Beastiary (found poem)

Michael Taekens*
BESTIARY
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Wild yellow irises.
Beautifully weathered

skull with parts
jaggedly missing. Strip

calcium phosphate
and the bones become

flexible—enough so that
one can literally tie them

in knots. 128,000
pairs of legs

had been turned in
for bounty. And they

lived, and stood upon
their feet, and exceedingly

great host: snail shells,
clams, turreted seashell,
crinoids, coral, deer
pelvis, thimble-sized

mouse skull. How I bore you
on eagle’s wings and brought

you unto myself. Crushed
and finely ground, used

as feed for stock, as fertilizer,
and as a nutritional
supplement for humans. They
can assess which threats
are real, which are not,
and respond accordingly.

Their bones dissolve
until at last the creature
is floating, Precambrian,
unicellular: trickster, earth
mother, hag, journey,
lying saucer, lock
and key. Plumes. Purple
mountains' majesty. Bone
black—a fine charcoal made
by burning animal bones
in closed containers, used
in refining sugar. they
sheltered themselves from
the rain under fresh skins. My
country 'tis of thee, sweet
visage duplicated on seals,
coins, quilts, totem poles,
mastheads, buffalo hides,
weather vanes, flagpoles, Boy
Scout ribbons and post office
doors. Most eighteenth
century Americans had seen
an eagle. Such indifference
is the eagle's usual policy.