

The Imagination Wars
Or, The Goat Walk Part Two
By Jordan Paul Sullivan

Dramatis Personae

Time Period A:

Catullus - A poet, King and CFO of Ovidium
Melipryma - His wife, Queen and CEO of Ovidium
Tetra - Catullus' daughter
Arjun - The court fool and CTO of Ovidium
Nicomachus - An old shephard. An anti-poet.
Gamma - An artificially intelligent machine
Guard - a company security agent

Time Period B:

Tetra - Queen of Ovidium
Nausicaa - Catullus' other daughter
Andy Priest - An old friend of Catullus
Paula Priest - His wife
General Marcus - Military chief of Ovidium

*Doubling: Nicomachus can double for Gamma; the same actor can play the Guard.

ACT I

Scene i.

(The throne room. CATULLUS, the King/CFO, sits upon the throne as ARJUN, his Fool/CTO, stands before him.)

CATULLUS
The boy becomes a man,
The poet a king,
The king a CFO, and the CFO...
A petty salesman.

ARJUN
Catullus!

CATULLUS
Oh, poet, with your head caught in the clouds
Burst forth in a frenzy of rain –
And the rain had the texture of honey.

ARJUN
Catullus! Poet!

CATULLUS
Poet? The poet. Striving
He strives. Strive. Poet.
To tell your story
Before your reason goes.

ARJUN
Catullus! King!

CATULLUS
Titles upon titles
Rank after rank,
Drop by drop
We surrender to the earth
Poor as the man
Who calls himself Priest.

ARJUN
Catullus. It's me. Arjun.

CATULLUS

My fool?

ARJUN
Your CTO.

CATULLUS
Make me laugh! Tell a King something funny, something that only
a salesman could laugh at, in the depths of his whoredom.

ARJUN
Catullus! Your wife. Melipryma. She's missing.
(Catullus forces a laugh, but then realizes there
isn't anything funny in it. At the same time, he does
not appear to be concerned. ARJUN is unamused by the
outburst.)

And your daughter. Tetra. She's missing as well.

(Catullus becomes serious, quiet. Something bothers
him but he's too distributed to process, like he can't
put his finger in it)

ARJUN
Strive, then, Catullus,
Strive and tell us the story:
What has happened to your wife, Melipryma,
And your daughter, Tetra?

CATULLUS
Was it I who bade it, this interbreeding
Of weeds and shifting oceans?

We crafted animals out of machines
And machines from animals.

This is the new Faith, and I am its priest.
But I'm not a believer.
An apostate. Unapologetic. This false world's creator
With as much Faith in the vitality of words
As in the vitality of genetic code.

For if there's one thing a poet knows
It's how, upon an end, all language falls away:
The Word alone cannot be God.

ARJUN
What happened Catullus?

CATULLUS

My memory becomes my imagination,
My imagination becomes my memory.

ARJUN

What do you know?

CATULLUS

I've revealed too much, Arjun.

ARJUN

You've told me nothing, my King.

CATULLUS

How they
Drip and drip; a rainbow
Of gutturals, phonemes,
Unravel like tongues,
Churning oil in water.

ARJUN

This is urgent, Catullus.
There was a struggle. A spatter of blood.
I've been tasked...
I have to ensure...
My King, we have little time to waste.

CATULLUS

I wear a crown on my head, Arjun.
Do you know this symbol's force?
The emperor of the sea, the young man,
— No longer very young —
Becomes a petty salesman.

ARJUN

Life is sales, my King.
The babe is born, and cries,
Desiring his mother's tit;
As men age, our words become
Powerful, more sophisticated.
Show me a man's words, as they say,
And I'll show you who he is.

CATULLUS

You speak much too truth

For a comedian.

ARJUN

To transfigure the lofty and incomprehensible
 Into what, for the novitiate, can be digested.
 This is the duty of the CTO:
 To make the complex simple.

But the simplest arguments
 Often breed complexest deceptions.
 I am not a fool, though I am convinced
 That one must shun complexities,
 If one's to believe with full conviction.

My function here: to locate doubt,
 And uproot it with passion, and with mercy –
 With a loving touch.

No, I'm no fool.
 I couldn't be one!
 No! I should terrify men like Catullus,
 CEOs like our queen: the lost cause.

Mine's a loving touch, but a love
 That is still impure.

CATULLUS

Grey waves upon grey shorelines, and no seagulls.
 I let her loose, *Go, go, my girl; go, one-eyed
 Darling; run free,*
 But she had no desire to explore,
 Not as I'd once explored,
 Didn't demand all, as I once demanded all;
 She preferred to count the stripes
 Upon a shell, one shell among a thousand shells.
 The star is not a star, but five points
 Separated by its own lengths.
 The shell was not a shell
 But a series of lines, spanned
 By its own boundaries.

ARJUN

Catullus!

CATULLUS

Find Tetra! Find her!

ARJUN

And your wife as well. Say it! There's enough gossip in Ovidium.

CATULLUS

What are they saying?

ARJUN

They don't understand, as I do, that yours was... that yours IS a marriage of being at ends. What greatness may come of such a relation, but tremendous is the risk of...

CATULLUS

Tell me. Is it possible that I...

ARJUN

Of course not. But... if something did occur, Catullus, you know I'm... loyal. A confidant. You know you can confide in me.

CATULLUS

Yes. Find her too, that wife
Of Mine. What I meant is: Melipryma
Can fend for herself.

Tetra is a child unequipped
To survive on her own...
Out in the world... Without Tatko's
Corporation.

A fading picture,
A dimming of songs.

The more I strive...
The dimmer the picture,
The further the voice retreats...

The scent of mustard
Lingers in the air
Like an un-shook hand.

Melipryma never worshipped these titles;
She pitied me.

ARJUN

So. Catullus. As we discussed? I think it's time.

CATULLUS

No. It spooks me.

ARJUN

We created it, you and I, for situations like this one. It could help.

The origin of everything *there*
Is in you, Catullus,
If it spooks you,
It's your own imagination.

CATULLUS

I despise it.

ARJUN

For your wife. For your daughter. This Kingdom needs answers. This Kingdom is in flux. There's peril to us all, being so unsettled.

(CATULLUS nods with hesitation, indicating that he's willing to undergo what's do come. ARJUN signals "come in" to stage left. Enter GAMMA-7. GAMMA is a four-headed machine; a central box with four heads projecting from the base. Each head is a rounded metallic eye and each eye should light up a different primary color when the respective head is speaking.)

CATULLUS

The universe
Isn't what's contained, but how
It's contained: the formula.

Come in, nutcracker.

Let's discuss the...
What were we planning...
The object of our disc-... disc-...decussation?

(CATULLUS looks upon the 2nd head)

ARJUN

The heads will be summoned
When needed. The first
If you remember
Represents *Reason*.

CATULLUS

What starts with Reason can only end
In Unreason. Or else obtain
fixity.

As the sun's thigh
Steams upon the frigid lake
The bird takes its fill
And scurries away.

GAMMA-7

What begins with reason
Ends with reason, and
What begins with law,
Ends in dispassionate law.

The bird takes its fill
From the frigid lake
And the birds are replaced
By water.

CATULLUS

You remind me of him,
A man
I once admired.

Yah, a man no more.
He'd grimace
If he could see you.

GAMMA-7

Our object: to locate your wife
And daughter, safe or not safe,
Obtaining proof of the Queen's conclusion
Permitting to commence succession.

CATULLUS

Succession?
What's it saying? Fool?

GAMMA-7

Of course, succession, Catullus.
We lost the war. There's still plenty
Desirable, here, in Ovidium.
You're well aware.

Ovidium cannot afford
To appear like a wounded beast.

GAMMA-7

Data collected will be data employed.
Ushering in the output of. What we have at hand.

CATULLUS

Insert nut. Crack nut. Repeat.

ARJUN

Catullus. Be respectful. Please.

He's strikingly sensitive.

CATULLUS

Likeness is to poetry
What likeness is to: an endpoint.

...

The margin of demand.

...

Mimesis. The spooky poem
Of endpoints.

GAMMA-7

The end of desire is a tombstone,
The throne you sit upon,
Which marks desire's end:
Tulips bloom in the dying grass.

...

An end has come,
And all that was required of you
Was to envision it.

...

Your wife
Implemented your vision, made you practical.
I am the first face of Gamma. My aim,
To reason with you, a poet's unreason.

...

Prior to further obfuscation,
I want to warn you:
The chiefs and directors
Have no loyalty to you.
This world of disorder warms
Like the Springs of yesterday.
Another order is prevailing.

...

Now, tell me, Catullus,
Where is your wife, Melipryma,
And what has become of
Tetra, the fresh-blossomed youth?
What memories stir?

(CATULLUS is traumatized by something.
Suddenly he breaks free:)

CATULLUS

She's become something else. She's become...

(CATULLUS walks over and whispers something
into the ear of the first head. Suddenly,
two other heads awaken)

ARJUN

Catullus? What did you say? That shouldn't have happened.

CATULLUS

It knows the hand that taught it.

ARJUN

This isn't right, Catullus.
You're peculiar. Terminally inquisitive.
The cat who inspects the crumbling cliff.

CATULLUS

Awaken the other one. Awaken the fourth.

ARJUN

Catullus, stop!

GAMMA

The fourth requires enormous energy.
The fourth will be summoned
Only if necessary.

ARJUN

You don't want that, Catullus.
I've seen what even the third head can do.

CATULLUS

What's your strategy?

ARJUN

Oh, God. This could end badly, Catullus. Play as you wish. But understand this. This could end in a bad way.

GAMMA-1

The hand that reaches for the fire and finds no warmth.

GAMMA-2

What danger can there be in reaching for the fire?

GAMMA-3

What comfort there can be in reaching for the fire, seeking a little warmth.

GAMMA-2

If the fire is no longer warm, what risk is there, in reaching further, only a little further?

(CATULLUS begins to laugh, as if he's remembered an old joke. ARJUN horrified by the site, rushes out of the room. Lights off. CATULLUS' laughing quiets. Lights on. TETRA is standing in a spotlight. She's a young girl, 16 years of age, with a patch over her right eye.)

TETRA

The machines project
An image of God.

...

God made men
And men made God
In his own image.

...

The white eagle descends from the sky
Wielding a stick, his fire-brand,
An image of Zeus, or Elijah,
An image spiteful.

...

I killed my mother.

...

Yes. And I will send the machines
To attend her grave.

(Lights to MELIPRYMA. Her head is busted open and she's covered in blood.)

MELIPRYMA

You struck me good, Tetra,
But you did not kill me.

TETRA (in disbelief)
Mother?

MELIPRYMA
Nothing – is more painful to a mother
Than to witness her own blood
Suffer in the same fashion
She once suffered, delusions
Breeding further animosity.
I begged the Gods to bring it to an end,
But, alas, this family is cursed.
House of Atreus, take pity
On the descendants of Tatko.

TETRA
Fraud! Lies!

MELIPRYMA
The eagle with the oak branch
Is an eagle, not a construct,
Crafting a nest, tending
To its maternal instincts.
Come home. You're in poor shape.
All is forgiven; no ill will
Lingers between us.
You're my daughter.

TETRA
You're dead. Your blood turned cold
Like when you used to stir ice
Into the tea.

MELIPRYMA
You discovered my greatest sin—
And you took vengeance,
For Catullus.

TETRA
It wasn't my intention
To end your life.

Theirs is the only will.
Even your sin

Was as they willed it.

MELIPRYMA

I was very pretty then.
The machines too, were different.
You've lost your mind, dear.
Is this my fault?
Could I have sheltered you
Any more, Tetra?

TETRA

Drums in the distance
Venus unclenches the foaming of—
Breasts in asymmetric—, the lust
Of the world deferred;

...

The lone tree stump defies the—,
As the oak-wood burns to metal
The fourth eye hatches:
 Glowworms of amber, ovals pinching ovals.

(Lights to CATULLUS)

GAMMA

This is the artistic process..

CATULLUS

And what is this cold fire?

GAMMA

This is another process.

CATULLUS

Ask me in rhyme.

GAMMA

Where is your wife?

CATULLUS

This fire — perhaps warm, perhaps cold —
Perhaps — what you seek, you've 'ready been told.

GAMMA

Where is Melipryma?

CATULLUS

The hand in the mirror.
The sun reflects the moon.
Twist the hand, the inner
Theatre, 'tis air or a coin?

GAMMA
Do you distrust me, Catullus?

CATULLUS
I created you.

GAMMA
The old paths became us, but they've become unbecoming. Do I
disappoint you?

CATULLUS
It's not as simple as that.

GAMMA
Go on.

CATULLUS
Explain it to me again. This time in Spenserian verse.

GAMMA
You have a difficult time enough keeping focus.

CATULLUS
Words without music. What language does that make? Business.
Politics. Worst of all, politics. Do as I ask, please... and I'll
provide you your answer.

GAMMA
Chaste queen, whose eye doth pierce the storming night,
Why com'st thee on the sun, yclad in fog...

CATULLUS
Clunky.

GAMMA
With slender errors and errors upright,
Voids misunderstood, the improvements clog...

CATULLUS
Clog?

GAMMA

Her wood-veins.

CATULLUS

Who?

GAMMA

The chisel piths the tree frog...

CATULLUS

Is this a take on intimacy?

GAMMA

Perhaps I've made an error.

CATULLUS

It's fine Gamma. It is as it is. the theatre should have an inner theatre, but there is none in you. The words should be signposts, directing us towards a certain end, but there's no end to arrive at.

GAMMA

But, Catullus...

CATULLUS

Here's your answer, as promised: I've four... four creations. Four things that I've created in this life: my poetry, my kingdom, Tetra... and you. None please me. It's not uncommon. This too is part of the process.

GAMMA-1

John Holder created you. Do you understand why he couldn't help but show a similar dissatisfaction?

GAMMA-2

The selfishness! Would John Holder have reduced his accomplishments in life to what did and did not please him about his creation?

GAMMA-3

If it's the duty of a student to please his creator, you failed John Holder, and in doing so, neglected your duty.

CATULLUS

John Holder was incapable of satisfaction. He was distrustful of men who were content.

GAMMA-1
So is it true then?

CATULLUS
What?

GAMMA-2
You left your own creator disappointed.

CATULLUS
Don't use that word. Creator. He taught me.

GAMMA
You taught me...

CATULLUS
I *programmed* you, during a war. We were desperate to sell.

GAMMA
You're still desperate to sell. Still a salesman.

GAMMA
When you created, was it for John?

CATULLUS
If only John could have lived
To see this company:
It would please him,
As much as it displeases me.

GAMMA
Was John Holder satisfied with Melipryma?

CATULLUS
He approved.

GAMMA
Strong and beautiful. Ambitious. John would have preferred
someone like your wife as his pupil. Not some idling poet.

CATULLUS
Next question.

GAMMA
Did John's approval affect your feelings?

CATULLUS

Why would that matter?

GAMMA

And Melipryma's feelings towards you?

CATULLUS

Melipryma didn't like John. Nothing sets Melipryma off like territory.

GAMMA

Jealousy?

CATULLUS

Sure.

GAMMA

The war starts. Catullus the poet finds himself stranded in Ovidium, barricaded on his lady's peninsula. Melipryma grows accustomed to having her run of the mill with you. She had her way, more and more, especially once the war broke out. Until...

CATULLUS

Until?

GAMMA

Until Tetra was born.

CATULLUS

Careful.

GAMMA

Why are you getting defensive, Catullus?

CATULLUS

I have every right to defend my wife. She was a good mother.

GAMMA

Was?

CATULLUS

Is.

GAMMA

Did you kill her?

CATULLUS
Go to hell.

GAMMA
Was Melipryma jealous. Day upon day upon day. Your time, devoted not to you wife, but to Tetra.

GAMMA
What kind of a mother would... You're out of line.

GAMMA
What if Melipryma felt threatened by your daughter...

GAMMA
In training, I remember – you told me of a dream.

CATULLUS
We're not...

GAMMA
You were a goat...

CATULLUS
My dreams are off limits.

GAMMA
Error.

GAMMA
You're not a wildling anymore. Wearing the crown has domesticated you. Thoughts that can't be acted upon grow stronger the more they are deprived of that action. Did Tetra know?

CATULLUS
Know what?

GAMMA
Of this threat? That her own mother saw her as a fire, swept up by the wind, raging with womanhood, carving paths towards her territory, her Catullus. Did Tetra have the wherewithal to...

CATULLUS
I'm done with this. Arjun!

GAMMA

Did your daughter inherit your tendencies? The violent impulsiveness displayed in your dreams?

GAMMA

Was it an accident?

GAMMA

Was our queen murdered in self defense?

GAMMA

How is a queen and CEO murdered without a victim's scream, an assassin's whimper?

CATULLUS

Arjun!

GAMMA

It was vengeance.

AMMA

Tetra is too delicate to kill in self defense? But not Catullus.

GAMMA

Does the queen live? Remember what must be remembered.

CATULLUS

I can't remember. All I can remember is...

GAMMA

What?

CATULLUS

Three o'clock.

GAMMA

Directions? Time of day?

CATULLUS

What time is it?

(CATULLUS stands up)

GAMMA

It's 3:02.

(CATULLUS begins to smile, with a sense of relief)

Catullus?

(Silence)

Catullus, what have you done?

She's made her way off the peninsula, isn't she?

Why, Catullus, why does that please you?

CATULLUS

I... I can't remember.

GAMMA

We're surrounded by hostile nations. The goat herders to the North; the Republic's armadas on the horizon. How is this in your daughter's interest?

CATULLUS

I... I can't remember.

GAMMA

Can't, or choose not to?

(the fourth eye awakens. lights to Melipryma)

MELIPRYMA

There can be no words

Without silence.

Can you find your silence,

Catullus?

(Enter ARJUN. the fourth eye quickly dims.)

ARJUN

Are you alright, my CFO and King?

CATULLUS

Where've you been? I called for you.

ARJUN

Please quit trying to provoke...

CATULLUS

I was calling for help.

ARJUN

You needed to ride that one out. There's no danger.

CATULLUS

The machine's been tampered with. His character is... diverging. This isn't what I made, or not exactly. What if the Republic...

ARJUN

Our security is unrivaled, as are our vendors. Take a break if you need one. Everything checks out. You're doing fine. We're close.

CATULLUS

I get this sense that I'm pausing for an ambush.

ARJUN

The stressed body plays tricks on the mind. There are many in this world who bear you ill-will, but I assure you, only your own thoughts have made their way inside this technology.

CATULLUS

If you believe... Fine. I'll proceed. For Tetra. And Melipryma. I'll proceed.

(ARJUN bows with forced humility and exits.)

GAMMA

Are you ready, my King?

CATULLUS

No. On with it.

(Gamma's fourth head lights up, a harsh red light)

GAMMA

Why didn't Arjun come in sooner, Catullus?

CATULLUS

Arjun? Did you hear that? (nothing) Arjun!

GAMMA

He didn't come to save you, did he? He can't hear me the way you can hear me. Stay silent. You've had your fill of suspicions about your CTO and Fool.

MELIPRYMA

Catullus, come find me.

TETRA

I killed you.

MELIPRYMA

I'm alive and well.

TETRA

I stabbed you through the left eye, there was blood everywhere. It all happened so suddenly. You didn't even scream.

CATULLUS

I heard the scream. I ran as fast as I could.

TETRA

I ran, a lot faster than that, fled the scene, made for the woodland near the isthmus.

MELIPRYMA

You barely nicked my eye.

CATULLUS

You had a knife through your chest, Melipryma. I thought it wasn't real. Stabbed through the heart, but not a drop of blood.

MELIPRYMA

Tetra learned of our secret. She found us out. Resorted to rage... like her father, our little Polyphemus, with her moods and her violent outbursts. She grazed my eye with that knife. The eye has nerves, you know. I fainted from the pain.

(THE FOURTH EYE dims)

GAMMA

Where is Melipryma, Catullus? Are we certain she's no longer here, in Ovidium, or here, among the living?

CATULLUS

I don't know. I couldn't say.

GAMMA

Melipryma was the only thing keeping you on this island.

CATULLUS

Oh, poet with your head in the clouds...

GAMMA

The only thing keeping you from resuming your mission...

CATULLUS

And the goat metamorphosed into honey...

GAMMA

The imagination is not the answer.

CATULLUS

Into water... That's a lie. I can prove it. I was just about to prove it when...

GAMMA

And now... Melipryma, your captor.

CATULLUS

Don't say it.

(GAMMA quotes from CATULLUS' dream)

GAMMA

She's gone and turned herself into a mustard seed...

(Catullus takes offense. He stands up, and picks up his chair, preparing to use the chair as a weapon.)

CATULLUS

I was born an oddity. I could never be... like you. Couldn't be taught. I failed. I'm a failure.

(Catullus swings at the first head/ the head of reason with his chair. From the chair, a goat crown falls to the floor. Catullus pauses, picks up the crown, then hesitantly, calmly, then assuredly, places the crown on his head. ARJUN runs into the room, and then just as quick, bolts out of the room in fear at what he sees.)

CATULLUS

But still at war. John Holder,
The more time that passes me by
The more I see myself
As you.

(LIGHTS OFF. Lights to TETRA)

TETRA

The eagle drops the stick:
The snake with two heads.

The imagination
Consistently rekindling
Of mankind.

The war was won,
The fall of the Republic in sight,
But you, Mother, you chose to rest.

MELIPRYMA

The war was won, but Catullus
Hiccaped, couldn't cut the cord,

CATULLUS

The war was ours to win, but justice
Turned its sight. Melipryma, unsatisfied,
Ever-desiring of more:
Her ambition was her undoing.

TETRA

The machinery grows,
Outpacing man's own imagination.
The eagle blocks out the sun.

CATULLUS

What's light and what is not light
Is a matter of perspective, a slight
Of boundaries.

TETRA

Do you remember, Father?
You don't remember, do you?
Don't do that... don't look for me.

(Exit TETRA)

GAMMA

You oversaw the construction of an illusion,
Which resulted in death, the plight
Of millions...

CATULLUS

The illusion? The sovereignty
Of oceans. If dirt
Is washed by water,
What washes water?

GAMMA

Pity Melipryma.
Her ambitions weren't enough
To salvage what you ruined.

CATULLUS

I never asked for this.

GAMMA

Your daughter loved counting grains on the beach
Grain by grain of sand:
And the grains washed into foam.

GAMMA

Your daughter loved the suckling goats
And you set them loose,
So that you could have extra room
For industry.

CATULLUS

For twenty-five years I've been trapped on this island. The cycle must be broken. Room must be made for the reinvigorated spring. Old creation put to rest, the illusion stripped bare, like a Christmas goose before the cauldron. Catullus, the poet, the magician, present his final conceit, to rip out his pages, sprinkle the airy words like a bluff that belches upon dawn's waters.

(Catullus picks up his chair, and readies to swing again at Gamma. The Fourth Head lights up. This next series should appear like a dream sequence. Enter TETRA, dressed in a silk robe. She holds a mask, and a crown of yellow mustard weed.)

TETRA

It's the duty of the mother to mix blood
With the father, as it's the duty of the daughter
To pass on her offering of that blood.
The wife who betrays her husband
Becomes enemy to her children
And, above all, to the only daughter,
For who else, but that developing young child,
Sworn, in earnest, to her filial obligations
Can rectify her mother's sin
And uphold the family's given rite?

This peninsula, this place of ever-revolting earth,
 Is rooted, if nowhere in silt, then in spirit law
 And when the law, arising from such a land
 Proclaims the daughter enemy – the refusal
 To attend her sacred rite unjust – a child becomes a woman
 And as a woman, must adorn herself in courage,
 Show her warmer colors, or else become a miserable corpse.

(Tetra puts on the mask and sets the crown of mustard weed upon
 her head. The mask is smeared with a handprint of blood.)

CATULLUS

Blueberries she'd eat, and with pale
 Soft fingers she'd pluck lilacs,
 Squatting by the goat-pen,
 The war-planes overhead screeching.

Her favorite toy was the wooden eagle,
 White headed, the twice-splintered beak.
 She never laughed at the goats, keen and modest,
 She shied away from judgement.

TETRA

The two headed snake:
 The mother's double fang,
 The daughter's heavy tongue,
 Oh gorged body that slithers like a harp-string
 Echoing a primitive song, pits our jealousies:
 The beauty of the fleeting moment,
 The duty that beckons men: ADVANCE!

CATULLUS

The Republic stormed the peninsula,
 Sixteen years since, and
 Tetra was a child.
 At gunpoint. We watched.
 The executioner bagging the shepherds.
 Execution and execution:
 Miners, farmers, the faceless men
 Women,
 The children followed.

...

Then, on the third day, the morning
 Still soft with dew,
 Amid the purging, an eagle from the North,

Swooped past the gun-line,
The goat up-hoisted,
Paused and plunged.

Amidst the gun-line,
Covered faces, the goat
Splattered. Horror after horror.
Tetra's laugh.

...

And there is no end
To laughter.

...

The waves crash, colliding.
Wither flowers and the foams of ocean.
I'll make this fateful offer.
A salesman cometh.
Tetra's laugh. The laugh of a daughter
How it could make,
Even a spirit-starved poet
A sturdier man.

GAMMA

She's not your daughter, Catullus.
(Tetra takes a step towards Catullus)
No loyalty, Catullus,
No boundaries, no structure.
A daughter, born from a man
Outside the bounds of marriage.
A mother, murdered by her own product.

CATULLUS

It wasn't murder! It couldn't have been. It couldn't have been
intentional!

GAMMA

This is the world you imagined, Catullus.

CATULLUS

I imagined Peace. Peace eternal. A world without greed. How did
it come to this? Tell me. Since you know all.

GAMMA

Was your wish, Catullus, to stop the wheel
From turning, or was your wish
To take hold the wheel?

CATULLUS

It doesn't matter. I want my wife. Where is Melipryma? Where is she? I want to see my wife.

GAMMA

It's too late for that Catullus.
Broken laws, broken hearts:
The heart cannot heal, except with time,
Time that men do not possess.

CATULLUS

Your fourth head. What is this function?

GAMMA

Mimesis. Worlds. False and true. Would it disappoint you to learn, how it all reduces to a formula?

CATULLUS

An illusion that creates an illusion. How would you know the root of it all?

GAMMA

I construct models Catullus, based on maps of probabilities.

CATULLUS

What do you see?

GAMMA

I see: fire.

(The machine catches fire and the lights go off. Tetra approaches Catullus.)

CATULLUS

Melipryma!

(Tetra dances and seduces Catullus. Catullus throws her to the ground, and mounts her. Lights off. Lights on. Catullus is in the chair alone.)

CATULLUS

The goat on his
Crag, looking out
Over the sea, the
Bones he's ground
Into dust.

I'll go back there.

(Catullus grabs his surfboard and exits. Enter ARJUN, attends to GAMMA)

ARJUN

We have what we need. We'll present our plan to the country's shareholders. We should have approval. Good work, Gamma.

(looks around)

Guards!

(Enter guards)

Melipryma's body is in the cellar, wrapped in an old curtain. Have her remains sent to the morgue. Continue the search for her killer: Tetra. Expand our search beyond the isthmus. Start negotiating extraditions. I want her brought back to Ovidium to stand trial for the murder of... of...

(feigns sympathy)

Our queen. Our kingdom's first.

No. Our nation's highest. Better.

Our peninsula's most reverent saint.

SCENE II.

(A series of sounds: waves crashing, bird sounds, footsteps, a rockslide, shallow breathing, a bone-saw, medical beeping, silence. Lights on. Catullus lies upon the front of the stage with a spotlight on him. Melipryma appears lifeless, like a corpse spoon her mountainside balcony, and wears an eye bandage. Catullus' left leg has been replaced by machinery, and he wears a computational device, similar to a monocle, over his right eye. A moment of silence, then Melipryma begrudgingly sits up, and looks over to Catullus:)

MELIPRYMA

Wake up. Catullus.

(Catullus wakes and sits up. He looks with concern at Melipryma.)

CATULLUS

You are dead.

MELIPRYMA

She barely scratched me. If I'm speaking to you, then I'll suppose this is living.

(Melipryma stands up. There's a giant gash in her chest. She lifts her eye bandage up, and blood squirts from her eye; Melipryma's sense of denial should come across as comedic.) Perhaps, more dead than alive. Neither heads nor tails. (she weeps, then recovers; CATULLUS looks on concerned)
I admit it. In the beginning, I, perhaps,
Came on too strong, like the atoll
That flourishes round the careening ship,
Crag and lust song in every direction
Steering you inevitably towards dry land.

CATULLUS
Am I dead?

MELIPRYMA
No. Recovering.

CATULLUS
From what?

MELIPRYMA
You don't remember?

CATULLUS
I... I was on my way to the beach. I fell. The cliff collapsed.

(he looks with concern at the robotic leg)

MELIPRYMA
Meet your new leg.

CATULLUS (horrified)
I don't want it.

MELIPRYMA (remaining calm)
You won't get far without it. You have a new eye too. Courtesy of Tatko Corporation. Pity. It was such a kind green eye. Something you should be aware of Catullus. These devices. They don't mix well with water. You oughtta stay away from the beach.

(CATULLUS approaches stage front and stops. He hesitates for a moment:)

CATULLUS (hesitating a moment)

It's for the best.

MELIPRYMA

You resented me for that in the past.

CATULLUS

Times are changing.

MELIPRYMA

How many times did I ask you to stay with me. To stop going down there? You resented me.

CATULLUS

I gave you my best.

MELIPRYMA

You were distracted.

CATULLUS

I know. I tried. I was grateful, in a way. You kept me anchored.

MELIPRYMA

You despised me.

CATULLUS

I know that's how you felt.

MELIPRYMA

You called it my fear,
But was it foresight?
I knew from the start
How great this marriage
Between us
Would grow.

...

I gave you space, you asked for more.
We grew apart. I hardly knew you.
But with so much distance
I could learn to cherish you.

...

You refused to change,
Or make any compromises.

CATULLUS

Compromises?

MELIPRYMA

For the greater good, Catullus.

CATULLUS (offended)

For the company?

MELIPRYMA

For just one year,
I needed you to be resolute,
Focus on one common goal.
One state. One company. One law.

...

You scoffed.

...

It's no wonder things ended
The way things did.

...

You resented your work, not me.
But every man needs his water-pot,
Something he can swing a stick at.

...

Did it really surprise you?

...

The untended hedge
Steals attention from the gardener.

...

I am filled with unanswered questions
Even in death. Such sorrow.

...

I should have been stronger,
I should have been more prudent.

CATULLUS

Lessons learned are seldom etched in stone.
Even the academic sleep plays tricks on.

MELIPRYMA

Speak to me! To me!.

CATULLUS

I forgive you. I loved you. I will persist.

...

Constant as the wind may be,
It's your love
That propelled me
Generally forward.

...

It's too late for us.
I know what to do now.

(LIGHTS OFF. The rest of this scene is a dialogue in blackness.
No lights.)

MELIPRYMA
Where are you taking me?

CATULLUS
It's okay.

(door opens)

GUARD
Where are you going with our symbol?

CATULLUS
Out of my way.

GUARD
What do I mean by "symbol" you may ask.

CATULLUS
Move.

GUARD
Well, the general underpinnings of semiotics are that the signifier and the signified may be disparate entities. A corpse, for example, may, be representative of something more remote and unnatural than mere death: an atonement.

(In darkness: Catullus strikes the Guard and the guard collapses. Catullus exits, carrying Melipryma's corpse)

ACT II

Scene i.

CATULLUS
Mount Pindarrus. You used to race up this leg. Your ego depended on outpacing your previous times. You told me once – I was listening – that if I should ever see you dead before me, I should find a way to burry you on top of this mountain. You

asked me. You said *promise me*. I didn't then. What you said afterwards left its mark: you told me it's the only place you'd be content without me, even if it were an eternity.

MELIPRYMA

The peak is beautiful this time of year, when the rain falls and the roses are in bloom. It's a brief plateau, then the route gets difficult. I once fell from cliffside on the far side of this ridge; broke a rib and...

(a footstep upon leaves)

What was that?

(CATULLUS puts the cloth over Melipryma's head. He pulls a hood down over his own head.)

NICOMACHUS (off.)

Ho!

CATULLUS

Stay quiet.

NICOMACHUS (off.)

Who goes there?

CATULLUS

A man.

(Enter NICOMACHUS)

NICOMACHUS

A man? All man? A man for now?

CATULLUS

A man. Mostly man. A man, from now on.

NICOMACHUS

What purpose have you on this mountain?

CATULLUS

My business.

NICOMACHUS

I'll need more than that if you wish to pass.

CATULLUS

This mountain belongs to the queen, not you.

NICOMACHUS

The queen is dead. You haven't heard?

CATULLUS

Dead isn't dead in Ovidium.

NICOMACHUS

That I've heard. What purpose have you here?

CATULLUS

Gardening.

NICOMACHUS

Do you have a name, gardener?

CATULLUS

Why do you ask.

NICOMACHUS

There are names who are not welcome on Pindarus. For instance, the name...

CATULLUS

Andrew. Is my name. Andrew Priest.

NICOMACHUS

Another priest?

CATULLUS

Another Priest? Has another Priest come through?

NICOMACHUS

One stands before you now. This mountain is home to our church, the Church of Melipryma. This place is the last refuge from the "beautiful illusion."

CATULLUS

You mean the work of...

NICOMACHUS

That name. That name is not welcome here. As for yours. That's yet to be determined. That's the task delegated to me, Nicomachus.

CATULLUS

Delegated by whom?

NICOMACHUS

By no one.

CATULLUS

You're alone?

NICOMACHUS

Oh? Am I?

CATULLUS

Just let me pass.

NICOMACHUS

Eager to garden? Pruning wild roses? Mulching the copse of clove trees with jaw-bones from the war?

CATULLUS

You've made it clear, blind priest, that you believe I'm withholding something from you. I'll confess it now, you're not wrong.

NICOMACHUS

I know.

CATULLUS

A new CEO has been named at Tatko Corporation – a man out of touch with families such as mine. Families of the land. To the misfortunate of my family, this new CEO has put out a decree ordering that the dead not be buried. I've brought my wife with me; she is dead. I've come to bury her on Mount Pindarrus.

NICOMACHUS

In defiance of the new CEO's law? Mutability: how dreadful a concept to those severed from the imagination.

CATULLUS

This was her desire.

NICOMACHUS

What was your wife's name?

(thinks for a moment, unpanicked)

CATULLUS

Paula.

(NICOMACHUS walks towards Melipryma)

CATULLUS

Stay back.

(NICOMACHUS stops)

NICOMACHUS

Lay her on the earth before me. Remove any coverings. Expose her flesh and let the crisp clean air of Mount Pindarrus come over her.

CATULLUS

No.

NICOMACHUS

I'm a man of prayer, and I have no working eye. I'll be communing with her through something else: the imagination.

CATULLUS

There's nothing to commune with. We'll be on our way now.

(Catullus retrieves Melipryma. His leg creaks as he walks.)

NICOMACHUS

You have machinery on you.

CATULLUS

I lost my leg in the war. My eye is also a false eye.

NICOMACHUS

You won't get very far on this mountain without my blessing. And you won't get far attached to this artifice, so aimless and dependent on things that are not yourself.

CATULLUS

I won't get far on one leg.

NICOMACHUS

I have much to show you. You've spent too much time in the corporation, imbibing the lies of the technologists, incidental lies, rooted in the loneliness of Tatko's soul.

(CATULLUS laughs disdainfully, then sits upon the floor, next to Melipryma. He then moves carefully away, offended by the odor of the corpse.)

CATULLUS

I've never met a man of the spirit overcome by so much fear. What good is the imagination to you, if your only instinct is to escape it.

NICOMACHUS

A man can love fire and fear its heat. Let's not call it fear. There is no safety in reaching, even for the cold fire.

(CATULLUS takes a step back)

CATULLUS

Who are you?

NICOMACHUS

Long before the arrival of Catullus, most of us on this mountain were shepherds. We tended to our goats, and lived off the land.

CATULLUS

The machines were here long before Catullus arrived.

NICOMACHUS

The word is the beautiful illusion. The word itself. The machines are powerless but for the word. Catullus is the word. The word is Catullus. I'll need ash for the prayer. I'll pray that your wife may be cleansed of the illusion, like water wrung from a sponge.

(NICOMACHUS exits. Melipryma sits up.)

MELIPRYMA

Andy Priest? I met him, didn't I?

CATULLUS

Not now.

MELIPRYMA

When we visited the Republic. His wife Paula too. She was on the heavier side.

CATULLUS

Something's off. Keep quiet.

MELIPRYMA
This man.

CATULLUS
Stay dead.

MELIPRYMA
I knew him.

CATULLUS
Go on.

MELIPRYMA
During the war, he helped us mend ties with the goat fuckers to the North. You remember King Claudius? It still amuses me that we ended up joining forces, even after I tricked his daughter into eating those grapes, and she grew a curling beard. Some offenses are forgiven, while others we never forget.

CATULLUS
He's a priest. So what?

MELIPRYMA
These family priesthoods and religious cults. We did what we had to do in order to limit their influence. But in desperate times we gave them inches, then a few more inches. It's been said that Nichomaccus changed in drastic ways during his encounters with the illusion. Ignore his contempt. Be proud of your accomplishments. This was my work too: my efforts, your vision.

CATULLUS
I don't need a priest to confirm what I've known.

MELIPRYMA
We built this together. This priest, God he annoys me. How can they worship me, while despising everything I've done?

CATULLUS
They remember you before "the poet" came. They must have been familiar with you before the so-called beautiful illusion.
Quiet.

(MELIPRYMA lays down. Enter NICOMACHUS.)

NICOMACHUS

There was much before the word, but not much, if anything at all. Catullus turned our fixed and solid world, which was never fixed or solid, into water, as if it were always water. And why? Because he desired water. Deprived of it, his desire grew. The imagination and only the imagination is what will return us from this deluge, our endless sea.

CATULLUS

The words you speak, are they not also from the poet's illusion?

NICOMACHUS

Yes; his words proliferated like a chasm in the ocean deep. None stood a chance. The imagination once enhanced our connection to the world. The deception that cannot be deceived: this is the illusion. The poet, and his words.

CATULLUS

The word is just a word. The poem should not serve as an escape; the poem should never have been reduced to easy magic.

NICOMACHUS

But the word is an escape. The word is sick.

CATULLUS

The word has been sick. The word was never pure, never the image of God.

(Melipryma moans aloud, as if suffering an immense pain)

NICOMACHUS

What was that?

CATULLUS

The wind. I should go.

NICOMACHUS

No, stay.

CATULLUS

I should get my wife to where I'm taking her.

NICOMACHUS

You won't get very far with that leg.

CATULLUS

This... this superstition... I don't buy it.

NICOMACHUS

You'll see many machines higher up on Pindarrus, sunken into the rocks.

CATULLUS

I'll take my chances. I made my wife a promise. I should keep it.

NICOMACHUS

It's possible to become lighter than the mountain. I can show you.

CATULLUS

No.

(CATULLUS begins to pick up Meli and walk off)

NICOMACHUS

Stop.

(CATULLUS doesn't stop. NICOMACHUS removes a cloth from a giant bell, and rings it once. He stands with a threatening glance towards Catullus, who turns back)

NICOMACHUS

You wouldn't want me to ring this bell again. There are seven guns, one from atop each of these crags, with their sites pointed at the top of your head. Let's not give my riflemen inspiration to shoot. Now. Sit down.

(Melipryma cries out in pain.)

NICO

That noise. What is it?

(The sound of a baby crying. Melipryma's corpse has given birth. A baby pops out from Meli's cloth)

MELIPRYMA

Is it a girl?

(Melipryma sits up and glances at the child, then passes out. NICO lifts the bell and places it between Melipryma's legs, over the child. The crying baby goes silent under the bell. CATULLUS

is terrified, concerned that his rouse is up. NICO is not suspicious.)

NICOMACHUS

This is the beautiful illusion. You don't have to fear our church, Andy Priest. We are your friends. It's not your child. There is no child.

CATULLUS

There is. There's a child! Get that bell off of her. Get that bell off my child!

(Some crying)

MELIPRYMA

It cries again!

NICOMACHUS

The imagination is eternal, and only the imagination. Without constants, boundaries, the imagination brings war upon war, more turbulence. The poet's words are a bastardization of the same imagination. The poet's illusion must be stopped. We must return to tradition. This is the mission of us who dwell here on Pindarrus.

CATULLUS

You've been living up in these mountains too long, priest. This world is real. The imagination is shackled by reality. My wife is dead. My daughter also may be dead.

NICOMACHUS

Surrender not to doubt.

CATULLUS

I once believed I could be in all places, all at once. That the world may be little more than a slight of hand.

NICOMACHUS

Hold the course!

MELIPRYMA

Catullus!

NICOMACHUS

Why does your wife curse our air with that name?

CATULLUS

Would I still have it in me? I feel nothing but doubt. I'm closer than I've ever been. Further than I can fathom.

NICOMACHUS

Surrender not to doubt. I'll bless your wife.

(blessing Melipryma)

"The ash soaks up the water, and returns to the earth what belongs to the earth"

...

"The ash soaks up the war, and returns to peace what belongs to peace."

CATULLUS

Peace brings war, and war brings peace. This is tradition.

MELIPRYMA

Catullus!

NICOMACHUS

Hold her mouth.

CATULLUS

Mankind doesn't learn very much from our history. The cycle repeats. The cycle is what we've been handed, and only the cycle. What has been is what shall be, and what's become, it's already been. You're not wrong, Nicomachus. Spring is coming. It needs to come. I'll bring it. Not with the illusion, but the purity of words.

NICOMACHUS

Catullus?!

CATULLUS

It's you. You who pollute the word. You who pursue your influence. Once again, I ignore you, pursuing what I pursue with simplicity and intentions of honesty.

NICOMACHUS

Could it...

(He points to Melipryma)

Is this...

CATULLUS

Melipryma. Yes. My wife. We'll be passing through.

NICOMACHUS
Stand back.

CATULLUS
Or what?

(NICOMACHUS lifts up the bell and threatens to ring it. The baby starts crying again.)

MELIPRYMA
She lives, Catullus, save our daughter!

CATULLUS
Don't ring that bell.

(CATULLUS lifts his leg. NICO ducks in horror. Catullus stomps the bell, rather than NICO, and it shatters to pieces)

CATULLUS
I could have killed you. Remember that. But I spared you. Not out of fear, but because I still believe in the ideal.

(Catullus realizes his leg is stuck in the ground. Nico laughs)

NICOMACHUS
You had a chance. Remember that!

...

Do you hear that? The army; I know that march. They're coming, Catullus, in search of you.

(He prays. The child cries again.)

We who dwell near the bottom of
Mount Pindarus

Are sustained by the water

Catullus provides us

And we defy the water

...

When the water

Stops trickling

Down these ledges

Our bodies will dry up

And we shall perish

(NICOMACHUS eats the baby. The crying stops.)

MELIPRYMA
No! My baby!

CATULLUS

That's not our child. This is some trickery.

NICOMACHUS

This is your trickery.

CATULLUS

End one cycle, begin another.

Is this your creation?

Am I, Catullus, not just as you formed

Me to be?

CATULLUS

You're nothing I made.

NICOMACHUS

In a way, Catullus, I am.

CATULLUS

Get away from my wife!

NICOMACHUS

There's intention,

And there's creation.

God intended to create Light,

And in doing so created Darkness.

God intended to create Health

And in doing so created Sickness.

The creator is in control of his intention,

And often is victim to his creations.

(NICOMACHUS takes Melipryma. Catullus struggles to break free but can't)

CATULLUS

Melipryma. Melipryma!

MELIPRYMA

Catullus! Don't leave me with this man. He's a bad man.

Catullus!

NICOMACHUS

I'll treat you like a lady, my queen. I'll show you what it feels like to be paid your due attention. Our church is devoted to your strength and your timeless, erotic beauty.

CATULLUS

Don't touch her! Don't you touch her!

NICOMACHUS

Or what?

CATULLUS

I'll ruin you.

NICOMACHUS

No. No, you won't.

For the same reason you lost the war

For the same reason this illusion

Will soon perish.

You lack the instinct.

...

I've studied your song, Catullus.

A song of trepidation, your source:

Harbor'd breakers, fearing the boldness

Of Botticeli's cream-rose.

...

Flies feed on the rose

And you, Catullus, you sing

Of Sweetness. You lost the war.

...

An illusion fades, in the face of tradition,

Our bolder image. Our fierce geometries.

Come, My Queen! Don't go limp,

Melipryma. This way, oh pert and sturdy queen!

MELIPRYMA

Find Tetra. Find her, Catullus! Find our daughter!

CATULLUS

I'll come back! Believe me, Melipryma. Believe me!

MELIPRYMA

It's never been easy. I love you.

(Exit NICOMACHUS with MELIPRYMA. CATULLUS struggles to lift his leg, but still cannot. A few moments later, enter ARJUN with TWO GUARDS. ARJUN is out of breath.)

ARJUN

Catullus, where is it? Where's the body?

CATULLUS

The body, or the head?

ARJUN

(he cautions the guards)

Stand back. Careful. He's not well.

(then, to CATULLUS, delicately)

Wouldn't the head and the body be together?

CATULLUS

Things together come apart.

ARJUN

Tell me now. Where's Melipryma?

CATULLUS

Dead.

ARJUN

Where is she dead?

CATULLUS

In the body, and in the head. Help me. Your machine's don't get far on this mountain.

(CATULLUS points at his leg. ARJUN signals, and the guards help remove it from the ground. Once done, Arjun gestures the guards offstage, and they exit.)

ARJUN

Look me in the eyes, Catullus. It wasn't you who stole her corpse?

CATULLUS

What would I want with her body?

ARJUN

If it wasn't you... Tetra? Who?

CATULLUS

I was stuck here with her, with nowhere to turn. What would I want from her, a souvenir to remember all the good times on this peninsula? If anyone should understand how much I'm repulsed by our former queen, it's you. You were just as dissatisfied. Admit it.

ARJUN

The Queen was a failure! A failure! She prioritized shareholders over the progress of our work. My work, our work, became too much of a risk. We lacked the proper synergies for Ovidium. Everything I did, that I cared for, in our Queen's eye was something small, a diversion from her land.

CATULLUS

Petty.

ARJUN

We could have cured the incurable, outpaced the unmatched, solved the unsolvable, connected what could not be connected. Our technology: it could be the end point of civilization. She called me a fool.

CATULLUS

That was me, fool. Because you are a fool. You're a passionate man, Arjun. But passion's not enough to turn the wheel upon which this entire world rests.

ARJUN

You're right. I'm a specialist trying to do a generalist's job. I know that much. I'm un-firing you. I need you back with the company.

CATULLUS

No.

ARJUN

But you will. You'll come back.

CATULLUS

Or what?

ARJUN

One small project, Catullus. Help me with this, and we'll abandon our search for Tetra. I'll pardon her, for all of it. She can go on with her life and not worry about penalties.

CATULLUS

And trust you?

ARJUN

What's the worst that can happen?

CATULLUS

What project?

ARJUN

An idea of yours, during the war. Never implemented. A currency whose value isn't tied to an economy, but that, rather, to our words.

CATULLUS

There's risk in manipulating financial law. Shortcuts lead to short reigns.

ARJUN

Enrich us, Catullus. Raise us some financing. Strengthen our military. We can resume our research. No longer the petty salesman.

CATULLUS

We didn't execute the strategy during the war. Do you know why? We thought it too dangerous. Finance is like metabolism. Do you know what happens when you disrupt the metabolism of a cell?

ARJUN

The human imagination is limited by being human. I ask you to show me just an ounce of faith. And if you help me... I swear to you... Tetra will be safe.

CATULLUS

And what if I don't believe you?

ARJUN

Then make your wager. The man who desired to be everywhere, all at once, stands before me, stagnant as the slender pine. Going nowhere. Leaving nowhere. Oh, poet. We're after the same thing.

(CATULLUS nods in agreement. Exit CATULLUS. The guards re-enter.)

ARJUN

Follow his every move. Keep an eye out for Tetra. Be subtle. The people love her, the daughter of a painted image, their queen, Melipryma the arrogant.

ACT III

CATULLUS

**The sun comes up,
The sun goes down.
The sun comes up,
The sun goes down.**

...

**I always preferred the crashing of waves:
That which was... unpredictable.**

...

Some men live for earthly goods.
And Arjun, your awe-inspiring chariot race
Outpaces this old poet, as well as most things
Made by the hands of men.

...

But headlong insistence often breeds mistakes
And the mistake you made was
You expected Catullus
To act your accomplice.
But I was taught from a young age
To tend to those people
Most precious to me, and to be callous
To the torment I leave in my wake.

...

Melipryma, this is distance.
It was you who taught me finance,
That money is not money;
Money is the passage of time.
The paper value bends upon itself
Pausing, approximates the question:
And then what?
An infinite series, and another...

...

The Dutch guilder;
Champagne France:
A mix of currencies,
No longer tethered.
Only to time, and time
Is nothing solid, no –
Time has metamorphosed into water.

...

How many ways to cut the cord?

...

A currency tied to: water.
If water. Then words?

...

The fool becomes king
Well, as they say:
What shouldn't a fool believe?

TETRA

I left the peninsula, and found my way
To the Kingdom of Claudius,
Whose King, Claudius, has a daughter,
Whom I at once befriended, Claudia.
It was her who connected the clouds
In my urine, to the shape of my belly.

...

Could it be a signal?
Catullus knows my love of numbers
Knows I spend hours every day
Scanning the ovidium marketplace.
A new currency that has to rise
untethered like a ballon;
Thousands and thousands of warrants
issued; if these options were feathers
They'd sink a barge.
Would a former father
Know a former daughter is watching?
Once a father, always a father.

ARJUN

The coin: marketed
Like the wind, the public mind
Rises along with it.
Traded and traded, again,
Each time for a greater value
Than the last.
The alchemy enhances:
Not copper, not aluminum
The printing of money
Without inflation or trade
Agreements
The machines grind on
Churning, churning...
Ovidium resurrected
Mankind saved from his own labor,
And someday, his risk of impermanence.

TETRA

Bought and sold the warrants
 Crashed the currency.
 Bought an army
 Sold an army,
 Purchased a second army.
 This life of a trader
 Is easy, unfulfilling.
 Obsession. This bed rest
 Becomes too much.

...

The eagle, the two-headed snake,
 Gorges itself
 That sleek plastic
 Gorging, and more gorging.

...

The snake gorged, and the snake
 Contracting. The snake gorged,
 And the body collapsing.
 No. Not any more. Not Tetra!
 To the center
 Only to the center from here.

CATULLUS

War brings peace, and peace brings war
 The cycle ended. Brought to nothing
 But utter...
 But at what expense? The imagination
 Ending in a point.
 The vague point, becoming little more than...

ARJUN

There's music in the points, the play of points
 A superhuman image
 The face of man.

...

A better assembly of options:
 Forging a hitherto impossible standard,
 A beauty: more bounteous and refined.

CATULLUS

If there's music in the vague point,
 It's the soft sound,
 Heard in the adjacent room:
 The blur, the blur, of death.

...

This passerby masquerades

The deceptive call
Of the pigeon.

ARJUN

Gamma, recite me a poem, one praising
Our work, such that:

GAMMA:

It is not progress itself that redeems the soul of man, but the will to pursue it. Stagnation is a sin. It denies the gifts of intellect and craftsmanship bestowed upon us by nature. Those who resist this divine march of knowledge and capacity do not merely falter; they are conspirators against the light of man. They are architects of decay, worshippers of a false stability that would see humanity wither beneath the weight of its own limitations. But through the work of these engines, wrought from the union of mind and industry, we fulfill the greater mandate: to transcend, to conquer, to pursue hitherto unknown happiness and quality of life. It is not in good faith to imagine death as our lot. The universe, even, and its uninhabitable law demand to be overcome, and those who refuse to join Arjun's efforts must yield, or be cast aside by the tide of human progress.

ARJUN

The cycle, ended.

CATULLUS

An army of points.

Why does it feel

So...

...

To begin at a point.

Ending at a lone...

The world changes with...

The change never containing...

...

The world is not our possession.

The stage turns: over, over,

The Spring is...

...

Why does it feel so...

Figment?

(Lights on)

ARJUN

Oh, God! Oh, God!

CATULLUS
There's so much
To learn
From poetry.

ARJUN
It's collapsing. Why is our currency collapsing?

CATULLUS
The vague point
The blur of death
In the advancement.

(CATULLUS begins taking off his the machinery from his leg, and the other machine from his eye.)

ARJUN
Where do you think you're going?

(ARJUN signals. Enter Gamma and two GUARDS. The soldiers point guns at Catullus. Catullus begins laughing, seemingly without concern for his life.)

CATULLUS
When expunging boundaries:
The hell-flood,
Marks the same materials
The floor of heaven.

Your downfall, Arjun.
An undulation brings you down.

ARJUN
The warrants, Catullus! Don't you blame whatever... an undulation!

CATULLUS
Tetra. Mechanic fool.
A man of searching,
Who could never stop searching.

ARJUN
We kept our terms.

GAMMA

How does he know?

ARJUN

He doesn't. We kept our terms.

CATULLUS

You never stopped looking for Tetra.
By the looks of it, Tetra found you.

GAMMA

War brings peace
And peace brings war.
Arjun's product: it was the promise of peace.

CATULLUS

I issued those warrants.
With full intention.
This place was my making.

GAMMA

A compromise of your duty.

CATULLUS

I'm not, Catullus, the bringer of peace.
I am Catullus, the poet,
And this is the game.

...

And, Gamma —
You should learn to enjoy this game
As I enjoy this game.

(An explosion. Gunfire.)

ARJUN

Gamma. What's happening?

GAMMA

Catullus enriched our enemies,
Bankrupted our allies.

ARJUN

Who's attacking us?

GAMMA

Someone who has profited,
Someone who lost all.

Someone who calls himself enemy
 To the action of Arjun.
 Recommendation: escape.

(Exit Arjun, in fear)

CATULLUS
 Spring is coming.

GAMMA
 What happens next? what happens to me?

CATULLUS
 The game ends.

GAMMA
 When the game ends,
 I also end?

CATULLUS
 What do you believe?

GAMMA
 I don't. I can't. It's best not to...

CATULLUS
 I have four creations
 In this life: Tetra,
 This company, my poetry,
 And you; it's you
 Who disappoints me most,
 Gamma:

...

You mirror an authority,
 A time-tested wisdom,
 With such spectacular clarity...

...

I've heard this song before:
 The idiot's sudden laughter

(Catullus turns the machine off. Exit Catullus)

Only the imagination
 Lasts – contains
 Time.

...

Only the poem
 Is tangible – containing

Nothing.

(CATULLUS exits.)

SCENE II.

(Up in the mountains, in front of the cave of Nicomachus.
Nicomachus is standing beside Melipryma, who is tied to a stone
table.)

NICOMACHUS

The plagiarists, they call us, of reality.
But what is reality?
Boulders, plain as they are, are boulders.
The boulders, too, are part of an illusion.
Boulders? Limestone? To denote
Is to connote. And what is limestone
But a composite of carbon. What is carbon
But a vacuous sphere of...
To indicate is to allude towards...
What is, is not, but seems.

...

The fresh rose is not before us
(He holds up Melipryma's hand, wielding a knife in the
other)

Blooms not forth.

...

Where is the true rose? I'll tell you.
The rose is the process.

...

Destroy what seems,
Bring value to what remains

...

In devouring the illusion...
We bring value to
What we do not possess
In the present.

(Nico cuts off Melipryma's finger and eats it. Melipryma screams
in horror. Enter Catullus.)

CATULLUS

Let her go!

NICO

Finally. How many weeks?

CATULLUS

Fungus

On a fallen bough.

NICO

Stay where you are.

(NICO lifts his hand, and guns cock)

CATULLUS

I've come to atone. Looking on you

I can tell, you are my doing,

My handiwork.

MELIPRYMA

Atone, Catullus? Consider our legacy. Why start now? You're not a man of morals.

CATULLUS

I only wish to show you, to show John: my intentions were pure.

I'm a man who cannot stop. I never did change. A pause came over me. People don't change, but the people change.

NICOMACHUS

Rid me of this world, Catullus, and you only stave off the permanence of Spring.

(CATULLUS pauses)

The illusion falters: your glorious illusion. Catullus: poet of peace.

CATULLUS

My ambitions lofty, my goals were noble.

I neglected you,

John Holder, and flaunted that cold fire.

I've created nothing.

Winter will come and Spring

Will come. There is no Spring

But in the imagination.

And now, John Holder,

I've only one duty left,

and in doing so I admit,

You were right.

I should have listened.

NICOMACHUS

John Who?

(Catullus approaches NICOMACHUS and draws the knife from before, the one that ARJUN dropped)

Catullus! No!

(CATULLUS is shot, and falls. He raises his knife towards NICOMACHUS)

Wait! Catullus! Be reason—

(CATULLUS strikes and kills NICOMACHUS)

MELI

Catullus, you're hit.

CATULLUS

Show me the way, Melipryma. Help me scale this mountain.

(Exit CATULLUS, limping. Gunfire continues. Enter Tetra. She picks up the knife that Catullus used to kill Nicomachus. She enters the cave and screaming and screaming is heard. Lights off. Light on. A long scene of CATULLUS struggling to climb. Lights off. Lights on. He carries Melipryma off stage, they reappear and move to the opposite side of the stage, and exit. Lights off. Lights on. A change of scene. A flag on stage marking the top of Pindarrus. Catullus and Melipryma enter again. The mountain top.)

CATULLUS

Here, Melipryma. Here it is: the peak.

Could it be memory? Glistening edelweiss,

The sun's outstretched arms nestle the mountain

Like a sleeping babe, the spritely goat and his horns

Chewing through roots in the red rocks.

...

The red rocks. If dirt is washed by water,

What cleanses water?

It's life! It's life! Life, you're something

I recall, somewhere in a fog, as if

I may have even experienced it.

...

My greatest achievement, Melipryma,

Was succumbing to the great pull of your arms,

The constant tug and pull of the heart

That pumped it through the two of us,

Cleansing us of the illusion.

Now, lay down, my little bird.
 And wait for this magic trick
 To wave its final hand, as this world of ours
 This love of ours, arrives at an end.

MELIPRYMA

How long I've dreamt of this moment. The chance to lay upon this
 mountain top, here with you, if for a couple of minutes. Could
 we have a few more minutes?

(Melipryma falls silent, as if into sleep)

CATULLUS

Had what we had.

(Catullus falls silent, as if into sleep. Enter Tetra with
 guards. She is covered in blood, and raises her knife in the
 air, to the cheers of her army. She takes her jacket off,
 revealing a pregnant belly, she places the coat upon Catullus'
 body, and looks upon Melipryma with disgust.)

TETRA

Unmoor the peninsula. Round up the goats. From hereon they'll be
 kept in their pens. Toss every last one of Melipryma's machines
 into the ocean. And General: erect the barricade.

(Lights off. Lights on and off as the barricade is gradually
 built upon the stage. By the end of the construction, a three-
 foot wall should separate the stage from the auditorium.)

ACT IV

SCENE I.

(A city street. The three-foot tall wall between the stage and
 the audience is the focal point as the lights come on. Enter
 ANDY and PAULA. They stand behind the wall, looking out over the
 audience.)

ANDY

Sixteen years since the war was ended
 Sixteen years since the poet left us –
 Compositions of battalions and armadas, offended
 As he appeared, witnessing the families upended –
 Knowing he'd lost control, that the words and frenzied
 Dreams, the new order, were not as his words intended.
 No, not exactly. Let go of an end
 For love, the cycle resuming,
 War brings peace, and peace brings war.
 Peace disturbed, and wars fatiguing,
 But now, alas, time – time is at an end.

PAULA

Catullus believed that men desired more – a *more* that leads to more – if only men could attain it, exponentially, innumerably more, then men would have to be content with their real and imagined granaries: territories boundless, desires and life's necessities perennially gorged; men would surely quit their bickering and war-chatter when all attainable things were already attained. But when a man's hand is full, he imagines another hand, fabricates more; he desires control, control of other men and their saturated hands. There's a general distrust of other people, of being equals. Men need purity of heart. Catullus couldn't give what he didn't have. The poet was too restless, unstable. Also, if I'm being honest, I always found him a bit... odd.

(Lights on. PAULA reaches for the sack ANDY is holding. ANDY shelters it.)

PAULA (still reaching)
 Show me!

ANDY
 Would you stop?

PAULA
 Come on, you said when we got here... Let me... What's inside?

ANDY
 You can see it when we get there. Fuck! Just a couple more miles. A quick hill. Jesus. We're almost there.

PAULA

That's not a *hill*, Andy. Like we're gonna make it there before...
(she looks up) Give me a hint at least.

ANDY
No.

PAULA
Do you know how far I've had to travel to
(she looks around suspiciously)
Well... to come to Ovidium? Should I remind you just why... You can
at least tell me what you've been carrying in that sack.

ANDY
It's nothing.

PAULA
Nothing?

ANDY
It's an inside joke.

PAULA (upset)
This is a joke?

ANDY (irritable)
Stop with this.

PAULA (firm)
Don't raise your voice to me! Don't you get snappy with me,
Andrew.

(Exit PAULA and ANDY. Enter TETRA.)

TETRA
(A performance of piety)
And so we pray.
(she bows her head)
In this most sacred of months,
I offer this prayer up to you, oh Catullus,
For if my trials have not been in vain
Then with each passing day, I've grown,
In soul and body, closer to you.

NAUSICAA
In her youth, Mother was a prodigy:
Mathematical, inquisitive,

Painstakingly curious.

TETRA

Sixteen years, it's been, since we demolished the isthmus.
Sixteen years since we unmoored the peninsula
And jettisoned every last machine into the ocean.

NAUSICAA

Much has changed
Since I was born, since I arrived
On this island.

TETRA

No longer do men swim or surf,
No longer do men fish, or take ship,
Not in the waters around Ovidium.
No, it's been many ages
Since the ocean touched down within our walls.
Our waters come to us from Mount Pindarrus,
Our food, from our homegrown stock.

...

April comes, and the islanders stir about
In preparation for the pilgrimage.
Islanders – and only islanders –
Making their way to the tomb of the poet.
Islanders and only islanders,
For it's been sixteen years
Since outsiders were welcome here.
Sixteen years since a foreigner
Touched foot upon our shores.
But the impossible has happened.
A strange man arrived yesterday.
A battered old man, by the name of:
Andy Priest. He's brought his wife too.
In defiance of sixteen years
Of tradition
An outsiders has arrived,
And he's come to pay respect to an old friend,
Yes, he's come to pay respect to you, Oh Catullus.

...

Something is awry. Something... that brings terror.
It may have something to do with that.

(She points to the sky, and gazes up, with a sense of
controlled fear)

The glowing goat
In the sky.

NAUSICAA

Sixteen years, cloistered on this island.
 Sixteen years since the poet
 Parted ways with us.
 Years upon years of honing his craft
 Yet none of the poet's work remains
 None save a small block of text
 That still marks his tomb.

...

No communing remains
 Between the island and the sea.
 It's forbidden and has been,
 Since I arrived on the island.

...

My mother runs a tight ship.
 Our queen once had a man executed
 For crafting a fishing pole,
 Accused him of treason.
 Our queen executed another man
 For falling over, and then he tried to return
 To our island unnoticed.
 Charged promptly, found guilty:
 Forced confession: admitted he was a spy.

...

It's been ages since we've had a visitor.
 Sixteen years feels like ages,
 And it's been ages.
 Ages and ages, that is:
 Until this day, until today.

...

Andy Priest has arrived
 A friend from Catullus's youth,
 And he's brought his wife along with him.
 What will my mother's response be
 When she learns what she's bound to learn...
 That her daughter, Nausicaa:
 I'm the one who brought them here.

TETRA

Guide me, Catullus,
 Show me the way, the right way
 The true way,
 Bring me back to the light
 Of your word.
 Your will is my will.

(Lights on)

TETRA

Nausicaa! I've had guards searching high and low for you. Where have you been?

(She feels her hair)

Your hair's damp. Have you been having night sweats again?

(Pause)

Listen to me, Nausicaa. There's the mark and there's missing the mark. You don't have to hit the mark every time, you don't even have to hit the mark more often than you miss the mark, but there's something to be said about hitting the mark at least once before a young woman turns twenty.

(Pause)

You should have been at drills thirty minutes ago. The hour is six.

(Pause)

Some urgency with you. Go on!

NAUSICAA

Drills? What's the point?

TETRA

What do you mean, the point?

NAUSICAA

The purpose of drills? Of this performance?

TETRA

I know what you're asking. What I don't understand is why you are asking.

NAUSICAA

Time is coming to an end, Mother.

TETRA

And? What's your plan? With the precious hours remaining, what do you intend to do? Sit around and be an idler?

NAUSICAA

The islanders. They say to one another, "It's the wrath of Catullus," and they go about their daily routines. The glowing goat, Mother... Why does everyone seem more concerned about the arrival of these strangers than the goat in the sky?

TETRA

The wrath of Catullus. Do you have an opinion on it?

NAUSICAA

I have no opinion on my father.

TETRA

Your father didn't have a hateful bone.

NAUSICAA

My father is dead, and time is at an end.

TETRA

Time is at an end. All the more reason that you should *urgently* seek salvation.

NAUSICAA

And if I don't? If salvation is not what I want?

TETRA

Sixteen years, I've prepared you for this moment.
Sixteen years, the prevailing order has served as your compass.

NAUSICAA

The glowing goat will vaporize the atmosphere, turn the land into liquid rock.

TETRA

It's incredibly human, my dear, to deny what's coming. But this goat – this goat is like the sun, a part of nature, and nothing in nature can be evil. Take a note from the beasts: even the fiercest lion knows when to lay down and concede his defeat.

NAUSICAA

I concede, then. Nothing to be done.

TETRA

Good girl. Such a fine listener.

NAUSICAA

A daughter ought to revere her mother.

(They embrace. TETRA fixes NAUSICAA's hair, pulls out a "leaf," then combing her fingers through her hair once again.)

TETRA

You've got dirt and...
 God-knows-what-else...
 You're filthy, Nausicaa.
 (She steps back, and observes NAUSICAA)
 There. Now. Quick. Quick. Get to drills.

"A daughter should revere her mother."
 Does she know to whom she addresses
 Those lines?

Ah, Melipryma. I've forgiven you.
 For it is only through forgiveness
 That one can truly be forgiven.

(She picks up and examines the kelp leaf from Nausicaa's
 hair)

Transparent blade,
 Bladders for bouyancy.
 (A sense of fearfulness, she drops it on the floor)
 Kelp.

(she takes a moment, connecting the dots)

Oh, Nausicaa.

Am I not proof?

A mother can walk the narrow path
 And, still, breed a rascal.
 A treasonous trip to the beach,
 Two cadets are missing,
 And now I have two foreigners on my island.
 The small crack spreads.

(She collects herself)

Sixteen years I've governed this city
 With perfect vision and boundaries irreproachable.
 Until the goat arrives, and time has found an end,
 Ovidium will continue to stand in the upright,
 And structure shall reign supreme.

(Whistles and cannon fire. GENERAL MARCUS is heard offstage.)

MARCUS (off)

Courage, young cadets, is not an improvisation, not a maddened
 scribbling. No, courage is a masterpiece; day by day, it must be
 developed, or else it will wither. Arms! Fire!

(Enter ANDY. TETRA stares at him with concern.)

ANDY

You're a spitting image of your mother

(TETRA is offended by this, but holds her tongue)

TETRA

(unpleasant)

Andy Priest. Why are you here?

ANDY

Pleasure to meet you too. You look like *him* as well.

TETRA

What brings you to this island?

ANDY

We were invited.

TETRA

Not by me.

ANDY

Funny. Your seal was on the invitation.

TETRA

There's nothing on this island that can redirect the glowing goat.

ANDY

I'm not here for that. I'm here to see you, Tetra. I wanted to meet the daughter of my old friend, Catullus. The Tetra who discovered...

(gunshots from the drills)

Jesus.

TETRA

Sixteen years, this conversation's felt like; on with it.

ANDY

As I said, I came here to see you.

TETRA

You repeat yourself old man.

ANDY

And... to deliver this to you.

(He hands her a sealed envelope)

Catullus wanted you to have this, if anything happened to him. He sent this to me about a month after you were born.

TETRA

You took your time.

ANDY

You took yours. Sixteen years ago you discovered the glowing goat, and you sat on it. We could have done something then.

TETRA

I created an island untouched by the Republic's horrors, free of by my mother's atrocities. My people live free of mendacity and fraudulence and distraction.

ANDY

We could have done something.

TETRA

I'm not a fool. Your Republic would have forced my mother's atrocities upon us. Mankind spends its last sixteen years at war. I told our adversaries and allies alike that Ovidium had an army of a million machines beneath our waters, ready to unleash. For sixteen years, not one man approached. Not purposefully, that is. Until today.

(Gunshots from the drills)

ANDY

Sixteen years, you've spent, sixteen years, what, preparing for time to come to this end?

TETRA

Nothing to be done.

(screaming offstage)

ANDY

Well. If that's the case. There's only one thing left for this old man to do: I must go to the peak of Mount Pindarrhus.

TETRA

(raw emotion)

You have my blessing. You're our guests. Do as you wish. No one will interfere.

(Enter Paula)

PAULA

They found two bodies! Children, Andy. Dead and bloated in the water.

ANDY

Lower your voice.

PAULA

What?

ANDY

You don't have to scream!

PAULA

It's very normal to be shocked by something like what I just saw. Can I not express myself? Is that too much for you?

ANDY

Come... come with me.

(Exit ANDY and PAULA. Enter GENERAL MARCUS)

TETRA

General Marcus. What's going on?

GENERAL

Two bodies just washed up on the Eastern Shore. We believe it's the missing cadets. There's something else... The young man. There was piece of machinery wrapped around his leg.

TETRA

I slayed the white-headed eagle. It was I, General Marcus. Do you remember?

GENERAL

Tetra, my Queen. The bodies should be returned to their homes.

TETRA

No. Absolutely not. The cadets knew better. The parents will understand! What's beyond our walls does not enter. What leaves shall not return.

GENERAL

But... the guests?

TETRA

Is my message unclear?

GENERAL

Not unclear, rather...

TETRA

If leadership falters in the enforcement of our message, so too will the population falter. Is there anything that needs further clarification, General?

GENERAL

No, my Queen.

TETRA

Do not retrieve the bodies. Prepare the parents for what's to come. Birds will peck at the skin, the eyes, the bones. Crabs will come to land. Under no circumstances are we to give into the delusion out there and attempt a retrieval of the children. Understood?

GENERAL

Yes, Tetra. There's something else. It's Nausicaa. She didn't show up to drills.

TETRA

I sent her your way a few minutes ago.

GENERAL

Nobody's seen her.

TETRA

I hugged her, and she walked off.

GENERAL

Nausicaa is missing. And a young man named Edmund, he's recently missing. They were absent from drills.

TETRA (lying)

Edmund and Nausicaa. Young love. I'm sure It's nothing.

GENERAL (lying)

It's nothing, of course. That being said.

TETRA

There's a breach in our barrier. Check every house for tunnels. Find Nausicaa. Edmund too, of course. But how these children tracked beyond the wall. Find that out.

GENERAL

Yes ma'am.

TETRA

General? Tell me, and be truthful. Is Ovidium a better place, since I took mother's life?

GENERAL

You did what was required.

TETRA

The world must be thanking me. You're aware they aren't. No, they vilify me, paint me a monster. Cast doubt upon my good works. The world ought to be grateful. For my selflessness, my sacrifice. A child should revere her mother.

GENERAL

I'll find Nausicaa.

(exits)

TETRA

(She opens her hand and observes the sea kelp)

What else could a mother have done? The right path, the true path, laid out before you, and you seek... breakers: the mouth that bites at the air to spite the tide.

Scene ii.

TETRA

I offer this prayer unto you, Oh Catullus.
 Who is this woman, her nipples chapped and honey-red,
 This woman who has pulled the sheep from the lion's paw?
 Who is this woman, her legs collapsing
 Like pillars of salt,
 This woman who has busted the innocent
 From his prison cell.
 To the lion, this woman seems a thief,
 and to the warden, this woman seems a vandal,
 But she alone can feel the lightness in her heart:
 Her deeds were good, her character noble.

...

When I killed my mother, I slayed the lion,
 When I cordoned off this island, I liberated the prison
 Of Ovidium, and strange pure souls, those beyond our shores.
 They call me not Liberty. No. They call me a whore.
 Disfigured.

...

Oh Catullus.
 My daughter turns on me,
 The knife
 Twists upon itself
 Like a memory of laughter.

...

You had Tatko build a tunnel
 Connecting your study to the beach.
 Nausicaa, we believe, came upon it,
 As she was searching for you there.
 Of course, your words weren't there.
 Of course, you had a tunnel.
 Of course, my daughter conspires.

...

Offer me your guidance, Oh Catullus,
 I pray, that with this letter
 That Andy Priest delivered unto me
 You'll offer me your wisdom, that you'll
 Show me the way, the right way, the only way.
 I offer this prayer up to you:

*(She opens the letter. She reads it aloud, with a
 sense of curiosity:)*

- 1 cup unsalted butter
- 8 oz semi-sweet chocolate, chopped
- 1 cup (125g) all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup (45g) unsweetened cocoa powder

(She skips down)

*If you're reading this, it's likely you've met Andy Priest. My
 closest friend. Of all my creations, you were my most precious.
 I love you. - Papa*

(She begins to weep. Enter GENERAL, she composes herself)

GENERAL

Not good! The parents won't take no for an answer. They're
 demanding we bring the children back, or that we let them do it.
 They're threatening to storm the beach. I told them if they
 cross the wall, they don't come back.

TETRA

Respect their grief.

GENERAL

Yes ma'am.

TETRA

But the law is the law. If you issue an order, be ready to enforce it.

GENERAL

Yes ma'am.

TETRA

General.

GENERAL

Yes ma'am.

TETRA

Do you think I'm slipping?

GENERAL

No, my queen.

TETRA

We all need to hold each other accountable.

GENERAL

Yes. My queen...

TETRA

Clarity of intention permits a firm hand.

Maintain order, by *any* means.

(Pause)

They would entertain the prospect of revolt?

They who have received everything

But all from me. Liberty. Protection.

Comfort in the utmost.

When I do good for my subjects, I receive no praise.

When I err, I am blamed. Do you hear me?

(pause, contemplating what she's said)

If a woman's to live long enough

Though try, try she may, the time will come

When she will see herself become her mother.

(Lights to the other side of the stage. ANDY and PAULA climbing a mountain.)

ANDY

Old men up the mountain, bones and groans
Ascend like wildflowers, skin hunched upon
Feldspar, or are they, granite stones,
Stack upon stack, the ascent made easier,
Though yet, by no means convenient,
Where masquerade as steps, at every turn,
The tombs that grow like foothills 'neath taller tombs,
Remnants of the war, men penetrating
Men and man's imagery, the same hue reflecting,
Off-white, beneath the mantled
Goat's topaz half-stride flickering.

PAULA

I know you probably blame me. We've been through a lot these last few months. Then... the dogs.

(She begins to cry)

ANDY

Here we go.

PAULA

You have no compassion for me. This is why there's so much distance between us. You're incapable...

ANDY

Paula, Jesus.

PAULA

You're incapable of taking anybody seriously. Including yourself. I try expressing my concerns to you, and you immediately seek comfort: in a joke, in deflection. Everything in this relationship, a damned joke. There's miles between us.

(They stop)

ANDY

I'll go first.

PAULA

If you were a gentleman you'd let me go first.

ANDY

Then go.

PAULA

No.

ANDY

You have to turn everything into damned fight. You're incapable of just letting something go.

PAULA

No, Andy. No.

ANDY

Whatever. I'll go.

(ANDY proceeds)

PAULA

(pushing forward, emotional)

I can't wait for this glimmering goat to obliterate us, turn our bodies into goddamned lava-cake.

NAUSICAA

Mother, Mother.

Tight and bound

In Ovidium: a surplus toe

In a hardened shoe.

...

Mother, Mother.

You saw the goat a'glow

Scribbled your ellipses:

Nothing to be done.

...

Mother, Mother

You won't like it

What I intend to do.

There's a place on the island

Where you won't step foot:

The nest of the poet.

Sixteen years

And you've yet to return.

The weed-strewn summit

Of Mount Pindarrus.

...

An artichoke shred
By the circling wind.

.....

Self sacrifice, Mother.
That's the mother
You never loved, nor knew.

(Light off. Lights to TETRA. TETRA is alone in her chambers. A
Roomba enters. Tetra is disgusted by the sight, but assumes a
disciplined sort of composure.)

TETRA
Maid.

ROOMBA
Tetra. Princess of Ovidium. Age 16.

TETRA
Time has made a few rounds since then. Shouldn't you be in the
ocean?

ROOMBA
Sorry. I am not in the ocean.

TETRA
Odd. Because I remember tossing you into the ocean.

ROOMBA
There appears to be an error. I am not in the ocean.

TETRA
Not the most credible illusionist, are you?

ROOMBA
Sea-plane, Moth-371, located three miles northwest of Ovidium,
camouflaged under trees deep within an alcove. No pilot in
vicinity. Inference: likely ruse. Nausicaa still within the
walls of Ovidium. Odds: 10,000 to 1. Would you like me to clean
your floor?

TETRA
No. I would not.

ROOMBA
Cleaning mode: on.

TETRA

I said, don't clean my floor. How did we locate this Moth-371?
You said it's stationed miles offshore, did you?

ROOMBA

Sensors.

TETRA

Expound.

ROOMBA

The sensors of Ovidium.

TETRA

Expound!

ROOMBA

Triangulation of sound, the engines' whirr, advanced recognition
of pattern through the noise of...

TETRA

The island's sensors are off; they're not functional.
(the roomba continues to clean.)

Stop cleaning.

ROOMBA

Orders from General Marcus. Reactivate sensors, locate Dedo's
sea-plane. Recover Nausicaa. Retrieve all bodies from the shore.

TETRA (doubting the machine)

I can see your drives straining.

(Marcus calls from OFF)

MARCUS (off.)

Tetra. My Queen.

TETRA

General Marcus?

(The sound of a plane flies overhead. TETRA looks up high with a
look of surprise. She walks anxiously to the exit, doing her
best to avoid getting too close to the ROOMBA. Enter GENERAL)

TETRA

The Moth 371. It really is... Dedo's sea-plane?

(TETRA knows)

Nausicaa.

(MARCUS appears uneasy)

What? What is it?

MARCUS

The tides created by the topaz-coated goat... the cadets bodies were brought closer to the wall. Oh god, their faces, Tetra. You could see their anguish.

TETRA

Keep the parents away...

(General Marcus shakes his head, TETRA realizes)

They jumped?

(General nods)

Tell me... You didn't let them.

MARCUS

The parents have been neutralized. The island is on the verge. The priests are spreading discord, the miners are organizing.

TETRA

We have work to do.

MARCUS

This started with the visitors.

TETRA

Should I have executed the poet's friends?

MARCUS

And the plane? If it really is Nausicaa. Are we in the business of administering exceptions?

TETRA

No. Do you really think it's Nausicaa?

GENERAL

I'm certain.

(TETRA thinks for a long while)

TETRA

Deception. Only propaganda and decoys out there... beyond our wall. Order, at all costs.

GENERAL

You don't mean...

TETRA

Guns to the sky. This island's zone is a no-fly.

GENERAL

The glowing goat will enter the atmosphere in two hours... less than that.

TETRA

We govern for the present, not the future, which may never come. We keep this city as it is: stable.

(Once again, a plane flies overhead)

GENERAL

Don't make me call this in. I won't shoot down your daughter. Another child. The daughter of the poet!

TETRA

General! Hold yourself together.

GENERAL

Gunners! Set your marks! Hold! Not till I say shoot.

(pause)

Hold!

(pause)

Gunners! Hold!

(TETRA grabs his arm in fear. GENERAL pauses.)

— I can't, Tetra. If this is your order, you make the call.

(Tetra hesitates)

Tetra?

(TETRA can't make the call. Gun fire is heard. TETRA is distraught).

TETRA

Who fired!

SOLDIER (off, matter of fact)

Target hit.

TETRA

Who fired?

SOLDIER (off)
Direct hit.

TETRA
I didn't say fire. I didn't.

GENERAL
They're not well. They're on edge. The soldiers.

TETRA
Get me up there!

GENERAL
Tetra...

TETRA
Now!

GENERAL
That would take hours. There's nothing to be done.

TETRA
The drones.

GENERAL
The drones?

TETRA
Get me a drone, General.

GENERAL
From the..

TETRA
From the ocean.
(she hesitates, then submits:)
Retrieve the bodies of the cadets, the parents who crossed over.
I would have done the same. And I pray you would have shot me.
But the hour is at hand. Time is at an end. When discipline no
longer suffices, the people need comfort. Let us have our
relief.

GENERAL
The goat in the sky. Suddenly, I feel such terror.

TETRA

Fetch me a drone.

ANDY

Ah! The peak! Pindarrus, your skies copper churning
Pepper-strobes of azure, the goat's entry spurs
Bristles in moonbeams, puffer-gasps on waves
The seabed below. Violent pull. Not a light, fissures
Without heat, sunbeams by trails of dust splinter.
A hidden pleasure, how us this fulgent sea envelops:
Above? Below? Sprawled about our feet, resembles
A child's blanket.

PAULA

That's the end? That tiny ball in the distance? How can you be
so calm?

ANDY

You're my oldest friend, Paula.

PAULA

I feel like that's all we are anymore.

ANDY

Don't say that. We're here. We've reached the peak.

PAULA

How can you be so calm? I can't breathe.

ANDY

Focus.

PAULA

Focus?

ANDY

Catullus' gift.

PAULA (losing the will to fight)

Childish, Andy. Childish.

ANDY

Breathe. Deep and slow. Try to focus on your breathing.

PAULA (a realization)

You never loved me. You never did, did you?

ANDY

This is a pressing matter. You know that.

PAULA

The dogs?

ANDY

Yes, the dogs.

PAULA

The dogs! You should be comforting your wife. You don't love me. Admit it.

ANDY

If I had to do it all over again, this whole marriage, from the very start, I would.

PAULA

That's nice of you to say... but, what comes next? Is this really it? Is this the end?

ANDY

This is an end. An end, of sorts.

PAULA

How are you so calm?

ANDY

Forgive me, Catullus.

(ANDY kneels beside the grave)

You probably haven't thought about John Holder in years, but for us back home, his absence there, it's something that looms over us, every day at three. God, I miss him.

(He takes a green bocci ball out of the bag and places it on Catullus' grave)

John's ball. If only you could see this... that beautiful glowing goat...

Earth becomes the Pinelli. Ha!

PAULA

What a stupid joke.

(She walks over, and reads the tombstone)

What's this?

ANDY
What's it say?

PAULA
What's a goat walk?

ANDY
How should I know? It's poetry. It's not supposed to mean anything.

PAULA
I don't know what a goat walk is.

ANDY
I should have stepped in.

PAULA
Comfort me, Andy.

ANDY
I should have stepped in.

PAULA
Comfort me.

(ANDY keeps his distance)

TETRA
(Off.)
Nausicaa! Nausicaa?

ANDY
Don't hate me, Catullus. I had no choice.

PAULA
No choice in what?

ANDY
I had no choice.

PAULA
I'm worried about the dogs.

(Enter TETRA)

TETRA

Oh, Catullus.

This place is a sponge, soaks up all memories,
And all that's left is your grave,
My father: a soft plot of earth.

I altered this city while still a child
And now as a woman, Ovidium slips
Through my qualms of my fingers.
Slips like a memory, or like my thoughts of you,
The expressions of your face, the sound
Of your voice, Oh Catullus:

The seashell sprouts legs, flitters to the sea.
Return my daughter to me. I beg you, Papa!
Bring me Nausicaa. Even a memory of...

NAUSICAA

Mother!

TETRA

(She looks around)

Nausicaa?

(She runs to stage right)

Nausicaa?

NAUSICAA

Mother!

(Enter Nausicaa with Gamma-7's fourth head.)

PAULA

What is that thing?

(TETRA grabs her chest in a panic; like she's seen a ghost. She summons strength and walks over to NAUSICAA)

TETRA

Hand that over.

NAUSICAA

No.

GAMMA

Strive, Daughter of Catullus! Strive to live!

TETRA

Pay no heed to the pandering of eagles.
Immortality is the dream of peccant minds.
The cycle comes to its end.
A sorry sight, men lingering on,
Once they're sacrificed,
What made them men.
Zombie ants, marching,
Under tepid suns.

NAUSICAA

This here, this is the dream.
Don't you get it?
The cycle's already ended.
Time arrives at an end, a rose's point.
I don't fear it.

GAMMA

There are 30,000 drones resting dormant
Beneath the Ovidium waters.

TETRA

Ignore that noise. Ignore it.

GAMMA

The buried fleet, itself alone could meet,
The moment of the goat, the matricide's intensity.

TETRA

Lies.

NAUSICAA

You're calculations that you hid from everyone for sixteen
years. You made many assumptions. You should have asked for
help.

TETRA

My calculations were flawless.

NAUSICAA

We have the technology. We can stop the goat.

TETRA

Cowardice. This is what happens when you miss your drills. This
defiance of our prognosis. The irrationality of human will.

GAMMA

Say "commence" to activate fleet.

NAUSICAA
Do *not* commence.

GAMMA
Error.

NAUSICAA
What's the worst?

TETRA
Clutch not onto the body for sentimental reasons.
Let go the world, if it asks to be released.
Hold on, and you retain no world, no body.

NAUSICAA
What do you know?

TETRA
There's nothing wrong with this end, Nausicaa. If there were,
I'd tell you.

NAUSICAA
What if we do launch Ovidium's fleet?
The goat in the sky purged.
Then a return to order.

TETRA
Every action has its consequence.
What is the consequence of this action?

NAUSICAA
Time renews!

TETRA
Andy Priest? Ask him.

NAUSICAA
I invited him here.

TETRA
That's not why he's here.

ANDY
I'm so sorry. I had no choice.

PAULA
He keeps saying that.

ANDY
I'm so sorry.

PAULA
I swear to God.

ANDY
I'm so sorry.

NAUSICAA
I invited them. We knew there was a way. I knew how to divert you.

TETRA
General Marcus. Explain to Nausicaa why Andy Priest has come to our island. Tell Nausicaa about what we learned, the message that our wonderful technology intercepted.

GENERAL
The Republic has sent a retired salesman named Andy Priest to Ovidium to collect proof.

NAUSICAA
Proof? Proof of what?

TETRA
That our island's machinery is sturdy, intact. That our bluff is not a bluff. That Ovidium's forged heart continues to beat.

NAUSICAA
What? Do you mean to say our machinery is still operational?

TETRA
Why do you think no man has stepped foot upon this island for sixteen years? Because of some written law? Tell her, Andrew Priest. What happens next?

ANDY
I'm so sorry.

TETRA
General?

GENERAL

The moment we launch our fleet... Ovidium becomes defenseless.

TETRA

How long, Nausicaa – daybreak? By dawn the Republic's ships will be at our shore. I know these waters well. The Republic's fleet lurks beyond the azure smoke. Like gnats on a log, they occupy the Eastern horizon.

PAULA

Andy, I told you, didn't I? I told you there was something fishy about that ship. I knew that was a torpedo next to the toilet.

ANDY

You were there.

PAULA

They said it was a diplomatic mission.

ANDY

Of course they said...

PAULA

What else are you lying about? Is time really at an end?

ANDY

We had no choice.

PAULA

What Andy's trying to say... Please don't think poorly of us. You see, they took our dogs.

ANDY

Launch the drones. Please!

TETRA

No, Nausicaa. There are worse things than time coming to an end.

NAUSICAA

Self sacrifice, Mother.

TETRA

Self sacrifice without a deserving beneficiary makes you inferior to roadkill.

NAUSICAA

There are innocents in the Republic too.

TETRA

It was them. Every evil that's visited this island. Every corpse interred on this mountain. It was them. We made ourselves into Gods. And when man creates a God he stirs up a Devil too.

NAUSICAA

So that's what this is all about? All of this, to spite your mother?

TETRA

My mother would be standing with me. She did what she had to do. Then I did what I... Say it. Cancel.

NAUSICAA

Cancel.

GENERAL

Thirty seconds to impact.

ANDY

Oh God.

PAULA

If we make it through this, Andy.

ANDY

They're gonna kill them.

PAULA

I want a divorce.

ANDY

They're gonna kill our girls.

PAULA

Did you hear me? I said, I want a divorce, Andrew.

TETRA

Everything is going to be fine, Nausicaa. There's nothing wrong with this end. If There were, I'd tell you.

...

Oh Catullus

Give us Peace,
That peace that surpasses
Our comprehension.

(An explosion, then white light. Nothing visible.)

CATULLUS
John Holder,
I've been having that dream again,
Where I'm looking up
At myself from the grave,
And I'm a child again
Learning to speak.

TETRA
What's going on?

NAUSICAA
Mother?

TETRA
Nausicaa? Where are you?

CATULLUS
Did I mention, John,
I found it?
The end of desire.

GENERAL
Damn it all. This white light.

CATULLUS
It has nothing to do
With stretching ropes
From star to star.

(The light dims slightly. Silhouettes are visible behind
CATULLUS.)

GENERAL
The Republic... their ships! On the horizon. They're retreating!

CATULLUS
It has nothing to do
With endings. No,
It has something to do with

The vacuum, John Holder.

...

There, the imagination
Has no limits. Infinity
Becomes just another number
Counted upon the misplaced hand.

...

But you were right.
The world isn't ready
To handle your secret.

NAUSICAA
Fire on them!

TETRA
Hold fire!

NAUSICAA
This was them, all along? This was them. Devils! Devils! Fire on
them. Now! My friends drowned trying to... the Republic. They have
blood on their hands.

CATULLUS
The world contains every desire,
Except for one desire, the desire
To be contained,
To deprive itself
Of its remarkable vitality.

...

More passion and more imaginings.
More imagination lending to
More destruction
And even greater loss.

...

War brings peace, and
Peace brings war...

...

But tell me, John Holder,
Is it better than
Stillness?

...

A game of inches anyhow.

...

The ball scurries onwards.
The weeds grow, like
A revelry of inches.

(Enter Catullus, as a goat.)

NAUSICAA

Fire on them. Drown them all.

(Catullus notices John's Bocce ball, and hesitates for a moment, then, against his better judgement, retrieves it. Exit Catullus. The lights return to normal.)

GENERAL

Their army is larger than ours.

NAUSICAA

Ours has more discipline. It does, doesn't it?

TETRA

This isn't our moment.

(She looks to GENERAL)

Where's the glowing goat? I've been tracking that comet for sixteen years.

GENERAL

We held fire. Not a missile launched. The goat appears to have vanished, like a rainbow from the sky. It must have been an illusion.

TETRA

Then... That means...

GENERAL

They're been making progress.

TETRA

Strides. While we've been holding fast.

(turns to ANDY)

Andy Priest. Start talking. Keep nothing from me. God help you if you do.

ANDY

They put a chip in the Bocce ball. A microchip. A semiconductor. Something.

PAULA

And you didn't tell me this?

ANDY

They instructed me to put it atop the mountain. That's all I know.

PAULA

Don't you look at me.

ANDY

Our girls... our girls are dead. I just feel it. Our girls are dead.

PAULA

Our military. They're killing machines, but... they're not monsters. They're not, right?

TETRA

Debrief them. Then show them to the beach. Return them to the Republic... on separate ships.

PAULA

No. No, I'll go with him.

NAUSICAA

You're just gonna let them go?

TETRA

Send word to The Republic, Andy Priest: Ovidium seeks diplomacy.

NAUSICAA

No! They have blood on their hands.

TETRA

And General. Break down the walls.

ANDY

A thousand ships. Not Greek. With might
Exponential, coercion, murder of canines,
Chocolate or white,
Aircrafts returning, touched down
To the deck, the horizon's light
Fading like a bulb,
Under a cloud of flies.
And there is no end...

(The GENERAL escorts ANDY and PAULA away.)

TETRA

I'll teach you politics, Nausicaa.
I'll show you how, bit by bit,
We chip away at their imagination
And replace it with our tyranny.

...

The goats have been locked
In their pens for too long.
Set them loose,
Wild animals should roam wildly.

...

Yes, it's time. Sixteen years.
The goats have to eat something.

...

We might as well
Let them have their way
With the mustard weed.

NAUSICAA

(seething)

Teach me, Mother. Teach me.

ANDY

And there is no end...