

[Two actors emerge from opposite sides and begin clearing the chariots. A central line is marked, and a ribbon is tied to a rope to indicate the centre. The scene is set for a Tug of War. Other actors emerge and help clear the stage. The actors then walk away and turn to face each other in two groups, equidistant from the centre.

They bend and pretend to pick up the rope, tensing their bodies. At a signal (a bell or whistle), both groups pretend to tug on the rope in opposite directions. When the actors on the left pull, the rope moves to the right. When the actors on the right pull, the rope moves to the left. This tug of war continues.]



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He-rose.

Scene 1

[A thin strip of light appears on stage. We see a line of several chariots moving along this path. The light expands, and the chariots scatter, moving haphazardly across the stage. They then arrange themselves into a battle formation and clash with one another. A battle scene unfolds. An actor bends down, picks up one chariot, and sets it down again. As the actor walks forward, the narrative begins.]

Storyteller: Stories, as old as the mountains unclimbed. They whisper tales that stir wars new and timed. Their dust settles on my ears, smart particles descending, scratching my fears and curiosity. I have mastered most of them. Tunes that soar, both low and high in taste, not a breath to waste. *[Begins to sing again, then pauses]* This moment is special, as I witness two mortals, Gods in sight, collapse, amidst a perilous plight. Being upside down has its advantages, you see, closer to their fall. I sense their agony, sweaty feet seeking answers on the hardened ground, their indecision caught in a breath, profound. What a sight!

"I can't," they seem to whisper. Suspended in the air, it echoes, a fear too much to bear. *[Off stage, we can hear 'I can't'. The voices from off-stage continue to whisper 'I can't'. She/he listens, and begins to speak again.]*

A breath that's caught between indecision, suspended, it seemed to whisper, "I can't." Wrinkle your forehead, and you will hear them better. *[Addresses an audience member]* Go on. *[Waits].* "What are you afraid of?" Maybe they are afraid too. Heroes. Yet fear grips them. I hear them anew as I swing sideways. *[Making gestures with the body as if she/he is*

listening] Listening to them midway, I spin my tunes, symphonies of courage which break the wall of fears. What a spell this is indeed. Let's hear them, a story that's both mortal and godly.

Blackout

Scene 2

[Two actors emerge from opposite sides and begin clearing the chariots. A central line is marked, and a ribbon is tied to a rope to indicate the centre. The scene is set for a Tug of War. Other actors emerge and help clear the stage. The actors then walk away and turn to face each other in two groups, equidistant from the centre.

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[Watching the game for a while, Actor 2 asks a set of riddles to the storyteller. (To be added) As actor 2 finishes..]

Storyteller : *[slightly irritated]* You have any more riddles ?

Actor 2: Hmm! no.

Storyteller: No more?

Actor 2 : *[Annoyed]* No.

Storyteller: Are you sure?

Actor 2: I said no. Sigh! It's been almost an hour. So hard to figure out who will win this game.

Storyteller: It's their game. Nothing you can do about that. Sit quietly or get out!

Actor 2: What I don't understand is why can't the Gods let the humans play their own game? Them meddling too much in human affairs is suspicious. Don't you think?

Storyteller: I have no mind to think. I am concentrating.

Actor 2: Oh! *[Looking at the action]* I can't judge the game of the Gods; it is so hard to know what they are playing at. Can you?

Storyteller: Fate.

Actor 2: Whose?

Storyteller: The one who is played by the Gods.

Actor 2: That's not fair. Tell me whose fate the Gods are determining now?

Storyteller: They are determining the fates of those they favour. This game is devoid of logic, and do you think the chances at living are decided by the living?

Actor 2: Do you think otherwise?

Storyteller: You are not wise, and can you be quiet? If the Gods hear you, they will meet their eyes with yours. How will that be?

Actor 2: *[Pretends to be quiet. But you can see he is restless.]* When I played this game a few years back, it built my upper body muscles so much that I couldn't recognise myself in the mirror.

Storyteller: That must have been tough.

Actor 2: *[Pointing at someone in the game]* Who is that?

Storyteller: That's... *[Whispers Indra in the actors 1 ear.]*

Actor 2: Ooooh! But they are going off the mark a little, see!

Storyteller: That's the whole point. Gods are allowed to go off the mark. It's the logic of the game they play — among themselves and with humans.

Actor 2: But how can this game be balanced if they don't follow the rules?

Storyteller: Why don't you ask them?

Actor 2: And whose side is he on?

Storyteller: Take a guess. *[Actor 2 looks clueless.]* He is on the side of *[Whispers something in Actor 2 's ears. Deliberately silent, so that the audience can't hear.]*

Actor 2: Oh, I see.

Actor 2: Is he the one who is protecting his son?

Storyteller: Yes, that's the one. *[There is a cheer from the players.]*

Actor 2: And what if Arjuna and Achilles refuse to play their game? Then what will happen?

Storyteller: You are the biggest fool.

Actor 2: How come? How come I am the biggest fool when they are the ones who play the game of taking sides? Who is that? Who is losing his base?

Storyteller: Can you be quiet and watch the game? We will know in a short while who is the biggest fool of them all. And what will become of Arjuna and Achilles? Will they play God's game or will they weave their own?

[The tug of war continues into a crescendo. Both sides heave and pull each other off balance. We see Arjuna and Achilles standing on stage. They imitate certain gestures used in the tug of war, both during similar movements that crescendo into a war-like dance.]

Scene 3

[Achilles and Arjuna sing]

Achilles & Arjuna: An ancient warrior, battle-worn and scarred,
Once fierce and strong, now feels debarred.

His spear arm weak, his heart unsure,

His mind is filled with visions of the past,

Of blood and death, that forever will last.

He hesitates to sing his warrior song anymore.

His voice was a weapon that sent fear to hide.

The screams of women, the cries of pain,

Echoes still, a haunting refrain. *[Pause]*

But now, his throat is tight, and his tongue numbs.

[We can hear sharpening of the weapons found coming from offstage. A group of actors, with their weapons in hand emerge. They seem to be preoccupied with movements that denote the sharpening of weapons. As this progresses, we see Arjun and Achilles attempting the same, except their conviction of readying their weapons for another war]

lacks certainty. Both Arjuna and Achilles could be exploring different ways of sitting. All seem uncomfortable. No one way sitting on the floor satisfies them.]

[Achilles and Arjuna start a game of Jenga, when each time the mount collapses the co-actors put it back together, and the action repeats.] [Kasou Taishou]

Achilles: This is so exhasuting. How far are you in this game?

Arjuna: Not much further than you.

Achilles: That doesn't lead us anywhere.

Arjuna: But, who said it has to lead us anywhere?

Achilles: Then I suppose we should stop this game. It feels like we are wandering in circles, with no clear direction in sight. We think we will win, but we will lose.

Arjuna: Perhaps.

Achilles: What do you mean?

Arjuna: Maybe we don't always have to follow rules. Sometimes, it's okay to pause and reflect. To tell you the truth, I didn't realise this would be so tiring. My hands are tired. My spirit's strength has collapsed, and I cannot proceed without some hint. I fear I am left with no purpose, no spark, no fire. And if my simple queries cannot find their reply, then to continue, I cannot. All my efforts are in vain if you cannot help. I fear that all my efforts are futile. I cannot. I cannot. I cannot. I think I need rest.

Achilles: You need a rest?

Arjuna: Until we sit, we never really know. Let's move a bit under the sun, burning bright might light our path.

Achilles: Do you sing?

Arjuna: I dance. Do you, dance?

Achilles: I don't. But, I play.

Arjuna: Let's start.

Achilles: Where do you want me to start.

Arjuna: That's the game we will play. No beginning, no middle, and certainly no end. Let's allow the liberty to stop when we are ready. A bold full stop, and a grand fall.

[As the movement reaches its crescendo, we see the crowd slowly turning itself into mourners who wail for their loved ones. In the background of these sounds, we see the storyteller emerge]

Blackout

Scene 4

[We see a crowd of people. They seem to be piercingly looking at the battlefield, terrified. They all seem to be holding each other's hands. Are they trying to untangle each other's hands? Could it be to free themselves from the inevitability of death.]

[Movement possibility: Searching for faces in the deadbodies. Arjun for Abhimanyu and Achilles for Petrocolus. Set: Mannequin hands and legs scattered on the floor]

Crowd: Row after row they lie on the battlefield.

Mouthless, they are mute.

Mid cheek their tears linger,

Their journey halted without a choice

To an unknown house, not yet their own.

An invisible misery wanders

As their colourless faces merge

with the smog so infinite.

The crackle in the air melds

with the smells so familiar.

Left with nothing

Their eyes stoop in submission.

They are dead.

For the wants of the few, soldiers die.

Row after row their flesh burns

Even in their death they remain disciplined.

Day after day they perfect their deaths,

For the benefit of the few.

Left without a choice they are dead.

And the ashes that dance along the wind

Will in time, mar the living as they do the dead.

[As they storyteller finishes her lines, we see a muslin cloth emerging from wailers and it divides the stage into two halves. The mourning slowly morphs itself into laughter, heard and unheard. From behind the cloth, we see a ball rolling out, and there are two children who emerge running after the ball.]

Scene 5

[Sound: Ancient double pan flute improvisation by Yannis Pan]

Aravan: What is your name?

Iphigenia: What is yours?

Aravan: You tell me first.

Iphigenia: Iphigenia.

Aravan: Aravan.

Iphigenia: Will you be my friend?

Aravan: Will you be mine?

Iphigenia/Aravan: Yes (Together)

Iphigenia: Shall we play a game?

Aravan: What game?

Iphigenia (pointing at the body parts): Look at that. We can play hopscotch.

Aravan: Yes yes yes yes.

[Manequinnes arranged for hopscotch, and they start playing.]

Aravan: Do you know why Chickin 65 is called Chicken 65?

Iphigenia: No. Why?

Aravan: You don't know?

Iphigenia: No. Tell me.

Aravan: Ok, hear this. After the chicken eggs are hatched, the chicks are allowed to run around and tell the stories of everyday life to their fellow chicks for exactly 65 days. On the 65th day, at 4:00 AM, the chicks will come of age to become chickens. At 5:00 AM exact, they are sacrificed, and at 6:00 AM their meat is sent out to places and they make Chicken 65 with it.

Iphigenia: Oh, is it? What time is it?

Aravan: Why? We have a lot of time to play.

Iphigenia: I have to be ready at 5:00 AM tomorrow for a ceremony.

Aravan: You too? Me too. I also have to be ready at 5:00 AM tomorrow. Maybe we could play after?

Iphigenia: I don't know. My mother's diary which details every moment of my life is strangely blank after 5:00 AM tomorrow.

Aravan: My mother said I would be elated to tthe ranks of the Gods after the ceremony.

Iphigenia: But, do you want to be?

Aravan: What?

Iphigenia: To be a God?

Aravan: They said I have to be one.

Iphigenia: But, do you want to?

Aravan: No.

[A group of actors enter with sarees in preparation for a ceremony.]

Aravan: Will I be seeing you tomorrow?

One of the actors: Go go go, your mothers are calling you.

Iphigenia: Yes. The game is not over yet.

Scene 6

[A strip of cloth runs across the stage, at the end of which Achilles is sitting, watching Arjuna. Arjuna begins to wear the saree from one end. The scene will explore the concept of tying and untying. Aravan and Iphigenia are running around playfully]

Achilles: What are you doing?

Thozhi: Can't you see he is wearing his sari?

Achilles: Yes, I can see. Why do you look so disgruntled, Arjuna?

Arjuna: This sari is very heavy and the folds are not falling right. Every time I try, I still get the measures all wrong- it makes me mad. How do I do this differently?

Achilles: Maybe you have forgotten how to wear it, do you need help?

Thozhi 2: He, forgets? He has a million saris and if he wants, he can wear them even in the dark, twice as fast, with precision.

Arjuna: Something is not right. This has become the most tedious ritual, tying and untying. I am bored of this; How do I get it right?

Thozhi 2: Keep at it. Keep at it.

Achilles: Why don't you ask someone to remind you?

Arjuna: I tried. Look around, everybody is tying it the same way and don't you think there is something absolutely odd about it? First of all, I think there should have been more length to this fabric. This wraps me so tight and it restricts my walk. If I can't walk properly, how does one expect to dance, wearing it?

Achilles: Why don't you move from where you are, maybe that might make it better.

Arjuna: You think so?

Achilles: I don't know, Let's try.

[Arjuna smiles]

Achilles: Now a bit to your right.

[As Arjuna makes a move, the entire group moves with him. This continues. Many Saris are being worn and re-worn at multiple places. This could be a choreographic movement with all actors wearing saris in different ways]

Arjuna: I will drop this end and pick the other end.

Achilles: *[Gets up from where he was sitting takes the sari]* I will drop this. Swirl around. Move, and pick the other end.

Arjuna: I swish this with a gentle sway, then fold it, inside out.

Achilles: And I move here. Pause. And I move again.

Arjuna: I pick up this end of the fabric, to drop it an infinite number of times.

Achilles: I do the same.

Arjuna: And I do the same.

Achilles: And I repeat.

[Everybody dances and they all collapse. Arjuna and Achilles lay in a plie of sarees. They then sit up and start folding the sarees, making a neat arrangement of them.]

Arjuna: Although my hands feel rough, I find myself drawn to this game. The callouses on my feet are sore and bleeding, Achilles, be mindful! Don't walk on them, for an infection could spread and ruin your day.

Achilles: Arjuna, you may find that the same worry affects your mind and mine.

Arjuna: Then move.

Achilles: I Moved.

Arjuna: Who we are, this design, this framework, the struggle to wear this fabric, this identity that we are to perform.

Achilles: Let's move.

Arjuna: Let's move.

Achilles: This movements that's restricted, these actions that are limiting.

Arjuna: Let's move.

Achilles: Let's move.

Arjuna: This smell, this taste...

Achilles: Let's move.

Arjuna: Let's move.

Achilles: Let's remove these iron that is binding our arms, let's rip this cloth.

Arjuna: Let's move.

Achilles: Let's move.

[They are both sitting down. staring at the pile of neatly arranged sarees.]

Achilles: How does it feel?

Arjuna: Although it feels unnatural and disorienting, this experience is clearly improving my vision. At once, the bubble suddenly popped, taking me by surprise and leaving me feeling hazy and dizzy.

Achilles: I find this game incredibly captivating and I'm eager to see where it will take us before coming to a final stop. Perhaps it's time we stop playing their game and start playing our own. What do you think?

Arjuna: Then let's continue to spin. Spin. Spin. Spin.

[By the time the movements end the sari-wearing is over. Both Arjuna and Achilles seem happy with the outcome of the game.]

Blackout

Scene 7

[We see a group of people sitting together in different circles. Each of them bring different delicious looking homemade snacks. It is an evening of people spending time gossiping. There is a lot of laughter and talk. Suddenly a bell rings indicating something significant has happened somewhere. We hear the music of a funeral procession that passes at a distance.]

[This scene will begin with the discussion on pakora, it's a tea time snack that people have which is very popular throughout India.]

Actor 1: I prefer yesterday's pakora. It was hot and crispy.

Actor 3: And oily.

Actor 2: Tasty.

[They all suddenly stop as if they heard a cry. Some of them are a bit confused. They lean towards the place where the sound came from.]

Storyteller: Didn't you hear, Arjuna and Achilles have taken a deadly vow. They will never fight.

Actor 1: But that won't do. There are wars to be won.

Actor 3: Who's war? Not mine for sure.

Actor 2: What happened?

Actor 3: Didn't you hear? Someone died.

Actor 1: Who died?

Actor 2: Someone important.

Actor 3: But who?

Actor 4: A son, and a lover.

Actor 3: Whose son?

[Actor 4 whispers someone's name to 3]

Actor 3: Oh, that's why they are fighting. Now the Gods will be furious. They will burn down everything for them to reverse their decisions.

Actor 2: *[To number 1]* You finished all the pakora? I got two for each. Now you have eaten most of them.

Actor 3: It's not healthy to eat so many pakoras in one go. And it's not healthy to kill so many people in one shot.

Actor 2: But there is nothing more to be burned. It's all ash and bones.

Actor 1: But what will happen to their reputations?

Actor 4: What about it?

Actor 3: They are the heroes. They are supposed to fight. Now what will happen to all those stories that are written?

Storyteller: Rewrite them.

Actor 1: I can't. I just finished writing one.

Actor 2: Which one?

Actor 4: Come to the point.

Actor 3: Maybe we should send you on a secret mission, a rewriting mission.

Actor 2: No, we have enough of that already.

Storyteller: Don't be confused. I want to make my point clear. Here we will only be rewriting stories.

Actor 4: Now how do you rewrite a story to re-rewrite a story

Actor 3: Maybe they can put a secret magic powder that will erase everyone's memory.

Actor 1: Do you have enough?

Actor 3: What? Pakoras?

Actor 2: A bit of intelligence.

Actor 1: These world-changing decisions came when they were sleeping?

Storyteller: A lot can happen while you sleep. For instance, while you sleep, a tent can be burnt, and horse can be abandoned, and that can rob you of your sleep and the chances of your dreaming.

Actor 3: I told you not to eat so many pakoras. You ruined this moment by farting.

Actor 1: It's a fart-worthy moment. And I didn't fart. I have noticed this, you always fart and blame it on someone else, usually me.

Actor 2: Come to the point.

Actor 3: Exactly.

Storyteller: It is simple. They have decided not to fight, ever. The decision is final. It will not change.

Actor 3: It is not so simple

Actor 1: Now what to do?

Storyteller: Nothing.

Actor 1: So, what will they do for a living?

Actor 3: But they are not alive I thought... aren't they just characters...?

Storyteller: Exactly! They are characters and they will tell their stories.

[Arjuna and Achilles enter with a bags]

Storyteller: New ones. One will dance and the other will play.

Actor 1: Wait, But the war is not complete, it's halfway done. What will happen now?

Actor 4: He dances

Actor 2: He sings

Actor 3: But....

Storyteller: There is no space for a but, not for you, or for anyone. It's done. Let's eat the pakoras.

Actor 2: Let's give 2 to them. They must be exhausted.

Actor 3: Do heroes eat pakoras?

Actor 1: Maybe not. Shut up!

Blackout.

Scene 8

[We see both Arjuna and Achilles sit on either side of the stage. They are involved in an activity that shows their reluctance to fight any longer. They are in an action of constant rejection.]

Achilles and Arjuna: *[They both speak in unison. At some point these sounds could morph as movements, representing the words that are spoken]:* Ripping, splitting, tearing, wrenching, pulling, dragging, spitting, heaving, slashing, cutting, shredding, rupturing, dismembering. Those sounds.

Achilles: You know my name and my fame. Both equal in grandeur, in forms and shapes which have entered your houses, so secured. I have seen them hanging on walls. I have heard them extend as melodies. I have seen them move a dancer's feet. Stories of my body so fierce and my eyes burning for more tales of glory, unmatched in war. There was no stopping these tales that I was spinning on the tip *Pelian*, my mighty spear. And all those sounds that tingled my skin. Those sounds.

[Chanting continues] : Dismembering, rupturing, shredding, cutting, slashing, heaving, spitting, dragging, pulling, wrenching, tearing, splitting, ripping.

Arjuna: Those sounds. There was never a stop. The multiple names that I carry as a price, now weighs me down. My *Ghandiva* being wiped with blood of lives that were not connected to my cause, my armour shining with lives that were burned. As my arrows hissed craving for more, my names gained a silver shine that outshined even the brightness of my soul. Was it all worth a fight?

Achilles: But as I stand against this wall, rubbing our guilt of the past, surveying the massacre that danced out of our hands and our minds, my head hangs, with a blinding weight. This realization, cracked open by the daybreak causes me to pause and to stop. *[Chanting stops]*

[Aravan and Ephiginea runs in preparing to play a game of dice/any game. Achilles and Arjun watch them as they begin their game.]

Aravan : Is it 5 o'clock yet ?

Ephiginea : Not yet. We have half an hour more.

Aravan : Lets start a new game.

Arjuna: It was all for nothing. I fought; And you fought to sustain my name worth not keeping. This profitless cycle will never end. This endless plague will never cease. I renounce this name and this fame that shined my soul. I melt this armour that protected my chest. I rip this earring that I received without an effort. I break this arrow that took lives without a care. I smash this godly name to stand as close to the human that I am.

[Achilles takes the dice that comes to him and rolls it back.]

Achilles/Arjuna: Let's start again. This delight that we find within ourselves springs from our resolve that arose deep within us. Let's stop. Let's start again.

Blackout

Scene 9

[A pile of mannequins are arranged at the back like a funeral pyre. Storyteller and an illustrator are on stage, on either ends. A woman takes the center stage. She could be any woman who is affected by war, or it could be Andromache, Gandhari, Draupadi, the list is endless.]

Storyteller: A woman, neither here nor there, decided to take a solitary air.

A woman, neither here nor there, decided to take a solitary air. The wind blew through her hair with a rush. The wind blew through her hair with a rush, but a mosquito bit, making her hush. In shock, her mouth opened wide, Annoyed, the wind pouted and sighed. As she thought to light a cigarette, rules reminded her she couldn't, not just yet. Not just yet. Her breath smirked with a hidden glee, at that very moment two strangers appear for her to see. All this is very strange, not part of her plan, her solitude interrupted by a mysterious span.

Her pocket was bare. Her pocket was bare because she had used the last eraser to clear the air. Nothing to be done, she thought with a sigh, let them come, maybe a non-committed hello will satisfy. Pleased with her grand plan, she continued their approach, "Walk fast you idiots" her mind screamed. Walk fast you idiots her mind screamed because I need to pass; no reproach, and I don't have time for your song and dance. Just move aside and give me a chance at my solitude.

The strangers smiled and greeted her in turn, she was about to smirk and their friendliness made her heart churn. She nodded and smiled with a hint of grace, but kept standing with her strong base.

Pray, tell us who you be?, asked **Arjuna**, as she stepped forth with left leg free.

Arjuna : Pray, tell us who you be ?

"A woman, wandering free," said she. " To places unknown, yet to be. Now that you've stopped me, tell me where does your path abide?" , asked she with a curious, wandering eye, as if to seek a new reply.

"To places where new stories abound, where we can weave and dance anew, with tales untold, and dreams yet to be true", said **Arjuna**.

"Pray tell why to weave new stories," said she. "Is it to breathe new life into those that fell, or is it to recompose and make them shine, with hope and love, and light divine?"

Achilles, with a smile so bright, said, "light my ignorant self now! If your travel is unknown to thee, could we follow you, and weave the story with the breeze? As we walk, do delight us with a hint, so we can entertain you with a tale well made".

"Give me pause, let me reflect, and turn your steps if you expect to walk with me on this winding road, For I warn you, it may be a challenging load. If I blink twice, I might perceive a tale hidden within the weave of words unspoken, thoughts unsaid, that linger like shadows in my head." With irony alight upon her face, she spoke to them with absent grace, lost in thought, her mind adrift, in search of a story.

With swelling eyes, Achilles said, "a mother's heart, broken and torn, by the war that left her child forlorn. A story of loss and pain so deep, of a young life taken in its sleep, a war that never should have been, leaving a mother with a heart so keen."

"But fear not, for we'll weave our tale, a collaboration that will not fail, a story of hope, of love so true, of a mother's strength, in all she'll do", said Arjuna.

Speak not, said she.

Woman : "Speak not".

Amidst the wind that carries ash and dust, she wanders, lost, with her memories crushed, searching for a glimpse of her loved ones' past. She longs to extend their lives, unfulfilled

dreams, to hold onto the past, or so it seems. But memories fade, like leaves that fall, a cycle, inevitable, for all. "Write me a song," she pleads to the earth where they have sunken deep. "Fill it with lullabies, to soothe my heart's cry. But faces appear, and voices disrupt, the harmony of our journey, interrupt."

"We know who you are," said **Arjuna** and **Achilles** in unison. And she laughs, for their words are so clear.

"How could I forget your faces ? For you erased my precious ones, with your battles and massacres".

"Our guilt, we wear like a cloth, heavy and fraught, but we made a vow to shed our warrior selves and fight not.", said Achilles. "We seek a path where wars are not fought, and hearts are not cold. With certainty, we walk, with you, with the wind in our hair, with lullabies and stories, to banish despair", said Arjuna..

And her heart, once dried up, now blooms anew, filled with hope and love, and memories that are true.

[They play music and dance along. A line of trucks moves in as the final line is heard.]

Blackout.

THE END.