

Prologue [Curtain Rises to *Sun* and *Moon*.]

[*The Sun* wilts, and the curtain rises, revealing a clock ticking the remaining words away. 12:00 strikes, chiming bells and whistles quietly, and *Song* steps forward confronting the murmuring glow of *The Audience* as they return from a long spell of sleep. *Song* finds an ambered instrument breathing for the first time, and takes a sip from it. *Song* drinks into a deeper depth from the instrument, finds its pitch, painting a melody long past remembered, stale in forgotten. *Painted Melody* willows ivy over arpeggio. *Song* continues deep into measure, until a crescent split opens from *Song's* forehead. *The Finale* reaches out of the contracting crescent split, wriggling free from birth. *Silence* dances with *Quiet*, as *The Finale* stands, bows, breathes, for a moment stopping the narrative music. *The Finale* takes the open *Song* and finds where the mouth goes, what strings to pluck, and what pedals sustain or dampen the color. The wilted *Sun* sinks to absence, mute-melodic and lightless, as *The Finale* plays *Song's* ending. *All* is quiet and speechless; the landscape, a whispered spindle weaving the inked ocean out. *The Moon* drifts up noteless, tasting light for the first time. Imagine the sound of *The Moon* trying to hold it, as a clock ticks the remaining words away.]

[A character wearing a Grecian mask of poetry steps forward while the shapes in the background shift into sound delicate with motion (the mouth moves, the throat catches, but no words are heard). The character continues to speak, but again, nothing is heard. This continues. The character bows, and exits. Nothing happens for a while, except for the shifting soundscape in the background.]

Words: [After the character departs, *Words* unheard, takes shape with season, springs from sound.] Hello everyone. Thank you all for coming. I have so much to say, but don't really know how to begin. What you are about to see, I can only imagine. I'm nervous, truly. I have never been, nor will be, an accomplished performer. But that isn't the point. I want to share with you something truly important. You see [Singing through a muted mouth.], you are about to witness a play that calls itself a play, acts like poetry, with unprepared lines read by an unprepared cast. But remember that this play is about forgiveness led by a character who cannot forgive. [Bows, and disappears in solstice.]

A Beginning After

[The night is lit in its own dreamscape, dreaming its stars away. I don't know if the night dreams, or if that's the point. A character steps forward onto the stage. The stage blinks, and sprouts an orchid nursery. The character is introduced by the rhythmic silence as *Romulus*. His shoulders are hunched and wordless in a draped posture. *Romulus* walks into the sprouted nursery, where he is met by his screaming array of plants and discarded instruments. He tries to welcome them, but instead, his lips shape a tuneless painting, jittery and out of focus. He goes over to a sun hanging loosely by strands of static, turns the bells and whistles, water dancing over-abundant in his watering can.]

Romulus: [Finding his voice among the screaming plants.] Everyone is screaming. Why?

[*The Sun* begins to sing in a brassy tenor to a listening array of plants. *Romulus* hums along, while bobbing the watering can, feeding his plants' hungry mouths. His plants surround him: growing, dying, blooming, screaming. Red, with its roots tangled and tapped into the nutrient vein of blue, blue twisting around the tinged lips of orchids, roses before, roses after, and jasmine is scented with the wrong color. The air surrounds, breathing heavy on the petals. *The Sun* begins to sway to its commanding lyric, voiced and resonant. *The Plants* are singing as a floral choir. Some bloom wings, carried off by a harmonic breeze. *Romulus*, overwhelmed by image, grabs onto something staccatoed and eye-iris scented.]

The Plants: No, we're not screaming, just you.

Romulus: Everyone is screaming.

Everyone: No, just you. You are screaming.

Romulus: Maybe I'm just dreaming in a screaming way.

Plants: What are you dreaming?

Romulus: My brother. There is so much that is wrong with that image. I'd like to think that he is growing. But even in dreams, he never is. He isn't the bloom or the bud; the word bled into the lyric.

Everyone: I'm not quite sure what that means, but it sounds beautiful, yet you were screaming.

Romulus: [Breathe. Again.] No, I need quiet.

Enter *Voice from Above*.

Voice: [Takes a sip of all the scents singing.] What are you trying to say?

Romulus: What am I trying to say? [A contemplative *Pause* is watered to thirst.] Who knows? I'm tired of greetings. Leave me alone, all of you.

[His surroundings begin to shrivel. The soil becomes salted sunlight. *The Sun* pales glossed to curtained *The Moon*, no longer singing. The scene is splitting from the seams.]

Romulus: My brother, he is
now what
I am trying to say,
really, my brother,
constant, another present
somewhere within
my plants singing
my words losing what
they mean to say, their
intentions carried off,
mine again, brother how
we say 'different'
with the same syllabic
count, begin our stage again,
losing this breath
differently, these flowers
echoing the dirt,

the texture, the coloring scales,
each sequence from here on, afterwards
remember that I slept
differently when you were
not so close, looking back,
here I am,
in my plants, pretending
the same narrative as the last,
except here, I need to tell you that,
just that, no, I need
to write you down,
losing my breath, never read,
we are different, and I don't know if this ends
with us ending in sequence, in arms,
wordlessly held together, remember
when it was safe to hold you, as an
impossible sharp, these written pages, delicately
unbreakable, the slightest phrase tongued
to language, written and ruined
in character to tell you
how I—

[*Rose*, smoking on a cigarette, interrupts with a thorn.]

Rose: Apologies, but you were sleeping again.

[*Romulus* wakes in his nursery again. There are crystalline cloud formations circling inside to a gray pour. The roof is can-opened by an imagined wind. The plants stare back at *Romulus*, not so much a look of worry, but expectation.]

Romulus: [It begins to rain inside. *Romulus* walks over to his onyx armor plated writing desk hidden away in a mist-canopy of roses. There is an old book, drowsy and snoring gently.] I'm not very

good at it, apparently.

Rose: [Sees the book and grabs it. The book is titled *Bloodletting in Minor Scales*. Rose fondles through the pages.] Who wrote this?

[Rose looks at the cover, sees the author's name, and looks at *Romulus*. Rose reads out some passages.]

Romulus: [Remembering that this isn't supposed to happen.] I did. I wrote it full of blame and hope. [He hides in a page of his own doing.]

[Rose continues to read aloud.]

Rose: You're interrupting! [Fondles further pages.] Jesus! You have Heart as a character? Wait until I tell him! He'll love this.

[*Romulus* reaches out and plucks a petal. *Rose* dies, shriveling back to life inside *Pantry*, the Oracle of the Past, serenely statuesque in pose next to his desk. Suddenly, there is a howling flash of singed orange blossom, and *Pantry* is caught in a trance: a vision of the past. It begins with *Pantry's* tongue twisting unpronounced in an atonal language (Help! Help! Canned corn on the cob! Pickled fish scales! Fermented prune juice! Lactose-infused caviar!). The trance then coils around the body, the past constricting the contortionist. *Pantry* in its night-brass breastplate and petal-silk veil, shifts from oval to octagonal, touched bare and wedded under the weight of memory's anachronistic gaze.]

Rose: [Frantically knocks inside *Pantry* seizing in recollection.] Let me out! Let me out! I didn't even get to the good part! [Instructed by something canned and expired to burn a saged hearing horn as penitence.]

Voice: [Sings.] Let him out.

[*Romulus* closes his eyes, and reverts everything back from memory. *Pantry* smiles, free to statue again in the present.]

Rose: [Dusts off the pollen.] Jeez, I was just kidding. [Mumbles something.] I actually thought some of it was pretty good.

Romulus: [Rolls up the torn petal, smokes, breathes, remembering from memory a melody he left under the lines now molding behind a door.] [Sings.]
Was there a purpose in your mother's suffering? Was there a purpose in your mother's suffering? Was there a purpose in your mother's suffering?

Enter *Chorus*.

I don't know, but she broke me into [Transmigrates (octaves are lowered and raised simultaneously).] decimals. [His eyes reflect the depth of a lost, red ocean, reflecting on the words.]

Voice: That part was beautiful.

Romulus: [Eyes revert back to still-life movement.] What was the fucking point though? [He closes his eyes. *In memoria*, he is back in that room, left in the conclusion of the last play, holding the conductor's baton, the finale singing away the perfect conclusion. Except the room was a stage, and he was out of breath.] This [Grabs the conductor's baton from the opening pages of *Bloodletting*.] looks so stupid now. [The baton blooms a rabbit to prove it. The rabbit wilts.]

Rose: [Looks up towards *Voice*.] I think it's time for us to leave. I don't like it when he gets like this, all [Searches.] abstract.

[*Rose* grays to blue petals with each step, leaving.]

Romulus: Wait! No, please, [The room, as a room, lost remembered.] stop! I—

Rose: [Gone.]

[*Romulus* looks up to *Voice*.]

Voice: [Gone.]

[*Romulus* looks for *Pantry* in the jasmine fields.]

Pantry: [Gone.]

[*Romulus* goes back to his writing desk and begins scribbling until he hears the conductor's baton suddenly tapping against *Timpani*. A phantomed *Remus* appears holding the conductor's baton, wearing a moonless night, shifting the wraith-whispered music to a strange tempo.]

Remus: [Tap, tap, and tap.] Shall we get started?

Romulus: [Closes his eyes.] No, I'm not ready.

[The orchestra plays a sleepless dream, as *Romulus* is unwritten, eye tick-twitching, wordless. *No, I'm not ready.*]

Character List

[There is a chair scripting the character list, leg pointing at certain parts of the narrative, coughing again nacre. The room is unrecognizable. The door is red, a closed opening. There is a sound of a sad ocean in the corner forming swells, the chair dry sinking, and underneath, origami birds screeching. Inside, fingers belonging to this room tap, a figure enters without *Chair 1* noticing, enters the character list, the quiet drowning, the sad ocean in the corner now flooding, the setting upended and unrecognizable. *Chair 1* turns as the figure approaches. A voice from above isn't heard. The swelling tides to red. The waves quell. The door is red, opening shut, breaking the surface, flooding over. Inside this room, there is an unrecognizable setting where *Romulus* sits on a chair attempting to draft a character list.]

Romulus: *Che ci faccio qui?* {What am I doing here?} [Drops what he was writing and continues to think on top of a stooped *Chair 1*.]

Chair 1: [Picks up the crumpled paper, and reads aloud, quietly.]
Character List: Character List is now bearded, wine-bottled, and wearing a sailor's outfit. He has aged salted and oceaned over. He finds himself alone, floating on his back in the middle of a sunken ocean at night. The wine bottle is lanterned, illuminating flat waves, fogged calls for help from a setting sun, and the directions he isn't floating towards. With his other empty hand, he begins pouring libations on the northern stars. A salty chill rises, ingesting everything in it. He begins to drift beyond the borders of comprehension, beyond and above the northern stars floating by. The wine bottle tips, pours out the red pigment of a new moon. The after-red liquid solidifies under the pull of tide, reaches for clouds, and becomes a hungry little sky. For a moment, his thoughts are carried off by fish glowing beneath how *The Moon* glows, reflecting a dripping surface. *I'm lost as a reflection.*

Romulus: [Translate to mother-tongue: I'm lost as a reflection.] *Mi sono perso come un riflesso.*

Chair 1: [*Chair 1's* voice grows buoyant in high tide.] All is quiet as a reflection in a turbulent ocean. Character List is drifting, trying to understand where the surface breaks. Finding it, his grip tightens in crisis, trying to draw closer to the water. His

breath takes in blue as a result, sinking further. With so much attention tied to the body as flotation, the stars, left to their own devices, happily dangle in dissent from Character List's compass. How the wine is red, the ocean filled by memory, and the stars shining alongside a blue salted sun, account for Character List losing his bearings.

Romulus: *Dove stai andando?* {Where are you going?}

Chair 1: [Continues, while following *Character List* to the bottom of a lost undercurrent.] *Character List* reaches the bottom and breathes in. He breathes, hearing chanting from all the ocean's ghosts in confusion: *Ricorda, c'è stato uno scopo nella sofferenza di tua madre? Ricorda! Ricorda!* *Character List* breathes, completely submerged, suffocating on memory. For a moment, everything is wrong, deafening, remembered. He closes his eyes, waiting for the drowning to pass.

Romulus: [The room becomes flooded with fire and pearls. *Ricorda*, meaning, remember. Memory growing to ocean. No, I don't want to, hearing the slash of blue across the wrist; eyes turn to water, water to red blooming. The melodic image of the room as water fire cools back to padded walls again. *Ricorda*. After coughing up water and feathers.] *Cosa succede dopo?* {What happens next?}

Chair 1: [Growing older in its voice.] *Character List*: Opens his eyes, soggy from deafened sight. Atlas comes into focus, pulls him in, breathes a living hymn into *Character List*'s mouth. A siren approaches, playing the wine bottle in orange-clove octaves, the wind stringed and wound to the glass body. The stars inside the compass begin to glow with percussive syncopation. The siren wears garments of struck glass, and the scent of a shipwrecked sea. The siren moves to lyric, singing the bodies of our lost songs to sleep. A red moon descends to dance. *Character List* and Atlas gaze into one another, not speaking the sound, the depth of it risen.

Romulus: [Eyes dark-rimmed now, the hours expired, a lack of sleep knowing what always happens next.] What happens next?

Chair 1: I don't know. [The crumpled paper burns wet away. In its place, a single salt-flower in bud. *Chair 1* goes to pot it in sand and drift.] I liked that ending.

Romulus: No, something terrible always happens. [Takes the crumpled paper and begins to read from the ending.] The red ocean rises, forms as a voice of memory, my mother, she... [No, it would be so easy and clean to just end it there. *Ricorda. Ricorda. Ricorda.*] The scene unseams into a broken image, all to black. Character List wakes and finds himself still surrounded by the ocean's ghosts vacant-eyed and silent-chanting. The scene ends under the drowned waves of a crumpled piece of paper. [The salt-flower shatters.]

[The red door of the unrecognizable setting opens. A pair of hands gently lead *Romulus* away to another room, padded and sealed away. A man is sleeping, while scribbling on a notepad.]

Enter *Freud*.

[*Chair 2* is also introduced, sleeping and taking notes diligently. *Chair 1* is thrown in quietly as to not wake the two sleeping characters. *Chair 1* makes a mental note calling for help.]

Freud: [Awakened by the loud scribbling of *Chair 1*'s prosaic mental note.] Well, thank God courtesy is dead! Please take a seat.

Romulus: [Confused, but obedient.] Yes, I think sitting would be a good idea.

Freud: [Annoyed.] I was talking to the chair.

[*Chair 1* sits. *Romulus* sits on *Chair 1*. *Chair 1* creaks in silence.]

Romulus: [To *Freud* and *Chair 2*.] What were you both writing?

Freud: [One eye droops back to sleep.] I was interpreting my dreams. It's much easier than people think [Checks his notes.] Ah! And thanks to you and that anxious-looking rocking chair friend of yours, I didn't even get to the steamy stuff!

Chair 2: And let me introduce myself to you wetdream-interrupti, as well. My name is Dr. Chair 2 and I'm finishing up on my latest book, "Making Nonsensical Sense of Stream-of-Unconsciousness." [Pauses for a reaction. Blank looks, and a nervous cough.] It's a working title. [Extends a leg for them to shake. They do so.]

Freud: [Checks his schedule.] You are a couple centuries early, or late [Shrugs, after conferring with a frail moon-dial.] the point being, you are not on time, and have ruined a perfectly good [Crosses his legs. Coughs.] scientific, [Forgets to wipe the drool.] unconscious metaphor I was having. [Again, blank looks and a nervous cough.] Well, let's get started since you are [Pokes *Romulus* to make sure.] definitively—

Chair 2: And irrationally!

Freud: Yes, and irrationally here. [Straightens an imagined bow-tie.] So you unpunctual depressive, tell me about your mother.

[*Romulus* is quiet.]

Did she suffer?

[*Romulus* is quiet.]

I see. So if I apply that to my patent-pending formula on neuroses, if you have a mother, and she suffered, I should then ask you... [The frail moon-dial transforms into an emotional abacus. *Freud* calculates, miscalculates, inadvertently divides the setting by 0 at one point (flooding, fire, and pearls briefly), sets the number to its absolute value, draws a lewd graph illustrating Point A to Point B, applies it to an anti-hieroglyphic language.] Eureka! Was there a purpose to your mother's suffering? [The abacus faints back to a Victorian moon-dial.]

Romulus: [Thinking to have been composed, begins to shake. The room floods with a drowning light. No one can breathe. A crackling sound approaches from above. The red door turns into an

ocean of closed doors, almost laughing.] No, please, I'm not ready.

Freud: [Draws from his pipe and checks the time through the thinly veiled, unconscious lace of the moon-dial.] I see. Well, you did get here prematurely. This is supposed to happen much later.

[*Freud* closes his eyes, and resumes his work. A pair of hands lead *Romulus* away.]

Exit *Romulus*.