside because
 it was sorta lame and crowded.
 so instead you sat on that fire escape
 together, and shared
 a joint. and she took out her phone
 and played that song "fugitive" by
 the indigo girls
 and you realize that people don't
 just meet by accident.

...

 but then you snap forward
 again and remember that
 your life is shrinking and you're
 getting older and you won't
 have time to do all the things and
 be all the places you want to be
 anymore...

dad whose life is shrinking?

justin mine. mine is dad.

dad right, only

you know, you're like
24 justin

justin ugh, i'm 25 dad!
 you know what i mean
 about the song thing?

dad i think i
 yes

justin so that's all this is

dad right, right
 but
 it actually feels like putting
 your ex girlfriend into a video game
 is like
 not really the same thing. at all.

justin forget it dad!

dad walks off

dad fine. fine.

he spots justin's guitar. he picks it up. he clearly does not know how to handle a guitar.

justin dad

dad i'm being careful! I just
 want to look
 how's the new album
 coming?

justin what new album

dad last time you said you
 were working on a new
 album

justin i said i had sketches.

dad well how're the sketches

coming?

justin not so great, to be
 honest

dad wanna play me
 something?

justin there's nothing to play
 really

dad sits on justin's bed and uncovers the pinecone

dad whoa. what's this?

justin oh, um nothing.

dad it's glowing justin

justin i know i know
 i don't know what to
 do
 i think it's magic
 maybe?

dad dope!

justin dad, don't say dope

dad but it *is* dope, son
 where'd you find it?

justin i stole it from a bear

dad so so dope

justin dad

dad wait but the bear
 doesn't need it?

justin um, he seemed fine
 i sorta need it more so

i think it's fine, i'm gonna pretend like it's fine

here let me see it

justin sits next to his dad and holds the pinecone

dad how's it magic?

justin i don't know

dad like what's it do?

justin i don't know
i just feel, like, power
when i'm holding it

dad here

dad takes the pinecone and tries

dad oh yeah!
bear power

justin yeah or like
justin power

dad damn, my
knee doesn't hurt anymore

dad stands up and walks around

justin placebo probably

dad no really, look

he bends it, he kind of jumps up and down

dad i need one of these
things

dad comes and sits back down

dad you think it could

help you with your
sketches?

justin what do you mean

dad maybe you need
bear power for your
album. here

dad goes over and grabs justin's guitar.

justin no, i don't
think so dad

dad bear power! come
on, i just wanna try

justin blah, fine....

dad do you want me to
plug in your thingy?

justin no it's fine

dad sits close. takes the pinecone and holds it above justin

justin looks up at it and then down at the guitar, it's like foreign object in his hands

dad play! go ahead

justin um

dad anything

justin strums a few chords that at first sound kind of like everything he's been playing

it is hesitant, but soon he changes and finds some darker, more interesting progressions

dad ooo nice

he keeps stumbling along

in a bare moment of inspiration, he sings one sentence of weird abstract words that is kind of our first peek at true bon iver, but maybe the words are also sorta funny, like something about a cow? whatever it is, he just kind of blurts them out

he stops playing

justin and dad look at each other like wtf bear power this rules!

dad whoa...

justin puts the guitar down

dad justin

justin yeah dad?

dad that was dope

talk with you!

justin uhhh, shit
 hello!
 sorry i had to, uh, borrow your thingy

justin starts scrambling around the cabin, looking for the pinecone

bear what?

justin i was going to give it back i promise

bear give what back?

justin i just need to borrow it for a little longer!

the bear knocks

bear come on open up!
 we have lots to talk about and i need to do it in person!

justin finds it and puts it in his pocket

justin i can't do that

bear why not?

justin because i can't give you back your
 err, totem

bear what the fuck is a totem

justin it's
 like a
 trinket?
 no more like an heirloom

bear like a tomato?

justin whatever, like i said i'll give it back when i'm done!
 but it's helping me write music

bear um, no it is not
i can hear your weak ass lyrics day and night

justin no but
but did you hear my new stuff?

justin finds his hard drive and holds it

i stayed up all night writing and i think i'm really onto something
actually

actually, do you mind if i like
play some of it for you?

the bear looks at his watch

bear oh my christ
can you just please come outside?
i do not have time for this

justin grabs his guitar

justin come on, i want to show you what i mean
what your pinecone is doing for me

also i could really use the feedback

bear yeah i dunno man, i hear your music sometimes
and it sorta makes me want to cut my own ears off

justin okay but this is different
i'm going in a totally different direction

bear i dunno man

justin come on, please?
if you listen, and give me some good feedback, maybe i'll be done sooner
and i can give you back your thingy

bear will you be opening the door to do so?

justin uh, yeah
i guess so

bear ugh fine
 play your stupid music

justin sits with his guitar. finds a space. tunes his guitar a little.

the bear tries to get comfortable

justin okay. it's called the lala song

bear ugh.

justin starts to play the lala song. it's a few hard chords, he's really kinda into it. watching the bear with a big smile on his face like oooo yeah you didn't think i could do this shit but i am

bear and are they're lyrics orrr

justin oooooOOOOoooo ah ahahah ha
 (this repeats for a bit)
 i'm not even listening
 i'm not even listening
 i'm not even listening
 i'm not even listening
 you're not even nothing
 you're not even nothing
 you're not even nothing
 you're not even nothing
 i'm not even listening
 i'm not even listening
 i'm not even listening
 i'm not even listening

now speaking over the chords

justin it's about my band
 and about my girlfriend
 ex girlfriend
 i've been listening to a lot of early weezer
 so maybe some of that is coming through for you?

the bear is holding his head. he looks like he's got a headache.

bear ugh

justin your magic thingy gave me an idea for a new name too
 a new name for this project
 my name is justin but i'm beyond that now
 i'm something else

bear what's that

justin i'm thinking about
 i'm thinking about calling myself....scab kid

...

bear what the fuck?

justin or THE scab kid, i need to test them both out

bear what the hell is a scab kid

justin because i'm *wounded*
 like scabs
 what i was telling you about my band?
 and about sara?
 wounds
 i'm scab kid

bear stop saying scab kid please

justin whatever. you don't like it? you don't like scab kid? fuck you.
 scab kid doesn't need you

bear you're not a scab kid
 you're not wounded
 you're a squishy little white boy

justin hey

bear you sing songs about people not listening to you

justin no that was *me* that wasn't listening
 i'm blocking out the noise
 i'm living *above* it

bear ugh. dude. i don't even *want* to eat you now

justin what?

bear uh, i said sounds real great scab kid!
you wanna pop out here so we can talk about it face to face?
feedback or whatever?

justin eh, i feel like i should do some more work first
i only just got up

bear wait wait!
maybe i could
uh
help you
or something

justin really?

bear yeah
but listen i'm just gonna give it to you
straight though
that's how bears roll

justin that's what i want

bear okay...you're not a completely shitty
guitar player but
your lyrics are garbage

justin blah, i knooow

bear you're so outside-in man
you gotta lose that
you gotta lose *yourself* more, you know?

justin whoa that's good.

justin finds some paper to write down some lyrics

bear even that shit you just played

justin the lala song?

bear whatever
 like, don't sit down and be like
 oh i'm going to write a song about
 my band, here i go
 don't start with that emotion

justin you really hated that song

bear dude, i hate *all* your songs

 you gotta come at it without
 intention
 you find it through the work
 try and forget more

 here it's easy
 like off the top of my head

 sticks follow, crack and crumble
 hunt for the hollow
 prey's a friend to some
 to me to me, you won't lie down
 it will be a different kind

 uhhh

 hunger, my friend
 we know each other well
 the hunt called off until
 the someday my pain
 what might have been lost?

justin writes this all down

justin yeah yeah
 oh man this is good stuff

bear protein and the fate of my father
 disappoint, you fool, he won't
 be a father to you
 oh dad, who was i

i'm breaking at the britches
trying to make you smile--

justin wait what?

bear what?

justin whose dad are you talking about
your dad?

bear no
no i'm not talking about anyone's dad
this is dissociation
this is abstract

justin okay well it sounds like you've got some messed up shit with your dad

bear what no

justin and it sounds like you're obsessed with food

bear what?

justin im just saying all you sing about is food and your dad

...

the bear tries to laugh this off, he's a bad actor

then he starts crying

justin whoa! shit my bad. you alright?

bear he never understood
he just never got it, you know?

justin yeah, i do man
it's okay

my dad's kinda too much sometimes too

bear no no

your dad is

ugh
he's what i always sorta hoped to have

justin really?

bear he checks on you
encourages you
cares about you

plus he brings you food
without expecting you to hunt for it yourself

justin yeah that's true

bear my dad
ugh

we just weren't cut from the same cloth, to use one of you
human expressions

justin yeah.

bear i was such an embarrassment to him
he was a master hunter, out of our entire bear clan
he was the master
but i can't hunt
ugh

i just don't have the skills in my dna
it just wasn't a passion for me the way it was for him

he felt like too much to live up to sometimes

the bear wipes his tears

justin fuck man. i'm so sorry
it's okay, it's okay

bear thank you

justin hey, what are *you* interested in?

bear what?

justin there must be something
so it's not hunting, whatever. fuck hunting

 what's your thing, huh? what turns you on?

bear um i guess...
no i don't know

justin no come on
there's gotta be something
speak, i know it's in you

bear okay
this is gonna sound
stupid sorta

justin no it's not. come on

bear okay..
my passion is

 science?

justin oh
what?

bear i'm a
or i *want* to be
a bear scientist

justin huh
honestly not what i thought you were gonna say

bear it's so stupid

justin noooo no
i just didn't know they have those
bear scientists

bear they don't

i wanted to be the first
the first bear scientist in the world

justin damn
 i mean, okay
 freak what you feel i guess

what does a bear scientist study?

bear looks up and around him

bear trees, nature

justin oh. okay that makes sense

bear i speak to them all
 develop an understanding
 a language that binds us together

justin damn

bear so while everyone else in our clan
 was out hunting, gathering food and preparing
 for hibernation
 i was studying
 collecting
 naming the wonders of these woods

justin which is why you don't hunt

bear kicks some dirt

bear one of the reasons
 underdeveloped sneaking skills...
 you wouldn't understand

my dream was to go to one of your human
towns. a land your people call *au-burn-dale*
in the province of *flor-i-da*

i had a human name picked out and everything
humans have the most uninspired names
for each other but i found one that i thought sang

justin what was it

bear fredrick. janene. emma.

...

dan

justin that's not really how human names work--

bear *doctor* frederick janene emma dan

i dreamed of studying under renowned professor
o'conner but my clan just pointed and laughed
humans would never take a bear scientist seriously

would they?

justin uhh
probably not no

bear hangs his head

bear i wish i was you sometimes justin
you live in their world, the human world *and* you live in mine
you can switch back and forth so easily
you can be anything you want to be
and i'm nothing but a bear who can't hunt

the bear growls a sad, mournful growl to his trees

justin hey
if i come out right now
would that be alright?

bear really?

justin so we can talk face to face
level playing field
what do you think?

bear i think
 i think that would be nice

justin you won't hurt me or anything?

bear no
 no i won't

justin promise?

bear i promise justin

justin okay

justin opens the door and exits the cabin

he stands there

bear hi justin

justin hi bear

suddenly the bear leaps to his feet and bum rushes justin

he holds him by the collar, he's growling in his face and is about to eat him

justin you said you wouldn't hurt me!

bear i'm sorry justin
 i'm so sorry, i haven't eaten in 27 days
 and it's partly your fault for all your shitty singing
 and partly my own fault because i'm a failure as a hunter
 but i am really sorry that i have to eat you right now
 goodbye

the bear opens his mouth, is about to chomp down

justin noooo!
 i'm sick!

the bear backs off

bear what?

justin my liver is infected
and i have mono

bear what's mono

justin it's
it's like the flu
which is like
um
cancer
basically

bear shit
cancer's the bad one, yeah?

justin yeah, super bad

bear shit

justin but also highly contagious
especially if i'm
eaten

bear really?

justin yeah, unfortunately
doctor told me that

bear you're not just saying that?

justin no dude, i have medicine
here look

justin goes into the cabin, the bear follows him

justin hands him a bottle of pills

the bear looks at them defeated

bear shit

the bear slumps in the chair

dude, i'm like so fucking hungry right now
fuck

the bear puts his head in his hands

justin i'm sorry
i'm sorry my singing scared away all your food

bear i mean look at me, man!
i'm so skinny it's like
ugh

justin skin and bone

bear whatever
just give me my totem or whatever made up word you wanna call it
and i'm out

justin i
i can't do that

bear what

justin i need it for just a little longer

bear it doesn't belong to you

justin i know
but
maybe we could work out some kinda long term loan sort of thing?

because it's really changing the way i see things

bear i sincerely doubt that

justin no really!
like

this thing happened to me like
four months ago
and it sort of completely wrecked me
but *now* i see it, um, differently
with the pinecone it's like--

bear dude

justin here let me explain

bear ugh

just so
 i got
 mugged

bear wha?

justin it means someone stole my money

bear oh

justin in raleigh four months ago, so
 yeah
 i was working at this super lame sandwich shop there.
 and i fucking hated it. like, my soul was being sucked.
 out my ass

but also i was so broke. so i was working at subway like six days a week

bear you made sandwiches on a subway?

justin no subway is a sandwich stop

bear i thought it was a bullet that shoots people places underground

justin yeah no it's also that but it's also a sandwich place
 where i worked
 so this one day i was on my break outside
 smoking a cigarette
 and i saw this guy lurking around the back
 like out back by the trash, not digging, just like lurking
 and i thought at the time he was probably high or something?

and i was like, okay weird
but also, i'll just let him do his thing
like, avoid confrontation.

bear was he big?

justin nah. just a guy. he was shorter than me but i was like
whatevs, probably just high and chillin

but then like two months later. i was leaving a show. with that band i was
telling you about that i got kicked out of

bear oh yeah what'd you do
to get kicked out

justin um, i mean nothing? i dont think? it was sorta like a
like a romantic break up. like a loving loving love break up.

bear damn

justin um, yeah
it was, yeah
so i was leaving this gig.
and i was walking alone
and i was sorta really drunk, and sorta high
and i was walking right over by my subway
and this guy behind me was like
hey
gimme all your money
and i turned around

and it was the high guy!
same dude!

only now he had a gun which was

yeah it sucked and it was really really scary
but also i only had like 10 bucks on me
so it didn't like totally ruin me?
even through i was completely broke at the time
you know?

the bear does not know

but
 a few weeks later
 i was working at subway, at the register
 and this guy comes up to pay for his sandwiches
 and it's the guy
 the guy who mugged me

he's in my subway. on a date.
 and i was like: dude, i paid for this date.
 you're really going to come into *my* place of work
 and go on a date that i paid for?
 it's like, fuck you.

but also, like, *respect?*
 you know?

no i didn't say that.
 i wasn't gonna like acost him.
 i just rang him up

bear did the human recognize you?

justin no
 i don't think so
 they just sat in this booth in the corner and had their date.

and so then, and this is sorta weird but
 i asked my manager if i could take my break
 and i went over and like
 sat sorta near them?

i was just scrolling through my phone
 pretending to be a random subway dude on break
 but i was actually, like, listening to them talk

and hearing this guy who mugged me talk about the super mundane
 parts of his life was
 i dunno
 like he worked at payless shoes? and had a daughter?
 there isn't something like super profound that i heard

but now part of me feels like something happened in that subway
part of me feels like i'm going to see that guy again

like we're destined to continue to cross paths
and it's just kinda nice that
i dunno, weirdly knowing that he works at payless is kinda nice
like i don't hate him now

i dunno

bear so the sandwich shop doesn't move at all?

justin no. dude. it's just *called* subway. it's a completely normal sandwich shop.

bear i've never been in a sandwich shop

justin oh you'd love it. you'd love sandwiches.

bear yeah. damn. i want one.

justin they're legit. sandwiches are legit.

bear well congrats on your hilarious story about getting mugged but i--

justin no but i'm saying that your pinecone is helping me *see* now
i used to be all pissed at that guy only now i'm like
dude, i *get* you

bear listen the pinecone doesn't do shit
it's not some hipster boy empathy machine
it doesn't have any abilities or anything

justin but
but it glows
and it gives me bear powers

bear it's just a pinecone

that belonged to my dad

justin oh
 what?

bear it was my dad's fav pinecone
 and he left it for me
 so i really need it back and won't be loaning it out to anyone, okay?

justin why did he give you a pinecone?

bear because his dad gave it to him
 it's a bear heirloom mystery, don't make me explain it
 you wouldn't understand

 also i don't call it a pinecone

justin you don't

bear nah, you denigrate its honor by calling it that

justin okay what do you call it?

bear where is it

justin i can't
 i can't tell you

bear i need to hold it to tell you what we call it

justin considers this

bear it's mine anyway you dick, just let me hold it and i'll tell you what it's called

justin he moves and takes it out of a hiding place

he brings it over to the bear

the bear holds the pinecone

a soft tone emanates from somewhere, magic is sorta happening

the bear lifts his head and does one of his really cool badass howls

it's verry bon iver

lump sum sort of howl, kind of a choir thing going on

justin stands in awe

bear anyway...

justin holy fuck dude, teach me

bear what

justin what you just did
what the hell was that

bear it's my name for the pinecone

justin no the sound
what was that sound?

bear it's my name for the pinecone dude, chill

justin grabs his guitar

he sits with the bear

justin do it again

bear this is gross, what are you doing?

justin please? come on you said you'd help me

bear i was actually just trying to eat you

justin okay i know
 but please? we're buds now, right?

 that was really really beautiful and i'd just really love it if you could teach me

bear dude
 i'm hungry as fuck! i'm not sitting here and growling with you
 when i haven't eaten for almost a month

justin okay
 okay so what about this
 you teach me what you just said
 how you *do* that

 and i'll go kill a deer and then we can both eat

bear ...you can do that?

justin yeah man, i have my dad's rifle out in the shed
 i'm like a baller hunter
 for real, it's easy

bear sighs, ashamed

justin come on, this way we both win

bear you really want to know?

justin yes dude

bear you don't think it's stupid?

justin what? no
 bear language owns

bear no
 it's not bear language
 i'm not actually saying pinecone, you get that right?

justin um
 yeah

no, wait
what are you saying

bear bear for pinecone is

he does a very short growl

bear *my* name for this
my classification
is scientific
it's taken me years to develop it and learn the name of
everything in these woods

only all the other bears think it's hilarious
and a stupid waste of time

justin no
no way dude
what you just did
the sound you just made
was beautiful
and i would be
like
totally honored to learn it

bear okay but, i can get you to mimic the name of this pinecone
mimic *my* name for this pinecone

justin dope

bear but
i mean it's more than that

justin right right
science is like
uh
humans aren't humans
they're *homosapiens*

bear ugh no
like, there's no equivalence

i can growl at you and get you to repeat it back but
for you to actually *understand* what i'm saying

that's an exercise that's going to be difficult

justin

nahhh

bear

you humans are so effing literal!
pinecone. where'd you come up with that one?
let's trace the complex origins

where's this thing come from? pinetree
what's it look like? a cone, sorta
pinecone! genius.

the word for *this* pinecone
the name i've given it
is everything...

it's the name of my father--

justin

what's his name?

bear

it's the name of the tree this pinecone fell from

justin

oh

bear

it's the name of the winter that it fell from the tree
it's the name of the patch of ground it fell onto
the name of the blades of grass it moved

okay?

i could go on...

it's not a *pine-cone*

to name something this way you have to *listen* to know it

it's like what i was saying about your lame-ass lyrics

you have to reach out to understand something outside yourself

get me?

justin you name everything like this?

bear it's my science

justin okay
 damn

bear but it's not something i've shared
 not with any human
 which is why honestly this isn't the easiest thing for me to

if you actually want me to break this down
if to get that deer, you need me to *explain* what
these words mean
then
i guess that's something i have to be willing to do

justin sorry, can i ask just one more question?

bear okay

justin does my cabin have a name?

bear no

justin it doesn't?

bear no
 not one that i've given it
 it's been here since i was born
 but i've never felt the need

to give it a name
for me it's just
scenery

justin

okay
okay so i guess
so then maybe

listen i don't think i can ask you to tell me the name of your father
or the blades of grass
or all the things you've
like
built into this
that feels like something you should
um
something you should keep for yourself

the bear seems relieved and somewhat moved by this

bear

thank you

justin

def, def
but
but maybe
if the two of us could sit here together
and work together
maybe we could
like

bear

you want me to help you name your cabin

justin

uh
yeah
or

yeah i do
would you do that?

bear

yes

that night

time has passed

justin stands holding his guitar and is at the ready

the bear stands nearby

bear remember to feel the bear science flowing through you

justin you mean it controls our actions?

bear partially, but it also obeys your commands

justin starts to howl and play

it sorta turns into the lala song he did earlier

bear no no no
 don't howl like a bear
 howl like a justin

justin stops looks defeated

the bear approaches

bear i suggest you try it again justin
 this time let go your conscious self
 and act on instinct

the bear blindfolds justin

justin heh
 with the blindfold on i can't even see
 how am i supposed to howl?

bear your eyes can deceive you
 don't trust them

justin starts to howl and it sucks again

bear stretch out with your feelings

justin adjusts

he howls and it is beautiful

he sings a line from re: stacks

he stands back kind of amazed

bear see? you can do it

justin you know i did feel something
i could almost hear the bear science

bear that's good
you've taken your first step into a larger world

if it's not already obvious that was all a major rip off of the lightsaber training scene from star wars: a new hope and can be treated as such, does the bear don an obi wan british accent? we'll figure it out

rip off complete, we're back in bon iver world

bear comes over and takes off the blindfold

the bear kind of staggers a bit and nearly falls over

justin catches him

justin whoa
you alright?

bear i'm fine

the bear sits

justin hands him a fruit rollup

justin here try this

the bear takes it, tries to play it off

bear stacks?

justin what?

bear you, uh, just sang about stacks

justin oh uh
 yeah i dunno
 there's this game called poker
 and you have these stacks of chips
 which represent like money

 i think that's maybe where that came from

bear it's a part of the fabric of this place

justin yeah
 yeah i guess it is
 see a few weeks ago i lost
 i basically lost all my money playing this stupid game

 i got a pair of jacks
 and then they flipped another jack on the turn and--

bear no no stop
 justin
 i don't want the story

justin oh
 okay, well you asked so

bear i don't want to know what actually happened

 to name something, you need to *listen*

justin yeah only
 i don't actually like to think about it so

bear i know
 but
 when i do this
 when i approach a thing to learn its name
 if there's something that haunts you

let it in

justin kind of hangs his head

justin yeah shit

bear no, it's good
 it's good
 because the most beautiful thoughts are always beside the darkest
 and also

i do this alone usually
 err i always do this alone

but right now
 we can be together

justin yeah

bear so let's sit here
 in the stacks

bear reaches over and takes the guitar

and tell me the story of the poker game again

bear gives the guitar to justin

only listen to this place to find the words

see outside yourself

justin takes a deep breath and goes to play

but he stops himself

justin okay this is stupid

but can you hold the pinecone over me?

bear it doesn't do anythi

justin no i know i know
 but i just
 it helps me sorta

 i dunno

bear moves and finds the pinecone

he comes to justin and holds it over him

justin plays parts of re: stacks

it's the first time we're really seeing bon iver

the words are not all correct and he's stopping and starting as he thinks

but it's beautiful and completely transformative

he finishes

they both kind let the song hang in the air for a moment

then the bear doubles over or tries to stand and falters

or perhaps a coughing fit?

justin tosses his guitar aside and comes to him

justin holy fuck
 hey
 you okay
 you okay???

bear [indistinguishable]

justin okay shit

hey hey
 can you hear me?
 i'm gonna
 you stay here
 i'm gonna go get us some food
 i'm gonna kill a deer for us

just
 just
 aw shit

justin rests the bear on the couch

he jolts out of the cabin into the cold and exits

the lights become low, we're in a dream with the bear

the bear is starving and rolling around

a kind of bear fever dream

at some point he becomes semi conscious somehow

bear justin??!

ugh
 oh my christ

the bear breathes heavy, rubs his eyes. is sort of coming to but realizing he's in a super bad shape

it's february
 he's hunting for deer and it's february

how long

the bear looks to the trees

addresses them directly

what time is it?
 how long's he been gone?

how long has he *left* me here??

days
it's been days and he's

ooooof

it's february
haha february it's
there's no
hunt hah

there's no deer in february to be

uggghhhh

i can't
i need to leave this place

this fucking asshole

fire escape isn't a

uggggghhhh

JUSTINNNNN YOU FUCKING FUCK!

the bear stumbles through the cabin, knocking things over citizen kane style

fuck all this shit

but also is he looking for something?

he stumbles out the cabin and into the woods

he looks around

feels the cold for the first time

the place feels foreign somehow

he exits

after a time...

bear, hidden or just behind us, narrates again

he appears at some point

bear i stumbled west

 searching for food
 anything
 i ate what i could along the way

 more berries
 more sticks

 but no real food

 nothing that would actually keep me alive for long

 i don't know how many days it was
 but eventually i emerged from a clearing

 and i looked to the horizon
 and saw the ocean

 for the very first time

 on this cliff
 standing on my two bear legs
 i looked out over the blue

 it went on forever
 its memory infinite

it was the most beautiful thing i'd ever seen

i stayed there with it
listened to it unmoving for two whole days

until i learned its name

and i started my journey home
to die
to be with you all

the bear looks at his trees

from the woods justin emerges carrying a huge armfull of subway sandwiches

he has like 20

he also looks different somehow

justin hi bear

the bear turns

bear hi justin
 hi you fucking dick
 what the fuck are those

justin these are sandwiches asshole
 i got them for you

bear yeah a little too late
 30 days too late to be exact
 i'm about to fucking die

justin listen
 i came back for you
 i killed a deer for you and you were gone

and my cabin was super fucked up

bear it's your dad's cabin
 and you're just a hack who--

the bear doubles over, grabbing his stomach.

justin comes forward and holds the bear

helps him to sit

justin here here
 please
 you need to eat

bear it's too late

justin it's not
 please eat these sandwiches with me?
 it cost me like 50 bucks and also i really don't
 want you to die right now

justin unrolls a sandwich and passes it to the bear

the bear stands and holds the sandwich out in front of him

he takes a bite

he swallows

he takes another bite

he sighs, it looks like he's feeling better

he goes to take another bite and doubles over again

bear ughhh

justin what!
 what is it?

bear ugh
 what is this?

justin a spicy italian?
 five dollar footlong?

bear i can't
 ugh
 i can't eat this
 fuck
 jesus christ my stomach is

 uggghhh

justin kneels and holds the bear

justin no!
 no no no don't
 please

bear i have digestive issues

justin i know you've told me like twenty times

bear and i'm a bad sneaker

justin i know i know

bear justin

 thank you
 truly

 thank you for coming back for me
 i thought you'd...left me

justin no please
 you can't
 i won't let you

 bear

 eat *me*

bear what?

justin if you can't eat these sandwiches
you should eat me

bear stop

justin no
i want you to

bear justin
no
plus
you're sick!

justin i'm not
not anymore

bear justin, i'm not going to--

justin before you say anything
i want you to know that i finished naming this cabin

and i'm sorta famous now
because people like fucking love it

and
and you helped me do that
to breathe in and let in the haunted
and to see it and to name it

the most beautiful thoughts are always beside the darkest
right?

the bear nods

and so
and so i can offer myself to you
and i can be happy

i want you to live

bear

but

but if i eat you i'll go back to having zero friends

justin considers this

he stands, picks up his guitar

stands back

and begins to play skinny love, in full

the bear, seated, listens sadly

as the song nears its end the bear struggles to his feet

the bear softly approaches justin

the song finishes and justin puts down his guitar

the bear steps toward him

they are face to face and look at each other lovingly, peacefully

in one quick motion, the bear lowers his body and assumes an attack position

lights down

end of play.