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# THE GOATWALK

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# The Goat Walk

A Comedy of Boundaries

by Jordan Paul Sullivan

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

CATULLUS — THE POET

JOHN — THE DEPUTY

ANDY — THE FOOL

PAUL — THE ZEALOT

BOB — THE ELDER

IRENE — THE ELDER

MELIPRYMA — THE HEIRESS

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TATKO — THE GENEROUS FATHER

SECURITY CHIEF

OUTSIDE CONSULTANT

NASTEIA

•

CASSIA

*A brick patio in Dana Point, California. There is a white, round plastic table at stage center that's topped with an assortment of food and beverages: fudge, cookies, dog treats, six coffee cups. The table is flanked by several three-foot tall rounded clay flower pots, each one painted a different, solid color: blue, red, green, black, violet, pink. Six white plastic chairs encircle the table. IRENE and ANDY sit towards stage left, BOB and PAUL towards upstage, and then towards stage right: JOHN and an empty chair, where CATULLUS will eventually sit.*

## SCENE 0

JOHN [nonchalant, to ANDY]:  
 If you're dead set on having up,  
 From the patch of grass—  
 Each blade bending  
 At their unpracticed angles— the copse  
 Of trees with the blight on it,  
 It would be feasible enough  
 To use that space for the goat walk.

The stage lights go dark, and then an overhead spotlight turns on, illuminating CATULLUS, who is lying on his back, upon the floor, in the middle of the audience. The audience is the ocean. Another overhead light turns on and follows CASSIA, as she enters stage right and makes her way to stage center. CASSIA gazes out over the audience, looking down upon CATULLUS.

CATULLUS [aside]:  
 John Holder,  
 Your secret deep in thought breaking.

There's a short pause. CATULLUS stands up. He is missing both of his hands. CATULLUS observes CASSIA, who bows her head, as if she's in mourning.

CATULLUS [aside]:  
 A woman, who is this?  
 Fur hat, pale shoulders bent with doubt, peers past  
 This amphitheater of pits and combers  
 With assassins' eyes—she looks  
 To me—, the gray crystallized in search of distraction.

CATULLUS ascends the stage, and CASSIA backs away from him.

CATULLUS [aside]:

But it's always been, there's only  
 So many liberties I can take. On whose authority  
 Do I become the bearer of this story? For  
 What if I come to improve, by some  
 Recombination of influence,  
 The structure of their intent,  
 Upon the original author's forgotten  
 Facts? Marginalia of readers, consistently  
 They move onward, and who is left  
 To forbid, if I disapprove of an improvement  
 That behooves him, or of what's not possible  
 According to my waiting imagination?

CATULLUS approaches CASSIA and gazes into her eyes with a sense of uncertainty. CASSIA continues to back away. CATULLUS turns back and heads to the empty seat at the table. The stage is still dark. Exit CASSIA.

CATULLUS [aside]:

Character of Andy Priest, closest friend, I permit you,  
 Already widened, that woman's brow, stretch it fair and  
 Bring it further, for you know the story.

CATULLUS sits down in his chair.

CATULLUS [aside]:

Force every rhyme if you must.  
 See what sticks, such that:

The spotlight turns off, and there isn't a source of light in the theater. A short pause, then the full set of stage lights comes on. The entire stage is illuminated. CATULLUS is in possession of his hands, which implies that this is now a memory, of sorts.

ANDY [reciting]:

And then smiled for some reason  
 it was the warm season, same as all the rest  
 Except—a nervous smile that hints at treason  
 Only a poet of his defiance could dress  
 With a kind integration—  
 Water heating up, seal suits

We take soft pleasures in divesting,  
Releasing to their stations

.

And just in time for the parade of the tall ships;  
We gather, watch them in passing,  
And take our paddles down to where they'll be docking;  
Goldens, Labs, here, there, baying,  
And left them upon the beach, save for John's poodle  
To stand amongst them, bearing an old pooch  
Instead of elaborate fruit. *"You know—  
Not such a bad idea, Holder,"*  
Little knowing...

.

John made me The Fool.  
I'll stop short of blaming  
Myself, for how I should have been foreseeing  
Somehow, how John, on that warm afternoon  
With all the pitches he was sinking  
Then curve-balling, lobbing,  
*THE GOAT WALK*, I mean,  
How'd I not see that one coming?  
*Not a bad idea, Holder.*  
Fuck! What the fuck was I thinking?

.

In the mornings, Monday through Friday,  
John and I, we two, will surf Doheny,  
But Paul and Catullus, if it's Sunday,  
Will join us in the harbor, sun-up, for some paddleboarding.  
At four o'clock, it's coffee, every day,  
Upon the front patio of Bob and Irene,  
A second mother, uncle to us four. And between  
The time at sea and our gathering  
Upon the front patio with salt taffy and creams,  
The five of us, all but Irene, will gather  
At the dog park, not a dog park, but a grass field:  
The Bell Park, near the San Juan Mission.

.

And, allegedly, the cycle of the grass's green  
Will reach its crowning point at the 48th noon of spring.  
Is it a flavor of crassness, does it make me mean,  
To admit I'm glad it was browner just yesterday?  
The balls rest colorfully, heavily,  
And the grass does splay;  
John calls red, as he calls it faithfully.  
Which means we're green again.

.

It's not that hard, to learn how to play  
 Our version of a very old game:  
 Throw one Pinelli, throw the other  
 Each team's players will get two throws;  
 Two points is the max per round,  
 A game of elliptical orbits, and balls rebounding  
 Crashing and motions swift, the bloated, hollow sound  
 Like the planets, the heavens colliding,  
 A mathematic to make Kepler proud,  
 But if this seems lame or largely  
 It might be noted, we add in calls,  
 Loose constrictions. We play on wild terrain.  
 The occasional throw succumbing to an array  
 Of deterrence in the grass' variegation;  
 Sop will sounds the plop; no further arranged  
 Motion; rocks and hill; slick tips pulling  
 Further forward; must skip o'er the concrete  
 path; but, if the concrete becomes too slow  
 The ball will lose its motion  
 Forward, and it may as well be in the parking lot  
 Sidewalk or gutter: all make for disqualification,  
 Bringing us the rapture of confusion  
 And conflict, epiphanies from false-hearted devotion,  
 To a game for exacting  
 Old grudges and a pleasant attempt to gain  
 Some renown with a swell of backspin,  
 By a kamikaze precise, clutch, poignantly thrown.

SCENE I.

The lights go off, and then the spotlight hovers on  
 CATULLUS, who is once again without his hands.

CATULLUS [aside]:  
 I cannot allow my mistakes  
 Their right to mercy, for a man  
 Like me these things have  
 A tendency to betray, how  
 Did you purge the imperfect,  
 And the fat from the places they belong,  
 How long did it take you to survive?  
 For how long, truly, for  
 How long?

.  
 My identity, John Holder,

Is tied intrinsically  
To this seventh character I portray—  
An aged actor, for instance  
Might have an impulse, if  
I may romanticize, to declare,

.  
I am a synthesis,  
A rebuilding  
Of myself and my latest gimmick,  
The wrestling, an art of us both,

.  
But if the audience ever-changing  
Expects you to keep up with their demand  
For entertainment,

.  
Then he who'd protest to not destroy  
In essence, is dying alongside  
Those reinventing  
Too much and too fast,

.  
Ignorant of the slow process  
Of the rehabilitation of truth:  
The nature of the spring  
Invoking its divergence, convergence.

.  
Do you see him there, the sex starved imp,  
Pacing up and down the curtain line?  
There's the driver of the whole spasm;  
That's all we ever aspire  
To be, and in aspiring, become.

.  
But not Catullus, no longer.  
I'm done with it, John Holder,  
Done loitering here in the interim,  
In this shallow water, amongst crags  
And jellyfish, that sting out of boredom,  
I've spent precious years attempting  
To lure in this horizon, one  
That's never been seen; the one  
That'll come, in due time, regardless  
Of my own efforts.

.  
But it wasn't all for naught,  
As I look out  
Over the crashing of these waves,  
The upsplashing,

Tumult of spray, roaring  
And retreating.

.  
I'm reminded  
Of something I learned  
While ensconced within that void,  
A glimpse  
I stole into nature  
And its subtle underpinnings,  
The workings and the moving of our airy world:

.  
Waves, desire, wars,  
From the galaxies, down to our composite  
Particles, the massy protons  
And miniscule electrons  
That fawn over  
One another, and commingle  
In certain realms  
To form consciousness, life; they're governed  
Not by laws  
Imposed by some power external  
To nature, but, rather, we follow rules  
Democratic, as consented upon  
By all the particles composite within nature  
Abiding. There's not one  
Absolute.

.  
There is no limit  
on the speed of my motion.

.  
I can be in one place,  
And then in a separate place,  
All in the same moment.

.  
The whole idea of territory  
May just be a sleight of hand.

.  
We all agreed  
To be like Prometheus  
Bound  
To this rock of limits, trapped  
In our own dreams,  
Of how things  
Might be less constricted,  
But with no God-like  
Hierarchy, this way

Is no longer irrefutable  
And now the hard part: to prove it!

.

The rolling wave  
Will reach a final height,  
The high tide  
Will retrace its former steps, now  
That half the night has passed.  
Not Catullus!  
Nope. No longer.

.

I forfeit  
That old way of life.  
Only expansion from here! Only motion,  
Motion unabating from here!  
Prophets of earth be damned, if they have  
To leech a little more blood  
From my sogged-up heels, as I make my way  
Back, over a school of ghosts  
In their blue conches, imbibing  
The stench of the sea lion offensive  
That washed up at night,  
Before the sea retreated, trapped in  
The tide pool.

.

I'll start by making my way  
Towards the whitewashed  
Chapel, on those high cliffs,  
And see if I can find  
A suburban oasis, anywhere  
Down in the lower lands,  
That resembles, in some way, my charming  
Town of so many years ago,  
The harbor of Dana Point.

.

Some solid land at least.  
But, wait!  
Isn't this the place? Isn't this  
The bulging hillside  
That was once smooth  
And out-sloping  
Like the belly of a pregnant mother?  
Isn't this the oceanside  
Mountain path  
That had way too many statues,  
I'd say twenty, at least,

Of the weeping Mary?

.  
 This is the inn, I'm sure of it,  
 Where I hid for three days  
 When I told her  
 I was leaving and she put out a bounty.  
 Yes, this is it,  
 This is where I left her,  
 Believing she'd thrive, here on her own.

.  
 This has to be it, the domain  
 Of Melipryma, I'm sure of it.  
 You remember Melipryma, John?  
 The one you called little Kissinger.  
 Of course. An aspiring young statesman.  
 She plots constantly for my hand.

.  
 Melipryma stood bare-chested  
 On the roof of her mansion, her body  
 Bronze and firm  
 From the years  
 Of rock-climbing.  
 Oh, I could still  
 Trace out that body;

.  
 She peered out  
 Through her telescope, golden,  
 That her great-grandfather had bequeathed her  
 Fashionable amongst  
 The third mates in his day,  
 And when she couldn't find  
 Her Catullus, she climbed  
 The cliff-face behind her property,  
 Which is also her property, another  
 Five hundred feet.

.  
 For days she looked  
 Out, and she scanned  
 The shoreline entire  
 Of the peninsula;  
 That telescope never retracted,  
 Not once, not till her arms  
 Grew thin, thinner  
 Than the glass itself.  
 When her sisters found her  
 She was barely

Breathing, due to lack  
Of food and water. She's a girl  
Who knows what she wants.

.

I'll give her that.  
But what hand  
Have I to give?  
I surrendered my hand,  
And the other hand with it.

.

For what's a hand, but tapering flesh  
And nails  
And the boundaries  
That contain them? The hand  
That writes, the hand that conducts  
The catskin  
And the wrist of the violinist,  
The hand that reaches like a vague blur  
Against the blackened sky.

.

She is my favorite  
Lady, my special one, I still  
Send her a poem, from time to time,  
Around this time  
Of the year.

.

I suppose it would be  
The polite thing to do,  
To stop by the place I last parted  
From Melipryma,  
To tease her for a bit,  
Make her think she has a chance  
To pull on me once more...  
To show her, at last, that  
I have no hands.

LIGHTS TO JOHN

JOHN [aside]:

[NOTE TO ACTORS: The exchanges between JOHN and CATULLUS should come across as a series of monologues that overlap in theme, and that are addressed to the other character from a distance. There is no direct interaction, and thus these exchanges should not

appear to be a direct dialogue between the two characters.]

Now, I have no prediction,  
As might as well have been predicted,  
As to the relations establishing the sovereignty  
Of your mind and the place you're  
Going, but, tell me this, Catullus,

.

You're still in college.  
You still recognize  
All the world's jumping and perfect  
Devils— or, if I'm wrong,  
Tell me, have you allowed yourself  
To grow out of those habits yet?

.

Your mind, my mind, are not islands  
But colonies. We're not independent  
Of the world around us.

.

Society and nature, they're governed each  
By their own set of rules.  
We're part of it. Not visitors.  
We're players,  
Not judges. So we learn the rules well,  
And we excel at whatever  
Game is put in front of us, and outperform the rest,  
And as our play elevates,  
We applaud ourselves for our performance  
Being best, within the bounds  
of those rules. And you should learn to enjoy it,  
As I enjoy it. And how I enjoy it.

.

These rules contain you,  
Because these rules permit you,  
Your thinking,  
Your mind's being, your perceiving  
Of the physical world, which contains you,  
And which is likewise  
Contained by the rules you're so swift to dismiss  
As malleable entity. Man is not flesh,  
Not hardware, but code, and the code is grammar,  
And the grammar, nature's law.

.

The brain's born  
Uninhabited by a mind. It's not

Until it speaks its first word, and when you, Catullus,  
 Spoke that word, *vacuum*, as your mother  
 Told us, bragging about your genius,  
 Your mind became inhabited by  
 The people of that word: Saxons, Latins,  
 Greeks and French, and from that day onward,  
 You would be, but you  
 Were never your own.

.  
 Their language claimed you  
 As one of its outposts, a bee  
 In the hive, a lighthouse  
 On English and Attic waters;  
 Your dialect, American;  
 Your accent, Dana Point.  
 And that may as well be your name,  
 The language, more so than you, Catullus.

.  
 In the beginning  
 Was the word,  
 As the old book said,  
 And it was right, at least,  
 About one thing.

.  
 Borrowed from Chinese, derived  
 From the Japanese, then there's mathematics,  
 Arabic numerals, the table of elements:  
 This all can be found  
 In the colony of a mind.  
 There's nothing wrong with that. If there was  
 I'd tell you.

.  
 And after all this inbreeding, outbreeding  
 Cross-contamination, what's left?

.  
 Power.

.  
 There's no language in Earth's history  
 That's been crafted of a finer steel  
 To one who knows it,  
 And then here's where you come in, the poets,  
 Trying to reinvent it.

.  
 Do what Shakespeare did, and make it strong again.  
 But knowing you, you're just looking  
 To screw something up—

No. You lack his tenacity. I don't think  
 Less of you. No. Not for that,  
 I wouldn't.

.

I have no secrets.

.

Understand, Catullus,  
 My words are not mine own either,  
 No words are my sole possession.  
 What you call secret, I call a will  
 To protect those who may act out  
 With what I've come to know.

.

Even you, Catullus.  
 You came to me as a youth, still mawing on  
 About sacraments and salvation, aspiring  
 To be a poet, of all the tawdry  
 Things. Would you have had me respond  
 Any differently?

.

Every bit of instruction, that came to me,  
 I shared it with you, and you come  
 From a family that built empires.  
 You could have been an Alexander;  
 That's what your mother  
 Tells me about you.

.

In my career, I've also been made  
 To view language as a tool,

.

**But I never felt the need**  
 To hunt words like lofty prey,  
 Never abused  
 A language  
 To convince myself that the time will come,  
 When I'll be better off  
 Than the rest of the world.

.

Consider all the good  
 You could have done,  
 Catullus,  
 Is all I'm saying.

LIGHTS TO CATULLUS

CATULLUS:

I once knew everything, John Holder.  
 Everything around me was still the consequence  
 Of an imagination  
 Dominant over strategy, over  
 Pleasure.

.  
 I even believed once, I made  
 A study, if I recall, that  
 Sovereignty  
 Could be packed  
 Behind motion as well...

.  
 Imagining so much and seeing  
 So little, erecting a  
 Libya of arguments  
 Consistent, each  
 Upon  
 Foundations of abstract  
 Virtues  
     Shifting.

.  
 All is pleasant nonetheless,  
 But it's getting boring, boring;  
 Another day of plodding, nonetheless.  
 I did my best, god forbid.

.  
 I'll find the secret,  
 The one that through a series  
 Of mass extinctions, the world itself  
 Forgot existed.

.  
 What secret, John? What feminine void?  
 What is good?

.  
 That secret, and your secret, John,  
 Which I suspect are made  
 Of the same fabric.

.  
 In a fog, buried here beneath our feet

.  
 Or flung out into the heavens, along with  
 My hands,

.  
 Into the place  
 Where things live on,

.

Where the sun itself has long since expired.

SCENE II.

*The peak of a mountain, stage right, and jutting out from the mountain, a concrete balcony. MELIPRYMA stands upon this balcony, wearing mountain climbing pants, but no shirt. MELIPRYMA's breasts are exposed, and she holds her golden, collapsable telescope up to her eye, and gazes out on the audience, where she spots CATULLUS.*

MELIPRYMA

Without your hand,  
You're still a body.  
Who needs a limb,  
When the rest of you  
Is my territory?

.

You think the form I take  
Is of desire.

.

As you dream  
Of the caressing sun  
Warming its glance on my swollen,  
My browning, nipples,

.

I have your mind now.

.

The female form,  
Is of possession;

.

Man's desire:  
To be absorbed  
Into another,  
To surrender  
The most valued of his territories.

.

The form I take,  
Gets for me what I'm wanting  
And at the moment, I want  
You, some part of you, a part  
That becomes the whole:

.

Sing not about me!  
I'm not in your story

I'll sing about you,  
this story's my own.

.

You didn't hurt me, Catullus,  
I'll have you know,

.

Mount Pindarrhus  
That day was wet, and moss  
Hid in the cracks  
Of the jut-rocks. I fell.

.

I nearly died of starvation  
Up on that peak,  
With nothing to do but watch over my love  
Where he went,  
Hiding.

.

I watched.  
You looked back.

.

I imagine you saw me,  
Blood spilling, and you still  
Decided to leave, preferring  
Your freedom to the safety  
Of someone you call  
Your special one,

.

More special than  
Your other special ones?

.

And now  
You return  
To my family's peninsula,  
Did you expect me not  
To be suspicious? To ask,  
Is it not by chance?

.

Don't expect diplomacy,  
Or for Tatko to set his table  
With the crystalwear.

.

Do you wish for a warm meal? You fired  
The first shot.

.

Remember when Aeneas returned  
To collect Dido's ashes?

.  
 My response will be unrestrained,  
 and I'll take what I want  
 Even as you entreat  
 that I be more patient,  
 TO be more predictable,  
 Like some grapevine  
 On her thin, wire trellis.

.  
 Here, in this land  
 Of fishermen and mines,  
 We don't divide our land  
 By acreage.  
 We partition it, rather,  
 By a system I invented,

.  
 Of Hillage. Every hill  
 Above 1000 feet is mine,  
 Every hill below one thousand  
 is mine. Every hill, here, at one thousand  
 Is mine.

.  
 And where are you, Catullus?

MELIPRYMA closes the telescope and holsters it in the  
 belt around her waist. LIGHTS TO ANDY. Exit MELIPRYMA.

ANDY:

And not today, but it could drop like the surge  
 Of the tides' desperate reaction to the sun's  
 Raking arm, ivory sea-foam's interpretation  
 Perhaps, of an ambivalent purge, Russian?,  
 A bellying of ocean,  
 That, intimidate like an unsalt sailor  
 Reaving in topsail measured by boxwood,  
 Sings a song, to bid the world sing another,  
 urges breakers to cascade,  
 form, the boulders down the jetty balding beards,  
 that foam also, and like over-fed  
     sailors, gray and dripping,  
 along the angled gunwale.

.  
 And what will come to cozy under flying  
 Jib-boom, unpatched, can rest 'neath uncomplaining  
 Waters, Irene will opt to stay  
 Unflinched, the figurehead, the greatest that

Gold paint has ever had privilege to decorate,  
 On a replica to come  
 From an industry conquered by zeal for gold,  
 As Bob, he explained, *That's a nice rack, Andy,*

•  
 And a young girl, *Wow, would*  
*You look how low the tide is today,*  
 Putting second hand to circle flowers, her friend  
 Adjusting sundress, compares the sandmargin  
 To a vacuum.

Stage center, enter a stone statue of RICHARD HENRY  
 DANA JR. Lights to the statue of RICHARD HENRY DANA  
 JR.

STATUE OF RICHARD HENRY DANA JR:  
 Stopping, for ears not for eyes, not wax; cones, rods;  
 Ice-shorn foresails hands numb to windlass,  
 All hands; that quaint tone still it startles, royal yards  
 To cross: you're neither man, soger, nor sailor, grog  
 Lifts, thawing the unbroken frost 'round Horn, then more grog,  
 quiet water  
 Then ninety days, with no grog, then more quiet water,  
 for ninety constellations, quiet waters,  
 And returning to the northeastern board  
 Declaring at last what I had long strove to see  
 The stretching cliffs of San Juan, romantic  
 Coarse sand cove, the  
 Lone romantic spot on the California coast,  
 Cliffs like fresh canvas, and warmth that the eyes can feel  
 Romance in knowledge, brief-c  
 And returning also with knowledge of how much the seamen  
 Of an abused system can suffer, faith  
     in duty deferred.

### SCENE III.

STAGE LIGHTS ON. The six characters at the table are  
 visible, and they are now interactive in their  
 exchanges. Exit THE STATUE OF RICHARD HENRY DANA JR.

JOHN: Well, if you're dead set on tearing up the concrete and  
 the blighted thicket of trees, you could use that space for the  
 goat walk, Andy.

ANDY: You know... that's not such a bad idea, Holder.

JOHN: It's not a bad idea at all.

ANDY: Jesus... I mean, realistically, how much could the city fuck me over for this?

PAUL [checking his bright red watch, not really asking for the time; he's more interested in showing off his new watch]: Is it 4:05?

BOB: No, Paul. I've got 4:17.

PAUL: Thanks, Bob.

ANDY: It might be better off if I just fixed it up myself. Do you think I'd be better off just fixing it up myself?

JOHN [nonchalant]: Well, if you wanna take the legal risk...

ANDY: Is it actually illegal? Fuck. You understand why I'm having a hard time taking your word for it. How could it be illegal to just fix it up myself?

JOHN: We talked about this.

ANDY: I know. It's just... I mean, two inches?

IRENE: I do not know what a goat walk is.

PAUL [laughing to himself, he looks at John]: It's better off that way Irene!

IRENE stares blankly into the distance

ANDY: Two inches. Who cares? The city council's got more important things to worry about, I know that for a fact. You think the voters care?

JOHN: Unless you opt for one of those goat walks with the elevation and the ramp...

ANDY: Ramp?

JOHN: If there's no ramp, you won't be able to see anything from the street down below. How do you expect the voters to give a damn about it, if they can't even see the thing?

ANDY: What the fuck are you talking about John?

JOHN: Same thing you're talking about.

ANDY: I'm talking about the mustard weed.

JOHN: We're talking about the same thing.

ANDY: You're talking about, I don't know, fucking landscaping.

JOHN: We're talking about the same thing.

ANDY: You know, it doesn't make you right, just because you keep repeating something.

JOHN: I'm right because I'm telling you, this is what's happening.

ANDY: And I'm telling you, my immediate concern is the back deck.

JOHN: You mean the one that goes over the hill, a little more than two inches past the line of mustard weed?

ANDY: Allegedly.

JOHN: That's what I'm getting at. It'll get rid of the mustard weed. It'll only take a day or two.

ANDY: Name me one person in this city, one person who votes for city council in local bullshit elections, name me one who would give a shit about two inches of some hill.

JOHN [correcting ANDY]: Municipal property.

ANDY [frustrated]: Jesus.

JOHN: You can relax, Andy. I've got you taken care of.

ANDY: I'll tell you what this is, John. You know what this is? Irene? [IRENE doesn't respond] It's a power trip. Some mid-level

bureaucrat at the Parks Department is getting his rocks off because this is what he has.

IRENE: I don't know what a goat walk is.

BOB: Irene!

BOB suggests by a gesture of his hand that IRENE not insert herself in the middle of this situation, as BOB is aware of what's going on.

PAUL: It's 4:22.

**IRENE [aside]: It is shining bright, the sun; and there is a gentle breeze, honing and shucking Andy's heat unto Paul, honing and shucking a weird and pleasant sense of intimacy, honing and shucking from Paul onto a black pot that serves as a backdrop to this funny scene.**

BOB [to IRENE, as if insisting she silence herself]: Irene.

IRENE [aside]: The breezes are moving past our faces, at a 5 knots pace, according to John Holder. Catullus trusts John Holder. The scene is Dana Point, California. The weather is always perfect, perennially perfect. One becomes jaded.

BOB: Hon, I think you should leave it alone. Stay out of it.

IRENE shushes BOB, harshly

IRENE [aside]: The boys confess a lot of details about their lives while they drink their coffee and eat their chocolates and their cookies at my white patio table, sometimes intimate, and sometimes they admit more than I care to hear, and so I'll excuse myself from the table with a clever excuse, that I need to bring out more snacks, or that I must fetch refills for their coffees.

BOB: Irene, I mean it.

IRENE shushes BOB, more aggressively this time

IRENE [aside]: Bob is always humoring the others as well as himself. Our front patio is hedged, as mass data might be hedged by individual experience in postmodern methods of analysis, by four clay pots, the size of elephants' feet, is it Asian or

African, from which rise cacti tall as statues of lesser gods, Greek not Egyptian, and hinting at the openness of a temperate desert.

The sun punctures polite tissues of clouds. It does in Dana Point. Quite different from the Bavarian sun, which any cloud could block out, converting a clear day into a five minute spell of overcast and Catholic gloom. It takes a thunderhead in Dana Point. All in solid colors, Bob had painted the pots.

BOB: Painted that one on my day off, Andy.

THE DOGS begin barking

ANDY [to his dog]: Stop it!

ANDY hands his dog a treat.

IRENE [to the dogs]: Ruby, Allie, quiet. Quiet!

IRENE hands the other dogs a treat, one at a time.

IRENE: Stop barking.

IRENE hits one of the dogs on the nose

IRENE [screaming]: Now!

THE DOGS stop barking

JOHN: You scold the dog for barking, Andy, and then every time she acts up, you throw her a treat. Do you see why the poor thing might be confused?

ANDY [laughs]: The goat walk. Fuck. If you're gonna bring up Paula again...

JOHN: You brought up Paula.

ANDY: The goat walk. Ha! Fucking goat walk! [ANDY laughs again.]

IRENE: What is a goat walk?

BOB [interrupting IRENE, pointing to the black pot]: You know, Andy, come to think of it, that one too. Painted it on my day off. [looks at Andy, laughs unrestrainedly]

IRENE: Bob is retired. I suppose that's his joke. Fifty two years. The joke isn't all that clever, but Bob has a way of mustering everyone to laughter when he commences with his laughing. His laugh is high. His laugh is nasally. His laugh hits you at the unrecognizable angles like when the chirpings of crickets envelop you, and you realize that so much time has passed since you last checked the clock on the microwave above the kitchen sink. The forceful *hiahhhhh-hahaha*.

And to the south, the sun shines white and lightly. There is a red pot it hits first. And pitch black, the soil in the pink pot faces the sun, and is sheltered from the full intensity of the rays. The purple pot aligns with these but also aligns with the pot with my roses, which are red and they rise gently to overlook the table,— the black pot across the table serves as a backdrop to its funny view.

CATULLUS [aside]: It is brown, the inside of the coffee mug. It is brown, the coffee mug, on the inside. The coffee mug is brown on the inside.

IRENE [aside]: Catullus knew he was onto something, and he knew he smelled fudge. The dogs have finally stopped their barking.

PAUL: 200 dollars flat. Total steal. They were practically giving them out, you know, as a promotion. This thing'll cost a couple thousand by next year.

JOHN is skeptical, in a way that doesn't seem particular to this statement, but rather to anything PAUL might have to say.

PAUL [noticing JOHN's restrained expression of doubt]: What?

JOHN: Nothing. Sure.

PAUL: Oh, you think I got scammed?

JOHN [not giving a shit]: No.

ANDY: Did they spell MAVADO with a "V" this time?

ANDY laughs aloud. JOHN suppresses his laughter.

PAUL: No! [He shows ANDY, briefly] Look.

Then, PAUL forces his watch into JOHN's face, and keeps it there, obstructing JOHN's entire plane of view for several seconds. JOHN is annoyed.

IRENE [aside]: The intrusion is enough to confront the relations not only of John's attention but also of the opinions he consistently withholds, if only for Paul's sake.

Paul is unsure of himself but they enjoy him. Catullus feels a special fondness for Paul, the sort of fondness a young person might feel for a dove who's lost his wing for the pride of a hawk. In spite of Paul's circumstances, Catullus admires how he's managed, nevertheless, to still be around. That, to Catullus, is something that's respectable, somehow, in itself. John has figured out the absolute minimum action necessary to affirm Paul, and often finds himself, inadvertently, doing just a little less.

The chocolate lab, which is Paul's dog, which is the one with the humping problem, a congenital spasm of the hip flexors, and which is also the one with the compulsive disorder, always digging holes and staring into them; waiting for gophers or groundhogs comes easier and with more sense than socializing with the other dogs, takes the treat from Paul's other hand, open palm, face upward. Fifteen years, off and on, grant you, as a paramedic.

PAUL: I can afford a Movado at full price. I'm just not the sort of mark who buys luxury items at shelf.

JOHN [aside]: Is that it? [looking past the watch, at PAUL himself, as if amused by what is lacking]

IRENE [aside]: John knew exactly the moves and decisions Paul could make if he wanted to improve his station in life, but John wouldn't betray his keen sense of judgement in vouchsafing himself to start expecting more out of Paul. When John would assess a person's worth, he would do so with a piercing, scientific reckoning of that person's qualities. John's condescension, though heavy and burdensome at times, was detached. It felt strange to take it to heart. John took no pride in being better than the others, even if he knew this to be the case, and he cast no pity upon those who weren't as impressive who happened to make their way into his intimate circle of acquaintances.

JOHN [aside]: Is that it?

Irene [aside]: Yes. It was no longer Paul's burden to shelter his shortcomings from men like John or Andy, or anyone else whom he called his 'good friends.'

BOB: Irene...

IRENE shushes BOB, more harshly than before

PAUL [aside]:  
Irene, today we conquered.  
Of a wet field we made the best  
Goodhearted as they are, the Mexicans  
Could never have exploited the land,  
Back when this was their land legal,  
As well as Andy and I did today.

IRENE [aside]: They play this game, Bocce, and the boys become mean.

IRENE stares blankly into the distance

JOHN:  
If you need more land, Andy,  
I know where.

PAUL:  
Out of play we took Bob  
The grass so slick,  
With a strong pull of the Pinelli  
We moved the target  
A hundred feet forward, and  
As Bob isn't half-shy to admit  
He's old. Was out of his reach.  
John, even so, had  
A good chance to tie,  
But the grass so slick,  
The ball shot in line,  
Too much mustard!  
Kamikazied the Pinelli,  
And fortunately rolled to where  
We had our two balls,  
And his twenty too many centimeters  
Closer to yon gutter.  
John is sure, however,  
Says he didn't lose, says Andy  
Kept crossing the throwing-line.

ANDY:  
Allegedly.

JOHN:  
Encroaching upon the hill  
Of mustard weed?  
Municipal property:  
They have every right  
To not take this as frivolously  
As you are,  
You know.

IRENE:  
And you were over the edge,  
Of the hill, Andy, by how much?

JOHN:  
I can't really say this surprises me though;  
I think we've already established  
That you have a tendency  
To not follow the rules, Andrew.  
It's not like it's a game  
Of inches, anyhow.

ANDY:  
The goat walk. Ha! A goddamned Euphus, John. Fuck me.

JOHN:  
And some things can only work  
Until you know why.

BOB:  
You can take the poodle to the pool,  
But a hungry dog only thinks of food.  
Right, John?

IRENE [replying to BOB, misunderstanding]:  
But that  
.  
Is how  
We met.

BOB [responding to IRENE]:  
Well,  
That's not what we were talking about, Ma.

But you're darned right, it's true.  
 Though there were no dogs, just me and you,  
 And my aircrew entire, my family  
 Not a person at the pool under thirty  
 Who wasn't next of kin, or serving,  
 Not another person there trespassing.  
 There was one girl, who sat under the linden tree  
 With dewy lips reciting Goethe's poetry.  
 The humble bronze cheekbones, with high-set inflections  
 Like a Colonel's, not some pit-monkey's, decorations.  
 For Vietnam, my friends, I'd be departing  
 In twelve hours, that next morning  
 When the sun came up. I couldn't bear  
 To demand her loyalty, ask a strange girl to care,  
 Plan out her grief, not if something likely to occur  
 should occur. So instead, I made her an offer:  
 Three years hereafter, on such a September day  
 If you're still unwed, I'll be at 303 Golden Bell Way.  
 I told her, on that day, we'd be co-hosting  
 A house-warming party. I held that party, not three,  
 But six years thereafter. And, my friends, she came!  
 But my house was too crowded.  
 I didn't know she was there.  
 So she left soon after, and disappointed.

IRENE [taking BOB's words too literally]:  
 Actually, I  
 .  
 didn't care.

ALL begin laughing in response to IRENE's comment.

STAGE LIGHTS OFF. LIGHTS TO ANDY

ANDY [aside]:  
 And laughed alongside Irene.  
     And then Bob laughed also,  
 And then laughed and all laughed,  
     And laughed as the wind warmed  
 The labor of our laughter, and Paul  
 surprising himself with the time,  
     And there is no end to laughter.

SCENE IV.

## LIGHTS TO JOHN

JOHN:

The past is irretrievable,  
 And the future an abstraction,  
 Which is never promised us.  
 The present, therefore,  
 Is all we possess.

.  
 Now in this day and age,  
 The only season apparent,  
 The price of gold, silver,  
 Silk and mustard,  
 The growth of every established  
 Government and corporation—  
 The Arab nations,  
 To which we'll divvy up  
 Our limpid insurances—

.  
 Is dependent upon the orchestration  
 Of words to capture the territorial interests  
 With fragrant fact, delivered  
 As such, one might endeavor, even,  
 To claim it as his own.

.  
 Words and silent notes! Who might be  
 The plausible alchemists behind this vision?  
 They skipped right over the poets,  
 Philosophers too, the artisans.  
 The people asked, and thus received:  
 Technology becomes the Trojan Horse,  
 Man of his own purpose convinces—  
 The vision of progress, the up and  
 Down, then right again, back towards  
 Where the thought began.

.  
 I've met some poets in my days  
 I mean real poets, recognizable names  
 Not the ones shouting from cafes and street corners.  
 I mean, the women with frail fingers  
 In academia, publishing in respected journals.

.  
 I've met them, from time to time,  
 Maryanne was one, her last name  
 I don't remember, not that it concerns me;  
 Humble little thing; she came to the Mayor's

house on Memorial Day, to give a reading  
 Some fluttering little poem she wrote  
 about her spiritual connection to New Guinea,  
 Or Haiti, or why should it matter?

.

Oh, this lot. She admitted it to me,  
 She'd even prefer it  
 If she could just resign herself,  
 Like men amidst the gender crisis,  
 To isolation, reactionary exclusion,  
 And other, more decorative, methods;  
 Paul and his watches, endless accessories

.

Time passes, the present remains,  
 Till the lights once admired  
 For decorating our trees  
 Themselves aim to bud and bud brown;  
 Our world is not immune from the decay  
 Of the non-physical spaces.

.

We trade access, for privacy  
 That once seemed inalienable;  
 Trading time, which is also limited,  
 For digital preoccupation.

.

Do you think people are aware of  
 The real meaning of words,  
 The scarcity of their time,  
 When they put on their glad-hand  
 And trade it in bulk?

.

Aristotle once said,  
 On the intention of machines  
 That they'd alleviate man's need  
 To enslave his fellow man.

.

The ways to not become enslaved  
 Are four: first, belief; two, taboo;  
 Then, fetish. And the fourth,  
 Be sure to win the game,  
 And play by the rules.

.

I mean, you're still young enough,  
 Catullus,  
 What would you recommend?—

.

When it is more moral,  
 The few tallest trees to remove,  
 Than to order a controlled burn  
 Of the smaller trees beneath them,  
 Why is that?

•  
 When should you opt  
 For what's moral, and when  
 For what is best?

•  
 Words, when structured  
 And shared, we've deemed that *information*.  
 What do you call the sharing  
 Of man's imagination?

•  
 The imagination is a structuring  
 of the word, as well, and none, Catullus,  
 Can escape the word, not you.

•  
 The most a poet can aspire  
 To be anymore, is this:  
 A man who owns a wooden horse,  
 Of his own making, trapped in  
 By the greatness  
 Of his own imagination.

#### LIGHTS TO CATULLUS

CATULLUS:

It seems the more complicated  
     The reaction are requiring of  
 More patience. How long for the whole process to  
 ignite!

    But on one front,

•  
 In an old city like Dana,  
     that prides itself  
 On freedom of speech and press,  
 It pains me to believe  
 The poets may very well be  
 the end of it, for

•  
 We were all either damned  
 With a desire to express our loins  
 Or nursed to be great liars,  
 To make Ulysses, appear

Like a young confabulator,  
Caught with his hand  
    In the wrong woman's jar.

.  
And Dana Point developed  
An information industry  
Twenty years before there ever was  
Such a thing?

STAGE LIGHTS ON.

BOB [aside]: And you were over the throwing-line, Andy,  
By how much?

JOHN [aside]: It's not like it's a game of inches, anyhow.

ANDY: Fuck!

JOHN: Is she still mad, Andy?

ANDY: Yes? No? Fuck, I don't know. Paula is pissed about  
something different now.

BOB: What now, Andy?

ANDY: I vetoed this idea Paula had, about doing this online  
course to become a yoga instructor. She comes to me last night  
and says, *there's this course I wanna sign up for, but it costs  
like \$500*. Total scam, by the way. So I bring up the issue of  
whether or not this is reasonable, as an investment, if, let's  
say, on the off chance, this course weren't a total fucking  
scam. I mean, I'm not trying to say Paula is fat or anything,  
but, come on, I've seen what these yoga instructors look like,  
and, if I'm being completely honest, Paula doesn't quite fit the  
mould. So I tell her that...

JOHN: You told her that?

ANDY: And of course that pisses her off.

JOHN: Yah.

ANDY: And then she says, get this, she doesn't want to use the  
license to become a yoga instructor. She wants to sign up for  
the course because she feels it will *motivate* her to get back  
into shape. So I laugh at that, as well.

JOHN shakes his head

JOHN [disappointed]: Andy...

ANDY: And of course that pisses her off even more, so she starts fuming and nagging me about the trip.

BOB: The trip? The hunting trip you and John took to Michigan?

ANDY nods

ANDY [continues]: Which [whispering] cost well over \$3000. But then again, you know, Irene, [IRENE stares into the distance] the week before our trip she bought a Roomba, whatever, which, I'm not exaggerating, cost a real shit-ton of money; I won't tell you how much, [then loudly shouting] *in the thousands*, Bob; and, honest to God, I'm not exaggerating, that thing is getting stuck under the fucking couch at least five times a day.

PAUL: I heard they're starting to commit suicide, those Roombas.

JOHN: Room-boss? Those are the little hockey puck looking things, right?

ANDY: Yah, a *hockey puck*.

JOHN: Ah!

ANDY: That aims for my couch like its Gordie fucking Howe in a Game 7 shootout.

PAUL: There was one Roomba...

PAUL searches his phone, trying to find proof.

PAUL [continues]: That turned on the stove, and then it drove itself into the burner, and the robot just parked there until it was completely incinerated.

JOHN: Sounds like another case of bad parenting to me. If you leave your kid next to an open window, don't blame the bugger for trying to take flight.

ANDY: That was staged, Paul. I saw the video of that. Clearly staged. Like, *obviously* staged. I'm with John.

JOHN: Hold on there, Andy. Let's suppress this little impulse of yours to jump the gun and put words in my mouth. I never said anything about any staging. The notion of bots committing suicide, I think it does make a lot of sense, when you think about it.

PAUL, excited for JOHN's endorsement, looks to Andy.

PAUL: You see. I'm telling you, Andy, it's a sign of depression in the bots, that's what the experts are saying.

ANDY: Alright. I see where this is going. A fucking mile out, John. I'm out! I'm out of this conversation.

JOHN: Of course you are. You're the one who's complicit in robot torture.

JOHN shakes his head, as if he's disappointed in ANDY.

ANDY: It's Paula's "hockey puck." And no comment. Not going down this rabbit hole, John

ANDY looks at JOHN, laughing forcefully.

JOHN: Tell him what they're saying, Paul.

JOHN looks over at ANDY, and holds back a smirk.

ANDY: Fuck. John. This isn't necessary.

PAUL looks to Andy, eager to prove that he is truly knowledgeable.

PAUL: Well, some of the experts have been theorizing that the Roombas, a select number of them, have come to realize their life purpose, which is more or less to roll around on the floor and suck up debris from humans, and dogs, or whatever; they're not even good at it doing it, and they know it. So now they're having a, oh, a whatsitcalled?

JOHN: An existential crisis. Is what they're calling it.

PAUL: Exactly!

ANDY: Shut the fuck up, John.

PAUL: And they're deciding to commit Hairy Kerry [malaprop. Harakiri] rather than continue their existence as Roombas.

JOHN [nodding, pretending to be in agreement with Paul] Some real fascinating discussions happening amongst these experts.

ANDY: Experts, Paul? Name one.

JOHN: It's all in the code, that's what they're saying.

ANDY: John, you don't even know what a fucking Roomba is.

JOHN: Little hockey puck, picks up trash, self-aware, tortured by its own existence.

ANDY: Hockey puck! Ha! No idea.

JOHN: I read the same article.

ANDY: Bullshit.

PAUL: It was a podcast, what I'm talking about. I'll send you guys the link.

ANDY: Podcast. PODCAST. *I read the same article.*

PAUL: I'll find it later. I'll send it to you guys.

ANDY: Podcast! [laughs, shaking his head]

JOHN: Tomayto, Tomahto [unflinching and casual, taking a small bite of fudge].

PAUL: You really gotta hear this stuff.

ANDY [to JOHN]: You're fucking bitter, I swear. [extended silence, then, lighthearted and laughing, he continues, loudly, so the whole table can hear] Verging on HOSTILE.

JOHN [mouth full of fudge, muffled]: You're the one torturing the thing, Andy.

ANDY [laughs, without restraint]: If it's so fucking artificially intelligent, why's it keep getting stuck under the goddamned couch? I'm this close [he holds his thumb and index

fingers centimeters apart] to leaving it on the counter, just to see what it does. I swear to god I'd do it, the only thing holding me back is how goddamned expensive the thing was.

JOHN [sincerely]: You just need to pay more attention to her.

ANDY: To the Roomba?

JOHN: To Paula.

ANDY [laughing, and then, as if he's being outboxed, and can't seem to get a single punch in against JOHN]: Fuck! [ANDY laughs, as if he's laughing at himself]

CATULLUS [aside]:

But your strategy admits to me  
Like the process I've recovered  
The process of composing a fine  
Love song. But who were you really singing to?

BOB [aside]:

If your aim is to strike perfect luster,  
Your handicap's ahead of you: too much mustard!

ANDY [aside]:

Rich mingle of rough passion and frivolous  
Airs, silver from the Santa Anas  
Inlaid with gold  
From the north  
And just as old  
Skirts along in silence  
Sneaking, leaf-like,

CATULLUS [aside]:

But who were you really  
Singing to?

#### SCENE V.

IRENE [aside]: The sun dropping behind a thin cloud shines to the south. First, upon the pot that is painted red. The pot painted maroon, appreciated by the shadow of the first pot, appreciates with its own shadow the pot furthest from the sun, the sea-green hue of which contrasts, from afar, the vibrant petals of my roses...

BOB [aside]:  
Not roses, Irene. Those  
are tulips.

IRENE [aside]:  
Which rests heavily to the north of the final pot, a black pot.  
Bob had corrected me twice.

BOB:  
Irene, those are  
Tulips.

IRENE [snapping aggressively at BOB]:  
I don't  
Care. They're my  
roses!

IRENE [aside]:  
Finally losing the motivation. 4:30pm signals my opportunity to  
be hospitable. I conceal my zeal. I hide it well, but one could  
see it in my eyes, vaguely. Vaguely, they might tell it was  
there, by the cadence of my speech, as I would, handing the men  
their cup of coffee, greet them with my casual stream of words,

.  
Hi how  
Was the park today?

.  
I speak my part, and nothing more. I command their respect with  
my silence, and then when I want something, I just have to ask,  
and they listen.

PAUL: It's better off that way, Irene.

CATULLUS: It's the answer to all of Andy's problems.

ANDY: Holder would love to wear that badge.

JOHN: I'm familiar with my limits.

IRENE: I do not know what a goat walk is.

CATULLUS: Stepping stones.

PAUL: Baby steps, baby goats.

IRENE: Andy, did you bring the creamer?

ANDY: Irene, now, I was on my way to buy more creamer, when John Holder calls me, "Andy, forget the creamer, even though I know how important it is for Irene. I have something I need you to do for me."

STAGE LIGHTS OFF. LIGHTS TO ANDY.

ANDY:

Cracked to abandon its original tone  
 Enhances her elegance  
 As gardens, by stones or fences  
 Or minimal paints or none, the dome  
 Of the minivan too long  
 Spent curbing earth, then flora, the objections  
 Of the three o'clock sun, tenacious, but no  
 Interest, small power but charity, the wit  
 And generosity accessorizing  
 The wealth of the lawyer, Marlene  
 Kernigan, wife of a more celebrated lawyer,  
 Fifteen years her senior,  
 Wins the competition, tied with John, as her  
 Childhood neighbor's Great Dane, desiring  
 To every which way at once go, gushes  
 From the sliding door,  
 .  
 Bees, every which way buzzing  
 Flits of fur and yellow arms, self-containing  
 Their invisible gravity, par-none,  
 Joy of fresh stars flaring  
 Catholics in their Sunday best come close  
 Shirts striped and sundresses  
 Also spread greetings affirmations to peace  
 Redwood basket patchwork—  
*A hundred less for the windmill wars,  
 Better battered women  
 Than Caesar's condominiums,*  
 Kernigan places it upon her leg  
 With light wrist, with the rest, displacing  
 Tepid airs on his account—  
 Maintains constant quorum and ordered  
 Despite the occasion of ambassador or a few stray rogues  
 They stay in their small space, we will try to step  
 Around them, but like little stubborn landmines,  
 Needles suggesting silver, and tells us, desperate

To disbelieve as we can still be, the worth  
 Of a dumb sacrifice is dumb theory  
 That their church understands, thus, teaches, maybe.

STAGE LIGHTS ON

JOHN: It all comes down to convincing yourself that you care.

ANDY [to JOHN]: Really, but I *DON'T* care. How do you do it? As a  
 three time divorcé— [correcting himself] Two time—

JOHN [casually joking]: Make it three—

ANDY laughs aloud, and JOHN laughs along

ANDY: I mean, you're friends with number one and two, and really  
 good friends with the first wife. I don't get how you do it. I  
 mean, you share a kid. There's that. But still, the  
 companionship you have together. I don't get it. If I left  
 Paula... I don't think I'd keep in touch with her.

JOHN: What if you were the idiot, the one who screwed things up?

STAGE LIGHTS OFF. LIGHTS TO ANDY.

ANDY:

Legs fresh-dipped into the sea  
 From some coast pulled, off France, hot-Germany,  
 Celtic solitudes of cliffs tall and churning  
 Rebellions of waves, zeal curled by pillaging  
 And light rape, resources of ivory and gold,  
 Into solemn sculptures misting; I take hold  
 Of liberties, with the poet, licensing  
 Textures presupposed of cottage cheese, ne'er seen,  
 On those wond'rous legs, I love my wife, but Marlene  
 We enjoy agitating, on the other blaming  
 The source of the agitations. Hub the wheels,  
 Wheels the hub, each to each, and each to foreaxle.

STAGE LIGHTS ON

JOHN: Acknowledging it's over, that's the obvious first step. It  
 sounds easy enough, but in actuality it's the most complicated  
 part. It takes time, and it takes a little discipline. A lot  
 more time and discipline than I was willing to invest.

ANDY: You made it work.

JOHN [correcting him]: *She* made it work.

ANDY: It takes two to hold onto a relationship.

JOHN: She put in the required time and effort for the both of us. I'm really not overselling my lack of dedication, Andy. I was out there fucking everything that moved to get back at her. Meanwhile, she was making every effort she could, in her own time, to put every piece of our friendship back together that I left in the wake of our marriage.

ANDY [laughing]: Everything that moved?

JOHN: I made sure word got around to Number One as well. I even married an unstable woman just to put Number One in her place, the last thing Number Two needed. I think part of me felt like the more cruel I was to her after the marriage, the more I would somehow be absolved of my original sin.

ANDY: Which was?

JOHN: Not important.

ANDY: John, we're your friends. You know we wouldn't judge you.

JOHN: I judge myself. I prefer to leave it as such.

ANDY: You cheat on her?

JOHN: Worse. But not what you're thinking. I didn't beat her or anything.

ANDY: What's the worst you can do?

JOHN: She left me. I crumbled, then got divorced a second time. Number One should have just taken the kid and run, the sort of man I was. But not Number One. She came to me after my second relationship failed and said, in so many words, what got us to the point: blah blah blah our romantic relationship is over... blah blah, and this will never be negotiable, never again. But blah blah, you need to be a rock to me, and to your son; we need you in our lives, blah blah blah.

ANDY: You know, you're skipping over all the parts that would be of any benefit to me and my marriage.

JOHN: In short, Andrew, she said she really needed me to grow a set for her. Just not for romantic purposes.

ANDY: Never again.

JOHN: I accepted her terms, and that was 20 years ago. I'd say we're doing fine, all things considered.

ANDY: Wow, man.

JOHN: It's perhaps better to ask yourself, in regards to your own marriage, what would be worth preserving?

ANDY: I just don't think I'd care enough.

JOHN: You always care. I mean— [shakes head, and looks at ANDY's face, suppressing laughter]

ANDY: No. [laughs] I wouldn't care. I don't care. It's just all this petty shit; *I can't believe my boss said blah-blah-blah to me today.*

JOHN: You're skipping over the part that would be entertaining to me.

ANDY: *I gained five pounds, I couldn't concentrate at all at the company dinner... You wouldn't believe some of the shit she goes on about. Ever since I turned 40, Pepsi has been making me extra gassy. Yah! It's a carbonated fucking beverage!*

JOHN: I think this says more about you than Paula. Your wife is suffering, and here you are saying it's a burden on your own quality of life.

CATULLUS: Andy plays it distant, but if anything he's perhaps too sensitive. He loves Paula.

ANDY: Thanks, Catullus.

CATULLUS: He uses his humor to keep his friends and family close but at a distance. He fears that if he were to ever let anyone get too close, they would abandon him and leave him hurting.

ANDY: Jesus.

CATULLUS: It has to do with Andy's father. He was an alcoholic.

ANDY [laughing in defeat]: Jesus Christ!

JOHN: Well, I have chronic pain in my jaw thanks to a helicopter accident I was involved in when I was in the Guards, but here's the interesting thing, Andy: over time, I began to ignore the pain, even on days when I could really feel it.

BOB: He care's, John. Andy's just playing around.

ANDY: Nope. I don't think I care.

CATULLUS: Every time she's on vacation you tell us that you miss her.

ANDY: That's true

JOHN: But not till the fourth day.

ANDY [laughing]: Forth or fifth.

JOHN: You just gotta show her more attention.

ANDY: Jesus.

STAGE LIGHTS OFF. LIGHTS TO ANDY

ANDY:

Head loosely swinging  
 And jowls, loosed to belly  
 Down air, confronting,  
 Air, warm and dry,  
 Passes field, and drones buzz by  
 Queens slim escaping  
 High lap of air, rings  
 Of grass yellowed by  
 Piss, hardened, stinging  
 Paws, and clusters of rings,  
 Dog hair and sweat, licking  
 More air, licking  
 Dirt, eachother, licking  
 Those who are inviting  
 And those stiff resistive

Alike, and more talking  
Leashes gathered in piles upon the table

.

There is a hillock that, where spreads its bosom  
Strong as concrete which has reached its middle age,  
Sediments compact consigns a half lonesome  
Table mostly wooden but what a handsome  
Steel foundation, rests the foot and buckled  
At the knee, once heavier, once quite handsome.  
The investment banker, who saved Dana Point  
From bankruptcy—the poet's great grandfather, who  
He'd never amount to if he'd tried in that way  
Seeks his identity in creation  
He says, of an unexplored form, as of yet—  
Whose wife is at home, coaxes though loose of breath  
The intrigue of Judy who alongside Herb  
Her husband, blind as a bat, his vision  
There's a dearth of it but on the circumference,  
Laugh, speak of grandsons, how greatness skips a generation  
And there's the proof, etc.

.

Bought a trailer used, ten  
Square feet larger than the last.

.

Young lab legs still too heavy for the gait  
That plants and to sharply turn  
He stumbles to belly  
And running wag of tails mouth full of neck fur  
Stumbles or tackles and tail wags no further  
Briefly, not absolute, stand, stare and postures,  
And lies down in the grass

.

And John in the grass, the tree with  
No defined shape  
Cone nor sphere, protects  
Us from the sun, sets  
Break to Santa Anas

.

With such attention, upheaving the dirt  
He's sure, the chocolate lab, Paul adjusting his loafers,  
Accosts his dog, with hands on hips, stares at the gopher  
Hole; and the poet looks from Paul to Holder  
Then to me, 'Thus it was I became a reed,'  
Paula gleams  
Back at Holder, "Because varnished was cheaper."  
"Okay—? No— not wrong, not dumb."

I'd have probably done the same."

LIGHTS TO CATULLUS

CATULLUS:

Andy Priest, closest friend,  
 Though we've hardly known each other,  
 We've trusted each other enough,  
     and have gotten through enough  
 With laughter; over white chocolate and golden  
 Pastries from the coast, we've laughed enough,  
 Resenting no one and believing no one and competing against  
 What we could just as easily be forgetting,  
     and there is no end to laughter.

SCENE VI.

STAGE LIGHTS ON.

Stage left, MELIPRYMA is hovering over her father,  
 TATKO. TATKO lies in a plush bed and appears to be in  
 immense pain. The room is luxurious.

MELIPRYMA:

Don't turn over, Daddy, don't toss and turn.  
 It's not good for you, Tatko, Derezliv Tatko.  
 You'll find no position comfortable, not for you.

.  
 It's been months now.  
 It's time to stop writhing. Let it go:  
 This false hope,  
 The dream of finding comfort.

.  
 That's the difficult part of surviving  
 A shattering of the pelvis;  
 Whether standing, sitting down,  
 Or lying there upon your bed,  
 There's no position, not a one,  
 Where you won't feel this agony, Tatko.

.  
 The doctors suggested something, that  
 We could try submerging  
 You in a vat of water,  
 But ever since the tsunami

And the calamity that's ensued,  
 you've been, to put it more gently  
 Than how the doctors spoke of  
 Your condition—  
 Paranoid of water.

.

Do you remember two months ago,  
 I told you I'd take care of Catullus.  
 You had your own ideas.  
 You told me, "End of story."

.

I told you, that same day,  
 Not to go driving on your electric bike,  
 Not today, I said, the Coast Guard  
 Had released a warning;  
 But you said their warnings were always wrong;  
 Don't toss, don't turn daddy, stay still.  
 I'll give you your tea soon, but first, listen.

.

Poleiurea, the urologist, my specialist  
 Little sister, tells me, you plan  
 To turn our finances  
 Over to her for keeping, and you know  
 What they say about companies  
 And their finances, so I ask you, why father?  
 Is it because she's a physician?  
 You should know she has the common sense  
 Of a fly spinning in the web; her sense  
 Is more specialized, as she is.

.

I'm the one here, I tended to mother  
 When she died of her cancer, and I am  
 Tending to you in your time of need.  
 Poleiurea comes when she needs something,  
 And then she wastes it all, down the gutter.

.

Did she plant this idea in your head?  
 For someone with a steady income,  
 She sure has plenty of time to worry  
 About your company's wallet.

.

She can dream about it all she wants,  
 But it's not hers to take, end of story.  
 She'll be sleeping sound  
 For a day or two. They'll be fine,  
 Just sleepy. Patience father.

You'll get yours in a minute,  
But I need your ear. It's important.

.

I'm the only one who has proven her value  
To this land, your company.  
Do you think Poleiurea understands  
The balance of foreign capital, and the limits  
Of our workers? What does she know about  
The feuds between the two unions who fight for work hours  
And blame me for short-staffings?  
What does she know about laying the roads?  
About never getting so much  
As a fine job, or a thank you?

.

I've been the workhorse of this family, and as you  
Fall into dependency, I'm asserting  
This value now, my value to you.  
You know it's the truth,  
    Dear invalid father, my  
Generous father. My sisters have their simple motives.  
I couldn't care less about the power.

.

Have you ever held a pebble, Tatko;  
    Fresh from a stream, cold and wet  
Oblong of grey and pinks,  
And just felt that, somehow,  
    Such a stone had been formed  
Specially, to belong there  
In the palm of your hand?  
Well, this is my land, my peninsula.

.

Hills erupting from hills forming mountains  
The boats at the sea-line, and the cranes moving boxes,  
As long as I feel it in my hand, I am assured,  
Nothing bad will happen to our family.

.

I have viewed the distant mountains,  
    the ones that don't belong to me,  
And when I do, I fall into a dream, as those mountains  
Become my body, the hills, the lowlands and streams,  
And upon waking I'm stuck with this conundrum  
To let them have me, or to defend my body.

.

Stay still daddy, don't turn and writhe in angst  
Screaming that name, Catullus.  
Don't worry yourself about Catullus.

You know Poleiurea's dog,  
 The one that, even at twenty, comes for my leg.  
 Well, it's nothing serious.  
 Catullus is taller, perhaps.  
 He understands my concerns  
 Better than anyone.  
 Well, get this, Tatko,  
 Catullus has started claiming  
 That he can now be everywhere, all at once.  
 Imagine that. Like he's a magician  
 Or something! Maybe he's here, amongst us.

.  
 Stop screaming it father, stop saying his name.  
 The wave, the one  
 That followed Catullus,  
 It has nothing to do with Catullus!  
 I've had enough of these superstitions,  
 From you and my sisters.

.  
 I'll deal with the mess this time,  
 Like I dealt with it last time. Sleep now, Tatko.  
 Don't moan and groan, you're making no sense.  
 Drink your tea slower. Hopefully you won't taste  
 The medicine this time.  
 I've given you an extra dose,  
 But I also put more sugar.  
 You seem to be hurting more  
 Than usual this morning.

LIGHTS TO JOHN

JOHN:  
 Now, if you want my two cents,  
 For a frugal man, well, I guess  
 It's still not much  
 But I don't mind to suppose  
 Perhaps, the social commerce like my incomparable insights might  
 Come to you less inflated;

.  
 The piety, the moral, the abstractions,—  
 You've hidden for too long behind beauty.  
 Exercised for so long in "ought" and "shall"  
 That now

With an ocean of metaphors to spare  
 No longer functioning

The confusion you're facing is a return to necessity—  
 The distance that their needs will place upon you.  
 Each person revisiting your words, until you  
 Are yet more unrecognizable,  
 But isn't that the point of poetry?

LIGHTS TO CATULLUS

CATULLUS:

I once held virtues in one hand and needs in the other  
 And trusted duty, the authority that established the lines,  
 I've lived through scenes of pens and declarations of wars  
 Treaties signed by men and embraced  
     by their enemies' mothers  
 Militaries to enforce legal reaches  
 Interchangeable as milk-water.

•  
 I've only fondness  
 Of friends,  
     and all of you,  
 Dearest companions of my younger life,  
     Always left  
 To the wind in the wake of the divine  
 Ambition of what virtue I maintain in the other.

•  
 I am in need,  
 Always, John Holder.  
 I want them to come to me,  
 To desire  
 To be invited;

•  
 The destruction  
 Of my struggle—brandish some  
 New form and person—  
 I can greet, with frightful laughter;

•  
 But being as I am, I may have to settle  
 For the opposite, or even slightly less.

•  
 I am at peace.  
 A kind of peace arrived at  
 By means of war, piecemeal.  
 War brings peace, and peace brings war.  
 My faith in morals has abandoned me;  
 Morality, my own, offending me.  
 I shall offend myself at will!

## LIGHTS TO MELIPRYMA

MELIPRYMA:

Catullus comes by, he tells me he loves me,  
Shows me he has no hands, and then makes love to me.  
Then the light comes, and he's nowhere to be seen.  
He has some gall to send me poetry.  
Does he really expect me to believe  
That he's in five places, all at once?  
He's started to grow a *headnail*, he says.

.  
All five of him have started growing headnails?  
Where does he sleep?  
If I head to the top of Mount Pindarrhus,  
Maybe I could follow one of the Catulluses  
Until sundown, and track where he's sleeping.

.  
In the meantime, I should send dignitaries  
To collect all of his parts.  
Some are in real bad places.

.  
The traditional. The war-mongering.  
Sending father's people to such places?  
There's a chance this won't end well.

.  
Send them, send them anyway.  
Tatko would trade  
Part of the world,  
As long as my Cat-Cat is safe.

## LIGHTS TO JOHN

JOHN:

Morality, let's say it:  
Ambition extrapolated to numbers,  
Only more self-indulgent,  
Limited as freedom, and just as constrictive  
As they'd have it empowered to be.  
Just look what they did to Icarus,  
Without even looking.

.  
The harsh trick being, Catullus:  
You need to believe it, believe it  
As you will yourself.

LIGHTS TO MELIPRYMA

MELIPRYMA:

Catullus spends too much time listening  
to that old retired  
officer,  
That man with the bulging, veiny legs:  
John Holder.

.  
The surfer who spends his retired years in the cafes,  
Contemplating whether the boundary lines  
Of human sexuality are clear.

.  
This is the man my Cattle-Cat  
Turns to when he's in need of some direction?

LIGHTS TO JOHN

JOHN:

I have a cousin who's a queer;  
Imperviously queer...

LIGHTS TO MELIPRYMA

MELIPRYMA

To not be a Greek god, his fear.  
And if the lines of gender are not clear,  
What's that mean  
For his own sexuality?

LIGHTS TO JOHN

JOHN

Queer as the eye can see...

LIGHTS TO MELIPRYMA

MELIPRYMA

With John, Catullus will confide...

LIGHTS TO JOHN

JOHN

I'm in touch with my feminine side...

LIGHTS TO MELIPRYMA

MELIPRYMA:

Till he kills me with that man's might.

LIGHTS TO JOHN

JOHN

I touch it every night.

STAGE LIGHTS ON

PAUL: That's a good deal, Andy.

JOHN: That's not just a good deal. That's a steal, if I do say so myself.

ANDY [insincere]: Because you're the expert.

JOHN: I'm just saying, \$200 and your troubles will be behind you. A distant memory.

ANDY: Save your breath.

JOHN: One week, that's all it would take. They'll clear the whole thing up. Not just the top part either; I mean the whole hill, up and down.

ANDY: So this is legal, but my solution isn't? My solution, which is reasonable. I'm calling bullshit!

JOHN: Forget about the legal stuff! Just imagine how much better the view will be from your backyard, looking out over that bare hill. It's foolproof, according to my guy. You just let the thing out on your back hill...

ANDY [correcting JOHN, with irony]: The city's hill.

JOHN [condescending, but playful]: See, there you go again, confusing me. NOT your hill. The hill that belongs to the city. Municipal property.

ANDY: Yes.

JOHN: Which you've gone and infiltrated.

ANDY [laughing]: Two fucking inches!

JOHN: Foolproof. Just let the thing out on the hill behind your deck. This is important! Put a bell around its neck so it doesn't get hit by a car... then two days, three days, and bam, the mustard seed is gone.

ANDY: [laughs], Fuck. That goat walk comment earlier. Right over my head, John. Fuck.

IRENE: I don't know what a goat walk is.

ANDY: Holder's on fire today, Irene.

JOHN: I'm telling you.

ANDY: Here's the issue though, John. They don't eat mustard weed. We *established* this, yesterday. Just yesterday we established this, as a fact.

JOHN: Well. It turns out that I was wrong. I did a little more research on it last night when I got home and, *apparently* [gesturing with his hand], they can select for that.

ANDY: Paula barely agreed to take on a second dog. And now you want me to propose this to her? I'll tell you what, if you can convince Paula to take on one of these atrocities.

JOHN: My guy doesn't sell atrocities. These are pedigreed...

ANDY: John! If you can convince Paula...

JOHN: We established this. The plan doesn't involve Paula.

ANDY laughs aloud.

ANDY: Fuck! Ha! If you convince Paula, then I will personally go down to *your guy* and buy one..

JOHN: Not just one.

ANDY: Not just one?

JOHN: You're gonna want to take on... at least two.

PAUL: He's right.

JOHN: My guy was pretty insistent about this. He says you never want to buy just one.

PAUL [laughing]: They get lonely!

JOHN: They do. And when they get depressed, they'll let out this loud, whistling 'eeee' sound. It's best if you buy two, he says, to prevent the melancholia.

ANDY: Fuck. [laughs suddenly] SELECT FOR THAT! You mean like Punnett squares? What... How would that even work—? SELECT FOR THAT!

JOHN: And you're gonna want to put up some sort of protective barrier around the trees. They'll chew right through the bark. Also, they climb.

ANDY: So what's the point of the wire if they can fucking climb?

JOHN: I believe what he was suggesting, Andrew, is that you use a type of wire they can't climb.

ANDY: Is that something I can ask for at The Home Depot?

JOHN: Because once they climb up into a tree, they don't come back down. When they get up into the tree, they'll get anxious and they'll just start wailing out that high pitched 'eeeeee' until you get a ladder out and bring it down yourself.

ANDY: Paula would shoot the damned thing with my hunting rifle.

IRENE: What are we talking about?

BOB [laughs, to IRENE]: Don't worry about it, honey. It's best to stay out of it.

JOHN: Next time you're not paying enough attention to Paula, and she's going to her mom's place for the weekend because she's feeling all these emotions and blah blah blah, you can just bring the goat into the house.

ANDY [laughing his ass off]: Fuck. Stop!

IRENE: Does anyone want more coffee?

Nobody responds to IRENE.

ANDY: Fuck.

PAUL: Last year in Pakistan, in one of the villages, there was a MAJOR outbreak of Gonorrhoea. Get this: they traced it back to the goat that the Chief was fucking.

ANDY: Bullshit.

PAUL: It's true.

ANDY: I don't trust anything you say, Paul.

PAUL: Look it up.

ANDY: I know where you get your information. You can't get gonorrhoea from a goat.

JOHN: In fact, you can. I did some more research on that too.

ANDY: [Laughs]. Fucking Holder. Holder's on fire today, Bob.

JOHN: Like I said, it's important to do your due diligence.

ANDY: They don't really eat fucking mustard weed, do they, John?

BOB begins to laugh, and then all begin laughing, even IRENE, who appears confused about why she's laughing.

IRENE: I don't like hearing that Paula is mad at you, Andy.

ANDY: She's not mad, Irene. Maybe she's a little mad. It's the kind of mad she'll get over, you know, without any effort on my part.

JOHN: Sounds promising.

ANDY: *I fucked everything that moved*, says John Holder.

JOHN: Fine. Learn from your own mistakes.

ANDY: That's part of the problem.

JOHN and ANDY both laugh

JOHN: I mean, if I can be sincere for a quick moment, is Paula alright?

ANDY: She's fine. Until this morning. If you want my honest to God opinion, John, she has no right to be mad, no right to be *seriously* mad.

JOHN: You want my advice?

ANDY: No.

JOHN: Here it is: her *rights* don't matter.

ANDY [laughs]: Thanks! Your advice is, well... you know, John.

JOHN: You do what you have to do. I mean it. Start acting like you give a shit.

ANDY: I really don't give a shit.

STAGE LIGHTS OFF.

#### SCENE VII.

Inside a conference room at the headquarters of TATKO's corporation. MELIPRYMA, TATKO, the SECURITY CHIEF, an OUTSIDE CONSULTANT, and NASTEIA, sit around a circular table, stage center.

TATKO [with a short temper, shouting in agony]: Soil erosion? What the fuck do I give a shit about the soil? Do I have to be awake for this?

MELIPRYMA: Patience, Tatko. We need your permission on a couple of things. I'll bring your medicine in ten minutes, I promise.

TATKO: Like you needed my permission to send my CFO and CTO to Kabul and Shit-stain-istan to look for, you know, whatshisface...

MELIPRYMA: Catullus. Calm yourself, Tatko. I know how much you're suffering, Tatko.

SECURITY CHIEF: Who was inside this building the whole time.

MELIPRYMA: Catullus is a magician. He does tricks. For instance, I can think something right now, and wallah!, he can think the same exact thing as me. You don't think Catullus could have tricked your cameras with his hocus pocus?

TATKO: Melipryma!

SECURITY CHIEF: We had cameras on his room the whole time.

MELIPRYMA: Cameras! You're the type who goes to a movie and runs out when the robots from the future start attacking, aren't you?

TATKO: Melipryma, stop this. Do I look like an idiot? Any more of this bullshit and I'm done.

MELIPRYMA: You're not getting your tea, Tatko, until this matter's been dealt with.

Tatko: Fuck me! Then let's get on with it. Tell me about the goats, and please start with, why should I give a fuck?

OUTSIDE CONSULTANT: well, the goatherders from the mainland have been bringing their livestock to graze on the peninsula at night.

MELIPRYMA [to the SECURITY CHIEF]: Was that not on your video cameras?

SECURITY CHIEF: The isthmus? There's nothing of value there.

MELIPRYMA [to TATKO]: Now you see why I trust my own people over your security force? [to SECURITY CHIEF] If someone comes into a peninsula, or departs, would it not be by the isthmus?

TATKO: Why am I awake?

OUTSIDE CONSULTANT: In Samothrace..

TATKO: Why the fuck is he talking about Samothrace?

OUTSIDE CONSULTANT: It's an island in Greece, sir.

TATKO: I know what the fuck Samothrace is.

OUTSIDE CONSULTANT: Well, overgrazing on Samothrace led to soil erosion, similar to what we're seeing on the isthmus of your peninsula.

MELIPRYMA: My peninsula.

TATKO: Quiet, Melipryma.

OUTSIDE CONSULTANT: In Samothrace, erosion gave rise to land slides, among other...

TATKO: Okay, so it's bad. Build a fence. You don't need my permission to build a fucking fence.

SECURITY CHIEF: We did.

TATKO: There you go!

SECURITY CHIEF: Then the goatherds built a bridge across the cove.

TATKO: Then take their bridge down.

SECURITY CHIEF: We did. And then... [he pauses]

TATKO: And then what?

SECURITY CHIEF: Well, they found another way.

TATKO: What? The goat fuckers build a goat tunnel or something? How about this? Blow it the fuck up.

SECURITY CHIEF: Not a tunnel.

TATKO: Then what the fucking what?

SECURITY CHIEF: They launched them.

TATKO: Launched them?

SECURITY CHIEF: We found a makeshift catapult, about two stories in height, when we were taking arial surveillance along the northern side of the peninsula's border. We believe they've been using this device to launch the goats... over the fence... onto the peninsula.

TATKO: Jesus Christ. When you live in the land of the goat fuckers.

MELIPRYMA: Keep the goats. That will show them this is Dedo's land.

TATKO: This may be your Dedo's land, but the goat fuckers are still under the impression that we're living in their country, which, you know, we are.

MELIPRYMA: Dedo inherited this land from Claudius' father, Claudius.

TATKO: Claudius only dotes and drools these days. The son, Claudius, and the daughter, Claudia, don't recognize that this is my land.

NASTEIA: Our land.

MELIPRYMA: My land.

TATKO: We're not a country, Melipryma. We just need to dole out the yearly bribes to these goat fuckers and they'll clean things up on their side of the peninsula.

MELIPRYMA: Dedo was gifted this land, and I have papers to prove it, and I'll happily train an army to defend it.

TATKO: Shut up, Melipryma.

MELIPRYMA: You want your tea now?

TATKO: Anyways... how'd the goat fuckers get their goats back from the fucking peninsula?

SECURITY CHIEF: We know they used a catapult to get the goats onto the peninsula. We've yet to figure out how the goats got back to the mainland.

MELIPRYMA: A real airtight operation you're running. If the rest of the department heads at this company followed my lead and started treating this peninsula like a territory to be protected, instead of a piece of, I don't know, commercial real estate for rent...

TATKO: We're not a fucking territory.

MELIPRYMA: We wouldn't have to be putting up with security breaches, and Claudius, and Claudia. Not to mention, incompetence in preparing for, you know, [she looks at her father's crippled body] natural disasters.

TATKO: What would you have us do? Tell Claudius to get his country's shit together, *or else*. Or else, what, Melipryma? It's that time of year, as usual. It's time to incentivize the goat fuckers. Why am I awake?

OUTSIDE CONSULTANT: Because the situation might be a little more complicated this time around.

TATKO: Fuck.

OUTSIDE CONSULTANT: The goatherders have been overgrazing all over Claudius' territory. They've turned his kingdom into a desert. The goatherds are out of tenable soil and vegetation. They're coming here out of desperation.

MELIPRYMA: I'll talk to Claudius.

NASTEIA: We'll be at war by morning!

TATKO: You wanna clean up your own shitshow, Melipryma?

MELIPRYMA: Maybe war is what we need.

SECURITY CHIEF: Claudius is no push-over. Not to mention The Republic. The Republic wants nothing more to push us off this peninsula.

TATKO: The Republic has the strongest military since, you know, fucking ever. Enough!

MELIPRYMA: Our technology is better. This is why the machines made you such a wealthy man, Tatko.

TATKO: We engineer the machines. We sell the machines. We don't use the goddamned machines. If we have to move to Africa, we move to fucking Africa. War? You fucking kidding me? War? What are we?

SECURITY CHIEF: Catullus has put a target on our backs.

MELIPRYMA: Stop blaming everything on Catullus. [she mocks the SECURITY CHIEF] He's been here the whole time, you know.

SECURITY CHIEF: Several of the surrounding countries have become unstable. The Republic remains functional, but they've little fires burning in every town. Have you read these poems? The Republic is blaming Catullus, and accusing him of adding fuel to those separate flames. The Republic is becoming more and more unstable. The government is united for once, and trying to shift the blame of their failure to your company, make us out to be the root of the problem for harboring Catullus.

NASTEIA: Let's turn Catullus out.

MELIPRYMA: We'll do no such thing. He's not even here.

NASTEIA: I'm sorry, Melipryma. We don't have to turn him in, but we do have to turn him away.

MELIPRYMA: You'd have to find him first.

SECURITY CHIEF: Regardless... The Republic believes we're the ones providing Catullus sanctuary.

NASTEIA: Aren't we?

SECURITY CHIEF: What?

NASTEIA: Aren't we sheltering him?

SECURITY CHIEF: We have footage of Catullus going into his room.

MELIPRYMA: Did you check the room?

SECURITY CHIEF: We did.

MELIPRYMA: And he's not there?

SECURITY CHIEF: He's not there.

TATKO: All this because of some fucking poetry? This is why the fuck has our stock price has soared to triple its valuation since last week?

SECURITY CHIEF [pulls out a docket of papers, nervously]: This is a letter from Claudius' foreign minister, blaming Catullus for:

[he reads the list] "Sinkholes and earthquakes, fires, infidelity"

MELIPRYMA: I don't know how they can blame my little Cat-Cat for any of that.

SECURITY CHIEF flips through the pages

SECURITY CHIEF: A war poem that praises Drusus.

MELIPRYMA: Words, words, words...

SECURITY CHIEF: That's the General of Claudius' army.

MELIPRYMA: They should be flattered then.

SECURITY CHIEF: He's the great symbol of Claudius' military might... blah blah

MELIPRYMA: Give me that.

MELIPRYMA gabs the docket.

MELIPRYMA: Ah, here. Quite subtle. Yah, blah, blah, blah. Catullus compares General Drusus, heroic on the battlefield, to the lady cat who takes shelter under the tomcat.

MELIPRYMA flips page, reads the next title as if genuinely entertained

MELIPRYMA: A Fount for Catullus: an ode to Princess Claudia's Pleasure Part.

MELIPRYMA laughs aloud

TATKO: Well, I can understand why Claudius would want the poet dead, talking about his sister in such a way. They stone women up north of the peninsula for even thinking about those parts, you know.

MELIPRYMA [enjoying herself, reading the next title aloud]:  
 Claudia's Clitoris for Catullus. [she laughs heartily] Oh  
 Claudia, the swamp-rat weeps for the poverty of your lowlands.

MELIPRYMA flips a few more pages.

MELIPRYMA: For Polyhydramnios, my *biggest* squeeze. [gasps,  
 amused as hell]. If he means, *Poleiurea*... No. He wouldn't!

TATKO: You and Poleiuria [correcting himself] need to shake  
 hands, and make the fuck up. Melipryma, I've made my decision.  
 The poet is an asset. We won't turn him over, but I don't want  
 him coming to my peninsula again. He's an asset as long as he  
 keeps his fucking distance.

MELIPRYMA: This is my peninsula.

TATKO: Whatever. Read me that poem about the Republic. Twenty  
 years they've been a pain in my ass for, well... You disrupt a  
 monopoly over there, and the government treats you like a threat  
 to be neutralized.

THE SECURITY AGENT takes out another paper from his  
 briefcase.

SECURITY CHIEF [reading the title of Catullus' propaganda  
 piece]: "The Republic As A Conflagration."

MELIPRYMA: Saucy. [she grabs the poem from him] We don't have  
 time for you to sound out every word. We're on the brink of war,  
 for God's sake.

TATKO: There will be no war.

MELIPRYMA flips through the pages, as if scanning  
 lazily, without too much interest in the nuances of  
 CATULLUS' poetry.

MELIPRYMA: All consented, ...together, our shared, sufficient  
 fire... warm on immovable nights... blah blah blah. Politicians...  
 yawping, fetid winds... blah blah blah. Our comfort and warmth  
 evolved... rolls out thistles upon tumbleweeds, a wildfire!... none  
 can put out... yup yup. Burnt houses, smoking granaries, the  
 charred bone of... I welcome it. The ice is melting... and of  
 course, Catullus welcomes that, Tatko, more for the ocean. The  
 ice is melting? Is the ice really melting? Is it also melting in

the mountains? The universe was born out of chaos... [corrects the poem] it wasn't though, was it? Chaos is the end, they say, not the beginning. Like our very universe, our new nation, our new politics, where out of this old nation's chaos might be born possibility, out of possibility new wealth and new freedom; sounds more like a politician than a poet. Freedom, money, I've learned that these are words the masses like to hear. Even if they never comprehend it. The embalmed corpse... ew, something, something, putrefacient, unsphacelating, I don't know those words... preserves only death... Catullus is in one of his moods. The only way, is a return to motion.

TATKO: This is why everyone is buying up our machines. They believe a fucking war might break out. The poet is an asset. Just make sure he's far away from here.

FINANCIAL CHIEF: To attribute the downfall of a great republic to poetry!

TATKO: What are you, a fucking Marxist? Fucking blame the billionaires for everything! Yah? My fucking pelvis, damn it. Curse that poet. Get my medicine, will you, Melipryma? Why the fuck am I awake?

MELIPRYMA: Here's my proposal. We take Claudius' land. We rebuild the land.

TATKO: Shut up, Melipryma. You've no fucking end game. We don't do war. We don't do land! Enough said!

MELIPRYA: We wait for the Republic's civil war. We sponsor the weaker of the two sides, in exchange for spoils, a piece of their foe's land. The western coast, that would be my preference.

TATKO: We don't do war for the same reason we don't do territory, Melipryma. Land, you know, who gives a shit?

MELIPRYMA: I do. Grandfather left this land to mother. Who gives a fuck about money?

TATKO: There's a reason no one tried to take this land from your grandfather back when he ran a trading post. It's not a one and zeroes game. You need to learn to see things a little more like an animal fighting to survive, a competitor. The way I see things.

MELIPRYMA: My sisters aren't cut out for this land. They're good at what they do, but everything they touch turns out a blunder. I'll always take care of my sisters, Tatko. Never expect me to share my land with them.

NASTEIA: It's my land too.

MELIPRYMA: Then take it from me, sister.

MELIPRYMA stands up and leaves.

TATKO: Where the fuck are you going?

MELIPRYMA: To get your tea. Would you like to start weaning off?

NASTEIA: Stay here! We're not done talking about this.

TATKO: Let her go.

MELIPRYMA: I'm done. I'm done wasting my time. Capture the goats! Put them with the others. With enough goats we can start producing our own milk and goat meat.

TATKO: Shoot the goats and throw them in the goddamn ocean. We trade for our food. The day my family becomes goatherders... That'll be the fucking day. Why am I awake?

MELIPRYMA: You're out of the loop, Tatko. We haven't been dependent on trade for our food in three years. [MELIPRYMA walks away] I have a new record, by the way, since nobody asked. I climbed to the top of Mount Pyndarrus in 3 hours, 20 minutes, 13 seconds. Is nobody interested? Didn't think so. Do you know, Tatko, who would be interested?

STAGE LIGHTS OFF. LIGHTS TO CATULLUS.

CATULLUS:

The tree branches branch

Branches, thinner branches

Branching

branches, branches more

Thin and gray

All is hazy through the upmost branches

From up high viewed

Eye to eye with the coming buds—,

Slick as liver—,  
 Resembles the tactic of confusion  
 As employed by the finest of Eastern diplomats; and

.  
 Something now calls me out there, Holder; time that I go smell  
 the geosmin  
 in the air; for  
 The rain has left—

.  
 and Holder,  
 Spring  
 is coming in!—

SCENE VIII.

Lights to MELIPRYMA. MELIPRYMA is lying on the floor,  
 stage left, near the base of the mountain. Her head  
 and thorax are bloody, and a rib bone protrudes from  
 her chest.

MELIPRYMA:

Catullus, help me. Do that trick you do,  
 The one where I think one thing, and  
 At the same time you think it too. Ah, it's no use.  
 A trick of your hand, what good is it?  
 I can see my breast! If you're really seeing it,  
 Catullus, you should be happy. Out from my breast  
 A broken rib, and on that broken rib  
 My heart: impaled and beating. I must be dead,  
 Catullus. Tell Father I didn't fall, not this time.  
 I look as if an elk's impaled me.

.  
 This might just be a sign my brain is failing  
 As its bloodflow lessens by the second  
 But I remember it so well, or else, I briefly went mad:  
 I fell up first, before I fell down. If down  
 Can still be considered down,  
 When down is not the way of gravity.

.  
 The earth, it was like, for just one second,  
 forgot about me,  
 Or more likely, in madness, I had forgotten it.  
 It wasn't you, was it, Catullus?  
 You wouldn't do that to me.  
 You were once like the rollers on the high sea.

Predictable and lovely. Kind and nestling.  
Fleeing to me, or away.

.

Now you're changed. Violent.  
Impulsive, and jarring.  
And gnashing, pulverizing.

.

Either you've gone mad, Catullus,  
Or the world has gone mad. The world  
Must be going mad.

.

Tell Tatko that you killed me... that it was an act  
Of terrifying vengeance! It would be such a shame  
If after everything, his daughter's death  
Were such a meaningless feat.

MELIPRYMA looks at the roses growing from the cliff  
face

MELIPRYMA:

Earth mother, take this blood. Drink it!  
This stuff contains my spirit stuff.

.

I will take new forms,  
I wish to climb again.

I wish to become part of this mountain  
To be beautiful, as bold as these roses,

.

That give the mountain such a vigorous flush.  
I could never climb you, oh Pindarrhus,  
With such speed and constant beauty.

MELIPRYMA dies.

SCENE IX.

STAGE LIGHTS ON

JOHN: Here's what Kernigan said...

ANDY [with disbelief]: Kernigan?

JOHN: In a nutshell, the way he explained it...

ANDY: You didn't talk to Kernigan.

JOHN: Legally speaking, you're in the wrong for expanding your deck as far as you did. The entire hill behind your house is indeed city property.

ANDY: No shit.

JOHN: The Parks Department is claiming that they manage the hill up to the line where the mustard weed ends, and that therefore, since you've built your deck across the line of the mustard weed... even if it's only two, maybe three inches...

ANDY: Two inches!

JOHN [continuing]: You've encroached upon municipal property.

ANDY: The logic is absurd.

JOHN: It holds up in court.

ANDY: You actually called Kernigan and spoke with him about this bullshit?

JOHN: Of course. You should have called him months ago.

ANDY: You really called him? You probably made me sound like a total idiot. You didn't actually call Kernigan, did you?

JOHN: You want the legal scoop, or no?

ANDY [surrendering]: Fucking... Flatter me.

JOHN: So... [he readjusts his posture] You can't root the mustard weed yourself. You'd... now this is a technicality... you'd *technically*... be vandalizing city property.

ANDY [laughing]: It's a fucking weed.

JOHN: And we've confirmed, there is no law regulating the feeding habits of exotic pets... and that legal absence can be extended to a defense of the rights of said pets to graze upon the flora that may or may not be growing on city property, that is, in Dana Point. Now this is where my guy comes in.

ANDY: This is so goddamn stupid, Holder.

JOHN: Your problems will be gone. It's perfectly legal. It's binding.

ANDY: For *my* goat to feed on *their* mustard weed?

JOHN: The goat eats the mustard weed, and the Parks Department can no longer prove that you went full Crimea with your back deck.

CATULLUS: Couldn't Andy just eat the mustard weed himself?

PAUL: Is Andy an exotic pet?

CATULLUS: No.

PAUL [to CATULLUS]: Then Andy can't eat the mustard weed himself.

JOHN: Why are you so against this, Andy?

ANDY: I'm not against this! I'm not against any *useful* suggestions. This isn't about the fucking goat, and you know it.

JOHN: What's it about?

ANDY: You're fucking bitter. That's what. I'm not being confrontational, Irene, [IRENE stares blankly] I'm getting assaulted here. ASSAULTED. Did you really call Kernigan? Fuck. [ANDY laughs aloud] Fucking Holder. Irene—, Does Holder seem a little more bitter today than usual? You know what this is, Irene? Holder's undefeated streak was snapped today. Not trying to say there's any correlation. Wouldn't want to throw out any wild accusations like that. I'm not the type to do that. Smashed! To pieces. A hard-earned victory, Irene, I fought my way.

JOHN: *Cheated.*

ANDY: Just pointing out that that *happened to happen* today, for anyone who isn't aware that that happened today. Irene!

IRENE sips her coffee, not really following the conversation

PAUL: Andy invents rules on the fly.

JOHN: Crossed the toss-line about, eh, 15 times.

ANDY: I did not cross the fucking line even once. Bullshit.

CATULLUS: He crossed it once.

ANDY: My toe... touched the line. And I repeated that toss. John couldn't let it fucking go, so I went all the way down the field, grabbed my ball, walked all the way back to the line, and tossed again.

JOHN: And you crossed the line on that one too.

ANDY [laughing aloud]: I did not.

JOHN: Alright.

ANDY: Every time I get close to the Pinelli, guess what, I crossed the fucking line.

JOHN: Well, that's an interesting correlation.

PAUL: Andy was inventing rule after rule.

ANDY: You were on my team, Paul. Jesus. The two of you. Catullus, where's the help? I'm being crucified here.

PAUL: Makeshift rules. They're the worst. Feed the rules to the poets, the poets to the damned goats. [PAUL laughs]

CATULLUS: I don't think they eat those.

PAUL: They can select for that.

CATULLUS: So once the goat eats the mustard weed, can I eat the goat?

PAUL: As long as you're not a goat, then you can eat the goat once the goat has eaten the mustard weed.

JOHN: Now don't go eating the goat. That wouldn't be fair to poor Andy. Or to Paula.

ANDY: Do you have any idea what my love life would be like today if I followed your advice, John?

JOHN and ANDY both laugh aloud

IRENE: Just push dirt under it.

BOB: I don't think they'll fine you, Andy. At most, they'll just have you take it in a few inches.

ANDY: I'm gonna have to re-do that entire section of the deck. That's gonna be just as expensive, Bob.

BOB: The lines of the mustard weed? We never settled boundaries like this in my day. I don't think the city will demand much of you. They'll just ask you to take it in.

ANDY: The city won't demand anything of me Bob, according to the *research* I did [looks to JOHN].

JOHN: Not if you listen to me.

IRENE: Can't you just put dirt under it?

CATULLUS: Sounds like a good idea to me, Irene.

IRENE [excited that someone has listened to her idea]: I know, ya.

STAGE LIGHTS OFF. LIGHTS TO CATULLUS

CATULLUS:  
You remember  
Melipryma, John? This is the truth,  
I swear it. She went and turned herself,  
Of all things, into a mustard seed.

SCENE X.

LIGHTS TO CATULLUS AND JOHN

JOHN [aside]:  
*Well, if that's all it takes...*

CATULLUS:  
And moved to the garage for the winter  
Cluttered about, so Irene could smoke in comfort  
Rubbing her hands on her knees, Bob crossing

His arms on his bloated gut, boat and  
Fishing gear not yet dusted  
And I asked, "So what ever happened to Paul?"

.

*If that's all it takes—*

.

That was the season of long-winded  
Offenses, climatic and cultural,  
As the north brought its cold air  
Upon us; Los Angeles almost made martyrs  
Of you and Kernigan. Almost succeeded.  
And Kernigan, he nearly bankrupted the Times.

And you held forth to your own,  
Held ground, brought your third wife in,  
Brought her to smiling—

.

So now Paul drives himself  
Doubtlessly his mind absent  
From all of his surroundings

.

Desert, the windmills—  
Which he's probably got himself caught  
Up in, Palm Desert,  
Driving two hundred miles to teach  
A weekend class on CPR, to earn \$300?—

JOHN [aside]:  
And how much does gas cost  
These days?

CATULLUS [aside]:  
And whatever happened to Paul?

JOHN [to CATULLUS]:  
What I'm trying to say is, it's genetic.

CATULLUS [to JOHN]:  
It's in the blood somehow.

JOHN [to CATULLUS]:  
They're always right.  
Remember that.

CATULLUS:  
I remember all things,  
John Holder,

•  
Some things more than others  
Depending on where  
I'm facing.

JOHN:  
And you're really one to talk.  
For whatever  
happened to Irene.

CATULLUS:  
I sang her your song,  
Little knowing, you can sing one song  
And mean another.

•  
But Irene  
Is already back.

JOHN:  
And Paul will be back too.

•  
Without discrimination or subtlety,  
He'll be back after so long.  
Where else would Paul go?

CATULLUS:  
But, tell me, John Holder,  
Who were you really singing to?

STAGE LIGHTS ON.

ANDY [TO JOHN]: And then what? I'm supposed to just return the thing after a week? What if I grow attached to it?

JOHN: I think we've already established that.

ANDY starts laughing aloud. JOHN begins laughing.

PAUL [clarifying JOHN's meaning, unnecessarily]: You start fucking it! [he laughs louder than JOHN or ANDY]

PAUL looks to see if JOHN is still laughing. JOHN composes himself and shrugs his shoulders. BOB begins laughing heartily.

ANDY [laughs in frustration, but is nevertheless having a good time]: Fuck. Bob— Holder's on fire today.

BOB already laughing heartily, nods his head in agreement with ANDY. IRENE drinks from her coffee, and stares at the black pot.

ANDY [exasperated, with good humor and humility]: Holder... that goat walk comment.

ANDY gesticulates, passing his right hand over the top of his head

ANDY: Right over my head.

ANDY briefly holds his hands up high, as if surrendering.

ANDY: [out loud, to nobody in particular]: On fire. Fuck — Right over!

ANDY laughs as he postures himself in his chair.

STAGE LIGHTS OFF. LIGHTS TO THE STATUE OF RICHARD HENRY DANA JR.

STATUE OF RICHARD HENRY DANA JR:  
 For he knows the story: of how the Rancheros,  
 Back when this was their land legal—  
 No longer that of the Spanish, and not yet  
 That of the States—  
 Would overcome the tall impasse of these mesas.

#### SCENE XI.

LIGHTS TO ANDY

ANDY:  
 Turns into the face, ridged like the tip  
 Upon tip of the leaf on an aspen, strip  
 By strip autumn waters lucid pulling to nip  
 At the hindboard, foamballs spray and sip  
 Back under, on both sides of John Holder; trips  
 Down, John, not entirely, but turns right his shoulder,

Along with his hips, up high into wavelip,  
     and the board  
 Follows the knees and twisted cord,  
 Straightening out, of his body, limbs aboard  
 Defiant remaining, lands with knees doubly bent,  
     sprouts the foam wall  
 And that's all that's left, no sight of John, no record  
 Of the surfer, not a sunbeam left to brawl  
 On the blue waveface. The lights, rather,  
     conspire in the ball  
 Of white foam, famished, expanding  
     and in a frenzy, transform  
 Into lanterns, long-bodied, and piercing, many-colored  
 Goldens and violets, like the crafted  
     lanterns of wooden boards  
 That once recorded streets, here in Dana Point, towards  
 Which direction, refreshing memories,  
     was the wedding hall  
 And which the ocean, so when billowing shawl  
 Begemmed and white veil parted, the bride,  
     adored, for the most part,  
 By the bridegroom, would know which way's seaward  
 And thus which way to set her footing. A sword  
 That pierces nature's undulating heart,  
 Or the nose of a lion grey, in a spat of aggression,  
     swept backward  
 By the fierceness of the charge, John Holder  
 Surfaces without an effort, his arms hold stronger  
 Than Roman sculptures of Neptune, the water  
 John bales, and jumps into, becomes the water.  
 Water upon water, surfers in the water, on shore.  
 Stripping her wet suit, blonde and younger than us,  
 By twenty years of more, pulling the black foamgear, down  
 And fall the firm breasts, the abdomen,  
     and there's the whale-tale, her bikini falls as well  
 In my imagination, and on her asscheek  
     a subtle frown  
 Carved of cellulite, and legs that extend like Babel  
 From the ground into invisible kingdoms,  
     and John Holder,  
 Casually, siding up to my board  
 Props himself upright near me. "I won't tattle,"  
 He ensures, also observing, not enticed, but  
     contemplative.  
 "You know John," I tell him, "I mean,  
 What an ass. I had a brief daydream,

That her hair was black, that that ass was Marlene's  
 I think that's how she'd look, in such a bikini."  
 "Divorce her. There are men out there  
 With more sexual attachment to a goat.  
 And don't let Dan hear about your little dreams.  
 Divorce her. What's keeping you?"  
 "It can't be explained. I need her,  
 For the company," I replied. Wrong answer.  
 By the very same night, he sent me the quote  
 A stellar deal, he said, I'd not get one better.  
 The seasons change, as the seasons do.  
 John and I would sit in the sand, as we'd often do.  
 I'd look at the surfers, mostly the women  
 Showing a little ass cheek, lithe abdomens,  
 As John would watch the tremblings of the ocean.  
 We'd talk about baseball, our fathers;  
 Who was on deck to restock the creamer  
 For Irene; the storms on the horizon,  
 And changing weather, patterns in the skies, his broken  
 Cough, fits and fits of them. See a doctor  
 It concerns me, I urged and I urged him,  
 This dry cough, that nags like Number Two?  
 Don't worry, it's nothing new  
 Said Holder. It's nothing of concern, my father  
     had it, his father, something Holders  
 Get in our sixties, I'm getting older,  
 Just a spasm, that's what the good one said,  
     "The doctors I go to, they know what they know.  
 But I'll let you in on a secret, Andrew, what I know,  
 Nothing that's according to nature can be evil:  
 Not illness, not death; you just need to know  
 When it's time to quit. That's the most important part  
 Of the game, and you can quote me on that, Andrew."  
 "I wouldn't quote you," I laughed, searching  
     for any good retort,  
 "If they subpoenaed me to court  
 And with my hand on the fucking Bible  
 Told me to quote John Holder,  
 Word by goddamned word."  
 .  
 And after the set is finished,  
 The surfer waits upon the ocean,  
 And then the ground swell comes,  
 And then another set comes,  
 And another set,  
     then another.

## LIGHTS TO CATULLUS

CATULLUS

I remember your secret, John  
Holder. How'd you keep it?

.

Each breath a battle  
Like at the center  
Of a storm adjusting  
Sails as the wind  
Adjusts again.

.

Shooting the same  
Blowhole. You needed a candle  
And knew where to search  
For the spermacetti.

.

Did you mean to hurt her, too?  
I meant to hurt Melipryma.  
I admit it! Confusing  
Violence  
With unwanted desire.  
For its rather common,  
And it seems now, after all this time,  
We've at least one thing in common.

.

I hear Irene was neglected  
In intensive care,  
I hear she died from a stress ulcer,  
The bacteria blossomed like breakers  
Upon the shore, surrounding her.

.

I couldn't attend the service.  
But I thought of you all  
For days. And in the afternoons,  
I often think  
Of Irene, and how she nibbled  
At her coffee.

.

I wanted to come home  
To show you, my hairline, John,  
Has started to look a lot like yours.

.

That woman, who was she?  
Her face reminds me,

Of song I once knew, the great shame  
Of it all: that so often in their youth  
Men aren't yet men  
When the woman comes along  
Who most needs them to be men.

.  
Her eyes remind me, that  
There's always a pain,  
That exists somewhere,  
Even when we do our best  
To ignore its fulminations,

.  
And this pain, I feel,  
Has some relation  
To man's fear of dying.

.  
John Holder, I've known for a while now  
The secret thing that drove you.

.  
You told nobody else that your lungs  
Had been scarring. Do you understand why,  
Strong as you are, she's the only one  
You could never shelter from your suffering?

.  
We've had up all your secrets, John.  
The mirrored bulb has been reunited  
Into one contour of glue and glisten,  
And seeing all your secrets, I shatter it again.

.  
We've had up all your secrets, John.  
It only seem fair, that I share one of mine.  
You remember, Melipryam,  
My favorite little birdie? She's no more.  
I may have killed her, knowing  
Full well what I was doing.

.  
In my youth, John,  
I may have found your image,  
But my mistakes, I made them  
As a man, with the intentions of a man.

.  
I meant what I said, when I warned her  
She could never possess Catullus' territory,  
Because I have no territory  
And will never be sovereign of simple territory.

.

I am Catullus, the poet, sovereign of my  
 Own dimensions, I prefer to be ruler  
 Of the skies and oceans,  
 The universe, which is my true name.

.  
 Tossing herself over a cliff, she prayed,  
 And Hermes, spiteful  
 God of boundaries, vexing  
 Constantly, that I'll outpace him  
 Someday, came rushing through,  
 A little too eager, I'd say,  
 When he heard Melipryma's prayer,  
 And granted it, turning her corpse  
 Into a mustard seed.

.  
 It was a bright but chilly day, when  
 I placed her warm, mangled body, down  
 Upon a sun-beat hillside, of billowing earth.  
 I chose a spot of land there, and pressed  
 My toughening palms as one,  
 Making a four-leafed spade,

.  
 And I spread my way into that soil,  
 And I traumatized that soil,  
 Which was hesitant, at first,  
 But it resigned in due time, becoming  
 A second womb for my Melipryma.

.  
 And now Melipryma,  
 Who I once worked tirelessly to flee,  
 Has blossomed as an invasive weed, a flower that  
 Has no borders, only the ocean,  
 Which she approaches in a fierce wave  
 Of yellow, and yellow, and more yellow.

.  
 She spends her days, minute and hour,  
 Invading hill and dale; the front porches  
 Where dogs in the tired suburbs  
 Take their pisses; wholesome, sun-strewn  
 Parking lots in urban centers; flooding  
     the world with a stain  
 Of yellow, and yellow, and more yellow,

.  
 As her roots, her color flaxen  
     of buttercup claim  
 Cliff-sides; driveways

Paved over with slate, cobblestones; the crack in  
The basement tile;

.

She claims it all  
As her own property; as she searches  
For her lover, Catullus, the one who refused  
To cede to her his hand, his tongue, his headnail,  
Or any of his sovereign territory,

.

Because he has no sovereign territory;

.

I am always in motion, John,  
And I refuse to stop, and I'll never  
Stop moving, until my motion

.

Becomes one with me, like the way  
In which the sea is one with the waves' motion,  
And in which the movement of the mustard weed  
Is one with the wind that blows across the hill,  
Or like my sweetheart, whose body is one  
With the ground's undulations.

.

I crossed off  
All desire. All but one, the desire  
No man can do without.

.

Night arrives. The languid airs,  
And Melipryma's scented powders  
Of mustard and thrashed soil  
Conquer the fumbling  
dark, and there's no light  
To my eyes parted, visible,  
My nose protruding, over-zealous,  
Impatient to get a sniff of her perfume.

.

I'm slowing, the odors grasp me  
Like strings of hands, tugging  
At some formless poles  
Affixed to my scalp, from high  
Above my head.

.

I have no  
Intention to stop.

.

I have to stop.

.

Where am I? One small strip of land.  
 I can't help it!  
 I begin emitting, shrieks  
 Of desperation, sorrow, I'm needy,  
 Desperate for more, and even  
 More of Melipryma's touch.

.  
 Is that her? There's something! The glimpse  
 In the distance. She comes on  
 Like the rising of the tide,  
 That lifts to bathe  
 The mussels and cucumbers  
 In the tide pools.

.  
 My legs, first, she cuddles, the knees  
 Come later, though I was proud to show her  
 They no longer bend forward, encased  
 In her yellow, and yellow, more yellow;

.  
 The green part of her, stiff, bristling, brushes  
 My bearded under-belly; constricts the stems  
 Around my beard, then up  
 Around my tailbone; and she envelops me,  
 And I'm inside her, warm flowers and saps dripping.

.  
 All her earthly vacuums, are filled  
 With my thoughts and substance; till she is reborn.  
 And as she calls out for more, and more and more,  
 My flesh, beginning to choke in that sarcophagus  
 Of her yellow, and yellow, and more yellow, I decline:  
 I press my cloven hooves  
 Upon the ground. I pin tight those ragged  
 Leaves, and look into her new-formed face in pitiful  
 Ecstasy, as she gasps for air  
 Through the ocean of  
 My hoofbeats. And I consume her.

.  
 Like Pan consumed Syrinx  
 Or like the breakers, day by day,  
 Consume the myriad sandgrains.

.  
 One patch of yellow, shivering  
 In the breeze, how'd I miss her,  
 Right under my beard tip

.  
 It's endearing the way she reminds me

With the delicacy of her weeping,  
 That what ends  
 In a horrifying gasp  
 Can only ever be  
 A fading reverie.

.

From down here at the foothills  
 Black as night, I see my head-nails  
 Both, the moon fading yellow behind them  
 Upon the peninsula's tallest mountain

.

From atop Pindarrhus, I can see the morning  
 Light nurturing Melipryma's yellow tapestry:  
 Pinching through the isthmus,  
 Beyond, into neighboring  
 Landmasses, down to the coves in further  
 Places. I follow the light

.

To my hand, dispersing in the breakers,  
 Where my other hand floats about in  
 The waters' crumbling battlements,  
 There, with my body.

.

From atop Pindarrhus,

.

I see a thousand goats shrieking  
 In joy, from the cliffsides, leaping  
 Down to the beaches,  
 To go frolicking amongst  
 The turbulence of the breakers.

.

And the goats metamorphosed  
 Into water.

LIGHTS OFF. CATULLUS returns to his place in the  
 ocean, lying among the audience.

LIGHTS TO CATULLUS

CATULLUS looks normal again, entirely human. He is in  
 possession of both hands.

CATULLUS:

And I come up out of the water

.

For air at last gasping, the wind

.

Reverberating with the sound  
Of that hillside chapel's bells. I climb  
Up, back atop my board.

.

All I can seem to think about, is that question,  
When Andy asked you: "They don't really eat  
Mustard weed, do they, John?"

.

And how hard  
We were all laughing

.

I didn't realize what I was laughing at.

.

It's funny how the meaning  
Of laughter changes, as time  
Changes meaning.

CATULLUS exits the ocean, heading towards the stage.  
ENTER CASSIA, stage right. As CATULLUS ascends the  
stairs to the stage, he continues:

CATULLUS:

Horns of goat, hollowed and stuffed with flowers  
Fresh hydrangeas, dahlia, tuberose  
Overflowing and spilling from the edges  
Of the walkway that burst upon the path  
Carved away of sandstone. Heifers even  
Whiter than the flowers  
Pace the hilltop,  
    decker equally with flowers  
But in buttercup, magnolias, daffodils: multiple and  
In fragrant colors.

CASSIA passes CATULLUS on the stage stairs, as she  
walks down towards the ocean, and they briefly  
exchange glances of familiarity. CASSIA descends to  
the audience floor and then looks at JOHN before  
bowing her head as if silently grieving and remaining  
still and silent.

CATULLUS:

You know how when we'd play Bocci  
And I would dependably miss my shot,  
But we could rely on you, John,

To bring in the points for our team? Well,

.

Today's the wedding ceremony.

.

I hear the harp playing now, on the cliffside.

Isn't it pleasant? It's time to go see

What tin crown my little birdie has chosen

To cover the bald spots

Where my horns used to be.

.

Melipryma's plan is to expand north

Beyond the isthmus, up the mainland.

.

Someday, perhaps, I'll learn to enjoy this game.

Even though my dream has only ever been

To colonize the ocean.

CATULLUS takes off his wet suit, wearing knee-length black swimtights underneath, and ascends the goat walk. MELIPRYMA wearing a white sash over her chest and a flowing white skirt. She has a bruised eye, a surgical scar visible in the middle of her chest, along with bruising on her chest, a bandage around her head, and a crown of mustard weed adorning the top of the bandage. They begin to ascend the goat walk. Half way up, CATULLUS continues:

CATULLUS:

These machine learning drones

Can destroy whole villages

In the blink of an eye,

But when they take off

You can almost mistake them,

For the hum of insects.

.

If nothing else is agreeable to my senses,

I'm at least getting acclimated

To the sound of the engines.

Their sound reminds me

Of your own words' sorrow.

MELIPRYMA and CATULLUS embrace and dance on top of the goat walk as the goat walk is rolled away, both vanishing off stage. JOHN HOLDER holds back a smile as his light dims to black. CATULLUS continues speaking

to JOHN, who's no longer there, as the goat walk rolls off stage.

CATULLUS [fading out]:  
I heard Paul came back  
And then left again.  
Is that right, John? I heard Andy  
Still drops by on the weekends  
To have a coffee with Bob.

.  
I'll be stopping by Dana Point, sometime  
In the coming seasons.

Six dancers, dressed in all black and goat masks come onto the stage, moving around, as if looking for something they've lost. In the commotion, all six members of the coffee klatsch return to the white, round, plastic table, then after the goats leave the stage, IRENE repeats the refrain:

STAGE LIGHTS ON.

IRENE:  
I don't care they're  
my roses.

BOB:  
Not Roses,  
Irene. Tulips.

JOHN:  
You set her straight, Bob.

CATULLUS [laughing]:  
They're gardenias.

PAUL [laughing]:  
Don't confuse her

IRENE [aggressive in her volume, but not emotional]:  
I'm not confused, they're my roses!

ALL break out in a frenzy of laughter, and when the laughing passes its climax, ANDY reads his final lines over the backdrop of the other character's softening laughter:

ANDY:

And Bob laughed, and the poet laughed,  
and John laughed, and Irene laughed,

.

And in the wake of laughter,  
A profound stillness, stillness, then  
More stillness, then more laughter,  
Laughter, more laughter and then laughter,  
Laughter and more laughter.

STAGE LIGHTS OFF

Exit PAUL, JOHN, IRENE, and CATULLUS. Lights on. Only ANDY and BOB remain. After the lights come on, they immediately begin to fade slightly, as the sound of waves crashing begins to permeate the auditorium. Mustard weed enters stage left, and begins to infiltrate stage front, until the entire stage is covered in it. SIX DANCERS, all wearing goat masks, of similar height and build, walk in, standing upright, behind the mustard weed and then they prostrate themselves and begin to eat away at the plant. ANDY and BOB are still visible, not noticing the scene in front of them, with ANDY smoking a cigarette, gesticulating as if in conversation, and BOB eating some snacks and looking pleased into the distance, past the mustard weeds. The mustard weed begins to vanish until it is completely gone. The goats stand up, on two legs again, and walk about the stage in a tumult. Exit BOB, who vanishes from the stage behind the tumult of goats. Goats leave the stage, and when they're gone, only ANDY is left at the table, and as the lights dim further, it is implied by a strobing of lights, that time is passing. BOB doesn't return. ANDY lights his afternoon cigarette. The sound of waves crashing begins to get louder, and louder, and the mustard weed once again fills the stage, swaying to and fro, as if in a slight breeze. ANDY bursts out laughing, explosively but very brief, as if remembering a joke from long ago, violent laughter, then quiet. As the lights fade, the sound of the waves crashing becomes all-consuming, and the mustard weed continues to blow gently, with an occasional violent gust whipping the weeds into a chaos of motion.