

The Goat Walk

"A Comedy of Boundaries"

A Closet Drama in Verse and Dialogue

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

CATULLUS — THE POET

JOHN — THE DEPUTY

ANDY — THE FOOL

PAUL — THE ZEALOT

BOB — THE ELDER

IRENE — THE ELDER

.

MELIPRYMA — THE HEIRESS

TATKO — MELIPRYMA'S FATHER

SECURITY CHIEF

OUTSIDE CONSULTANT

NASTEIA — MELIPRYMA'S SISTER

.

CASSIA — A MYSTERIOUS WOMAN

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 surrounded by several three-foot tall, clay flower pots, each one painted a different, solid color: blue, red, green, black, violet, pink. Six white plastic chairs surround the table. IRENE and ANDY sit towards stage left, BOB and PAUL towards upstage, and JOHN and an empty chair, where CATULLUS will later sit, towards stage right.

SCENE 0

JOHN [casually, 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 [note: the audience represents the ocean throughout the entirety of this play]. Another overhead light turns on and follows CASSIA, as she enters stage right, and the light follows her as she patiently makes her way to downstage center. CASSIA gazes out over the ocean, looking down at CATULLUS.

CATULLUS [talking aloud to himself]:
John Holder,
Your secret deep in thought breaking.

A short pause. CATULLUS stands up, and as he does, the audience will notice that he doesn't have any hands. CATULLUS observes CASSIA, who bows her head in mourning.

CATULLUS [talking aloud to himself]:
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.

As CATULLUS ascends the stage, CASSIA takes a cautious step away from him.

CATULLUS [talking aloud to himself]:
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, with a sense of uncertainty, into her eyes. CASSIA takes another step away from him. CATULLUS turns back and heads to the empty seat at the white table, but doesn't sit. He looks in the direction of ANDY. [NOTE: The stage is still dark.]

CATULLUS [talking aloud to himself]:
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 [talking aloud to himself]:
Force every rhyme if you must.
See what sticks, such that:

The stage goes black. A short pause, then the full set of stage lights comes on, such that the entire stage is illuminated [from now on, simplified as: "STAGE LIGHTS ON"]. When the stage lights come on, CATULLUS is in possession of his hands, as this is now a memory, of sorts.

ANDY [as if reciting a poem into the void]:
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 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.
Ha! Fuck! What 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,
Second parents to us four. And between
The time at sea and our gathering
Upon the front patio with salt taffy, treats,
An assortment of 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' 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, once 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 game 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.

Lights off. An overhead light shows 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 aging 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, the 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 up-splashing,
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 planets, down to our composite
Particles, the massy protons
And minuscule 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, these all follow rules
Democratic, as consented upon
By all the composite particles 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 another 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
Authority, this way
Is no longer irrefutable
And now the hard part, to prove it! Ha!

.
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, offending,
Who 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, even a little, my charming
Town of so many years ago,
The harbor
Where the Brig Pilgrim sunk, in Dana Point.

.
Some solid land at least.
But, wait!
Isn't this the place? Isn't this

The bulging hillside
That once rolled smooth
And out-sloping
Like the belly of a pregnant mother?
Isn't this the oceanside
Mountain path
That was adorned with statues,
Too many, I'd say, twenty, at least,
Of the praying Virgin.

.

This is the inn, I'm sure of it,
Where I hid for three days
Once 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, you do.
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
She'd spent rock-climbing.
Oh, I still
Dream of that body;

.

She peered out
Through her telescope, golden,
That her great-grandfather had bequeathed her
Fashionable amongst
The first mates in his day,
And when she couldn't find
Her Catullus, I'm what I assumed
She was searching for, she climbed
Behind her property, the cliff-face,
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.
Rumor is
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 catgut
And that wrist of the pretty
Young 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, 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.

CATULLUS lifts up his hands, as if showing JOHN that his hands are no longer there. CATULLUS' light turns off, and then JOHN's overhead light turns on.

[NOTE: this specific lighting sequence, of shutting off the spotlight for Character A and then turning on the spotlight for Character B will henceforth simply be written as "LIGHT TO CHARACTER B"]

JOHN [aside, as if replying indirectly to CATULLUS]:

[NOTE: The exchanges between JOHN and CATULLUS are a series of monologues that overlap in theme, 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 young enough.
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.

.
A man is born
Uninhabited by a mind. It's not
Until he speaks his first word, and when you, Catullus,
Spoke that word, *vacuum* – as your mother
Told us, bragging about your wits –
You 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.

.

Learn to solve the hypotenuse,
Pythagorus in your own breath
Welcomes 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, who wields it well,
And then here's where you come in, the poets,
Trying to reinvent it.

.

Do what Shakespeare did, and make it strong.
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 raving 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
Says about you.

.

In my life, I've also been obligated

To view language as a tool,

.

But I'd never 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 part of the same
.
Whole. In a fog, buried here beneath our feet
.
Or flung out into the cosmos, 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 a concrete balcony that serves as a platform halfway up. MELIPRYMA stands upon this platform, wearing mountain climbing pants, but no shirt. MELIPRYMA's breasts are exposed, and she holds her golden, collapsable nautical 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
You're now my possession.
I have your mind now.
There's no escaping.
No, my form
Is one that can't be

Evaded.

.
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 me what I'm wanting
And at the moment, I want
You, some part of you, a part
That becomes the whole:

.
I'll rip you in half,
My little Cat-Cat,
And keep both parts.

.
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,
I'll have you know,

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

.
Thirty feet,
And my shin to pieces
Shattered
Before even my throat
Remembered to scream.

.
That's why I nearly died of starvation
Up on that peak, all alone,
With nothing to do but watch over my love
And watch where he went –
Hiding,
For fifteen days – through a gold

Telescope

That my Dedo gave me.

.

I watched

You look back, as you approached
The shoreline.

You looked back, precisely
To where I was standing, there
On one leg, near the top
Of the Pindarrhus cliffside.

.

I imagined you saw me
Blood spilling and you still
Decided to leave, preferring
Your freedom to the security
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? My Cat
Shows up, to the place
where he abandoned his lady,
Left her in a raging heat,
And I'm not supposed to ask,
Is it not by chance?

.

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

.

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,
Be more predictable,

Like some grapevine
On her thin, wire trellis.

.

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

.

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

.

And where
Are you, Catullus?

MELIPRYMA closes the telescope and holsters it in the
belt around her waist. Lights to ANDY.

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, intimidated like an unsalt sailor
Reeving 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 decide 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 explains, *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.

Upstage center, 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,
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-
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 [from now on "Stage Lights On" means
the entire stage should be well lit. When stage lights
are on, the play has entered into the mode of
dialogue. The six characters at the table are visible,
and they are now interactive in their exchanges.]
MELIPRYMA and the STATUE OF RICHARD HENRY DANA JR. are
no longer on stage.

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 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, John? Fuck. I'm having a hard time taking your word for it that it would be illegal.

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 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. What do you expect the voters to care about, 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 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: 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: Municipal property.

ANDY: 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,— weather that's never a challenge to you, day after day, really, it's oppressive to a man such as John. A man needs fluctuation.

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 at times they admit more than I care to hear, and so when this happens I'll excuse myself from the table with a clever excuse, such as how I need to bring out more snacks, or that I must fetch refills for the boys' coffees.

BOB: Irene, I mean it.

IRENE shushes BOB, more aggressively this time

IRENE [aside, describing her patio, which should match this description]: Bob is always humoring the others as well as himself. Our front patio is hedged, as mass data might be 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 it acts up, you throw it a treat. Do you see why the poor girl might be confused?

ANDY: You know, somehow, Irene, [addressing Irene, invoking her name aloud, although it is clear that he is still directly engaged in a conversation with HOLDER] I'm getting this feeling that John's not really talking about the... *frickin'*... dog.

IRENE stares blankly

JOHN: Is there something else you'd like me to help you with, Andy?

ANDY [laughs]: The goat walk. Fuck. If you're gonna bring up the... fucking... Paula... thing 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 doubting expression]: 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, I can tell, feels a special fondness for Paul, the sort of fondness a young person might feel for a pigeon wounded in a battle over love, or a dove who's lost his wing to 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 in itself. John has figured out the absolute minimum action necessary to affirm Paul, and often finds himself, inadvertently, doing just a little less. For that's what happens to make John content, to do only a little less than what it would take to bring the situation to a crisis.

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 his luxury items at shelf price.

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

IRENE [aside]: John knew exactly the moves and decisions Paul could make if he wanted to improve his position in life, but John wouldn't betray his keen sense of judgement in reducing 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 emotionally detached. It felt strange to take it too personally.

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 good that happened to make their way into his circle of acquaintances.

JOHN [aside]: Is that it?

Irene [aside]: Yes. It was no longer Paul's burden to shelter his lack of usefulness from men like John or Andy 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 Bocce, and they are not nice about it.

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 insists, however,
He didn't lose. 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, Andy,
Of the hill, 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! 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
But 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 a next of kin, or serving,
Save 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, I informed her, I'd be departing
In just hours, the 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 thereafter, on such a September day
If she were still unwed, I'd 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 never found me. The house was crowded.
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
Men of their 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,
Or other, more decorative, methods;
Paul and his watches, endless accessories

.
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 virtual 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 young enough,
Catullus,
What would you recommend?—

.

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 poet has wood, and wood alone
To build his horse.
He'd need an Alexander
To approve of, and then deliver
What he's fashioned.

.

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 reactions 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 cursed
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 completely 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
image. 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 actually 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 [shaking his head]: 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 [nodding]: 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 shitton 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 [searching phone, trying to find proof] 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 little 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 on this one.

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] 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 [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 knowledgable] 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 hold 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 smallspace, 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 of it all. 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: 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 that 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: We weren't thinking that.

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

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

JOHN: In short, Andrew, she told me to grow a set, but 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 care. There's always a part of you that cares... 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, soda 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'd abandon him and leave him hurting.

ANDY: Jesus.

CATULLUS: It's because Andy's father 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 in the Guards, but here's the interesting thing, Andy: over time, I learned to ignore the pain, even when I really feel it.

BOB: He cares, 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]: Fourth or fifth.

JOHN: You just gotta show her more attention.

ANDY: Jesus, John.

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, or the gratitudes
 American, 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,'
 Well Sundance it seems I've managed to stir
 The disappointment of the gang entire,
 He had smiled, here at hole in the wall. Paula gleams
 Back at Holder, "Because varnished was cheaper."
 "Okay—? No— it wasn't dumb 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 over,
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 you—
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 this morning, 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 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 womb cancer, and I am
Tending to you in your time of need.
Poleiurea comes when she needs something,
And then she wastes it, down the gutter.

.
Did she plant this idea in your head?
For someone who claims to have 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 tending 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
My value now, my value to you.
You know it's the truth,
 Dear father, my
Generous father. The others have corrupt reasons.
I couldn't care less about the power. It's the land.
The land is special to me. All of this,
What my limbs touch down upon is my cause.

.

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

.

I'll go out and I'll touch the grains
 and feel the jagged
Granite upon my fingers,
 I'll walk the depressions and plateaus,
Crawl up the fans at the mountain's base
That spread out like carpets on nature's stairs
To welcome me back to my physical domain,
The rose that sprouts on the cliffside,
That claws its way into the bedding.

.

There's no part of the mountain
 that's too high for me to climb
I reach the top, and look
Through Dedo's golden telescope
When I see it all
I am comforted, and I know it's mine:
Hills erupting from hills forming mountains

The boats at the sea-line, and the cranes moving boxes,
As long as I have my grasp on this land
Nothing bad will happen to our family.

.

I can also view 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'll try to return to that dream,
But no, it isn't possible, so I'm stuck with this conundrum
In my own waking, to let them have me,
Or to take my body back, and whether I'd do it
By force or by strong-armed diplomacy.

.

Stay still daddy, don't turn and writhe in angst
Screaming that name
Don't worry yourself about Catullus.
You know Poleiurea's dog,
The one that, even at twenty, is coming for my leg.
Well, that is to say, it's nothing serious.
Catullus is nothing more, taller perhaps.
That, and he understands my concerns
Better than anyone I've ever been close to.
Well, get this, Tatko.
Catullus has started claiming
That he can be everywhere, all at once.
Imagine that. Like he's a magician
Or something! Maybe he's here now.

.

Stop screaming it father, stop saying his name
You're being, to put it gently, paranoid,
Once again. The wave, the one
That followed Catullus,
It has nothing to do with Catullus!
I've had enough of these superstitions,
From you, and from 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;
You just seem to be hurting more

Than usual this morning.

LIGHTS TO JOHN

JOHN:

Now, if you want my two cents,
Well, for a frugal man, I guess
My incomparable insights might
Come to you less inflated;

.

The piety, the morals, 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 reader revisiting your work, 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 declarations of wars
And proclamations of peace,
Treaties signed by men and embraced
 by their enemies' mothers
Militaries enforcing legal reaches
Interchangeable as milk-water.

.

I've only fondness
Of friends, pride of my home
 and all of you,
Dearest companions of my younger life,
 Always left
In the wake of my divine
Ambition and what virtues I maintain
In the other hand.

.

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 slightly less.

.

Still I am at peace, John Holder,
A kind of peace arrived at
By means of war.

.

My faith in morals abandons me;
Morality offends 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 morning comes, and he's nowhere to be seen.
On top of that, he has the gall to send me poetry.
Does he really expect me to believe
That he's in five places, all at once?
That he's started to grow a head-nail?

.

Have all five of him
Started growing head-nails?

.

If I head to the top of Mount Pindarrhus,
Maybe I could follow one of him, and see
Where the five are sleeping.

.

In the meantime, I should send dignitaries
To collect all of his parts.
For 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 could trade
For an entire part of that world.
As long as my Cat-Cat is safe.

LIGHTS TO JOHN

JOHN:

Ubiquitous as dirt and dust, with enough gall,
Morality is the excuse we all recommend. I'm not
opposed to this. I mean, if I wanted to I
Could be. I relearned as sheriff what I first
Was told and took for granted
Serving in the guards, there's equal
Place for the shallow trench as for the
High hill.

.

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:
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, now a full-time surfer,
That man with the bulging, veiny legs:
John Holder.

.

John 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 a steal.

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 the thing.

ANDY: So this is legal, but my much more reasonable solution isn't? 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: The city's hill.

JOHN: See, there you go again, confusing me. NOT your hill. The hill that belongs to the city.

ANDY: Municipal property.

JOHN: Which you've infiltrated.

ANDY: Two fucking inches!

JOHN: Foolproof. Just let the thing out on the hill behind your deck, and... This is important! Put a bell around its neck so it doesn't get hit by a car... then two days, three at most, and before you know it, 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 I was wrong about that. I did a little more research 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, in-bred...

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 of these in-bred mustard weed-eating things... tomorrow! I swear to God, on my mother's life, I will bring the goddamn thing back to my house.

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 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—? 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 my guy was suggesting, Andrew, is that you put up a type of wire they can't climb.

ANDY: Is that something I 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. She doesn't like me having a gun in the house but she'd go get the gun, and she'd shoot the damned thing.

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 and feeling all these blah blah blah emotions – 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: Some of us do our due diligence.

ANDY: Jesus! Ha! 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. Maybe she's a little mad. It's the kind of mad she'll get over, Irene, you know, without any effort on my part.

JOHN: Sounds promising.

ANDY: *I fucked everything that moved.* God knows what you're carrying.

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 moment, is Paula doing any better than the last time we saw her?

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: 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 abracadabra, 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 the matter at hand has 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 goat-herders 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 have it!

SECURITY CHIEF: Then the goat-herds 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, near the 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 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...

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.

TAATKO: The Republic has the strongest military, 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 him] 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 and city. The Republic is trying to shift the blame 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.

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

MELIPRYMA: You'll 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: Are we not sheltering him?

SECURITY CHIEF: We have footage of Catullus entering his room.

MELIPRYMA: He's not in his room.

TATKO: All this because of some fucking poetry? This is why the fuck 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 strength... 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 tom-cat.

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]. If he means, *Poleiurea*... No. He wouldn't!

TATKO: You and your sister 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 here. 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... [she 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 simpler people 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! Ah! 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 wait for the Republic's civil war. We sponsor the weaker of the two sides, in exchange for spoils, a large piece of land. The western coast, that would be my choice.

TATKO: You've no fucking end game. We don't do war. We don't do land! Enough said! 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 was running a trading post. It's not a one and zeroes game. You need to learn to see things a little more like an animal struggling 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: This is my land too.

MELIPRYMA: Then take it from me, Nasteia.

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!

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 food in three years. [MELIPRYMA walks away] I have a new record, by the way, since nobody asked. I climbed to the peak of Mount Pindarrhus in 3 hours, 20 minutes, 13 seconds. Is nobody interested in what I've accomplished? 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, John 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 them 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 I've done for him,
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: 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: I know. But that's the law. Now on the upside of things: Kernigan and I came up with a loophole. I mean, Kernigan came up with the loophole.

ANDY: Kernigan! Kernigan? The man is suing the fucking City of Dana Point right now. For \$30 million. THE CITY! You didn't actually talk to Kernigan.

JOHN: I did. Dan was actually quite intrigued by your situation, by which I mean, in a legal way. He ended up consulting several other law offices in Southern California which specialize more in boundary disputes.

ANDY [embarrassed]: Fuck me!

JOHN: And we've confirmed, there is no law regulating the feeding habits of exotic pets: that includes the flora that may or may not happen to be on city property, 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. The goat eats the mustard weed, and the Parks Department can no longer prove that you went all 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 idea, Andy?

ANDY: I'm not. 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 stair 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, should I explain the correlation for you?

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 very fair to poor Andy. Or to Paula.

ANDY: Do you have any idea what my love life would be like today if I followed all of 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 [one overhead light on each]

HOLDER [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?—

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

CATULLUS [aside]:
And whatever happened to Paul?

HOLDER [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 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 exactly 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-point
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 it's rather common,

And it seems now, after all this time,
We've at least one thing in common.

.

I heard Irene was neglected
In intensive care,
I heard 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 used to nibble
At her coffee.

.

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

.

That woman, who is she?
Her face reminds me,
Of a 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,
Which is to say, mutability.

.

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 keep from your suffering?

.
We've had up 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 seems fair, that I share one of mine.
You remember, Melipryma,
My favorite little birdie? She's no more.
I killed her.
I may have done it, knowing
Full well what I was doing.

.
In my youth, John,
I 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.

.
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.

.
Yah, I've 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 coddles, 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 envelopes 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 their points
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, among the audience.

LIGHTS TO CATULLUS

CATULLUS is seen lying once again among the audience.
His body 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 the 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,
 decked 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 Bocce
And I'd 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 cliff side.
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 swimtrunks 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. Begins 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, John,
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, no longer there, as the goat walk is rolled off stage:

CATULLUS:

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 stage rear, 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 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, and when BOB doesn't return, it's clear he isn't alive anymore. 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.