

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

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Inspired by "The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls"
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The tide rises, the tide falls,
The twilight darkens, the curlew calls;
Along the sea-sands damp and brown
The traveller hastens toward the town,
 And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Darkness settles on roofs and walls,
But the sea, the sea in the darkness calls;
The little waves, with their soft, white hands,
Efface the footprints in the sands,
 And the tide rises, the tide falls.

The morning breaks; the steeds in their stalls
Stamp and neigh, as the hostler calls;
The day returns, but nevermore
Returns the traveller to the shore,
 And the tide rises, the tide falls.

"the tide rises, the tide falls," henry wadsworth longfellow

Character(s) :

WESLEY—27, the baby of the family, a bit of a romantic, largely lost in life. He is not an angry person. His humor is dry and unassuming.

VICTOR—(non-speaking, the "other") 32, Wesley's older brother. Married, a baby on the way. All-American Golden Boy.

Setting:

Edisto Island, South Carolina. On the beach. Evening.

On Victor:

Stage directions for VICTOR are in the script not to suggest the actual presence of another actor, but to present non-verbal cues to which WESLEY can respond.

Notes on Text:

"..." indicates the briefest of pauses used to find a word or phrase

"**Beat**" indicates a slight pause, a breath, a chance to compose oneself before moving forward.

"**Silence**" indicates something larger than a beat. It is heavy. Several breaths.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

(Night. WESLEY sitting on the beach. He has been drinking. Not drunk, but there's an ease with which words fall of his mouth. VICTOR arrives, having followed him. WESLEY notices VICTOR.)

WESLEY

I know it was, you know, *dramatic* for me to walk out like that, but I'm so...*fed up* with all the tears, you know?

(VICTOR sits.)

And before you start with the whole lecture on the validity of all the crying, *I know*. I fucking know, Vic, so don't even...

(Silence. WESLEY focuses on the beach.)

I *loved* this place as a kid. But I never wanted to come back after I left.

(Beat.)

Dad never cared. There were phone calls from Mom, but Dad...he never reached out to see if everything was okay, never asked if I was upset about something, why I wasn't coming back. At first, you know, I just wanted to hold onto my independence from them for a little bit longer, but as time passed...I think I was avoiding home. Avoiding *him*.

(Beat.)

I think I came out here because...I couldn't sit in that house surrounded by people crying over a man I was so angry with...through the end. And I guess I'm trying to remember the happy stuff.

(Beat. In thought, WESLEY laughs.)

Like all the times you and I spent afternoons burying him in the sand just over there and he wanted us to sculpt the body of some macho heavy-weight champion around him, but instead we gave him those *huge* boobs...

(WESLEY finds this hysterical. VICTOR does not, which annoys WESLEY.)

(*Bitingly.*) You're allowed to laugh at a funeral, Vic. You know that, right? No dead person could possibly be happy watching their loved ones sob uncontrollably for hours on end.

(Beat.)

Look if you're just going to sit here and watch me spiral through the stages of grief until I'm finally at the same state as you, just do me a favor and head back to the house, okay? I'm sure your wife could use a foot massage or something after all the standing she's been doing all day. I heard her complaining to one of Mom's neighbors right before I left.

(Beat.)

I feel bad for you, though. Staying sober through Bethany's pregnancy in solidarity. Couldn't imagine going through this without a drink.

(Beat.)

(*A moment of levity.*) If only Dad had held on for a couple more weeks. Could've met his grandson, and you could've had a *fucking* beer.

(Beat. VICTOR is not amused.)

Sorry.

(Beat.)

I always hoped I would beat you to it. Marriage. Baby. The whole shebang. I should've known better. Grandma always said you were so much like Dad, and I was just like Uncle Rodney. Uncle Rodney, bachelor 'til the grave. History repeats itself, I guess.

(Beat.)

(*Ironic.*) What a bummer, man.

(Beat.)

I think that's why Dad always liked you more.

(VICTOR tries to negate this.)

(Cutting VICTOR off. Matter-of-fact, no anger.) Dad always saw himself in you and saw Rodney in me, just like Grandma did. I mean, you can't deny that he always gave you more attention. When presented with two options, your football game against my cross country meet, your student art exhibit against my science fair, whatever, he chose you every time. The passcode to his fucking phone was your birthday, for Christ's sake.

(Beat.)

And I'm not mad at you for that, obviously. It's not your fault, you just wanted your parents' attention just like I did. I'm not even mad at Dad. I'm not angry. Period. Full-stop. Or maybe I am. I don't even know why I'm rambling like this, like I'm back in therapy, or something. You ever thought about being a therapist?

(Beat.)

Don't. You'd be awful at it. No offense, I mean I'd be shit at it, too. I don't think the men of our family have...the constitution? But hey, maybe your little guy will be different.

(Silence.)

I know it's really hard for you, Dad not meeting him. But you're going to be a great dad. I really believe that. And Bethany's going to be a great mom. Hell, she already is. She won't shut up about all the shit she's doing to keep the little guy happy and healthy in there. That fetus is going to pop out with superpowers, I swear to God.

(Silence.)

(Difficult.) Victor. I have a favor to ask of you. And the only reason why I'm bold enough to ask this of you is because I know you, I know Bethany, I know how your minds work.

(Beat.)

Don't name your son after Dad. Please.

(VICTOR rolls his eyes, guffaws, and stands to leave. WESLEY stands as well.)

Is it *that* ridiculous of a request? Your *ridiculous* baby brother asks *one thing* of you in his goddamned life and you can't do that for him? Victor, you were raised in our father's image; you got *every fucking piece of him*. Let me have his name.

(Beat. VICTOR stops.)

And I know what you're thinking: "What the fuck is Little Wesley going to do with a fucking baby name? No sign of a baby anytime soon." But *Jesus*, Victor, my whole fucking life I have chased after Dad, only to be overshadowed by you. And if you name your son after him, you *still* have him all to yourself, even in death. And I *need* a piece of him.

(Beat.)

I know it's...stupid. But I will love my son so much. And I want him to have a piece of Dad, so I can love him and have him love me so I can set this right. No son of mine will feel unloved by his father.

(Beat.)

And no son of yours is going to take that from him. And neither are you. I need it, Victor. I need his name.

(Beat.)

Victor, please.

(VICTOR averts his eyes, turns, and walks away. WESLEY sighs, sits, and watches the waves. The tide rises, the tide falls.)

END.