

Sample—hit me up at ben@bencollum.com for the full script

DANCE BRIGHT GODS

Comedy-Romance in Two Acts

by

Ben Collum

© 2019

(520) 609-6134
ben@bencollum.com
www.bencollum.com

Cast of Characters

(Bracketed roles are played by the same actor, so that the cast is 2 women, 1 girl, 7 men, and 1 young woman cast anew each performance, even plucked out of the audience)

<u>Beatta Mathias</u> :	Chief Curator of Textual Antiquities, HengwrtMuseum LA, 31
<u>Michal Benares</u> :	Beatta's daughter, schoolgirl, 12
<u>Asher Mathias</u> :	Beatta's brother, newspaper columnist, 30
<u>Nathan Sohlesen</u> :	Dagnar Sohlesen's son, Sohlesen Corp Exec.Vice Pres., 31
<u>Elhanan Passerin</u> :	D. Sohlesen's semi-adopted son, Sohlesen-Studios CEO, 31
{ <u>Dagnar Sohlesen</u> :	founder, owner, Chairman, CEO of Sohlesen Corp, 67
{ <u>Flasken</u> :	misplaced old man, imagined from an old story, 70
{ <u>McCurran</u> :	pressman at a protest, 60s
{ <u>Thomas Powell</u> :	owner, publisher of <i>The Los Angeles Empire</i> newspaper, 75
{ <u>Word</u> :	musical, mute old man, imagined from an old story, 75
{ <u>Peter</u> :	pressman at a protest, 60s
{ <u>The Tree God</u> :	young god of undetermined powers, 17 aging to 27
{ <u>Ancient Gods 1 & 2</u> :	versions of an unknown god
{ <u>Rahab</u> :	defeated sea god
{ <u>The Dahvith Tree</u> :	ancient wreck of a fig-like tree
{ <u>Leah Hobbes</u> :	Museum Executive Director, 60
{ <u>Stem</u> :	sandy scruffy boy, in love, 17
{ <u>Joab</u> :	apprentice museum curator, 23
{ <u>Abner</u> :	farmhand at Powell's ranch, 23
{ <u>Polyhistor</u> :	fading old man, imagined from an old story, invisible
{ <u>Polyolbion</u> :	quiet girl, perhaps in love, 17 (1-line role)

Cast Note: Special abilities: Beatta and Tree God have an expert tap dance, Dahvith Tree a puppeteer, Word a strolling one-man-band

Scene

Los Angeles, Calif., in and about

Time

The Present, yet aslant

DANCE BRIGHT GODS

ACT IScene 1

Before anything starts, WORD may (or not) tune his strange collection of one-man-band instruments; others may help him in a growing song, perhaps playing found-objects from an elaborate set left over from some other play, which they may (or not) strike to bare-naked (since there's no set in this play, unless a unit-set is wanted—also no curtain, no lighting blackouts). WORD might play an introit, clear the stage, and begin

But back to the set a moment—some largish props are needed: mainly an ingenious multi-purpose box/crate, on wheels, about 4' x 4' x 4' that can hold an actor, hinge-lidded, false-bottomed, desk-drawered, folds out to a bed, holds tent-poles for a canvas roof. There's a wheeled fabulous door that stands on stage throughout. And the tree: a falling-apart-wreck costume/puppet then (per resources) growing into full-leafed glory

Presentational style is with zest, comedic timing, quickness. Some undress but no full undress. Gods in the cast, held with secular gloves

AT RISE: Suddenly: Thunder! Enter ASHER MATHIAS, pushes wheeled Box ridden by JOAB across rainswept rooftop Statuary Garden, HengwrtMuseum|LA, downtown Los Angeles, storm abates, night.

ASHER

You steer the right course?—

(needles JOAB, who just sits and glowers)

Jo-ab? —No? —Nothing? A mute Joab, bumble Joab.

This storm's turned round to hunt you, and I alone save your life,

New-stuck barnacle to my sister's treasure I shove off this roof. -- --

Watch out!

ASHER (Cont.)

(stops to mockingly examine a statue before them)

I came by your little toe of smashing that statue—

A monster I'd avoid in this swirling dark.

—Or don't you see it, or any of these who surround you—

This rough-bronze choir your museum force sing to the sky?

No, you sit plump up there—

—Like to the old story! —Riding your wooden ass, while this statue, haply a god, flamed its sword to bar your way, and you slouch, dumb.

Yet this crate saw it, halt, and save you.

Look around Joab and see your peril. I know my sister: tremble.

(starts to leave JOAB behind)

Then, Slack-Bottom Sir, if you won't guide me, I walk ahead through these rain-glistened bodies to find a door off their wet roof: I walk faster.

JOAB

You, ran, over-my-foot!

ASHER

This crate you toppled flattened more toes.

Yet new friend, I take the blame: for stormy lack of electricity, afterhours lack of porters.

The frightening lack of steering was yours, and into priceless relics though you apprentice these dark museum halls.

Thus my rooftop detour to this garden of statues not so easy molested—though they may molest you, Joab.

JOAB

Come back and get me down off, this.

(beats and kicks the Box.)

ASHER

Hit not my sister's precious crate—

—Like the story's poor donkey, that asks what offense you beat it three times.

Say Joab: who here, by truth, is the God, the Rider, the Ass?

JOAB

You, are, the, ass.

ASHER

Mush Joab. My dread sister Beatta may spare your life, though you dropt open her prize to the rainy skies.

(Exit ASHER as JOAB jumps down.)

JOAB

My foot. Mr. Mathias, Asher!

No time for that and the clay tablet in there's perfect dry, and very sturdy, I'm sure.

Now, all's well, all quiet—

(Sound: sustained tumult inside Box, unheard by JOAB.)

—All quiet, all normal.

(beat.)

No raindrop hit inside, and that lid's on tight enough now.

(Enter TREE GOD, bursts open Box lid and stands inside, wears hardly anything, wholly unseen and unheard by JOAB; speaks throughout in a trochaic stomp.)

TREE GOD

Drop of wet, touch me!

Chaos wash the crust of eyes.

Seep through sleepened ears who starve for soundlings.

Words—and Words I heard.

Words like Sand; Words like Sun.

Speaker? Grow me! Speak on!

JOAB

(pushes Box as TREE GOD still stands in it.)

Out my way, grabbing statues—

(stops a moment to address the statues.)

Quicken to life now 'fore your night-rain's freshened sinew rusts under Los Angeles sun and marvelous dries your bones to bleached imprisonment!

TREE GOD

(beat of astonishment, noticing JOAB.)

What is that? —What being, strange? —I care not, if it talk.

Speak you thing, words for food, words to know what you are, what, where, when, and who am I.

(holds on as JOAB swerves Box through statues.)

Move we rough—like over oceans—hiding Chaos—that I crush to stand atop its dust?

Stop you thing—I remember. I say STOP!

(Sound: Thunder; Box loses a wheel and so stops.)

I may be a thing most—'marvelous'.

JOAB

When wheels flee then Disorder's impediment control—

—And lay me in it to cure.

(down on his back to fix the wheel.)

TREE GOD

Lay not wet but dazzling sand like—

—Ones I know: that a Man!

(beat, to look upon and examine JOAB.)

What—‘impediment’—did skew your sculptor’s stick?

JOAB

I freeze, caught in this iced-world’s misformed solidity before I could set it right.

TREE GOD

(remembers a ditty.)

Stick in hand, draw a man.

Part from sand, another man.

None but man encov’ring sand.

JOAB

Los Angeles streets hear: are quiet-stilled. Sure all creation congeals.

TREE GOD

I unmoving dreamed.

Long fix’d I stood among sand men that Sun forgot to move.

Shimmer’d sky now ripple men to wave and raise a sandy sea.

Wave of men huge mass’d that arch’d the sky and crest o’er me—

JOAB

Clouds skin over gluttonous of their rain yet let careless slip to the clay tablet a terrible—

JOAB

—one drop!

TREE GOD

One drop—

TREE GOD

—loosed its wave fell wet on me.

Now, start sky; now, churn wave.

Crash all down, again all drown! -- --

(beat, braces for a wave that doesn’t come.)

No? Slink back dreamed wave your glassy still, nor disturb the dunes’ soft bed, where lay the men and here stand me—whatever I be.

JOAB

Drop touch me!—though none quench. Only a She to make everything right—

Then deluge me Love like rain—it hurt without it a young man.

But clay’s dropt on, likely receipt the sale of ancient chickens!

If Dr. Mathias find out, I curate no more, and her clucking brother—Asher!—will tell.

JOAB (Cont.)

(once more to the statues.)

You statted iron and stone: if freed by rain, execute justice on this meddler.
I call you gods!

TREE GOD

What was that word?

What form'd mouth to sound it? —G o d s.

(beat.)

—Sky speed start, stick to hand, I know: I stand a god!
Unattended—where companion Tree that hands my stick?
For: a god am I; man that, and difference between to draw.

(Enter ASHER, pushes on a Fabulous Door.)

ASHER

Door's found!

—And through it listen: footsteps, gentle hammers toll your doom in exquisite shoes.
My sister tracks her prey—you Joab—she knows you rained on her great excavation.
If you'd live, then quick hurl crate through doors and run.
I'll fight to the death to save you, but go man!

(JOAB slowly pushes Box as ASHER energetically swings
Door around it several times.)

JOAB

My boss or not, her brother's an idiot.

TREE GOD

Tree, old friend, say where you lay. I will find you, roust you up.
Faster, faster turns the World; Time comes round to catch the Now!

(Exit TREE GOD in Box, closes lid over himself;
Enter BEATTA MATHIAS with book satchel, as ASHER
shoves JOAB off.)

BEATTA

What have you with my curates and run them off?

ASHER

(from inside Box, removes cylindrical, hollow clay tablet with
spindle inside it, places it on closed lid of Box.)

Herd them deliver up one clay tablet: cylinder ancient, center stylus, and short time to

ASHER (cont.)

inspect before presenting them. Therefore high-hearted Beatta, jolly Bete, will you smile?
—Breathe your wit on 'em?
—Forget the harming news I told?

BEATTA

And stand a hollow-heart statuary storms not bend? I can neither smile Asher, make you smile, stop your making me smile—so fail you on three fingers, and hold poor sisters.

ASHER

But one who'd be happy. See your beloved Rotunda, wired on forgotten circuit: the Museum's last lighted room, though its vast dome pregnant only of dust.

(grabs BEATTA to dance.)

Sis, let's kick it up: take hands, click fabulous heels, and dance afore your magnificent ark, only be merry.

BEATTA

(spins away to stop dancing.)

More to dancing than fine shoes, sweet Ash, and tonight hear no tune.
I turn a Fury what you tell: All snatched away? Your newspaper column, newspaper itself, that whole inky world?—and by that man.

ASHER

The vile Mr. Sohlesen may buy our *Los Angeles Empire*, yet not presume to shut us down. Our paperstock secret come from an old tree rooted to L.A. bedrock.

BEATTA

He engirdles your tree to kill it, even push out baby birds.

ASHER

Then hear glad news: tonight we plan war. Outside in the Bannin Green Park assemble a battle-council of newspaper pike and spearmen.
They chose poor their captain—me—but tomorrow by deathly banner, bullhorn, and pen, we take protested victory before Sohlesen's fearful tower. —We must.

BEATTA

I pray you may, yet pace, for you've wrote too much light to his dark corners.

ASHER

But Bete, confess you won't smile 'cause Sohlesen too encircle this museum.

BEATTA

His millions of reasons sway directors, who cede him much, even dictate curator's arcane

BEATTA (Cont.)

method. He so love money that things unprofitable—museums, newspapers—offend him, then he usurp.

And hear worse: to tonight's benefit unveiling this new-dug artifact, comes Sohlesen.

ASHER

For the gods' sake turn merry, or you'll imagine him a warted toad and make him one. Beatta be absent.

BEATTA

(walks to examine the clay tablet.)

I be chief curator; this chief need curating.

(addresses an imaginary Mr. Sohlesen.)

So welcome Mr. Sohlesen. Chirp no note off-key my brother or my anger boil awake some sleeping sea-giant to dine on you. —That makes me smile, confess my fault.

Then a quick look rain-wet clay, jot notes my little book.

(hauls from her satchel a huge, ancient book.)

ASHER

'Tis an almanac.

BEATTA

(examines the tablet's markings.)

Rare script I know poor. Well, with wit was it writ, with wit be it read.

ASHER

And summon gods.

BEATTA

Gods—heavens, they've but flat wit.

No, find me a rounded specimen: a Man, who I study a scholar and like them well, nor inspect one in an age. If Love cure sadness, I'll read a man who runs round this over-baked story, and fall in love.

ASHER

No man but preening heroes fill up these tales, loving their manly repute while manly repelling all Love, and hear thyselves speak.

BEATTA

Would I could, and take good direction thereby.

(still examines the tablet's markings.)

You're right: stiff-spined marks, callous slashes that hide all semblance of Love.

A woman wrote this, hard-learned in the ways of men's care-crafted unadornment.

ASHER

Yet I'll defend even these 'gainst women.

BEATTA

—Who you should not hear, only watch work.

This writing decipher take too long. Since Mr. Sohlesen not yet says no, and to learn better how read its story, I'll imagine forth a storied figment and talk to it.

ASHER

Avoid it. I take Sohlesen's side and ban guessed-at inventions, who're more Bete poured in 'em than their own clay marks—and still they go rancid.

BEATTA

Says the boy who over-imagined the most sour lack-wits to cast them extras in your love-wooing?

ASHER

Painful memory, I thank it. Yet now I'm love-cured, and banished that gout-ricket-bilious contagion of pestilence: Love.

BEATTA

—Will sneak back over your borders, Brother, with an army.

(hands tablet, spindle, book to Asher to hold.)

I'll bring out and speak to an imagined creature, so learn of it, then slam book on it.

Sir Figment there—

(reads tablet marks, then writes in her book.)

I'll character you, and unfold your poor legible, to round reveal: Come!

Alas, I think no man.

(Enter FIRST GOD from Box, carefully opens lid, steps out of Box. Haughtily wears pristine robes.)

BEATTA (Cont.)

A god, stiff and mute, and remember your tongue?

FIRST GOD

When sun reach zenith pure, its beam shall shine the tenth window perfect angle, reach next-below vein on tenth wall-stone, glint twenty seconds silver upon fourth farther altar horn, none touch any bronze which shall light two minutes before sun set. The lighted—

BEATTA

—Faster.

FIRST GOD

(speaks faster and faster at BEATTA'S prodding.)

—horn shall warm the room one eighth degree. that ripple three waves five mal-cubits center the basin's cleansing sea, adjust weight even its twelve bronze oxen that hold it. except the eighth ox shall—

BEATTA

—Swat its tail on a blowfly's nether lip, that buzz its perfumed backside, which blast it out the third window, and I will stamp my foot!

FIRST GOD

(amazed beat.)

Are you a god?

BEATTA

No! —Nor like my anger to reveal what you may be, rulered god, writ by form. I could meet you a thousand more just like—unless, you've made your man?

FIRST GOD

What is a, man?

BEATTA

Asher, all expense, excavation, expectation of this clay for return infinitesimal.

ASHER

(reads the tablet himself.)

Look, here older marks troweled over to write this one, who's too much revised.

BEATTA

Praise cramped scribblers, here may yet find a god to shake hands with.

(again reads tablet, writes in book.)

Now Misalloy: crack—and emerge your purer self.

(FIRST GOD becomes SECOND GOD, reveals different aspect of robe as rags; this god is a poor specimen.)

SECOND GOD

If a god to bless sit, then—I forget. Mighty blessings, mighty hands: bare. Sea basin: dry. Storied walls: burnt. Cherubim hold throne of air. Once here I walked beside—

BEATTA

Who, ragged god?

SECOND GOD

The man. In beauty I made! Breathed he here?
I see none, but yearn, if ever he stood. Where's he gone? Tell. I would sit.

BEATTA

(helps SECOND GOD slide to ground, embraces it.)
Erased to confusion, and have beside you one like-learned in longing—and fall tears?
Then let these arms shelter. O Asher.

SECOND GOD

Man walked away, I know.
(stands again, stiffly.)
Help me and I go after him, through here? May I go?

(Exit SECOND GOD through Door. Enter MICHAL
BENARES, a girl of twelve.)

BEATTA

I wish you find him, and farewell ever, and close my book.

MICHAL

Who's that?—A new creature lost out its story?
Mine wear themselves out and I need new ones.

ASHER

Michal—lurking in dark museums? Away from that door and none more for you.
For as mother so poor daughter: too much dreaming up brainchild.
Your Uncle rescue you outside to Nature.

MICHAL

Horses live in Nature, and since I have no horse—I'm left with imagined nobodies to
keep me company. But no gods—they're no fun.

BEATTA

Poor footnote graced me in a sad moment and walked out with it.
Michal, ripe for a mother's love-mood.

(Enter POLYHISTOR, invisible; and WORD who plays a tune
on numerous musical instruments he carries, his only speech.)

MICHAL

Look Mama, these need squeezing more 'cause they fall apart.
Just look at poor Word, and if Polyhistor here fade any more we'll never find him.

ASHER

Bete, same make-believe cretins fit companions for a child?
Word, quiet!—and I trip over Polyhistor. Thankful no Flasken—O.

(Enter FLASKEN, in a haughty preposterous step.)

FLASKEN

Word: walk ahead my already hurried step, when instructed no?
Do stark and justice cry against you? Yes, and beat you for it.
(begins to beat WORD; ASHER defends WORD.)

ASHER

Bete, you two torment me with these—rusted inventions, out decrepit stories.

MICHAL

There's worse: Flasken wrote a long chant to lure Polyhistor's god back, and stop him fading all away. Flasken played a bush, holding branches over his head—Word the music. Polyhistor sang his note nobody can hear, except a crow did, landed on a branch croaking along, then another, then a humongous flock, and Flasken fell over, chased squawk-birds, beating Word like he's to blame. I'll show you: we start again.

FLASKEN

I will tell it—

(Exit FLASKEN, WORD, POLYHISTOR, shoved out of Door
by ASHER, who locks Door behind them.)

ASHER

—None, cover mouth, out door, lock. Any wonder the gods fled these once they saw what they'd made? —Bete make her stop.

BEATTA

You wanted me to smile.

MICHAL

Amazing, Mama. I get these but no horse?
Why can't I have Assurbanipal, pretty foal? He's lonesome.
You never loved something so much?

ASHER

(hoists MICHAL on his shoulders.)

Michal, I your horse, and ride you outside to the park for *Empire's* mighty protest,
Pressman Page First-Class.

MICHAL

Mama, I forgot: Aunt Leah says hello, and the Benefit's moved here because the lights, and that Mr. Sohlesen will look at the clay before everybody else.

BEATTA

Blessed grandfathers! The Time linger me in rags.
Then a kiss, and look: the rain pour itself down again.

ASHER

Prepare for wet, Child: rain will not save you, and you're for me.

BEATTA

Mr. Sohlesen: you're for me. Quick fetch over rooftops fair costume, and whether you will, by fancy I'll ransack this clay for a proper man. Rain: I'm for you.

(Exit ASHER, carries MICHAL; Exit BEATTA. Sound: door-knocks; Enter JOAB, in half-tuxedo, returns materials to Box.)

ELHANAN

(calls from offstage, behind Door.)

Open gates, for come the Flood! The dead keep dry while wash away the living!
We want no moldy pot but a patch of its roof!
Then open, or I'll save my knocks for one who locked doors! -- --

(JOAB slowly unlocks Door; Enter ELHANAN PASSERIN, drenched, carries NATHAN SOHLESEN, dry under ELHANAN'S jacket, in a full leg cast; both wear tuxedos.)

ELHANAN (Cont.)

Long last Sir: if you require we bathe we're now very clean. Cast dry and man attached?
Sir, lead to your rain god: up those soaking stairs I a fit sacrifice.

NATHAN

Then stand me down, seeping brother.

ELHANAN

(sits NATHAN on Box; turns his fire on JOAB.)

Then I freeze to death. Sir Creeping, you wear plaster too, indentured here, interrupted your bolted solitude? Storms surely not lock out festivities of Mr. Sohlesen, who'd command locust plagues scooped for canapés.

NATHAN

I'm Nate Sohlesen. This raindrop, some name. I'm instructed, invited by my father.

JOAB

He saw you at this back door, sent me let you in—lock out him. —I didn't say I would.

ELHANAN

I bow, pledge open you dry doors quick. I'm Eli Passerin, Mr. Sohlesen's other, sometimes son. Sprint me through your dark halls, for I must speak to him.

NATHAN

A moment. Drenched Eli a despised Eli, and dry a little.

ELHANAN

Young museum lord: we'll have wood to burn for heat. This crate—no? Not more chilled out these than in, so shuck off rain-blest tuxedo, that must be wicked for it shrink of it.
(takes off clothes down to his briefs.)

NATHAN

Ever excuse to over-expose.

ELHANAN

Hang dry suits in the house? An antiques museum—
Then tunic, no earlier than—whats-his-name, at least cover my knees—and be quick.

JOAB

May rain never fall to grow such stuff, and I go.
(slowly limps to the way out.)

ELHANAN

Dry, shivered skin, in frigid dome—astonishing dome.
Come back runamuffin: what's this vast and empty round?
A forgotten film-set: ancient Rome! And what's etched in the floor? Up crate and see.
(jumps up to stand on the Box.)

NATHAN

More care, Brother Eli.

ELHANAN

Look: drawn a world silver-inlay, though what continent that, or missing?
Nate, I've got it: across a world a Dance, a Grand Ballroom! Pull of music, swirl of gowns, warmth of dry tuxedos—frame and I'll block it by leaps. -- --
(jumps down and begins to grandly dance.)

It wondrous warm the blood, but need more dancers.
(grabs JOAB and forces him to waltz.)
Sir, never think you'll sneak out: you for me, and we waltz.

JOAB

My foot—halloo Sir! -- -- Why I'm put on tonight but Disorder's let loose. -- --
Stop: here dry tuxedo, wear mine. I'll bring the rest—and then go far, far away.

(Exit JOAB, afraid of ELHANAN.)

NATHAN

You see how everybody runs from you?

ELHANAN

But you, loving brother.

NATHAN

You'll need love after Father's coming storm.

ELHANAN

Merest shower Nate, and I'll answer all our father's complaint.

NATHAN

Our father—your unmingled blood more loyal than his pure in me—take no answer 'less
Jealousy now be talked to. You outshine him Eli, in his own hand-to-heart Sohlesen
Corporation—commit blinding treason, he extinguish.

ELHANAN

I'll stand in his shadow, as I want, but my one father push me away for unknowing
offense stab my heart. He'll hear me and all be well.

NATHAN

No.

ELHANAN

Where that slack-joint creature? Almost lukewarm, I'll raise heat by an overdone finale
this too fantastical dome deserve.

(dances, then stops before marks he sees on the floor.)

Look: here stood, pedestals?—for statues—footprints of lost gods.

Recall them for my shot and make dance.

Gods wake, return! Match step to your power: Harvest pick bushel, Westwind fan dust.

NATHAN

What step the goddess of Love?

ELHANAN

Who?—I see her not here. Great One, hurl thunders yet leap aside answering retort.

NATHAN

Teach gods leap? Eli, extend your too reckless self then your symptoms come and sickness dance on you.

ELHANAN

Nate, I won't ginger-toe round this disease, though it ambush me with chains—but skip while I may, strip me joyous bare as new, and sinews command more full than full.

NATHAN

How naked gods dance fuller-full if spurn Love?

ELHANAN

I yet have Life, what need Love?

NATHAN

Say the man not in love.

ELHANAN

Great Love owed greater worship. Number count not days Love due costliest gifts. Dome fall short the height Love entitled stand. Extremity fail its name, nor view, waft, savor, or tune discern sense Love engender but that one turn a leaping lover, and I do not.

NATHAN

Then come Goddess, and prove your rule unmovable pedestal.

ELHANAN

Just so, though love-talk on set interrupt my finish. Where necessary gods?—
 (looks around, then out windows to rooftop statuary garden.)
 —for they don't lingering die— There! Out looking in: pushed out, or fled—
 (sees [unseen to us] BEATTA standing in the rain.)
 —lacking proper adoration to let rain anoint. But see that lovely small one—O!

NATHAN

What? You pale, what's out there? And help me down.

ELHANAN

It nimble move as one alive. Her hand light turns, what sees she looking up in Rain but that she bathe it fresh, and its drops fight to blest touch her. She throw back her head, stand her body graceful pose to school a host of goddesses, she their queen.
 O Nate see. —But she's gone, if ever stood there and not a dream.

NATHAN

Rain no terror, and if you saw her go after.

ELHANAN

No! I—leave best a vision. Where suit to dress me in?
Go whip that curate, then on to Sohlesen and smooth my way, Brother Meddler.

NATHAN

All right, Brother Gusto, but watch cracks ‘neath Rules ‘gainst Love: its goddess come
and topple. On to dear Father: though you be cast down, I’ll not be lifted up.

(Exit NATHAN. ELHANAN hears someone coming and hides
behind Box for modesty; Enter BEATTA drenched.)

BEATTA

(removes book, tablet, spindle from Box, and speaks to it.)
You hide, and more’s here than mere god redact, god pilfer: somewhere a lusty origin
I’ve small time to find. Out clay—what odd mark?
(reads marks on tablet, and writes in her book.)
I’ll pick at it decipher—yank the hairs off it—snap its knotted spine.
(hears ELHANAN fearfully react and by accident knock Box.)
-- -- Hello?—Anyone, anything there?

(BEATTA finds ELHANAN who stands dumb, astonished to
see the woman in the rain; ELHANAN bows to her.)

BEATTA

O, Sir, you have but little clothes— Are you a god? -- --
(beat, waits an answer from dumbfounded ELHANAN.)
Answer no woman’s question, then sure a man. Out o’this clay’s story?

ELHANAN

You stood in the rain. You moved. —Quick, the clay rolls off.
(reaches for clay cylinder as it begins to roll off Box.)

BEATTA

Catch, let it not fall!
(catches at hard-to-hold tablet: her arms and legs entwine
with ELHANAN’S, in ridiculous, close, lovestruck tangle.)

BEATTA

(disentangles herself; puts tablet and book inside Box.)
I re-box these. I have no time to—I have to—O Rain, save a drop to stand me in.

(Exit BEATTA, ELHANAN falls back to the floor. Reenter
BEATTA, and ELHANAN quickly stands to face her.)

BEATTA

But I -- -- No, to Rain.

(Exit BEATTA, ELHANAN falls to floor again. Enter
DAGNAR SOHLESEN, NATHAN who carries tuxedo.)

SOHLESEN

I instructed lock doors against—you Sir: up and get you out, and bolt it.

NATHAN

Father, heaps of sons have you to thrust out?

SOHLESEN

Undress shame me, and you smile? Smile hear my command: I cut you out, from Studios,
from Sohlesen Corporation itself, and as I am Sohlesen itself, from me.

ELHANAN

Sir, Father—

SOHLESEN

Father me no father, I know not you.

ELHANAN

I astonished at your unhappiness, work entire to your increase your son, what sons owe
fathers, and retrain light glance on me to you, by my heart's love.

NATHAN

You're changed, what happened?

SOHLESEN

Love dare speak? Love Sohlesen—Corporation and pick it out my pocket. Sing me this
song all Los Angeles hum: Studios yours, new-sprout atop withered lifeblood, and step
me aside. I do not step aside! Defy false love.

ELHANAN

Love the greatest word I know, though quick confound my knowing. Love most ennobles
us, stored give, given us store by Grace itself. Yours stored overflowed to raise me an
orphan on your son's asking. Others' talk make me no disloyal, neither you hear it.
Hear me: my love for you owed my debt.

SOHLESEN

Love know no owing, pay no debt. You spendthrift lavish love on Nathan, yet count out
mine by pennies. Take them and walk out. You, Sir, my instruction—

NATHAN

—None. Repent ravings ‘gainst your one other son, my brother.

SOHLESEN

A fool, but Sohlesen take its pleasure of you soon enough. When this unveiling’s done, go late to Powell’s ranch and humble that wearied, beaten man sign our terms taking his newspaper—so the new sun rise on his defeated *Empire*.

NATHAN

You can’t have the *Empire*. Every voice already high-towered Sohlesen’s but one. The gods bless the *LA Empire*, and its near-lost inky language, spoke by groundlings who may hurl lettuces up at you. Send me to Powell: I’ll shake his hand, wish him well. He knows enough to shun you.

ELHANAN

I’ll go to Mr. Powell, buy his newspaper, and prove you my love.

SOHLESEN

Treacherous love, yet may pay well. Go, when we’re done here, late, and take the *Empire*—at one-half my price. Choose fail me, let me see your face never more.

ELHANAN

I’ll win it for love of you, Sir. —Brother, let pass and help me dress.
(steps aside with NATHAN to put on tuxedo.)

(Enter BEATTA exquisite, LEAH HOBBS with cane.)

NATHAN

For love of you, Sir, but who’s summoned?

BEATTA

Hurry Leah, any lurk by crates? How look my dress? Alas, none but wear clothes.

ELHANAN

I think to know: that’s SHE. Stand here, and I shrink behind, and tie my noose.

SOHLESEN

Late we begin restore order to misimagined curators who account them great.

BEATTA

Leah—my pen. I’ll quick return.

(Exit BEATTA.)

SOHLESEN

Dr. Hobbes, recall this Mathias the instant.
Her Director instruct her no misbegot indecencies she pose as decipherers?

LEAH

Sir, she know all, decencies.

SOHLESEN

I know her a Mathias, and may convict herself a trial she know none of.
I sudden conceive that our dusty antiquities need a start—fresh.

LEAH

‘Fresh’ frighten the word Antiquities, till Dr. Mathias reconcile them by fresh method,
fresh discovery, fresh museum repute the World bows to, that I am stale to defend.
The word you seek is not, I think, fresh.

(Enter BEATTA, with pen.)

BEATTA

Mr. Sohlesen, I unforgivable make you wait, and under extravagant dome that poor alone
enlight our dark. For my sake, pardon.

SOHLESEN

None pardon, this embarrassed trace of an over-florid time I soon remedy, flat.
You cut time short: show this to me—nor embellish, which I detest—on clay, newsprint.

BEATTA

I surrender my art to your constraint.
For those I love, I’ll not warrant my Will’s restraint, and defend.
If this dome totters, then all under take care. I prepare.
(retrieves tablet, spindle, book from Box; uses Box as table.)

SOHLESEN

Care Ms. Mathias, and Dr. Hobbes step and hear instruction.
(steps aside with LEAH to talk.)

ELHANAN

(chokes as NATHAN ties his bowtie for him.)
Nate, tie all life out! O Hide: comes dazzling She.

NATHAN

I hide you none—go temper Father’s temper—push you tempt your tempter.
(pushes ELHANAN toward BEATTA, walks to SOHLESEN.)

BEATTA

Who block my light? O. -- --

(sees ELHANAN, now clothed, bow to her.)

Majestic bend I thank it, tuxedoed Sir.

Just here a lack-clothed man your equal, or god maybe, gave its like.

ELHANAN

Where you stand in new-sprung beauty, I saw a dripping goddess.

BEATTA

Strange beings congregate round this clay tonight. What more fantastics read out it?

ELHANAN

I disturb you read these marks and stand apart.

BEATTA

No, Sir, I plead your help holding this tablet rolling away, and you.

ELHANAN

My hand tonight tremor and cause you read double.

BEATTA

My hand too shake tonight, and ours by harmony may cancel out.

ELHANAN

This center spindle not like to roll for it more a tree branch petrified.

(looks more closely at the tablet's Stylite [spindle].)

Do these marks on it tell part of the clay's story?

BEATTA

What marks—and show me.

ELHANAN

I guess they're marks, and close-mimic natural figures running along its grain.

BEATTA

(examines quickly the Stylite.)

I ne'er saw resemblant marks on a center Stylite, older sure than clay, for its carved pictures ancient, and I go to work on them—

But I mistake: their discoverer, you alone may make them speak.

ELHANAN

Discoverer by chance, and I step aside knowing none.

BEATTA

It's simple: tell what that look like, next, then back and forth a plough-ox: proceed.

ELHANAN

(attempts to read the Stylite's marks, as BEATTA writes.)

I—this look like hills, mountains, a range receding all directions round a barren peak. What, you write this? -- -- And what happens here?

(looks around truly astonished, as if in a new place.)

The ground heaves to move! I sudden see out this dome mountains rise full over the Earth. Now we climb with them, lifted stand atop the arc of the World!

SOHLESEN

What noise? Sure none insubordinate, and Sir interrupt no work—and Madam: work.

BEATTA

We sent to the corner. But swear tell for I scarce believe: what do mean you see, stand on mountaintops?

ELHANAN

You did it. When you wrote, we flew up to this clear-lighted height where cold even sting my breath—and how this wonder?

BEATTA

Have not our trembles matched happy chords? No wonder.

ELHANAN

I poor know the word if stare not amazed at unnumbered peaks n'er touched, dry broken rivulets plunge blue-black thousands feet deep, ice-blue glaciers smooth-crush new vales and blowing snow gauze the Sun a wave's spray. —Yet, this not more fearsome a wonder than one who raised this massif, in beauty to overwhelm.

BEATTA

I wonder you read the rod rightside-up? Turn and dust off my extravagances. No mountains but waves, then melt peaks to steep-massed oceans: a frozen storm that'd sink the world, for each wave so over-admire its next fellow it yearn crash upon it, and what blame? Its neighbor's fault to stand so over-handsome.

ELHANAN

—What mark next read? This one radiate out. O! -- --

Watery mountains unleash, and leap seas over greatest hollows in deafening roar!

BEATTA

Any land you read?—For no story's worth a drowning.

ELHANAN

This next mark a jumbled swirl turn on itself alone like—

BEATTA

Touch it not, nor speak it, Sir!—For it may cause the storm: the Ocean's dark god of Chaos we would not meet in this world. —Alas, storm quiets, and what comes?

(Enter RAHAB from below, spreads dark robes.)

ELHANAN

It look, not nice.

LEAH

Beatta we walk. Sir, a quick step, not there or a wet step, a deep step.

SOHLESEN

What happens? If you Ms. Mathias imagine daydreams to seek my harm I promise you'll see how deep I harm you. Dr. Hobbes, now invested her powers, before benefactors we go meet. Nathan come, you Sir as you please.

NATHAN

I deep-salvager play.

(Exit SOHLESEN, LEAH, NATHAN.)

BEATTA

A lashing not worse than this Chaos, I distract forgot warn you; I fear it pull us under.

ELHANAN

Come inky smudge and I'll blot to push you down again.

RAHAB

Never more where corals jab. Know me: Rahab, ever deepen, kneel and hear of me.

BEATTA

These foul gods are full of matter and give away their weakness in telling it. Speak.

RAHAB

Before Any was an old tree cradle the new world in its roots. Shade the tree throw down with me, unwanted despised watery damp I inward grow. Tree love-cosset another on its branch ripen by Sun, it outward grow. Hate hid, I say: O Tree: rain not fall your roots then dry and die, so I bring rain. Rain I pour that overbrim them all and World encovered ever mine! Then, cunning hid a voice say: O Deluge: shade nor fall your seas then dry

RAHAB (Cont.)

and die, so I bring shade. Tree then rise up, divide my waves, pull mountains in its roots and on its limb sit the voice: the cosset-god, now burst its ripened bonds.

ELHANAN

It spread: quick finish you.

RAHAB

Hurricane armies I raise t'wash both under again, yet the tree god tickled of a twig laughs and blows back my winds against me. Sea-serpent host I call forth, yet tree god tripped of a root falls and quakes annihilating wave crush my poor creatures.

ELHANAN

I begin like this treeish fellow, and would meet.

RAHAB

Too late: last I myself stride to fight where I rend both god and tree, break their limbs and scatter them deepest seas.

ELHANAN

You lie, your weakness show and I'll force you say true.

RAHAB

Back and hear: I go forth yet the tree god reaches of a falling leaf and wraps me in crushing arms that scatter o'er the world a never-ended shore to destroy my children waves. Now rise again, I will all drown.

ELHANAN

You give way your fault: are scattered broke and I'll grapple you down.

BEATTA

Mortal man wrestle gods? I'll have you unbroke and say no.

ELHANAN

Mortal man have but short fight in him, then allow me mine 'fore 'tis gone.

BEATTA

Courage I've little, yet take—though yours overtop need none, but wish you well.

(ELHANAN, RAHAB wrestle; ELHANAN thrown.)

RAHAB

Sure no god yet like: for you've a ripening too.

ELHANAN

Vileness, what know of me? I come at you again.

(THEY wrestle again, ELHANAN throws RAHAB.)

RAHAB

No more, no more.

ELHANAN

I no green tree god, yet full power a man—and not us sink but you: down, down, down.

(Exit RAHAB, as ELHANAN pushes it beneath.)

BEATTA

And others rise up to one deserving fresh laurels, though here but a pen.

ELHANAN

Then write me more gods to wrestle, and name me your champion!

That man who threw down sea monsters—monsters who say -- --

(beat, comes back to himself, in distress.)

—say I too a ripening.

BEATTA

Sir, you are not well.

ELHANAN

Words that fit the time and fall on my head. Drain seas and sit me back the dusty world,
for when I'm near you my place lost, self forgot.

BEATTA

I say remembered.

ELHANAN

Aye, to myself. By duty owed Mr. Sohlesen, I must leave.

BEATTA

That man's barbs strike quick. But in going of a place, you learn how return—

ELHANAN

—I'll lose my way, misplace damp gods, goddesses. We the other may not know.

BEATTA

You know poor what mean 'know'.

ELHANAN

I know what you don't, yet repay your sparkled grace rained on me with meager knowing what I am: jousting of gods—so not wise—a mortal man. Concord those words: I die.

BEATTA

Mortal woman, so I.

ELHANAN

Sooner than would, mortal man, I die.

BEATTA

Sooner mortal woman do I.

ELHANAN

You let me not easily say my tale, then hear. Sooner than would, mortal man by mortal disease ripening within, I die. Read it no mark on me tonight, but by swift day decipher me plain: man unshined—one, part from one, part from one—then neither walk, nor stand, eat, breathe.

BEATTA

O Sir—I'm sorry beyond -- -- Heart, learn your mortality—

ELHANAN

And mine, yet its carved epitaph read: No night, no woman—if not goddess you suspicious deny—have I known in my life. Stingy Time bar reverent study what you are, hymns sing you, imagined worlds find you, gods fight for you, blessings beg knelt of you—Beatta, she named you. But time, we'd find this young-sprout god and give a bow. But Time rustle to let me know: time to stand, time to go.

BEATTA

Where you stand would I, you where I—and come what may.
Sir, you will not go: you suffer.

ELHANAN

Of new affliction.

BEATTA

It catches.

ELHANAN

Others come. I, a man not free in himself, and more cause, raise a Rule Against Love more powerful to barren oceans. Rule myriad-facet issue single decree: harden me despot I obey, depart. Farewell.

(ELHANAN gives highly-elaborate bow, exits through Door.)

BEATTA

No, what even your name? Knees, fail your burden.

(BEATTA falls to her knees in tears as SOHLESEN enters.)

SOHLESEN

Madam, hear me: all association of Hengwrt Museum, by authority, I instantly dismiss you. Up and walk you out that door—yet view a Mathias at my feet. Hear me?

BEATTA

(stands with effort; her power grows.)

Aye, and by these tears worse. Up of marbled oceans, spread wet robes, and you'll dislike what I impersonate.

SOHLESEN

Threats? Your impostures ended in this your fit monument I'll scrape off the earth without memory save one: malfeasance punished.

BEATTA

Malfeased by happy chance: artifacts read too well, not bad as you wise constrain.

(Enter NATHAN who assists LEAH, both hobbled.)

NATHAN

Father, you will stop this harming pastime of yours.

LEAH

Beatta—Sir, this wrongful expulsion—

SOHLESEN

Ms. Hobbes, dare not defend. You, out that door.

NATHAN

No cause but you hate a name this lady own, and she make this museum's name. My name got from you I give back with son's counsel: stop.

SOHLESEN

Mewling boy, trust our enemies not harm us. If father fail, then hardened Time teach, and strike first. I go. Hobbes: confiscate all from her and bring to me. Get you gone.

(Exit SOHLESEN.)

NATHAN

Elhanan, now believe? —Where's he that was here?

BEATTA

What name? Out that door.

NATHAN

Told not his name? Yet told more, I read of your face, and his brother second that sorrow. Never much hope for him, even healthy as mules, and name him Elhanan Passerin; me, Nathan—none else. —

I beg you release me Ladies, to walk out the cool after-rain, limp forgetful in park's dark trees. You deserve of me douse gross, undeserved injury—but infant tears ne'er reach vengant flames.

(Exit NATHAN, on his crutches, through Door.)

LEAH

Beatta, dusty: that banishing man no genuine harm to bow you low.

BEATTA

Another so. Leah, I'm marched outside the walls, abandoned: go where, live how? Child of nomadic father, shall my child be like?

LEAH

Michal, you, me fasten against these tides; then throw your net to catch a love.

BEATTA

My net a cobweb glistened, but a breeze blow it away.

LEAH

Then chase it, for I saw here a man most handsome—perhaps dragged out this Stylite rod? Read it more and see what may.

BEATTA

No: it foretell sad end by its sad begin. Read foolish glyphs all I know, nor what do a sick man good. Take forfeit artifacts, book, even pen, Leah, nor follow me.

(hands everything to LEAH.)

LEAH

I wither, creak, fall apart—and will you walk nor let me follow on your road?

BEATTA

No, but I—

LEAH

—Then, hobbling along, I mention not live life in an instant's thought, but let it unspool its own pace—all the life we have. I return your pen when you remembered of yourself, of the diamond stuff 'tween lovers' meet and part, of tales speaking light when dark, dark light, and in them trust.

I think to go reverse Sohlesen, yet I'm close by and come when you call. This the door you're banished out, where a man you may love went? Banishment such misfortune.

(Exit LEAH with all materials, leaves Stylite on Box.)

BEATTA

Great crownèd round, we are forc'd separate:
 Out mortar'd stones the fearsome scatter'd road
 Lay wait for me to trace its dusty paths—
 Find bitter water that no tree make sweet—
 Unreckon brim the hollow'd Earth of sand
 Where stake our tent, that shift when windy gods
 Write songs on dunes, curve ridge to hieroglyph
 That none record or sing 'fore brush'd away,
 A song Farewell. Close gate and lock me out.

(Exit BEATTA. Sound: tumult in Box. Reenter BEATTA.)

BEATTA (Cont.)

Yet 'fore I go, Round, quick borrow me relic of a man I'll not see again, to sigh over:
 eye's lash, shirt's thread, star's mote fly unnumbered lifetime luster his hair half a second.
 Leah, what sly left by?—rod saw, held, read, breathed on by Elhanan—and snatch it!

(BEATTA grabs Stylite from Box; enter TREE GOD in Box, throws lid back, then TREE parts from false bottom.)

TREE GOD

Olden wood drift far up ripple dunes. Every branch I dig by hand. Limb you wake your diss'lute sleep.

BEATTA

(dodges TREE limbs, trunk.)

Hello—I stand here, and here—nor wish turn compost yet—what ho!

TREE GOD

(jumps out of Box; poorly assembles the TREE form.)

Jump to sand. Root my toes. Stand up yours Old Tree. Join your limbs right set by me.
 Wear you this your rear and done.

BEATTA

(rearranges tree parts in the correct place.)

And beat your drum. This, a tree look like? Fit not here—exchange this for that—what this spot?—Better, but at best a slough-barked pile.

TREE GOD

(tries to wake the TREE, then kicks it.)

Wake, attend, a twig pluck me. I now start me sculpt the men. Foot I'll use, awake!

BEATTA

Stop that!—for who'd flutter eyes so trampled? Gentle, lure slumbers.
Give bows like so: arm, knee, sweep low, simple.

(gives a simple bow to the TREE.)

TREE GOD

O, O, what that bend, what arm, what up? —Nor tell, I care not.

BEATTA

Nor I, but if you'd know, thus poised show.

(bows again, to TREE GOD.)

TREE GOD

I will move like that, by reason that—I will! Yet improve like this—

(TREE GOD bows poorly, falls down. Enter DAHVITH
TREE from below; inhabits tree form, then drops a limb.)

BEATTA

A well-engined fall, yet it wake this antique, who's a falling sickness too, and here limb.
(reattaches limb, and places TREE GOD by the TREE.)

Stand beside, and match two to an old story.

TREE GOD

(speaks in extra-strong trochaics.)

Sleep to lose yourself? Dream of leaves and sap? Where my twig?

(takes a twig that TREE has broken off for him.)

Now to draw.

BEATTA

Stomp, young bumpkin, toe to tongue—and had I a pen I'd nimble your feet.

(TREE breaks off a twig, gives to BEATTA; bubbles pitch
from knothole, and stretches out a limb for her to write on.)

BEATTA

That write a tale—and I wonder of this woody spindle.

(shows Stylite to TREE, who gives an evasive shrug.)

Twig I thank it, ink, and here 'ciphered write—

(examines Stylite's markings, and writes on TREE's limb.)

Young Trudge, I'll iamb your heel's second step a goodly weight, give our ears godly thanks. Writ, then speak.

TREE GOD

(resists at first his new, smooth iambics.)

Yet No, for I, will speak, just when, I choose,

Nor nothing will, but I decide, how use.

BEATTA

Well freed your line its too much tedious.

Then proper hail to gods I give, remiss.

(BEATTA gives Elhanan's extravagant bow.)

TREE GOD

What's that? Wonder never seen on Earth that I will—not.

BEATTA

Alas, I deciphered you out, and wait your Will enact.

(TREE GOD slowly, but expertly mimics Elhanan's bow.)

BEATTA

Gorgeous Relic, again! By sight Elhanan gave its like. Soothe heart to burnt crisp: again!

TREE GOD

(gives the bow one more time, in much better form.)

I will a bowing-bend draw all the men!

BEATTA

What men? —But begin see them—O!

(sees all around her sleeping sandmen, who cover every dune.)

Lay at my feet every way in stretching sand, where no empty patch but each infinite star adore a face and glow it.

TREE GOD

If Sun come back, wherever gone to, see men up uncounted dune: all sculpt by me.

BEATTA

You'll have rowdy hosannas. But all sleep: may you toe one awake to speak to?—Walk with? —None, but ever lay as drawn? I wonder your story not quite—ripe.

TREE GOD

Here a beautiful man.

(trips over a sandman, scatters it.)

BEATTA

Now a stumbled man. 'Tis a rough-hewn bunch, for what their sculptor give he lumbering take back.

TREE GOD

The Sun won't come. And I see poor to tread.

BEATTA

Blame no clumsy on the Sun. Your foot, like tongue, need lessons—and for Man's sake, I'll cure your clomp, so off heels.

(takes off her shoes to dance in the sand.)

Man's shoes I need in this sand—Elhanan's—over-large, yet in 'em see as he. -- --

(reads marks on Stylite, writes more on TREE'S limb.)

Now storied rod read—write—grab hands and as I do:

(begins her dance lesson with TREE GOD.)

TREE GOD

(watches, slowly mimics the dance steps.)

Your feet learn mine: step, step, step; halt—fast—slow—skip!

(stops abruptly.)

But no more.

BEATTA

Yes more, stubborn god—and why do I like you?—Your over-green promise the sour. I know: my Beloved say he like you, and I dote what he dote on.

TREE GOD

The Sun I'd show new steps—but it stubborn lag where I walked away from it.

BEATTA

Walk away, and this proper for gods?—who sudden seem play a man I know—after such a meeting? Jangling farewell—no name neither—rules: treason to Love herself, who grow angry. Sir Walk-Away: more medicine for you and learn leaping.

(plays an angry bait/balk game with TREE GOD, who follows game, not knowing when to move or not.)

TREE GOD

You make to jump then don't; jump when I guess you stand.

BEATTA

Now do this.

(performs extravagant, difficult dance steps.)

TREE GOD

Arms spread? Fast over men: turn—twist—leap at one from three—

(dances, unsure at first, then gets the hang of it, very well.)

O Sun! Come this sight to see.

BEATTA

Yes, come Sun, and shoo-away my night-humors. I lighten for last lesson, and refine:

(teaches an elegant tap dance.)

Cross toe, little shift, tap-tap-tap—to wake men. Old Tree step with us! Wonderful!

(TREE joins somewhat in their dance.)

TREE GOD

(stops dancing, crosses arms and sits under TREE, to wait.)

Well, the Sun must find me: I won't go look for it. Here by Tree: sit and wait. -- —

BEATTA

(beat, to view the tableau.)

No more of that, up! Go find what you miss! -- --

(overhears herself.)

And pitch my ear hear my tune.

TREE GOD

I'll try link new steps, yet men cringe.

BEATTA

What say? My ears stuffed. Tell me: if find the Sun, how lure it back to you?

TREE GOD

Because it love me, and so brighter shine the trembling air.

BEATTA

Love you to delightful tremble? Elhanan liked near to fall down for me! Drenched, but no rain; ran away. —And do that not sound like a man in love? A woman not go after?

TREE GOD

Here I go—O poor man!

BEATTA

Yes we go: to your Sun and I mine. Yet before, teach you combine your kicks to a rousing style, and we stitch 'em together by foot—and keep up!

(BEATTA, TREE GOD perform rousing tap dance hand-in-hand over, around sandmen, with interjections and replies. TREE beats out a baseline rhythm.)

TREE GOD

Full belly there—
That man be fat—
Man eat the feast—
The feast then pass—
Man eat must chew—
What fat man think—
Man eat enough—
Man eat till sick—

BEATTA

Then preach no spare,
Must soon be lean,
On eve must fast,
The fool remain.
And speak must think,
Not thin man know,
Then make him wise,
Then starve him dumb.

TREE GOD

I move good—and more!

(grabs BEATTA; they dance a show-stopping grand finish.)

TREE GOD

New feet to brave sands and lure the Sun! Sweet Planks, fasten on and to Sun we leap!

(Exit TREE GOD now with nimble feet, pulls TREE with him through sandmen.)

BEATTA

And me—abscond house idols, not sat on neither.

(retrieves Stylite, then speaks to the Rotunda.)

Abundant Round return, and blest push me out! I'll breech land on a larger, lit by an even larger, so men cannot hide.

(speaks to an imaginary Elhanan.)

Sir, look to yourself and rules: think you woman in love not track you down?

Know you none how this old World spin?

(Exit BEATTA with Stylite, dances through the Door.)

(Enter ELHANAN immediately from Door, to starry-skied hillside meadow at Powell's ranch in the mountains above LA, later that night, still wears part of his tuxedo.)

ELHANAN

(yells offstage, through Door.)

I'm over here! Mr. Powell, this gate's open, and I don't see her!

(faces the clearing sky and city lights.)

Every star step out your rainy gown to shine her found—

Mingle the City's sparkle to float me between on this dark hillside—

—a sight Beatta imagined me to prove Love lift feet off ground.

(Enter through Door, THOMAS POWELL, in his 70's.)

POWELL

(yells offstage through Door; then speaks to ELHANAN.)

Abner! Back paddock's left open again, little heifer's out, tracks in wet grasses lead up!

Sir, thank your help: aged things like me can't bear harm come to the young—sweet soft-eyed creature. —Abner, you never-sprout seed!

(Enter through Door, ABNER, a ranch-hand.)

ABNER

Mr. Powell, I just knew I locked it. She hates the barn and wants to live free on the land, like me. But lions or coyote'll smell her out and if she gets—all my fault and I can't take it. She ain't coming down, then I go up—good little brown heifer.

(Exit ABNER, almost to tears.)

ELHANAN

I'll go with him, but'd rather keep mountain lions off you.

POWELL

They taste no boot-hide, and Abner know these dark hills. Stay, and hear me out, young man. Now I refuse Sohlesen's kind bargain for my *Empire*, you say you're barred his majestic presence. Elhanan, take me your humble friend.

ELHANAN

With happiness, Sir—I, your destitute friend.

POWELL

Hardly. Never knew you before—I tell you this tired heart jumped to see you—who'll save the *Los Angeles Empire*.

ELHANAN

I—cannot.

POWELL

(beat.)

Look at L.A. out there I love, we stand high on her gates this last night 'fore fall towers.
There a tower I'd see fall: Sohlesen's, its high god glowering o'er his tight-grip domain.
Give me free sidewalks to stroll where I will.

Elhanan, who run that paper's no god but a Man, and proud o'the title, who not force the
world but together enlist. Bad coffee, stale smoke, penners and beaters and hacks,
shysters, inkers, rollers, drivers, carriers and hawkers all—this motley drain swamps to
bright lands, I used to see.

You see 'em: take *Empire's* hand and lead us there.

ELHANAN

What friendship return for love, a blank refusal?—for reasons manifold, soon manifest.

POWELL

(stiffly sits on the ground.)

Hold your answers. I'm tired-out of this Sohlesen's war, and sit me to ground and rest
eyes' sight. —Bend down.

(moves to bless ELHANAN and then sleep.)

Spangled dew I touch your head, my blessing. Nor ask why—'tis the natural right of old
men—and to a moment doze.

ELHANAN

(places his jacket around sleeping POWELL; speaks alone.)

Jacket 'gainst chill new friend, and rest thee in softest grass, now too my bed.
Ranch-hands be happy men uncovered, and so will I: dew be my roof! Blest of it, twice-
blest by Beatta's rain.

And I return no love? 'Tis bad equity.

Rule: unmerciful, unbroke—overhate Love too much.

I know: I'll here amend it by codicil. Chisel it thus: Wherefore I, Elhanan, love Beatta;
therefore I, Elhanan, may love Beatta—only never see her again! -- --

Then how live?

Beatta: learn me imagining, and I'll bring you forth a statue to bow before. Encase me too
in undying stone and ours a perfect love!

POWELL

What? What word wake my dreams—who comes?

(Enter ABNER.)

ABNER

I found her! Perfect alive, her big brown eyes, poor dumb creature, and safe stowed in a
sheepcote.

ELHANAN

(grabs ABNER and they dance about in each other's arms.)

The heifer's safe? The heifer's safe! Then thrice-blest and leap man.

ABNER

Heifer, Heifer, warmest nuzzler—

(stops the dance for a moment of clarification.)

Wait: you know a heifer is a cow?

ELHANAN

(resumes the dance.)

Yes, a cow, a cow, a dainty little cow!

ABNER

—Who needs a little rope—

(ABNER spins away and Exits through Door; gives a yawp.)

POWELL

(speaks offstage after ABNER; then to ELHANAN.)

Bring clover!

Elhanan, let's walk up to her. Hold my arm, I'll tell my dream: you in the *Empire* Publisher's chair, and I that prophesy.

Say none—you know your present mind, 'tis its future I know.

So climb with me, and I will smile.

(Exit POWELL, ELHANAN, arm-in-arm.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 2

Setting is Bannin Green Park, downtown LA: clear, wet, later the same night. Enter McCURRAN, a pressman, slightly drunk, pushes forward Box, now serves as a Stage, and yells offstage, to PETER.

McCURRAN

Peter no! Here's fit hilltops for public executions:

(pushes Box/Stage to face Sohlesen Tower before him.)

Face stage to Sohlesen's face, sharp-beak spire that peck at clouds.

Rain thunderous rant! It shush no groundlers.

Peter!—Feet wet but throat dry, and where's drink Man!—And find that Mathias.

(Enter MICHAL, pushes ASHER onstage.)

MICHAL

Uncle, amazing—I push you?

McCURRAN

Cap'm good. Treach'ry foots 'round us this battle's eve—undone thank-a-gods—you'll soon hear it, and I go sharp my axes. Look: set you our *Empire's* stage of war.

(Exit McCURRAN.)

ASHER

McCurran, set it in Hades, now I see this dread ledge, more horrible than horrible.

I'll lead hot fighting, hand-to-hand the dusty day this park's battlefield 'gainst thousands swarm out Sohlesen's door—not climb that scaffold.

MICHAL

To read a speech you wrote?

ASHER

Child, imagine see the swollen mass before us: lips ne'er bent by smile, cheeks sallowed by the gape, eyes but squint to wish us hurry.

(puts MICHAL on Box/Stage to stand, gives her papers.)

Michal, stand up here, and wonderful. Hold papers, and perfect. When Sun bring citizens, speak you our protest and save you our newspaper—I thank it, and go.

MICHAL

But that I'm twelve and never heard of newspapers.

MICHAL (Cont.)

(looks out over the park from her height.)

Look: tents rise all over Bannin Green, and little campfires the night before battle.
Is there horses, is there cavalry?

(Enter McCURRAN, speaks offstage to PETER.)

McCURRAN

Screw him down by chains! No guard enough that slinky fellow, who'll by certain run away—and take those crutches.

MICHAL

I'll run to the tent and dream Assurbanipal's here, his mane ribbon-braided *Empire's* colors, snorting to charge. —Or, just watch Flasken and Word and Polyhistor fall apart. Bye!

(MICHAL jumps down and Exits, runs.)

McCURRAN

We done it, caught the brazed enemy: a spy who squeezed through our line, and no greasy squirmer neither—a Sohlesen itself and we have him.

ASHER

McCurrans, you ink-sotted wretch, come here my friend. A lusty voice, born to bellow speeches, hear my command: take papers, climb stage, bellow—I thank it, and go.

McCURRAN

Cap'm, I print 'em. I ain't write 'em—I sure ain't read'n 'em.

ASHER

Read no speech and your press never roll again. McCurrans never eat, drink again—thrown out, obsolete, dry. *Empire's* Duty: do it, battlefield-promoted Lieutenant.

McCURRAN

I won't rank no officer for all the ink in Siam. Peter! I go set court-martials for spies, none but pressmen: more stiff-spined than your common, limpish man. Here's one of us, who manly push the on button, and the off—Peter!

(Enter PETER, an elderly pressman, sweet and drunk.)

PETER

Confession, confession: he a Sohlesen, say he love *Empire*, mean us no harm, but against his own father fight with us—he's so nice.

McCURRAN

Expunge all nice from glossaries. Trickster spy, and tortures'll wring the truth—I his inquisitor, steel myself more drink. Left by imbeciles, he'll sure 'scape. Peter come.

(Exit McCURRAN. ASHER grabs PETER, hands him pages.)

ASHER

Peter, I'm well pleased in you. Reward a mission not to refuse: say this speech. Nature built you for it, fine specimen of a Man—very much I thank it, and go.

PETER

I don't talk much, but a lovely man—they'll chop his head off, but his executions fall asleep and he give 'em blankets and pillows. —
He gave me soup! —McCurran save him!

(Exit PETER giving back pages; runs as well as he can.)

ASHER

Words: writ by, stammered to, behalf of: Idiots—but O the good *Empire*.
Bold spies have heads lopped off, and I not summon manhood to mount mere gallows?
(climbs up to stand on Box/Stage.)
Up. Still doom-shook hands. Read out, and die the death.

(Enter McCURRAN, PETER, NATHAN on crutches.)

McCURRAN

Guilty—I knew it. Fair ransom, thou Reconnoiter, and call him that own that tower, or your people, your wife, to say bring a mammoth golden heap—or die.

NATHAN

Take what come, a solitary man and have no ransoming Beloveds.

ASHER

(reads from papers, his Speech.)
Down with Sohlesen!

NATHAN

Misspoke: Tonight men stand 'top tables—why?
This man's fit height, that table deify.

ASHER

What well-made man, belong not there with these?
Of *Empire*, scarce enough sag, stain or crease.

McCURRAN

Cap'm, punish. Spy, nor molest that man, and Peter watch his charmish ways.
Blood blacker than ink tonight nor I be cheated of my justice.

(offers NATHAN a swig from his bottle.)

Here thou: after me drink, for it soothe the coming slice.

NATHAN

(helps a fading PETER slide to the ground.)

Sir, let me help you a soft slide before a rough drop.

PETER

You're so nice—

(passes out.)

McCURRAN

Wake Peter, though I tire to my bones. 'Fore bladesman, I shall sit, lean, recline, say
prayers: Gods bless our wives: better ones than left us!

Unburden rest, past deadline, gone to press—don't let them squeeze me—

(passes out, on his belly.)

ASHER

You: do you read? Do you say speeches?

NATHAN

You're wet and shivering fall. I help you down.

ASHER

(lets NATHAN help him off the Box/Stage.)

I sometimes fall, and you're strong.

NATHAN

I climb, and sometimes climbing, fall.

ASHER

Off mountains? Break bones? Here a man!

Read this page but a tiny hill to you: climb and save our *Empire*.

NATHAN

(reads papers he takes from ASHER.)

“Down with Sohlesen, by Asher Mathias.”

ASHER

The headline—but what a voice.

NATHAN

You, Asher Mathias? I pictured from your writing a pickled barricado, but find a dashing
—nincompoop. And no bravery say speeches, but old tricks. I'll show you:

(motions to passed-out McCURRAN and PETER.)

First multiply these by hundred to glorious assemblage.

ASHER

These rotted gin-bottles?

NATHAN

Drunken man great as a god—whose god-like eyes you need, Sir, to see these stripped-
down: not modest, but brave, bare-bottom naked. Natural man hold no terror, then speak
them true—for since we wear clothes we know not one another.

ASHER

Since we wear clothes we stomach one another. Naked? You do sabotage, and I lose my
voice. O! Your wish, and see what peek out yon lump's pants:

(points to McCURRAN.)

—A backside not to laugh at, but smile—and one drunken stretch make dogs howl.

NATHAN

You make a point.

ASHER

Point! Speak not of his point, Man, but praise gods this ham flops belly-side! It moves.
Quick, your coat.

(NATHAN removes coat; both hold it, walk backwards.)

No, look not or turn salt. Over shoulder like me, crutch back, step, shut your eyes.

Place it, done. See my face? No more naked: too dangerous round *Empire's* citizens.

NATHAN

This man's face like my father's: I like this one's flamed nose over malicious perfection.

ASHER

Who are you? And you speak for *Empire*? Tonight's downpour quench me.

NATHAN

I relight. Who am I? A spy, Sohlesen's son who's learnt a father's speech to memory:
'Not I, but Time rust antique *Empire*, nuisance of better men to pretend petty law bind
while build a city. Stop weak transfusion of ink for blood, speed Time, and *Empire* fall.'

ASHER

You freeze me, yet what's *Empire* to you and why urge me defend?

NATHAN

Because you love it and I—like you. And would stand beside in gallant endeavor.

ASHER

Sohlesen's son I pictured a horned, seven-toed billionaire—but you're not quite hideous. That's why I cannot speak: a moldy list say what I feel. Your kindness spark dry hearts feel what to say, and where my pen? I'll bleed it dry the speech I'll write, stand taller than towers yawp it out. Those pages, Sir, I no longer presume on you.

NATHAN

You may presume much on me, Sir. -- --

ASHER

-- -- O. Then presume ask edit my ravings, yet before lug these bottoms to a softer deep than deserved, else poor wanderers find 'em and turn stone. Then we write!

(Exit NATHAN and ASHER who pulls off PETER, McCURRAN. Enter BEATTA, runs, leaps, twirls.)

BEATTA

Here Bannin Green I leap; Sun, where are you?
Unshadow that I'll astounded see ten thousand shades purest green flutter their banners,
same I saw twelve lives ago out gray hallways.

(forces herself to stand still; speaks to the absent Sun.)

Sun, I here post unmoved await you come, attest a tree god true that he lure you, and so I Elhanan too. —Sun, you bright announce then come not, leaving poor grooms stand torment at the rail. Most like you see a cloud-wisp and turn round not liking of that garment; or come a new Sun that lose your way; or my grievous fault of wit leach to the tree god's talk who you knew a good plain lump but now avoid. —Sun, come, and I pledge a slower tongue, if with your new coming I be made a new Beatta. —I cannot stay, and'll find other proofs than slow gods.

(begins to run and twirl.)

I'll run to you who bring the Day that I find my Love: step Love's liquor each greening blade and spread its amendment out—for I love! Blush no surprise, Sun, if 'top that hill I greet you a highest salute.

(Exit BEATTA. Enter McCURRAN, PETER; both stumble.)

McCURRAN

Peter, nor pull me. Tell what fangled, gruesome inferno shoot flame in my skullpate?

PETER

Is, the Sun.

McCURRAN

Peter, what phantasmic wild surround us that this diabolic come?

PETER

Is, a park.

McCURRAN

Heard of 'em, thank it was never in one. Tripping shrubberies and stalks, Peter, what are they?

PETER

Are, trees.

McCURRAN

Horror, but see: citizens of this hell and sleep 'neath blankets of *Empire*—all it's good for: cover their bones and I join 'em.

PETER

McCurran, I've got to go.

McCURRAN

You drunk too much last night, nor my example, though was an honorable wake for good, good *Empire*. Civilized toilet in infernal green? Mathias learn better billets or hear officious grumbles o' me, in triplicate. —Sir, your toilet.

PETER

Is, a building.

McCURRAN

No: behold smooth, sinister tower of Sohlesen—facing off 'gainst our pocked palace of *Empire* across. Two facades do war: the Battle of Bannin Green. May it go well for us.

PETER

If you cry McCurran, I'll leak both ends.

McCURRAN

Peter, you're right: stand mannish defiance this Sohlesen, and against his wall: pisseth.

(his back to the audience, he pisseth; continues to speak.)

I, well a man, would show him high my backside; down here water his stone.

PETER

Guards will come—hurry.

(joins McCURRAN with back to the audience, to pisseth.)

McCURRAN

Man shall not be hurried: mark claim, none budge, proceed: shriveled fish up a weak stream. Look: doors open—

(sees the Door open outward.)

I hear they cannibals and eat up the slow and the dribbling—run for your lives!

(Exit McCURRAN, zips up and runs.)

PETER

I won't run. I a man, not young brawn yet true standard-issue. What these tauntings? An inborn function and malice to none. Sure, gods need not, but man must, and stand ground, I will. O, but who come?

(Enter ELHANAN from Door; PETER continues.)

ELHANAN

Farewell Father—home no more. Then Green, provide: bounteous overflow of grasses, breezes, splashes. Where a new family?

(sees PETER facing the tower; goes to him.)

A native dweller: Sir, I beg press your hand.

(PETER screams, zips up, runs and exits.)

ELHANAN (Cont.)

Yes, Honest Sir, teach me bound through your soft world. I'll run tree to tree, climb towered gents, sit the side birds singing Love's under-harmony, and teach songs of Beatta, Beatta, Beatta! Nor that high enough: then Nature raise this Green, sink circled towers, and float above—high sprinkled garden. Abundant brother, wait for me!

(Exit ELHANAN, runs. Enter WORD who plays each of his instruments, in order, a tune. Enter BEATTA, dances.)

BEATTA

My feet imagined hear you, darling imagined Word, but so will Flasken find you—
I wonder Elhanan plays fiddles. Then sprightly—

(dances to WORD's playing.)

—before stern marches, and learn me love-rites: how wing a man once he's point and flush'd.

(Enter MICHAL.)

MICHAL

Mama? Word's found, and you don't call—but hop?

BEATTA

Michal, I swear a hundred oath I heard a thousand echo in this park call my name.

(Enter FLASKEN, pulls POLYHISTOR who is invisible.)

FLASKEN

Naughty Word, and thou Polyhistor, by guilt and combined let a god go by: I punish.
(begins to beat WORD.)

MICHAL

Flasken, you smushed crab, no god was even here—I never saw it.
Mama, you decide who's right, and stop spinning, over what's his name? Elhanan?

BEATTA

Say again; Word: play! You'll love him too Michal, for he—but I lack air to say in my too-high love-state.

MICHAL

I'm very happy, and will meet, but now Word's getting beat.

BEATTA

And what this place? Why pushed out tents by Asher, strange, who well-nigh knock it down when I spoke of—Love?—
I can sniff out Love ten fathom deep—and Asher sudden smell. O, I'll proclaim him, for Lovesicks require every mortal catch it too, medicined of dulcet tune.
(continues her dance.)

MICHAL

Your dulcet hang by a reed but you save him innocent, force Flasken prove a god walked by.

FLASKEN

Provèd thus: searching this idler I passing glance in a basin. There on the water was the god—whose face gaze back at me, goodly distinguished, as I knew it'd look.

MICHAL

Hear this amazing story?

FLASKEN

As I moved, so the god. Then I instruct it pause for rites we enact to keep it. I reach in water to greet it, when abrupt the god ran distract. I jump in to chase, but it gone ever—
fault these slackens fail perform their parts, and so the god lure.
(beats WORD even more, as MICHAL comes to his defense.)

BEATTA

(stops her dance, to question FLASKEN.)

Lure you say? Tell this luring of handsome gods who run away.

FLASKEN

For the sake of these low ones—unthanked—I devise ceremonies their gods them return.

MICHAL

Muddy ceremonies only you see through, floating on top, chaining them under.

BEATTA

Was ever so: holding Beloveds need much lock and bolt, and I'd hear more.

FLASKEN

I step down to balm their rank failings, provide needful control to men, and gods.

BEATTA

Gods too, even men? My ears know you better, and poor gods limping by soon find them kneeling to you—who're much to blame.

Tut, I 'scape no censure neither: guilty too much leaping plans to snare Beloveds, condemn me severe formalities, lashed to ground, and a step somber.

FLASKEN

No god but it be held down—and to get one, we begin new rites.

MICHAL

Where's Polyhistor?

FLASKEN

(looks around, doesn't see POLYHISTOR.)

Word, you told him to run away, and I'll pinch you.

We go catch that faded man; you let no god go by—nor touch horn till we be back.

(Exit BEATTA with formal step. Exit MICHAL, FLASKEN.
WORD resumes tune. Enter ELHANAN.)

ELHANAN

Who charm by music? A natural, and seem familiar, whose hearty pipe summon every fellow. Reverend Sir, attach me where you lead.

(WORD sees ELHANAN and is in awe thinking ELHANAN is a god; plays a magnificent fanfare, then falls to his knees.)

ELHANAN

Sir, are you unwell? Then I'll provide, ask by return join your living here, learn its secret shaded grasses, soft benches, and who else live here, and what they're like in all ways.

Say—. Speak on—. But a word.

(enchanted, as WORD plays a short answering tune.)

Gentle player: a better language of brass and string—then teach it me to pass tender days in your green republic. Slip by hunger? Then we be starving brothers and walk for food.

(walks on, thinks WORD follows, then sees he doesn't.)

-- -- Pardon, I help you up.

(WORD still on his knees, touches grass then the head of ELHANAN. Enter FLASKEN, MICHAL, POLYHISTOR.)

ELHANAN (Cont.)

(helps WORD to rise and walk.)

Gratitude mine, gracious Sir. Lend arm and we stride to meet new fellows, who come.

(bows gallantly to those just entered.)

By bow, highest welcome fresh friends.

FLASKEN

(falls to his knees in happy awe.)

A god, and knees fall, most Exalt One. Was my rites brought it.

ELHANAN

A famine of stumblers? I humble request abide your leafy mansions, and find food.

FLASKEN

Highest, Flasken my name to serve—a ceremony I know ends with a table of plenty. But a moment craft it, I step aside—and you stay.

(rises and steps aside; pulls out papers and writes.)

ELHANAN

May food come first? Well, a young lady unexpected grace this society, and live here with these marveled men? Your face hold a likeness I dote on to see everywhere.

MICHAL

Who are you?

And I'm an old man too, disguised.

And how see or hear these, for I tell you they're just storied inventions, seen and heard only when taught by teachers you don't know.

ELHANAN

Then Love taught me, or this place Love-touched of my beloved Beatta.

MICHAL

You love a Beatta? That answers a lot. Guess what? I know a Beatta, a fancyhead like you. —Twelve years old, play parent.— Sir, you live here, in tuxedoes?

ELHANAN

These I wore an age ago, last night, blest by her eyes and never take ‘em off.

MICHAL

My name’s Michal, what’s yours?

ELHANAN

I can’t remember me before yesterday. Pretty Michal give me a new name.

MICHAL

I will, and choose: Elhanan.

ELHANAN

Elhanan my old name too! Perfect chance in perfect world.

MICHAL

Amazing, but handsome. —You meet here, what’s her name, Beatta?

ELHANAN

No, never to meet: but wander afar her pilgrim.

MICHAL

Not from that protesting crowd?—Or know one in it just as dense? You two should meet. I’ve a quick errand, if you promise stay—I know: take a part in Flasken’s rites, Elhanan.

ELHANAN

Shorten me to Eli, and for you Michal I will. What role?

MICHAL

The god. —It’s easy—Eli—no motivation, just do exact as Flasken directs.

ELHANAN

I can play no god, so poor play a man. Yet, sharp direction shackle leaping lovesongs and sweeten yearning Love. Michal, I’ll play the god, divert praises to Goddess Beatta.

MICHAL

Flasken loves changes to his script—

(sees FLASKEN coming, with pile of pages.)

And here comes a tall stack to keep you a while.

FLASKEN

Rites, to thank my perfect memory, talent, tact? Yes; follow for costume and we begin.

ELHANAN

Farewell, high-storied pomp! Home now in the bosom of honest, simple folk.

(Exit MICHAL, then ELHANAN, FLASKEN, POLYHISTOR.
WORD resumes tune. Reenter FLASKEN, pulls WORD off.)

(Enter NATHAN, to his office high in Sohlesen Building;
searches Box, now his Desk; speaks to his office as if alive.)

NATHAN

Desk move, and window light to ransack drawers my dark-hid jewel.
I promise free you all, my office entire: choose fitter name than mine your towered
height. “Nathan” I’ll scratch off the door, let “Sohlesen” remain—he keep you his sons
when learn banish a living one he banish them all. Cower no more thou gem, but glow
radiant and I’ll soon set you grander to Asher’s hand, for courage, in saying speeches.

(finds and pulls out a 4-5 pound, rough, granite rock.)

Found, dainty jewel! Lopside granite, value more than crowned sparkle, tally my life’s
value when Mountain threw you at my head, yet I lived. I’ll throw you at Asher’s head!
Or— But he’ll think I match your too-much-dull to his facet wit.

I must learn Lover’s Talk: snip words bare, sew suffixes outlandish arms and legs, turn
Anthimerian—“and well Romeo the aboved Handsome”.—I’m too plain a man to play
that, Asher. —Speak his name hear I stay too long from his sight—

(looks out his windows to Bannin Green below.)

So peer down tiny specks this height, yet poor angle. Men climb furnitures today—

(climbs atop his Desk to better see the figures in the park.)

—And I’ll know why. So: up—stand—and I like it!

Love light his single star from the vast, and I tremble. Asher too trembled on high, paled,
stumbled, liked to pass out—and is that not Love?

(climbs down.)

Then hurl me down this harsh splendor to happy dirt—

And diademed rock to Asher go: my giving you him, say all he need know.

(Exit NATHAN, on crutches, with precious rock.)

(Enter to Bannin Green: ELHANAN robed; FLASKEN with
baton, script; WORD plays a miniature march; and
POLYHISTOR invisible: all in ridiculous procession.)

ELHANAN

‘If step must steppèd be, o’er seas the’—

FLASKEN

(beat, waits for ELHANAN to remember his line.)

The god. The god. —No, start again. ‘If step—

ELHANAN

‘If step must steppèd be, o’er seas—the god
Steps, me’—not me, but She! Sea-stepp’d Beatta!
Apart o’er oceans stand, yet see her clear.
A man, brief god, who cannot love—now can!
Beatt’ my thought of you too close by far:
As Mortal to Goddess, as Earth to Star.
Ne’er heard no tongue so high to speak you true,
Then raise my words far heights to beauteous you!

FLASKEN

Sir God—and muffle that slide-box—Sir God:

(motions to script; thwacks baton about, near to ELHANAN.)

I wonder where those lines are writ just here.
They’re not writ here, No! Then not be said here.
See writ, the god: ‘if step must steppèd be’,
So forth, inerrantly. Only. Proceed.

ELHANAN

‘If leap must leapèd be’—
Beatta leap and Eli kneel to thee!

FLASKEN

A note: very good. Yet for our rite—bad.
I labor rescue it by soft correction,
Say kindly, how can man exalt a god
Who’ll not confine its clear proscribèd role?
(beat)
No answer have you that, but that the god
(poses ELHANAN in ridiculous pose.)
Do this, and this: stand like, arms here, feet so.
You see necessity to act as writ—
Exact.

ELHANAN

It’s Love doth tune my words to rhyme!
— ‘Leap gulfs of spinning spheres up high, aloftly.’
My speech now end, the god then faint complain—
Put down that stick—that I was promised food.

FLASKEN

Food for right-spoke gods abundant found
Our ending off'ring feast: the god eat first.

ELHANAN

I'd eat a crumb, and last, if we'd but start.
Quick run through rites and say what next your part.

FLASKEN

Then Man respond by -- -- O, O—what's writ here?
Our time behind, o'erleap to God's more lines.

ELHANAN

What do I hear? Hunger make giddy gods:
I'm switched correct'd to minute syllable,
Shall Man slip by one speck this page? But nay:
Perform your part, I'd hear as writ—exact.

FLASKEN

This wrote in haste, mere flourish sure my pen—
That say, the god require response from Man,
Nam'd song and dance: Grand Rounded Ducdamé.

ELHANAN

Whatever ducdamé thou do, no delay.
You sure know how perform it, perfectly?

FLASKEN

Of course, if here it writ—a moment. Word!
(huddles apart with WORD, POLYHISTOR.)
You Polyhistor, what this ducdamé?

ELHANAN

I hunger see your ducdamé and rumble.

FLASKEN

The god to catch us gave no time t'rehearse,
Force find his measure for displeasure—wait:
You men, we extempore invent. Both watch
My rhythmic movements. What I do, do you.
(along with WORD, invents, improvises, and performs absurd
stances and movements; they compete with each other to
control the performance. BOTH are wholly serious.)

ELHANAN

Where song, I hear no song. Don't it have music?

FLASKEN

By course. Word I compose, you follow me:

(sings an invented tune; WORD takes over the tune.)

A SONG NOT WORDS, THEN COME WEE BIRDS:

TOO FREE ON WING, THEY WILL NOT SING.

NOW LIMBS WE LIME, THAT STOP THEIR CLIMB:

ENSNARE THEM, RING THEM, FORCE TO SING THEM.

WILD TO TAME, BILL TO BILL

THEN ALL IS WELL, ALL IS WELL.

FLASKEN (Cont.)

Pitch tune that high and Word I'll knock you flat.

ELHANAN

All not well, stop. Your too-flat rhyme sit queasy.

It need a manliness: rough, better verse.

The god step in your Rite, and move, and sing:

(sings, performs ducdamé, as WORD plays.)

WEE BIRDS IN SMALL NESTS MUST AGREE:

OLD MEN MUST IN HARMONY LIVE.

LOOK NEAR, LAST YEAR'S NEST EMPTIED BARE,

A MAN I WAS, NOW LOVER AM.

TAME TO WILD, BILL TO BILL

THEN ALL IS WELL, ALL IS WELL.

ELHANAN (Cont.)

Look: Polyhistor take a verse. We'll watch.

(ALL watch, listen to invisible, silent POLYHISTOR; long bored pause, then horror, then relief.)

ELHANAN

Now I've a taste, I wonder you don't starve:

Hunger forgot, I'll feast on ducdamé!

(Exit ELHANAN, with leaps; WORD follows him.)

FLASKEN

All ruins! Hush come back: know one who sing in

Disaster, weep for all his life hereafter.

(Exit FLASKEN, pulls POLYHISTOR after him.)

(Enter MICHAL, BEATTA to different part of Green.)

MICHAL

Over here Mama, your surprise. Hurry or you'll miss it, or scare him away—what?

BEATTA

(walks using dance-steps; writes down her movements.)

I catalog every infatuate step, soon heave a treatise of 'em on the world that all study themselves into Love! Have they books in Sohlesen, read they books?

MICHAL

He's gone. Mama! Where do you go?

BEATTA

To proselytize Love's Creed to all the Green—then Elhanan!

(Exit BEATTA with dance steps and twirls. Enter FLASKEN, WORD, POLYHISTOR stealthily; WORD plays.)

FLASKEN

(tries to take WORD'S instruments, to stop him playing.)

Give those horns or it find us—for more climbing, more yelping?

MICHAL

Flasken, what did you do with the god?

FLASKEN

We let it go, for a better one.

MICHAL

Snagglebrain, there is no better. Elhanan! Good, he comes.

(Enter ELHANAN, still in his robes.)

FLASKEN

O! Run away Word, Polyhistor—run!

(Exit FLASKEN, WORD, POLYHISTOR, they run.)

ELHANAN

Prettiest Michal! These rites be wonderful! More leaping music, and Men I come!

(Exit ELHANAN, with leaps.)

MICHAL

Wait! Will nobody stay put?

(Exit MICHAL, runs after ELHANAN.)

(Enter BEATTA, pulls ASHER onstage, away from a fight.)

BEATTA

Skirmish no more with Sohlesen guards, but persuade your rabble: clarion-voiced.

ASHER

They started it, push our speeches away o'that dark tower. This is a public park!

BEATTA

That's the Asher I know: balmy. Yet confess more's here than *Empired* passion, for your wind shift direction an odor of—Love.

ASHER

That word smell me a mute.

BEATTA

—A mackerel. If you Love, then shower poems of it on this crusty earth and grow us fragrant petals, but you must speak it out.

ASHER

For that condition, quiet is best.

BEATTA

—Say the fox whose mouth is stuffed with the chicken's head. I official accuse you of Love, that you not deny. Know you Silence's brother be Consent.

ASHER

And Hector's sister, the Plague.

BEATTA

(comes upon the Box, now the Stage; then calls offstage.)

Why here's your stage: Imperials come! Have hearts inflamed for besieged *Empire!*
Asher now to it: either brave climb and speak, or declare me your love's name.

(Enter MICHAL, who carries the granite rock and leads
NATHAN, on crutches.)

MICHAL

Sir, that man's my Uncle Asher.

NATHAN

Dear Michal, thanks, and to carry the rock. I'll take it back nor hold it long.

BEATTA

Mr. Sohlesen—just Nathan—what do you here, led by my darling child?

NATHAN

Michal your daughter? This man her uncle, then Beatta you—

BEATTA

Sister. Know you my brother Asher?

(beat, of realization.)

Two reek till my eyes water. You brother to Elhanan, I remember: a whole school of 'em!

NATHAN

(presents ASHER the granite rock; ASHER takes it.)

Asher, this I rescued from the tower. For courage, take of me this rock.

BEATTA

You a rock, unspeakable Brother?

ASHER

I speak my speech. Take new courage of you, Sir, and clamber up.

(climbs up on Stage with papers, rock.)

MICHAL

I know a god who'd be here, and Mama: do, not, move.

(Exit MICHAL, runs.)

ASHER

Gather all near! Let me sit close to you—

Hear Friends: Our breaths too rank offend the Great
Sohlesen's high nose: away we're push'd.

That cordon twine but guards frail Sohlesen,
That when I've said my blessed speech, I'll leap

To jail. Then join with me in dungeons deep
My Sisters, Brothers of *Empire*. We shackled,
Strong mark our fight by more than breaths. I here
Bellow and raise a stink imperial!

ASHER (Cont.)

I kneel, 'This Sohlesen pull down *Empire*
 So raise in 'st place a wide and world-fused bland,
 Loyal to none—Los Angeles dissolve.'
 Diffused we read across the globe and yet
 Of neighbor none?—till he's done hurt then watch
 Them swarm like flies 'round tragedy until
 The next fresh harm, then fly. But here next day
 A blank is told: no news the wounded salved,
 Fair justice won, hurt lives made good that would
Empire tell, rally aid that make it true.

I stand, 'This Sohlesen pull down *Empire*
 And raise in 'st place a thin and inward news
 Loyal its clan and not community.'
 Dare I disdain that we our lives thus screen?
 To smaller streams our river backward run,
 Soon those on shores apart forget our speech,
 And then we merely yell. Yet our paper,
 Thou grand mixed multitude of City's breath,
 Force us a noseful what we'd not—yes force!
 Some sour'd, yet cure our lives from cul-de-sacs.

My last page lost, I was to compliment
 This Sohlesen, encumber'd not by us.
 A man thus free who wants his blest state ours:
 Free all obligation: stand best a man
 Himself alone, that seek his own content.
 Free from paper dare tell he belong
 But one door down his neighbor and his town.
 So man who live for self alone miss what?
 A handshake, make our life worth living it.
 Your hands I claim my own from our *Empire's*
 Most fragile art of close and patterned place.
 I'd stir your hearts to storm that stony keep,
 (can't find last page of speech; finds the rock.)
 But find no page, just rock new given me.
 I'll read its rugged face as tablets old:
 Here writ what I feel—for our paper: Love.
 Newspapers note down days that lovers join,
 List lives now gone where's lost the witty wise,
 Tell ribbons cut, and tables set, and school
 Games played, then sad tale told, and happy too.
 All these alone home papers know how say:
 Small life's details we note—yay Love itself,

ASHER (Cont.)

So grow our love for those who're one door down.
 So sift humaneness from attention paid.
 'Tis Love breaks out, and Love I feel: op'n Love's
 New eyes see you my friends: ink-black'd, smoke-brown'd,
 Squint in the brightest sun we never saw,
 And think us beautiful. Los Angeles:
 Magnificent, and her *Empire*—knit me
 To that. Grab hold our city's knotted rope,
 Warp and woof to strange and woven cloth
 Fit wrapp'd round shoulders all, we shout as one:
 Hurray, Hurray! Long live our great *Empire*!

NATHAN

(helps ASHER down from Stage.)

My honor to help you down, Great Sir.

BEATTA

(kisses ASHER.)

Who take a kissing. What say of him, Nathan? —Asher, all words used up? —Mannish quiet descend that appear handsome, but prove tiresome. Jailers teach you speech.

ASHER

Jail! Yes we go, and escape tortures.

NATHAN

I with you.

BEATTA

I your bail, after joyful, deprived sufferance a time. —Then what happen?

ASHER

Michal comes with me to the ranch, so to run next door and brush that poor foal all night long. Then I've a weekend cutting firebreaks in the canyon: too much green from too much rain its absence see burn.

BEATTA

Celebrate a jail-break clearing creation? Pardon, I gave good warning.

(to NATHAN.)

Sir, chop you trees?

ASHER

He plastered, constrained by plaster.

NATHAN

Yes. A leg only not arms. I'd love to.

ASHER

Thank you Nate—hot work, but glad of your company.
When freed from jail, Bete, we'll to your house for Michal, who comes.

(Enter MICHAL, FLASKEN, WORD, POLYHISTOR.)

BEATTA

And protégées.

ASHER

Who we flee: I'll lay my body in roads, take the jailer's lash, but not one second with those—not invited to ranch, or that new one I saw leaping and singing. But adieu.

(Exit ASHER, NATHAN.)

MICHAL

Only these I found, and missed Uncle's speech. I wanted to kiss him.

BEATTA

He be kissed soon enough. We go too, and leave behind the horrid god Flasken tell of.

FLASKEN

Beyond telling.

MICHAL

'Cause he take no orders. They lost him somewhere—experts in that.
—A strange god, who kept singing something like 'Beatta'—and wore tuxedos.

BEATTA

Tuxedos?

MICHAL

Amazing. You count footsteps to praise him, and he walks right in front of you: Eli.

BEATTA

Who Eli?

MICHAL

Your Eli—that you pine for—Elhanan.

BEATTA

Eli is Elhanan. You met him? Know him? When-where-how and not told me? He's here?
Tuxedoed, still fit him well? Say my name? —Speak child or be whipped.

MICHAL

Mother, Mother—yes Elhanan—and I made him play the god.

(Enter ELHANAN with purpose; doesn't see BEATTA.)

BEATTA

O how it become a god be played by a man. Who walk here?
Him, in bright array, and I in sloven disrepair run away.

FLASKEN

It comes! Quick away—

MICHAL

That's it and enough! —Flasken, by ear, you stay and the god obey.
Mama, you go nowhere, but step aside to fix you up and watch the god.

ELHANAN

Man run free when hear no gods, while gods ceremonial confined? This robe don't fit,
and here amend me mortal.

(takes off robe; gives extravagant gestures as he speaks,
unaware as FLASKEN, WORD obey those gestures behind his
back with runs, leaps, twirls, collisions, rubs.)

A man, I'll by rites enshrine my goddess Beatta: encompass that far sea, to that far
mountain, hush all, let swirl the sparkle air anticipate, enclose all as palms meeting manly
together—palms cold so rub them warm to worship.

(sees FLASKEN, WORD collide, rub against each other.)

What do you do? New rites? I embrace it to join close throng!

FLASKEN

(takes ELHANAN'S hands, slides them into his pockets.)

Hands well fit pockets. Now hear: you the god.

Thus stand still and take venerate: the only warrant given man above gods.

ELHANAN

I am a man!

(kneels, rubs dirt on his face; FLASKEN, WORD do same.)

Dirt smear my face, and feel a man again. By proof: my body a man's, and disrobe
dissembling shirt!

(rips off shirt; FLASKEN, WORD obey and do same.)

No, Sirs, obey no more my command, and cover venerable bones.

(helps put FLASKEN'S, WORD'S shirts back on them.)

I'll prove a man: kneel to my goddess—who I may see only by imagined eye:
Appear lovely Beatta!

MICHAL

(shoves recalcitrant BEATTA to face astonished ELHANAN.)
Your prompt, and push you out.

BEATTA

Well met, men of earthy knees, my name called: what would you?

MICHAL

Sir: here your Beatta—my mother. These are for other gods, and I need a rest!

FLASKEN

Heavens prevent find gods like that. Better seek ever, find never.

(Exit MICHAL, leads off FLASKEN, WORD, forgets
POLYHISTOR. ELHANAN tries to follow as one of them.)

BEATTA

(finds Elhanan's shirt; examines it; holds it up.)

O Sir—your back lack a shirt and go about naked. Come here and take it from my hand,
for if you join my daughter's ragged band you must answer my questions.

ELHANAN

(knows he's caught; stops to face BEATTA.)

I'd have my shirt to cover; vow but I'm a modest man.

BEATTA

Yet missed buttons not cover much. And how will your goddess—what's her name,
Beatta—answer you, so attired?

ELHANAN

Please? I'm much exposed, to show I am no god, but mere a man.

BEATTA

Muzz your mere, so please you.

You unshirted prove but you dislike shirts. I've seen gods wear rays of the Sun—only—
and men so go about with no shirt on, it need no comment. Here take:

(hands shirt to ELHANAN, who puts it on.)

You profess a man, yet play well a god. And when a god, raise you to a man's estate.
I throw up my hands, but propose to find you out: god or man, genus to species, and
you'll not leave until I do.

ELHANAN

I—would not, be left alone with you.

BEATTA

(points out the left-behind POLYHISTOR, invisible.)

Polyhistor here our chaperone. And you a man like these?

Then I'll examine you by their creaks and groans: tell me what story was't you fell out of.

ELHANAN

I, bare, remember my name.

BEATTA

(examines ELHANAN.)

I lure your memory by example: not Flasken's precise: body bare-covered, hair knotted, face fuzzled: I suspect an untidy god cobbled you of rough noun and verb.

ELHANAN

What?

BEATTA

Word's, fanfare, deafen, you! But it's Polyhistor you most resemble: wishing disappear.

ELHANAN

Certain only, like them, I'm a man.

BEATTA

My verdict not given. Now I look at you, perhaps no god made you, but doting goddess: guessing what a man is. —No, what she or any woman know of manliness?

ELHANAN

Seem know more than men themselves.

BEATTA

Not near so wise, hence I cannot catalog you.

ELHANAN

By truth, I am a misplaced man like these: wander in rags, sleep 'neath skies, pray see again my lost goddess—for you classed me right: goddess-made.

BEATTA

A maid I doubt. And she comes not when you call?

Then a dim maid I'll hunt down and scratch her eyes out.

ELHANAN

No—she's perfect, from first I saw her a statue in the rain, where she may now serene stand. Like these men, my heart command me rites to her: leap, bow, kneel in love.

BEATTA

Love!—No, for I remember you: afflicted by Rules Against Love. Dare not speak it.

ELHANAN

My goddess, made me an honest man, so confess—clarification—of that Rule, that allow a tiny speck of—Love: by dread proscription that Love be apart—ever afar.

BEATTA

For lovers, a breath apart's too far, thus 'Afar'. Flaw, flaw in your amendment—for a dangerous word this 'Afar'. Append an Afar to Love and your Rule walk on its head to talk by its toes. Tell me what distance by league, mile, cubit, fathom, and inch this Afar, for the World's too narrow to hold my notion of it. And now if you say you push Love Afar, I say it's 'cause you keep close love for Another.

ELHANAN

I love no other I assure you.

BEATTA

Come, if you're a man, like men you'll not confine Love to one but spread it multitudes wide and thin.

ELHANAN

I've not that relation with Love.

BEATTA

It's plain: a man, you mistake the defining of Love to disavow what you know not.

ELHANAN

I know Love plain, believe me.

BEATTA

Make your goddess believe it—whose cheeks I'll gouge for she slid here inside:
(motions to ELHANAN's chest.)
—no heart to feel Love, she over-loving love keep it all herself.

ELHANAN

Think well of her, a heart I have.

BEATTA

Stolen out you unaware, as many men before, and now feel it none.

ELHANAN

Stolen yes, but Love suffered the more.

BEATTA

No, you suffer no Love, but stand one whose arm's cut off yet feel it counterfeit an itch;
or a Lover whose pain anticipate too much when Mortality cut all off.

ELHANAN

I will stand all such pain.

BEATTA

Yet fear too much your Beloved's pain: name her a wilted, coward flower who hide when
come showers—or a goddess who rather fear the rain than stand in it!

ELHANAN

Beatta -- -- she, no coward, but great.

BEATTA

(beat.)

Step near: my anger to this goddess abates. For I should have seen at first the germ of this
Afar: you are, as they kneeled to: a god—giving afar, pats-on-the-head Love.

ELHANAN

I know none of that Love. The god's lines quoted but not stuck.

BEATTA

I've seen actors lead an audience brilliant suppose they saw Jupiter himself, but these
rustics not so easy fooled. They saw a god; I know certain last night a woman saw same.

ELHANAN

I the poorest player, these the dimmest house—I cannot speak for the lady—say only I
played a god, am not one.

BEATTA

Then you play love a goddess, for answer with care: how love a goddess if not a god?

ELHANAN

I don't, know, or know me that was, now new, strange, whirled around a dizzy creature
who love—and whichever say your wit.

BEATTA

O what woman in love cannot think, speak, and win all she will?
But Sir, to end: your case remember me of a lively fellow very like, and as confused.
He claims be a god, but knows none what a god is, and I wonder.
You heard tell of this greenhorn last night, out the mouth of the very monster you
overthrew.

ELHANAN

You met the tree god, the young conqueror?

BEATTA

A blank object.

Bows well, learns a passable step, and draws in sand unnumbered facsimile of an unmade man, for it know not how to make one.

I met the Tree too, and together not more prosperous than your poor brothers.

Who, now I consider, are no kin to you—for you more resemble the tree god. And when I brood on his story, you soon arrive: both befuddled whether god, man or what you be.

ELHANAN

If he my brother, let him shine favored who win the world. I, quiet brother, a man.

BEATTA

You smile. Court rise for my verdict. I never seen a god so smile—smile conceal a heart or uncover unaware, smile by lips that may be pressed to kiss, smile framed by bristled beard so well that women give up the attempt.

I know not for gods above the Earth, but for men they -- --

(carried away, she remembers herself.)

They live upon the Earth, so I rule.

ELHANAN

Like a learned court, you say and don't say what you mean.

BEATTA

I lack evidence—but hear how I propose get it: a simple test divine god from man, shown me by the poor, sapling beanpole—and 'tis this: you must make a man.

ELHANAN

I don't want to make a man.

BEATTA

Not yours to choose, for two underwrit brothers need emendation—that I undertake, at my workshop, now my house—where, saving labor, you two together will make your man—if you be gods.

ELHANAN

Must even gods?

BEATTA

No god earn its name till it make its man, and your goddess will never stoop to schoolboys clutching failed exams, or be proved no god at all.

ELHANAN

I know little how to make a man.

BEATTA

It's easy. Look at most of 'em: parts misshaped, joints misplumbed.
Ten times out of five a god'll throw a lump of stuff on a wheel to spin—it always turn out
a man though the god couldn't shape a pot.
And by this a man's made, or not; and by that you're made a god, or not.

ELHANAN

Beatta. I would not know which, for either turn tyrant.
Whatever I am s'that will not last long.
Aside my Rule's wisdom, its edict close all: Sick come, then I go, wait out its ravages
alone—farthest afar ever charted. Avoid break unbearable—I invoke rule—go.
(turns to leave.)

BEATTA

(calls him back, with force.)

Mistake not your goddess Beatta—formidable to a controlling fault.
Hear my concordance on your rule: a Time spin round when Sick come, when what differ
god from man palling show. That Time's not this time. This Time's Bright Day who
decree its own rule: to spend it fleetly and discover if you be god or man—so knowing,
know your heart, your love, and what to do with them.

ELHANAN

I'm undone by famine, by feminine.

BEATTA

Who give no quarter or how the world turn good? Say you come to my workshop.

ELHANAN

Wherever's Afar, I don't think it's at your house.
Yet, feel I owe a bow to the young godling. Alas my fallen state: avoid sharp whiffs,
muffle rumbles, and call me unfit.

BEATTA

Then eat, refresh, and after to my house! Come when this Sun ends its workday and
relaxing unshirts, revealing its ruddy self to find common like to th'rosy creatures it's
gazed on all the day, and dusky bless.

ELHANAN

Green's my allegiance and I would not leave.

BEATTA

Nor will not. My house long ago was part of this Green: 'Mr. Bannin's Greenway
Pleasure Park To The Sea'. When it was broke up, a parcel was sold and walled-off where
a house and garden've come down to me—very green.
Come to not leave the Green—sunset—promise not be late.

ELHANAN

(beat.)

By the goddess, I promise: I will come, not be late.

MCCURRAN

(from offstage.)

No Peter, never stop me!

BEATTA

Quick to your feed and bath—take Polyhistor's hand—I'll point out my house along the
Greenway—you point out how honest you are in promises.

(Enter McCURRAN, PETER. Exit BEATTA, ELHANAN,
POLYHISTOR.)

PETER

Come back, don't say it McCurran, do not, O do not!

McCURRAN

I go to die.

Los Angeleze provide tar pits—then to 'em!

Peter, our battle rout, cap'm taken, press stilled: then fall mighty *Empire!*—just a little
hole need swallow me up.

PETER

O!

McCURRAN

Throw me in seething oil!

Mingle my bones with mastodons—

Sink me by saberèd teeth into pitchèd night: For Man, inky death is best—where the pits?

There, thirty thousand years hence, let them unsubmerge my immortal frame, disentangle
to display, and note me: Pressman—Extinct!

PETER

I will not hear. *Empire's* not yet fall'n, we have hope.

McCURRAN

No hope, and why to fear death? —Peter: jump with me.
Death: pish! Fear it not or kneel its lackey.
Thirty thousand year? By damnable hell, I weren't sensible a hundred back, now wail
lamentation lay senseless a hundred on?
We start press to ink th'day's edition: last page roll and off switch press: Nature's way.
I switch off.
Tar pits too far for my intent, so here lay me down, and die.
(stiffly goes down to the ground.)

PETER

Stop, get up, O McCurran!

McCURRAN

Close my eyes, and to all say—
(gives a last breath, and 'dies'.)

PETER

-- -- What? I can't stand it, don't die. Terrible, please! O, O, O!
(kneels, mourns, composes McCURRAN's body a while.)

(McCURRAN suddenly sits up with loud breath.)

McCURRAN

So that's Death.
I'm not too proud to say, Peter, I liked it not. Dark, like covering tar, I liked not at all.
We breathe! Blood flow!
(stands up; helps PETER to stand.)
I stand, and from this time learn philosopher like every man: to horrible fear Dreaded
Death!—Ever push it off a good twenty, thirty year.
But I hungry, thirsty, and are liquors to eat and meats drink 'fore some faraway end.
Friend, a voluptuary I feel myself coming into—and say I'm thirsty?
Then take my arm, and let's to it!

(Exit McCURRAN, PETER arm-in-arm.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 3

Setting is Tree God's world of unending sand dunes—all covered with sand men that he has drawn; near sunset. Enter TREE GOD, TREE, who try to carefully walk between the sand men.

TREE GOD

Is't true, Old Tree, I to make a man?—who sit, breathe? —This one? —I drew that? Then none of these, and I bare contain my Will through this mince-step election, feel a second rip'ning to fresh-create!
Far dune, I'll freckle your face golden men till draw Him immaculate—

(Enter STEM from below, a sand man, asleep, on a bier, covered in sand; TREE walks to stand over him.)

TREE GOD

What, he's found?

(walks to examine STEM.)

That one? Lumpish scribble of all the worst: face scored of lines, nose a broken branch, ears flap, jawbone fit two.

Yet now I see him, I think him too surpassing great to take actual breath, or stand or walk. Is it not a lapse to make him rise? Best leave him profuse grains of shining sand—or what part God from Man?

(sees TREE disagree with him.)

Yes I hear you, but not that one. Lines—yet may of eyes too much wonder-stretch'd or mirth-squint. Nose—reset a more manful bent. Ears jut, but won't he hear well? And chin arrive a step before him his herald. O see him Dear Tree! His out flaws tell an in without, and look him handsome. Him my Will will make a Man!

Attend him here by the Sun's crimson glow, and to say he's found, then swift return I go.

(Exit TREE GOD, leaves TREE, STEM off to the side, somewhat unseen to those in the following scene.)

(Enter, from below, BEATTA, NATHAN, ASHER to Asher's old room, turret of Mathias House, Beatta's home.)

BEATTA

Up here Asher, hide your dusty chest. Nate, can you climb, and pass a crutch. Today I spent time with an old man so faded I worry of his god and would read that story again to make sure. Yes Asher, up and help me look. Nate, what think you of Asher's abandoned turret room, high in the house of Mathiases?

NATHAN

As one enchanted hold a sleeping prince.

BEATTA

Who wait a kiss from a lame one to wake.

ASHER

Torment no men, Sister.

BEATTA

Painful torment's due all men for one who promise to come then not come.

NATHAN

(sees BEATTA'S ferocious glare mid-sentence.)

I hope Eli come—I know he'll come.

BEATTA

For men's sake. Where that chest of old writings?

ASHER

You need read no chested story.

(calls down below, through trap door.)

Michal! Your one-minute-more packing is up.

BEATTA

Michal a girl and subject to no rush.

(closes trap door they entered through; smells both men.)

Besides—close door—I your new jailer and O: two aromas give an authentic air of it, so open balcony.

(opens Door, now a balcony door to outside.)

ASHER

If I find your musty writing may jailbirds fly?

BEATTA

If your wings work, for your beaks are yet in chains—which grow your feet cold, so I go to work on you. Nate, by this slant-orange light, is not Asher 'passing handsome?

NATHAN

Yes, most handsome.

ASHER

Hear Michal call us?

BEATTA

No. Here's your treasure box:

(pushes forward Box, now Asher's trunk; opens it.)

Shards and scraps of stories we found growing up in our father's deserts.

ASHER

Which none here bring to life.

BEATTA

(pulls out an brittle papyrus scroll to read.)

Crack open encrusted seals and read: Here a king called Ammon-Kish, remember Asher?
A kingdom of one: himself and dined with birds. Do you dine alone Nate?

NATHAN

Days ago, I dined with birds. Falling off the mountain, I lay by a lake and ate with an eagle, who saw his dinner swim, fell the sky after it, and with streaming feathers walked ashore for our feast: the eagle his catch, the man his bread.

BEATTA

Sir, you should tell stories!—And with fine feathers in 'em, for they make fine birds. You solitary climb mountains? D'you know Asher writes a newspaper that embrace five million a day yet lives a perfect monk?

ASHER

Your too-quick questions stop up our mouths.

BEATTA

(finds and reads from a broken clay tablet.)

Here's one I remember: a hero whose name we never found. Five hundred wives and loved none, dressed him in costliest robes—kept his ladies dull. Loved only himself in a glass: two reflected cocks refusing the pit t'admire the other's plume. For birds of like-feathering may love each other—only leave a handful to love women for my sake. Have you been in love, Nate?

NATHAN

Yes, a brother's love for a man I now learn's in some danger.

BEATTA

I won't harm a hair—but hang on your neck for loving him. Asher, say he's perfect.

ASHER

(finds a dusty, wooden chest inside Box.)

Here's Polyhistor's writing you look for.

BEATTA

(to ASHER; takes the chest from him.)

You will confess love before leave this room: by feather, your goose is plucked, and I'll have the last one for my cap.

(opens chest and reads from inside, not touching text.)

Polyhistor: writ on eggshell!—and we called his, the Birdsong God—'cause always came fluttered music. Now more dust than shell, and its markings fade, so its man—
And man's love-talk: Nate, have you a love more than brotherly?

NATHAN

More, yes, though my father say less: reasons that my hand in my Beloved's provide neither two men a combination complementary.

BEATTA

With my compliments, I'll refute him better raisings.—

(sets an imaginary dinner party.)

Here: Ammon-Kish invite No-Name and Birdsong God to dinner table, where plate complement cloth, cup saucer. Yet, raise eyes to table-center, where stand two silvered candlesticks, alike-carved in baroque plumage: a matched set, that grand complete each the other's shining brilliance, and let the candles go by.

ASHER

Tie your proofs in taffeta-bows, we climb down and snatch that child, ready or no.

BEATTA

Yet I'd hear again antique tweets.

ASHER

Beatta, wake no god—we go.

BEATTA

Felt a breeze from the open door? Motes sparkle, the god yawns announced: too late. Late! Eli may even now walk below—O that he does!

(stands a reluctant ASHER, NATHAN next to each other.)

Here stand hand-to-hand, silver-carved, and greet the god. To my catch, down I swoop!

(Exit BEATTA, below.)

ASHER

Woman prime us to speak, yet left alone Men sputter out. Will you go?

NATHAN

Asher, this god comes: let's wait silent, watch reverent, though I've no knack t'see it.

ASHER

None see this faded god, though its presence plays on the world—and look: it starts.
Nate, see out my eyes where this room turn to vast barren earth, 'cept we stand upon a
last patch of vernant moss.

Ferns sudden push by our feet and high as trees, unfurl mammoth fiddles that fret
clematis and trumpet's vine, strummed by the god's exhale to a sweet-forgot harmony
taught it by drowsy birds.

The high air falls small bright whimsies: the god stretch awake, arrive!

(ASHER, NATHAN gasp, kneel, hold hands, watch as the
invisible BIRDSONG GOD enters, walks across, exits. THE
MEN, reverently astonished and excited, exhale then kiss.)

ASHER

Nate—I am most pluck'd, for I love none, but thee.

NATHAN

Asher, my Love tackle you on this green, or if no, then quickest down and fastest to your
ranch, where cast, crutch, or none, I'll carry you over threshold even thrown over my
shoulder, then: bedfellow, beloved.

ASHER

Michal! Nate hand down your crutch, and close follow.

(Exit quickly ASHER, NATHAN, below.)

(Enter to sandy dunes TREE GOD, BEATTA who carries a pail
of water; they walk through sand men to TREE, STEM.)

TREE GOD

No, he's much better than these, and leap to find the beautiful He.

BEATTA

Where this perfection? I'll bedevil him Man's exemplar, break-promises all.

TREE GOD

Slosh again: what is in that pail?

BEATTA

What shrink any man, dumped on him, cold.

TREE GOD

Tree, does he lay perfect as I left him? Look, 'tis He!

BEATTA

(examines STEM.)

Happy-faced at least. But when he turn sad, promise stay by him or he turn poor: earn his wandering leg honest. I'll prepare him rain on his road, and sprinkle.

(pours a little water from her pail onto sleeping STEM.)

TREE GOD

Is that water? Banished of this world, take it back up.

BEATTA

Even gods can't do that. And a fault to banish water, that temper his sand a good mud—to compound an upright, solid man.

(sees that her water has uncovered STEM'S nakedness—

though not to our eyes; clothes STEM with a leaf from TREE.)

O—water drop expose stones, and Good Tree borrow me a leaf for Man's modesty and our eyes.

TREE GOD

(holds forth the twig he uses to draw men in sand.)

This twig does not 'pound', but artful sculpts.

BEATTA

Just knock a Man together. The hard part's his: for once made, he must erect himself remade what he will.

TREE GOD

I like not that. Man shall stand content his given ground—

BEATTA

—Content a clod.

TREE GOD

Live pleasant his likeness of me—

BEATTA

—A coin stamped of your head, pleasant spent.

TREE GOD

Here, simple live by me and Tree, alone.

BEATTA

Make a man and you'll not long be alone! Know you what they do?

—Make more of themselves.

TREE GOD

I never heard that, and like not believe. I'll hide the twig, he shall not use it.

BEATTA

He shall have his own twig, and do as he please. Now pour, for wet make the man.

(Enter ELHANAN. BEATTA sees him and falters, pours all water out that creates a muddy pile around STEM.)

ELHANAN

(quickly catches BEATTA in his arms.)

A fair time to catch your fall, plead forgive my late, but I could not find you—and I's chased through your trees by a lioness, or a bear!

BEATTA

And they not catch you? I forgot tell this was the old zoo of the Greenway, and at dusk glimpse skulking beasts. None forgiven your late—danger, but O you took no harm?

ELHANAN

None from creature, thank you. In peril yet. —Are there any young gods near?

BEATTA

By sight, cross my Green border to his Gold: watch sand get in your shoes.

ELHANAN

I do see: dunes, burnished-curved, ripple all ways past sight! What cover them? Men! Infinite lay, 'cept that there standing? The god?

Then hail high greetings, great Sea-Bender: my honored bend to you.

(gives a magnificent, extravagant bow to TREE GOD.)

TREE GOD

Where learned you that bend? Watch this one -- -- ever seen its like?

(performs Elhanan's earlier bow that Beatta taught him.)

ELHANAN

I seem recognize it, add this flourish back to you.

(adds to the original bow with improvised grandiosity.)

TREE GOD

I'm cheated of good instruction: show, show me how—will you stand by me?

ELHANAN

This no terror Beatta, but a god who takes victory by charm.

BEATTA

Barrelfuls. And here, meet too the god's singular arboretum.
(walks ELHANAN to TREE, that he had not noticed.)

ELHANAN

Beatta, what amazement is this? You ransack my addled head—give dear memory substance. Old Dahvith Tree: what set you here? I thought to never see you again.

BEATTA

I read no name given this tree.

ELHANAN

No, it's sure not the same, though as sprout of the same fig!
Its identical stood by my house, and my mother'd sit me under, a fallen nut, fold clothes, sing songs, and she named it Dahvith Tree, a name sweet to me, and by honor call thee.
(almost to tears, gives simple bow; TREE returns bow.)

BEATTA

Antique trees save curtsies in 'em loud.
(stands by STEM to point him out.)
But brave benders think: here one by right owe his bows, nor pay 'em 'till two here sprout him up a sapling Man. Matched-brothers stand beside and Tree I beg ink and limb.
(produces her twig, as TREE gurgles sap, straightens limb.)

TREE GOD

(pulls ELHANAN over to see STEM.)
Come, here's He—looks he perfect? A crease there, that's not right: he's not bad?

ELHANAN

No—good, perfect as you say, see: good strong feet.

BEATTA

Not too strong, or make him a rambler. Now that Man's a good ripe mud, step in and proper shape him and I'll note you. -- -- Please you start. -- -- Neither gods or men but precious boys not get pretty ribbons dirty. Pardon.
(walks past them to STEM; starts to shape mud.)

ELHANAN

Beatta, you too quick take our work—yet shape a fine toe, too fine.
Amend your deciphers and we'll craft one infinite more fair: a Woman.

BEATTA

What god first made Woman, be a god got in this world.

ELHANAN

Woman too high a leap at perfection, so start baser stuff: a Man.

BEATTA

Silence that, or this man learn bad habit.

ELHANAN

Sir God, we are shamed, and must to mud. Remove, Beatta, to your pen—a smudge.
(wipes gently some mud off of BEATTA'S face.)

TREE GOD

(gets his hands into the mud; ELHANAN joins him.)
Mud is good! Handfuls here and here.

ELHANAN

We muddy mason a Man, and stack little bricks.

BEATTA

Then build a house-husband, who impress makers-marks on new bricks t'outlast their
brickyard, and is that not fine?

ELHANAN

Pass mud if you will -- --
(ducks as TREE GOD throws mud at him; he retaliates.)
But better aim, or I miss mine.

BEATTA

Gentle gods, hear, and throw mudpies? I neither smile at you.

TREE GOD

Mud is great!

BEATTA

Look to yourselves; this will not serve, and you'll have lawsuits for poor join'ry.
We want method; lack a model man. Stand up both, inspect for proper specimen:
(examines muddy ELHANAN, TREE GOD.)
Alas—no, and no. Then hear: necessity compel decree the model man, be me.

ELHANAN

I promise Beatta, you will not do for a man.

BEATTA

Yet play your necessary man, and stand one thus.

BEATTA (Cont.)

(strikes a pose; motions to ELHANAN, then TREE GOD.)

You: examine me a statue, take dimension, geometries draw, and solve me down to atomies. Treeish brother, mold such measures in mud, and I'll note you down.

Now, I am the very man.

(formalizes her ostentatiously masculine pose.)

ELHANAN

I lack that physic to imagine, and protest that fine detail in Man overwork us—for men are all of a stock. This—my finger, not distinguish from any man's.

BEATTA

So may as any man's be banded?

ELHANAN

To stay him the more at home?

BEATTA

Nay, that done by the shrillest tongue in his lady's head. But Sir, smallest difference are all-in-all Infatuate's hook, that hang us. So study me small.

ELHANAN

(kneels and holds BEATTA'S foot to examine.)

Perfect foot held to scrutiny, I'll miscalculate ratios oversize so that Man may climb mountains, and impress Woman.

BEATTA

Not too sized or he trip out his door. Proceed, manly ankle to knee.

ELHANAN

(slides his hand up BEATTA'S calf for inspection.)

A proper calf, but my eyes so dazzled they cannot read.

BEATTA

You're a wanderer: imagine this leg an austere piece found on pilgrimage, and stol'n from reliquaries—nor rubied shin or amethysted thigh.

ELHANAN

By effort. What now once I have it?

BEATTA

Why, translate it here: for pilgrims actually walk home, wonder why he left at all, sit warm-hearthed to learn that stories heard on cold roads were better read in a book.

ELHANAN

So teach Man not set foot out his door. —What matter is next to hand?

BEATTA

Stay your hand: you late began and must swift move up, to Man's breast.
(helps ELHANAN to stand.)

ELHANAN

I swear I cannot there see a man.

BEATTA

See what it beneath conceive, and that its outward form say.

ELHANAN

Man's breast granted highest duty: to hold that which hold Love.

BEATTA

Love again presumed spoke? No, say rather Man's tongue's duty is to speak both sides of
Love yet utter none true. Men take up room on this Earth who profess Love, yet writ
'cross their chest: 'Thou shalt not'!

(glances at TREE GOD'S progress, goes to TREE.)

—But I hear these'r only a myth and may be none.

(dips twig in pitch, writes on TREE'S outstretched limb.)

ELHANAN

May be hunt to extinction.

TREE GOD

These measures don't fit, and my Will give the measure: mold arms to break seas, and
legs to stride worlds—

BEATTA

And make a god. —No? Then smooth that back again and work the while quiet.

ELHANAN

The god's right, Beatta: let Man have godly feet, and say he's best loved, farthest off.

BEATTA

(puts down her pen, faces ELHANAN.)

Thick-pated men who say so, the gods bless—no woman will. No Eli: the man who
wanders, leaves home one who loves him. 'Afar' he fall, alone lamed, thirsts, falls ill.
His Beloved must journey, find, medicine, and mend as may. And far from home, the
Home will feel it: sag, splinter, overgrow of vines, leak of holey roofs, wait the man's

BEATTA (Cont.)

own mending—but he comes not. Then house fall in, bricks unstack to spreading sand.
Women are flighty things, who recite dreams to want an adventured man—but they lie:
She best love him who bolt them in at night, under his nightcap, and blow out the candle.

ELHANAN

(beat.)

What reward his castle-keeping?

BEATTA

The castle his, and all in it at his call.

—Our light slip horizoned with bare time to read, so to this hand,

(holds up her hand as ELHANAN touches his palm to hers.)

—and measure palm by palm.

ELHANAN

Warm-soft, steel-strong.

—If next an arm, hold out yours:

(holds out his arm as BEATTA holds out her arm to touch his.)

Let my rough musculature measure your smooth. —What part left?

BEATTA

That crown all: a keyed arch over his brow that shelter the quality most manly: his gaze

—what he see, and would see, and that more ambitious than a god.

Quantity brow-to-brow, watchful of ‘woman’ with beard.

ELHANAN

Or ‘man’ without one.

(touches his forehead to BEATTA’s a moment.)

BEATTA

(steps back, walks to TREE, dips twig, writes on TREE’S limb.)

What see you?

ELHANAN

What need no word to say.

BEATTA

Then I’ve little to write, yet more than this full tree-limb hold.

ELHANAN

(holds out his bare arm.)

Here a limb of mine: write.

BEATTA

Nay, then my words walk away.

ELHANAN

Root me here—this present—and write.

(stands as BEATTA writes on his arm; looks at STEM.)

Yet Man remain muddy asleep.

BEATTA

This last mark breathe him, but your limb's full-covered.

ELHANAN

(opens his shirt for BEATTA to write on his chest.)

Open blest shirt, for a trunk rough-barked, yet may serve.

BEATTA

T'hold me up? They say in small woods are caught large hares, but steady hand:

(writes across his chest.)

The mark unknots, 'tis pen and I entangle.

(BEATTA, ELHANAN move to kiss, but before they can, the
TREE GOD comes between them.)

TREE GOD

What d'you here enact? Breathe for the other, and this be the Life? That Man simple
catch the breath of my tossing it him? Then nose to nose, and windy gust!

(TREE GOD blows onto STEM nose; STEM takes loud breath,
sits, stretches, yawns, scratches, then lies down again to sleep.)

TREE GOD

I blow it every breath? No: prime your works Man, and up!

STEM

(sits again, rubs his eyes, sees TREE GOD.)

-- -- Hello.

TREE GOD

Hello. O Tree, is not Man a wonder, splendid-good?

STEM

Great One, first I see, so honor these rounds to name them eyes. Rise!

(stiffly stands up; looks remarkably like Tree God; kneels.)

STEM (Cont.)

—though fall again this too much weight: grains press in knees.

(motions his blood, lungs, arm and bone; his eyes tear up.)

A warm move inside here to here, this fill then not, soft out lift a hard in and feel it
'splendid good'. Yet eyes blur to see this lovely world!

(STEM cries softly; raindrops fall in a brief shower.)

TREE GOD

Man come apart! Water you poured now pool his eyes to fall his face!

(notices raindrops; tries to understand what it is.)

A drop from high, and more? As eye, so sky, and it banished Man, and stop up your eyes.

BEATTA

Try govern that. Yet if Man cause rain, then by nature it be short. See: it stop.

(The rain shower stops.)

TREE GOD

(looks all around him; frantically runs here and there.)

But look: water take away all the men! —Sink every one of thousand-thousands to
smooth sand! —Come back, nor leave me alone—O come back!

(sees TREE motion to STEM, who looks dazed at the sky.)

What Old Tree? Yet one's left?

(sees STEM; runs to him, and strongly embraces him.)

STEM

(notices TREE, kneels to it; sees the World change.)

Who this rough and gray you speak to—another god? I love it too, fall to its gnarled feet,
where look: quick push up soft blades—that spread—and change the color of the world.

(enchanted by the waving grass that covers over the dunes.)

They wave at me—hi! I'd roll in their softness, and beyond even more beautiful, and it
wants touching! I come, O World I come!

(Exit STEM with leap, twirl, and yawp.)

TREE GOD

(beat; looks after STEM, astonished; wheels on BEATTA.)

-- -- What?!

BEATTA

You wanted to make a Man, then learn it be a rootless kind.

Do you study leaps and will not after him, in this new-grassed and happy-civiled world?

TREE GOD

I can—I will—wherever Man go. Tree: Man has too much bend for your too much stiff, then up in my arms you're swift as me, and so step we!

(Exit TREE GOD, carries TREE, with leap, twirl, and yawp.)

BEATTA

They obey wand'ring foot, and stay you home? I, a man, barely stifle whoops to run.

ELHANAN

(catches BEATTA from following; embraces her.)

And I catch you: by my strength herewith unsex you a man, return you what you are, to your—real—beauty. I do itch t'explore, yet follow my own map, my own mate choose. These teach hoisting so I do same:

(holds BEATTA up in his arms.)

I came in fear, Beatta, to find my goddess—and now I hold her.

BEATTA

Wet, cold, marble to touch?

ELHANAN

Wet, but warmest, flesh-blooded Woman loveliness never told. Too, I came to learn if god or man I am—speak now your verdict.

BEATTA

But, good divinity like to good husbandry—and Eli, my love not account you.

ELHANAN

Then we go—explore. Stay housebound—learnt here by rote. You've notice, Beatta, that one night my Illness find me, take back up the rain to repeal creation, and be my cue for stumbled exit—Alone. But this night—by your will—leave with me mapped, cold nature for uncharted, warm worlds 'tween sheets: where proofs you shall have, and those all the night long, that I true am a Man.

(Exit ELHANAN, leap, twirl; carries BEATTA, gives yawp.)

(Enter WORD, plays rising tune, holds last note, then brash finale. Enter FLASKEN in nightcap, holds candle and club to beat WORD. WORD escapes FLASKEN'S blows, may urge all to go drink, and runs off pursued, still plays his tune.)

(END OF ACT)

End of Sample