

WOOLWORTH

By Terrance Hayes

for/after BPK

Across the street from the men in bars of booze,
Music, and confinement, a dog walked into a diner
To find diners eating, a cat eating, a mouse eating,
A daddy longlegs spider, and an empty stool

At the lunch counter beside a quartet of black boys
Eating nothing. The dog leapt nimbly from the floor
To the stool, a pair of paw-cushions barely touching
Seat cushion as it jumped upon the counter,

And turned its snarl directly upon the cat, who paused
In its meal of the mouse, who paused as well
In its meal of one of those daddy longlegs spiders
Folk say are extremely poisonous, but whose fangs

Are too short to break anybody's skin,
Not the shorter-legged daddy longlegs arachnid
That shares its name with the spider
And secretes a small poison when attacked.

"A man walks into a bar and sets a big ugly dog bone
Down on the bar," the cat says to the snarling dog
Without clarifying whether it might be the bone of a dog
Or the bone of an animal mauled by the dog,

"The man sets the bone down beside a wad of cash
And orders a tall tumbler of the most expensive whiskey
In the bar, into which he dips the nasty tip of the bone,
Stirring slowly while looking around the bar

Terrance Hayes is the author of American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin, which was a finalist for the 2018 National Book Award.



With its stunned oblivious witnesses and big-bellied barkeep
Before quickly guzzling every drop of the burning amber,”
The cat says to the dog and an equally stunned audience
In the diner previously predisposed by the four young African-

American men who’d entered the diner to dine,
All of them now rapt and wrapped in the yarn being spun
By the cat. “When the man rose to depart, leaving the bone
Behind, the bartender snapped, ‘You can’t leave that lying there!’

And the man said, ‘That ain’t no lion, Man,’” chuckled the cat.
The dog had leapt nimbly to and from the stool,
Which was one of those tall spinning stools you sometimes find
A small child set and spinning upon while the father drinks

In bars of phony euphony before stumbling from the bar
Like a dog with three legs, but this dog was not like that,
Nor was it the kind of dog you might recall turned snarling
On the black college students in Greensboro sit-ins in the Sixties,

It was not a dog like that but the dog shook its head
With the look of someone suddenly violently slapped,
And the dog said to the brothers who’d simply entered the diner
Looking to eat, “Holy shit, it’s a goddamned talking cat!” ■