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Cast of Characters

ATHENA, the ancient Greek goddess of war, dressed and acting accordingly, formidable in every sense.

CHORUS OF MODERN SOLDIERS, A-F, six modern American soldiers serving in Iraq, both sexes, various ranks, all in fatigues.

GERTRUDE BELL, the noted British Arabist, political analyst, and senior political officer, responsible in large part for literally writing the map of modern Iraq as well as determining its original political structure. Famous for her insightful writing on the complexities and failures of Britain's imperialist venture there. Humorous, brilliant and rueful. Upper class.

CAPTAIN, an American who was in on the first push into Iraq and coped with its aftermath.

SICKLES, a specialist in A.J.'s unit.

LESLIE ABRAMS, a corporal in A.J.'s unit.

CONNIE MANGUS, a specialist in A.J.'s unit, her closest friend.

REBO, a specialist in A.J.'s unit

A.J., a specialist close to the end of her first tour of duty.

VINCENT CHARLES, a corporal in A.J.'s unit.

PISONI, a specialist in A.J.'s unit.

ODYSSEUS, the wily hero of the Greeks, Ajax's rival for the armor of Achilles.

AJAX, the warrior said to be the bulwark of the Greek force, second only to Achilles in strength and power.

SERGEANT, the commander of A.J.'s squad, her immediate superior officer.

CHORUS, no fewer than three soldiers, members of Ajax's company, all from his native Salamis.

PATIENT, a woman in her late twenties or early thirties, wife of a soldier.

THERAPIST, a man working with the VA who specializes in veterans and their families.

TECMESSA, Ajax's war bride and mother of his son, a captive taken during the Trojan War, daughter of the defeated king of Phrygia.

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK, a soldier of undetermined rank.

SECOND MAN IN THE DARK, a soldier of undetermined rank.

NOG DREAM SOLDIERS, A, B, and C, three soldiers of undetermined rank.

DEBBIE, a soldier in Iraq.

FLETCHER, the head of a shelter for homeless veterans, a Vietnam vet.

JUDY, a woman whose husband or family member is serving in Iraq.

LARRY, an Iraq veteran.

TEUCER, Ajax's half brother, son of their father's war bride.

MINISTER, a member of A.J.'s unit.

Author Notes

Design:

In keeping with the classic Greek Theater aesthetic, a spare approach to the design is the wisest way to go. The set needs to allow for maximum flexibility since the action must move swiftly between the ancient and modern world. There need only be one standing structure on the stage, Ajax's tent, and any other set elements can be implied rather than made literal—beds in the women's barracks, for instance, need only be indicated by the women lying on the stage. The map painted on the floor, however, should be a beautiful thing, with plenty of detail, if not national boundaries, dating from the turn of the century. The costumes are tricky since some actors will need to be able to move quickly between worlds. Previous productions have discovered that if most of the cast is in a basic costume of desert fatigues for the duration of the play, slight changes in accessories—a cap, sunglasses, a helmet and so forth—can serve to distinguish between modern military characters while the addition of wrist bands or some other easily adopted costume piece can indicate the change into the Greek chorus of Ajax's soldiers. The only characters who need to be in direct contrast to the anonymity of the desert fatigues are Athena, who should look like the iconic goddess she is, and Gertrude Bell, who must be in the dress of her own period and class. Ajax and Tecmessa may be in distinctly classical dress or they might both be in stripped down versions of modern fatigues. Ajax should probably be bare-chested.

Author Notes (continued)

Dance:

The movement in the piece is to be determined by the collaborators. The Maori dance used in the first two productions was based on the “Ka Mate” haka, a version of which is performed by the New Zealand All Blacks before their rugby matches. I am indebted to Renzo Ampuero who first brought my attention to this haka and who taught it to the cast at ART. However, there are many versions of the haka to explore and the “Ka Mate” is merely a suggestion of the place to start since it is suitably powerful, terrifying and short.

Text:

One speech follows another except when there is a slash (/) which indicates that the next speaker’s line overlaps the first, breaking in at that point in the sentence.

For example:

A.J. so I could taste, she said, / the sky.

AJAX. The sky.

In this case, Ajax would overlap with A.J., saying “the sky” at exactly the same time she does.

Acknowledgments

Ajax in Iraq was originally developed with the director Scott Zigler and the class of 2009 at the A.R.T. / MXAT Institute for Advanced Theater Training at Harvard University. The playwright is indebted to the passionate and inspired work all of the participants contributed to the process over the course of her sixteen month residency, and to the grant from Theatre Communications Group and the National Endowment for the Arts that made it possible. The original production, directed by Scott Zigler, was produced by the A.R.T. Institute in October of 2008. Designers were David Reynoso (set), Hilary Gately (costumes) and Margo Caddell (lights). Elizabeth Bouchard was the stage manager. The actor/collaborators in the development of the piece were: Emily Alpren, Renzo Ampuero, Skye Noel Basu, Kaaron Briscoe, Sheila Carrasco, Doug Chapman, Shawn Cody, Carl Rahn, James Senti, Lizette Marie Silva, Josh Stammel and Chudbey Skyes. The vocal coach was Julie Foh. The dramaturg was Heidi Nelson. Thanks must also go to Ryan McKittrick, Head of Dramaturgy at A.R.T., who is responsible in large part for the project’s conception.

Ajax in Iraq was produced by the Flux Theater Ensemble (Heather Cohen, Managing Director) in New York City, opening on June 4, 2011. The director was August Schulenberg and it featured the following cast and crew:

CAPTAIN / THERAPIST / NOG DREAM SOLDIER A /
FLETCHER / MINISTER Matt Archambault
F / ABRAMS / PATIENT / DEBBIE . . . Tiffany Clementi
B / SICKLES / CHORUS /
NOG DREAM SOLDIER B Sol Crispo
E / SERGEANT / FIRST MAN IN THE DARK /
TEUCER Joshua Koopman
AJAX Stephen Conrad Moore
A / ODYSSEUS / PISONI / NOG DREAM SOLDIER C /
LARRY Mike Mihm
D / REBO / TECMESSA Lori Parquet
GERTRUDE / CHORUS / JUDY Anna Rahm
ATHENA Raushanah Simmons
A.J. Christina Shipp
CONNIE MANGUS Chudney Sykes
C / CHARLES / CHORUS Chinaza Uche

Set Design Will Lowry
Costume Design Lara De Bruijn
Lighting Design Kia Rogers
Sound Design Asa Wember
Dramaturg Heidi Nelson
Production Stage Manager Jodi Witherall

Introduction: Finding *Ajax in Iraq*

In 2007, Ellen McLaughlin and the A.R.T. / MXAT Institute at Harvard received a grant from Theatre Communications Group and the National Endowment for the Arts to write a new play for the Institute class of 2009. The grant allowed the project to develop over sixteen months with McLaughlin in residence for much of that time. At the first workshop, McLaughlin told the students that she wanted to use the residency to grapple with war and its impact on soldiers. The class expressed a wide range of attitudes and opinions on war and the military. One student had a sibling on active duty; one was a pacifist; another had considered enlisting after graduating from high school.

McLaughlin encouraged the students to pursue their own interests and research anything and everything related to war and then to

present their material in theatrical form. World War II, Vietnam, Korean comfort women, foreign policy, video games used for military recruitment, civil war letters, and soldiers' blogs are only a handful of the subjects explored by the actors. Each student also interviewed a soldier, veteran, or member of a military family. Over the course of several weeks in the fall of 2008, the students presented their material to McLaughlin and Institute Director Scott Zigler. Presentation approaches included movement and dance pieces, scenes and monologues, and various kinds of performance art.

The project quickly took a more focused direction, and several themes emerged: American soldiers' experiences while on tour and after coming home, women in war, combat trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as the mythology of warfare. The group also investigated the enduring problem of homelessness among veterans, sexual assault on female soldiers, and the crisis of increasing suicide rates in the military. McLaughlin quickly recognized the connections between material the actors presented and Sophocles' tragedy *Ajax*—a play about the Greek hero of the Trojan War driven to madness and suicide after what he saw as his betrayal at the hands of his commanders. McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq* fuses the ancient and the contemporary, combining her adaptation of Sophocles' tragedy with a modern play inspired by the material generated by the students during the workshops.

—*Excerpted and adapted from program notes for the A.R.T. production in 2009 written by dramaturg, Heidi Nelson.*

When August Schulenberg approached me in 2010 about producing *Ajax in Iraq* at Flux Theater Ensemble in New York, I welcomed the opportunity to revisit the material with another ensemble and to update the play two years further into the conflict.

I am grateful to all the artists who have brought their dedication and insight to bear on this project over the years. Without them, the play would never have taken the form it has. I have learned so much. I'll always be grateful.

—*Ellen McLaughlin, July 25, 2011*

AJAX IN IRAQ

by Ellen McLaughlin

(The floor of the stage is a period map of the Middle East circa 1890 without any country boundaries drawn but perhaps with some place names. Patches of sand are heaped to indicate mountains. The area that will be modern Iraq should be center stage.

Preshow: A woman in Edwardian dress [GERTRUDE BELL] uses a sort of long handled rake to arrange the sand to make a topographical map of Iraq, also creating the boundaries in some way, either with sand or lengths of string.

The only standing structure on the stage is a small canvas tent. Sounds come from within, difficult to discern. Shadows are cast against the walls from a figure [figures?] inside. At the end of the preshow, Bell exits and the lights change. All we can hear is whatever is going on inside the tent. Still unidentifiable, but disturbing.

ATHENA enters, she should look suitably martial and impressive, recognizable as the goddess of war, perhaps complete with helmet and lance. She speaks to us.)

ATHENA. You don't want to go in there. Terrible stuff happening in there. Can you hear it? Not really, right? But you can imagine. He's been at it all night.

It's O.K., no one's going to make you go in there. Well, I won't anyway. You've been outside this tent before, haven't you? It's familiar, isn't it? The not knowing, the not wanting to know.

Still, every now and then, you can't help it, you get a glimpse. Some grainy, jumpy hard-to-see thing taken from somebody's point of view. It's never long, just a few seconds. And even though you can't really hear, not quite, what anyone is saying, and you can't see what *exactly* is going on, it's enough for you. Isn't it? That's all you need to know. (*Sound from within.*) Screaming? You think? Nah. Could have been something else. Any number of things. (*Sound from within. She smiles.*) O.K., so that was, *had* to be... what the heck is going on in there? That's what you're thinking. Or rather, that's what you're trying *not* to think. Who wants to think about this stuff? What's going on right now? Nobody.

Yeah, it's bad. In fact it's worse, it's worse than what you're imagining right now. Or even right now. I don't blame you for not going in. Who in their right mind would?

What's his name? Ajax. It's a play by Sophocles. It's about what I did to him. Because I could.

(Choral section. Modern male and female soldiers speak to the audience, as if being interviewed. They represent all ranks and different eras in the war. These are, none of them, characters who are going to appear again, so actors cast in several parts will need to take pains to differentiate themselves from characters they will play later. A range of accents would be helpful.)

A. Yeah, we help people. Every day we've done something that was just, by anyone's standards, a good thing. People were in need and we stepped up, over and over. But the bottom line? We are soldiers. We were sent here to kill people. We've done that too. We take lives, that's what soldiers do. And once you've done it, you're never the same. So you better get clear on what that means to you. Because for the rest of your life, that's what walks with you.

C. You just live in fear all the time.

B. It's just, the noise, it never stops: gunfire, explosions, rockets—they kinda hiss when they—and RPGS, it's a, like, a rushing / sound...

D. There's so much adrenaline pumping through you all day / every day

C. You're jumpy every second because there are no people anywhere in this country you can rule out as threats. Shit man, there are no *things* in this country you can rule out. A paper bag by the side of the road, a dead dog, a tin can? That could be where the IED that's going to kill you is hidden. That *thing* could kill your sorry ass.

B. We can't talk to them, they can't talk to us. It's a situation. We're, like, screaming at them, "We're here to help you!" while we're pointing guns at them and scaring the shit out of / everybody.

C. Should I shoot him?... How about / him?

D. It's gotten to the point with the locals—all you feel is anger. Because they hate us. And there is nothing we can do, no amount of— We are genuinely trying to help them. I am, we are. And they just keep trying to kill us. Are they crazy? Are we crazy?

E. At least with the Iraqis you can see the pure struggle of their lives, day after day. Even when I hate the mother-fuckers, I get it, why they're doing what they're doing, because I can see their lives and they just suck. But when I get home I look at all these fat idiots wandering around the malls and I start feeling just, I don't know, contempt? So that's not good.

F. You're always second-guessing everything because the rules for engagement are just unworkable. Seems like our job is to get shot at sometimes, 'cause you have to draw fire in order to legitimize firing back in a civilian situation, which is, let's face it, this entire war. We're the only ones in uniform here, you know what I mean?

C. How do you know who the insurgents are?

I don't know, man.

B. You can't just shoot people without good cause, but after a while it got to be: if you killed him, that was an insurgent.

C. How about that guy? What's that guy doing?

E. I gotta say that when I'm in a fire fight I'm really happy, really calm, because it's finally clear. That guy who's shooting at me? I can kill that guy with no hesitation at all. Thank you! Everything else I do, I'm telling you, *everything else I do* with these people I have hesitation.

D. I'm going in to try to talk to a bunch of chieftains and shit about how they need to let us set up check-points? I got one translator for the whole unit. Even he can't speak this particular local dialect all that well, apparently. But he's all I've got. He's *it*, you know? And I can't even trust *that* motherfucker.

A. O.K., the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Article 88 says you can't speak against a superior officer from the president on down. Which makes sense, otherwise there'd be chaos, right?

F. It's this feeling of all of us, the Iraqis and the American soldiers, we're all being just hung out to dry.

A. But even at the beginning, when Bush was saying things like "Mission Accomplished" to an enemy who had only just begun to hit hard and dirty, telling them to "Bring it on" when the troops didn't have armor, shit, we didn't have full battle-rattle until, like, well, do we even have it *now*? So you started feeling that the people in charge don't know what they were doing. We were taking casualties we never should have taken because we were going on nothing, no real intelligence, not enough translators, no gear, no *water* sometimes—I'm asking my troops to function without sleep for days in 120 degree heat, passing a single bottle of water around six guys. I don't know who I'm more angry at, the enemy or the higher-ups, I mean, the disconnect—

F. When you're back in the States, you hear, "Bring the troops home, bring the troops home" all the time. But see, how's that going to work? If I get to go home, who doesn't? You know? How am I going to live with that? And I don't just mean Americans as this point, I mean Iraqis. There are people I don't want to leave behind. I can't just walk away from them at this point. I can't. Don't ask me to do that.

D. So what's the mission anymore? Remember when it was about WMDs? That's why I was here. That's what I was told the mission was. O.K. so it turns out there weren't any, no WMDs, weren't ever any. When we heard that we were like, so what the fuck are we doing over here? Then we hear that the mission is the security of the Iraqi

people? Suddenly that's what we were here to provide? That was a big surprise to us. The day I heard this, I remember, I'm standing in what used to be a government building but now, I mean, between the invasion and the looters—there's nothing there, I mean *nothing*, no furniture, no files, no phones, no ceiling tiles, fuck, they even stripped the copper wires out of the walls, y'all, the place is a shell. We've disbanded the army, there's no police force; all day, all night, all you can hear on the streets is screaming, and now...oh hang on everybody, turns out we're here to give you a brand new democratic country? Built out of what? You ever tried to make a living cow out of a cooked hamburger?

A. Were there accidental casualties? Well, yeah.

C. So when you say that you disagree with this war, OK, that's your right, and I can deal with the idea that I'm basically putting my life on the line to protect your right to say that.

A. The place is made of mud and straw. You're shooting 25mm armor piercing rounds into these mud walls, the bullets are going to go through and out into god knows where. That's the thing about Iraq. Everything bleeds into everything else. The threat is everywhere, you shoot at something, you're always going to hit something else as well. And there's always the smell of something burning, because always, always, something is burning.

C. But I know people who died, people who lost arms and legs, I know people who will always be haunted by what they did, what happened to them over here. It has to have been for something, OK? Don't tell me I did this for nothing. Don't tell me that. That makes me crazy.

E. So bin Laden's dead? That's supposed to mean something to me now? I came over here because of him in 2003. That's what *I* was fighting about. It's hard to remember at this point, but back then? Most of these people? They didn't even know his name. There are a lot of things that haven't changed since then, but, well...*that's* changed, hasn't it?

A. What I can't get a handle on here is the time. It just doesn't go by. When you're being mortared, the seconds happen so slowly that they expand to where you can walk around in each one of them like it's a cathedral. Each detail is important—the angle of my hand on the wheel, the shape of the white cloud of the blast twisting up from the road—it's all there to be looked at, thought about, while your life just kind of hangs there in the balance.

B. It's half of one percent of America, that's who's fighting this thing. What kind of division of labor is that?

A. And then there is the rest of the time when nothing's happening, nothing is even ticking. The clock just won't move. And you think about your life, how long you've been here, how long you've got to go, how you're lost out here, maybe never getting back because the time just fucking won't go by.

F. I've been back and back. This is my fourth. I can't stay home. I don't feel like I mean anything except here.

A. But you know Iraq might just free you from time for good. Any second. You might never have to think about time again. Or about anything else for that matter.

F. I'm important here. Actually I'm a little *too* important here. There are just so many ways I could fuck up. And people would die. My people. And it'd be my fault. I don't sleep much.

B. So I guess if I'm going to take the big dirt nap, I want to feel like I'm doing it for something. But when I go home, I can't stand the people I'm supposedly fighting for. I can't talk to them, they just seem obsessed with a lot of stupid crap, and all I want to do is get back here, and then I get back here and I go, oh fuck, that's right, life here is just as bad as I remembered it and I can't wait to get out of here and go...well, where am I supposed to go at this point? Nothing makes sense anymore.

(One of the soldiers begins a Jody call—i.e. "I'm a steam-roller, baby..."—and the soldiers, now all present on stage, march out with it. End of section.)

(GERTRUDE BELL and the CAPTAIN enter. In the course of the scene, GERTRUDE will continue making adjustments on the borders of the country. Both speak to us, referring to the map beneath their feet.)

GERTRUDE. Perhaps, looking back on it, we were doomed from the start.

CAPTAIN. I guess it should have been obvious what would happen, but in the rush to war, no one thought past the invasion and the transfer of power. Once we'd effected the regime change there was no sense that we might have to stick around.

GERTRUDE. We rushed into the business with our usual disregard for a comprehensive political scheme.

CAPTAIN. No one had thought through what it might take to help the Iraq people make the transition to a workable democracy. Hell, a stable functioning government of *any* kind.

GERTRUDE. I believe I was the one who articulated the plan. It went something like this:

CAPTAIN. Something they still don't have, by the way.

GERTRUDE. "Mesopotamia would have a good British father in the High Commissioner, she would be nannied by British advisors and she would be mothered by me. Like any tractable, well-reared child, she would return the favor in kind. Her general sentiments would be ones of gratitude and loyalty, as well as a natural obligation to protect the parental route to India, giving us the wealth of her agriculture, archeology and oil."

CAPTAIN. The only project anyone was interested in was taking out Saddam. We would protect the oil but that was the only thing the American military was committed to protecting. The looting, the destruction of the culture, the squaring off of rival ethnic and religious factions, the whole, well, the whole *mess* that followed the invasion...if anyone had cared, it all could have been anticipated. It wasn't. We were supposed to be able to take the country from Saddam and then just turn it over to a bunch of Iraqis we picked to run it. As if everybody would be just fine with that... It's like no one had ever read a book about the place. Or even just rented *Lawrence of Arabia*.

GERTRUDE. We sat in our ornate room, day after day, a mass of men and me, alone of all my sex as it were, carving up the Eastern world between us. All the vast holdings of these former empires, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and of course the Turks, countless miles—well, I suppose they can be counted, can't they?—the seat of civilization, to be divvied up by the victors. It is the Garden of Eden, after all, that green cradle between the Tigris and the Euphrates. It is where it all began.

CAPTAIN. But then the whole thing unravels, we're standing in rubble, the country is in chaos.

GERTRUDE. I shuddered to hear the way they talked, some of them, my countrymen, pale denizens of government buildings who have spent their lives scuttling down marble halls. Men who never look up; men who have never seen the light of day, much less a desert sun.

CAPTAIN. We start trying to make some sense of what we've done.

GERTRUDE. When these men referred to the people of the country we were chopping into bits, they spoke of monkeys and barbarians and worse. They said this of a people who were writing great poetry and making great art when *their* ancestors were still sitting in the mud.

CAPTAIN. Turns out we're supposed to build a new country from the ground up. Someone else's country. That's when it just becomes this ludicrous improvisation.

GERTRUDE. (*Referring to the map at her feet:*) The Sunni nationalists want an Arab kingdom, the Shiites want an Islamic religious state; and of course the Kurds in the north want an independent Kurdish entity.

CAPTAIN. Basically, it's up to us to justify doing the thing after we'd done it.

GERTRUDE. No one can agree on what they all want except that they don't want us.

CAPTAIN. So, yeah, we create havoc and then we want to be thanked for it.

GERTRUDE. We had promised them an independent Arab government with British advisors and what we gave them was a British government with Arab advisors.

CAPTAIN. It's the American delusion. We always go into these situations with a kind of toxic combination of confidence, naïveté and a will to power.

GERTRUDE. We would allow them to advise us on how we were going to run their country.

CAPTAIN. Military occupations go wrong, they just do. Even when they begin with the best of intentions. The reason is that you always have to do the same things to occupy a country. You have to come in with force, which is always going to hurt some people you don't intend to hurt, and then because you don't know the territory, the language or the people, you have to set up your network of local informers. You become completely, cripplingly dependent on those locals. And those locals will do the wrong things sometimes, for any number of reasons. Maybe they're using the opportunity to settle scores, maybe they just make mistakes. People make mistakes. But when you're kicking down the wrong doors, when you're arresting the wrong people—and you really can't avoid this—harming the innocent, doing damage, however limited, local resentments are inevitable, local resistance grows, and then, well, what happened before will happen again. The country will shake the occupiers off. And it doesn't matter what kind of benefits the occupiers might have brought in along the way. What matters in the end is the damage they did, the mistakes they made. Because that's what will be remembered.

GERTRUDE. Ibn Saud once challenged even the notion of national borders. Iraq, he said, was a fiction in which none of his people would ever believe. He called it a made-up place, as indeed it is. He said,

"My people do not think as you do. You draw marks on a piece of paper you call the desert. We don't see those marks, we see only the horizon, which shifts as we journey toward it. We are nomads, you are map makers."

CAPTAIN. And the country will return, for better or worse, to whatever state it was in before all of this happened. The occupying force is the one that won't last. Everybody knows this but no one knows it better than the Iraqis. They've done it for centuries. They know it's just a matter of waiting it out.

GERTRUDE. I said to Ja'far Pasha that complete independence was what we ultimately wished to give. "My lady" he answered—we were speaking Arabic—"complete independence is never given; it is always taken."

CAPTAIN. We're the ones who leave. That's what they know.

(End of section.)

(CONNIE MANGUS enters. She speaks to us.)

MANGUS. You get tired of the whining. I just wasn't interested in whether somebody missed their family or their favorite TV shows or whatever. If you're really a soldier, you just suck it up. And if you're a soldier with tits, the pressure is just unbelievably immense to, not to... If you, even for a second, can be seen to be, like, indulging yourself, having a little pity party... I don't know, I just have no patience for people who need a lot of attention for just doing the job they signed up for. But there were things I didn't see, people who I just didn't...I didn't take in how badly it was going for them and that, well, I'm just going to have to live with that.

(SICKLES, MANGUS, ABRAMS and REBO, women soldiers, are sitting around, playing poker, five card draw. Cards have just been dealt by REBO. A.J. is sleeping off to the side. They take their hands up and begin arranging them. They use different types of bullet casings as chips. The women are comfortable with each other, the joking rapid and off-hand, the concentration on the game minimal.)

SICKLES. A hand like a foot, thank you very much.

ABRAMS. You've said that the last six times.

SICKLES. I have not.

MANGUS. And you're still beating the pants off me.

SICKLES. Well, this time it's true.

ABRAMS. So anyway, then he starts going on about how he was related to some Choctaw warrior—

SICKLES. Oh, please.

MANGUS. He's like the whitest person I've ever known.

SICKLES. Totally glow in the dark.

ABRAMS. That's what he said.

REBO. (To SICKLES:) You in?

SICKLES. Yup, betting five.

ABRAMS. And that's why he's so ferocious in battle.

MANGUS. Did he actually say that? "Ferocious?"

SICKLES. Not 'cause he's a total / tool?

REBO. Just 'cause you shoot forty times as many bullets as you need to, doesn't mean—

ABRAMS. And then he tells me that's where he learned that insane battle cry he does.

(*They variously imitate it.*)

REBO. Oh, for god's sake—

ABRAMS. Five? What the heck. (*Puts in her chips.*)

REBO. I'm staying in.

SICKLES. You know he got that off some old western movie.

MANGUS. I'll take three.

SICKLES. Some rerun of *Little House on the Prairie*.

ABRAMS. Two.

SICKLES. Can't you just see him sitting in front of the TV in his little fringed vest and cowboy boots?

REBO. I'm taking two.

MANGUS. Hey, don't be mocking cowboy boots, I *loved* my cowboy boots,

SICKLES. Two, please.

MANGUS. Little red ones. I cried when I grew out of them.

SICKLES. No, three.

MANGUS. I wore them with my feather headdress.

ABRAMS. Unclear on the concept apparently.

MANGUS. And my dashiki. (*They crack up.*)
I was confused.

REBO. Or just proudly multicultural.

SICKLES. (*Singing:*) We are the world.

REBO. (*Joining her:*) We are the children.

MANGUS. I was an only child.

SICKLES. No wonder. Your mother must have taken one look at you and thought, well, that's enough of *that*—

MANGUS. I *was* kinda lonely.

ABRAMS. No kidding.

REBO. Can't imagine why.

MANGUS. And when you have to play alone, you gotta play all the parts.

SICKLES. So what'd you do? Run around the backyard stabbing yourself with an arrow?

(They laugh. A.J. turns in her sleep.)

ABRAMS. We should keep it down.

SICKLES. I don't know why, she can sleep through anything lately. Ten.

MANGUS. (*Throwing in her ten:*) Why's she so tired?

ABRAMS. Ten? Really? Oh, all right. And I'll raise you ten.

REBO. Why shouldn't she be tired? I'm always tired. Aw, I'm out.

MANGUS. She's never been like this.

ABRAMS. I know, she's usually like Miss No-Doz.

SICKLES. Seeing that ten and raising it another ten.

MANGUS. Oh, you bitch. All right, I'm a-calling you.

ABRAMS. I'm so very out.

(SICKLES and MANGUS put their hands out.)

MANGUS. Three fours.

SICKLES. Three nines.

MANGUS. WHAT? Let me see those cards, she's got to have put some secret-ass magic marking on them.

(They start to mock-wrestle, laughing. A.J. wakes.)

ABRAMS. Sleeping Beauty's up.

SICKLES. Oh, sorry.

REBO. Are you O.K.?

A.J. What time is it?

ABRAMS. It's like two in the afternoon.

A.J. It is? How'd that happen? Didn't I do roll call?

SICKLES. That was yesterday. You've slept, like, fourteen hours.

REBO. Are you sick or something?

A.J. No, I...I just can't seem to get enough sleep.

REBO. You keep missing meals. You must be starved.

A.J. No, I've got some power bars around here somewhere.

ABRAMS. When did you last have a meal?

A.J. I'm fine, I'm fine. Is there any water today?

REBO. Maybe like a bucket's worth.

A.J. Well, I'm gonna dump it on my head or something.

(She leaves. Little pause. A sense of unease. SICKLES starts gathering the cards, which were scattered when they wrestled.)

SICKLES. Have you noticed her nails?

REBO. What do you mean?

SICKLES. She's chewed them down, bitten them, the tips of her fingers are raw.

MANGUS. Really?

ABRAMS. Something's up with her.

MANGUS. She's O.K.

REBO. She's the toughest person on this base.

ABRAMS. Was. Not anymore.

MANGUS. I know, she scared the shit out of me when I first got here. So hoo-ah.

SICKLES. Well, yeah, she had to be. Until we showed up, she was the only woman in the unit. It was like months. She must have taken unbelievable shit.

REBO. Well, she never talked about it.

ABRAMS. Of course she didn't, would you?

REBO. She's been first in line every time for anything going out, she's got nothing to prove, / that's for sure—

SICKLES. That doesn't mean that she's doing all that / well—

REBO. Maybe she's just tired.

SICKLES. (*End of discussion.*) Maybe she is.

(*SICKLES shuffles the cards in silence for a while.
CHARLES and PISONI, men, come in.*)

CHARLES. Strip poker? I'm in.

PISONI. Yeah, we're here to help.

ABRAMS. (*Sarcastic, but relieved:*) Oh, terrific.

CHARLES. You know, you have any problems getting your bras off or / anything...

PISONI. We're trained experts.

REBO. Sickles here has been whipping our butts in five card draw—

MANGUS. Only 'cause she's been / marking the cards up—

ABRAMS. The most boring poker game / going—

SICKLES. (*Objecting:*) Hey, hey, / hey—

CHARLES. Five card draw? Who taught you how to play poker? My granddaddy?

PISONI. It's Texas Holdem or nothing for me.

REBO. / You're so butch.

CHARLES. The only time I've ever seen anyone fall asleep midgame. We're sitting around at the nursing home / and—

SICKLES. Just 'cause you guys are incapable of mastering the subtleties / of—

PISONI. Where's A.J.?

MANGUS. She's in the shower.

PISONI. (*Mock earnest:*) You think she might need some help / with that?

CHARLES. You mean she's actually conscious? I haven't seen her awake for like a week.

PISONI. Yeah, what are you guys doing to her? We figure you must be drugging her up so she can be your zombie sex slave.

ABRAMS. That's so like us.

CHARLES. We won't report you, as long as you let us take videos.

PISONI. O.K., let's get down to business, I'll deal. (*He takes the cards.*)
Who's in?

(*ABRAMS nods.*)

MANGUS. I'm out.

REBO. Sure.

SICKLES. If I must.

CHARLES. Seriously though, what's wrong with that bitch?

MANGUS. Don't you mean that whore?

SICKLES. Well, no, if she was a whore she'd have slept with him.

REBO. Whereas, a *bitch*, as we all / know—

ABRAMS. "A whore is someone who sleeps with everyone, / a bitch..."

ALL THE WOMEN. (*Joining in:*) "A bitch is someone who sleeps with everyone but you."

PISONI. Bitter, bitter, bitter...

CHARLES. (*Good naturedly:*) Bunch of dykes.

MANGUS. Ah, the third option.

ABRAMS. Gotta be a bitch, a whore or a dyke.

REBO. "And dykes / aren't worth screwing anyway."

SICKLES and MANGUS. "...aren't worth screwing anyway."

PISONI. Are we going to play cards, or what?

SICKLES. What do you mean, "what's wrong with her?"

CHARLES. Forget it, I'm not talking to you people.

SICKLES. No, really.

CHARLES. You'll just jump down my throat.

PISONI. Are we playing cards?

SICKLES. I'm just curious.

CHARLES. It's just, I've noticed, forget it.

ABRAMS. What?

CHARLES. Just, well, last week, she was outside, we sometimes used to go out the side exit there and smoke together, just bullshit a little, you know, nothing much, but I hadn't seen her out there lately,

so I was surprised when I got out there and she was there. (A.J., *unseen by the others, enters far enough to overhear this. Her hair is wet.*)

It was a few nights ago, really late, and she hadn't seen me and I was about to say something, but then I realized she was like, banging her head against the wall. Not really hard, but hard enough to, I could hear it, smack, smack, smack, and I said, I don't know, something dumb, you know, "that's not going to improve your looks, you know" or something and she goes,—

A.J. "Like I give a shit about looking good for you."

(Long pause.)

CHARLES. Yeah, that's what you said.

(Awkward silence.)

A.J. What is it, poker? Don't let me stop the game.

PISONI. Nobody's playing. The cards have been dealt for like a half an hour here.

A.J. Too busy gossiping.

CHARLES. *(To PISONI:)* Come on, let's get out of here. They're all on the rag or something.

SICKLES. Chicken shits.

(PISONI and CHARLES go.)

(A.J. looks around at the women with disgust. She lies back down as if to go back to sleep. Pause.)

SICKLES. Five card draw?

(It doesn't get much of a laugh, and no one wants to play anymore anyway.)

(End of section. ATHENA addresses us.)

ATHENA. Remember—boy, those were the days—remember when Achilles was giving everybody the business? Wasn't that something? Achilles and Hector out there swinging away? Spectacular. But of course it was just a matter of time before it all went to hell. 'Cause first Achilles killed Hector and that was an ugly, sordid business, and then that putz Paris killed *him*—Achilles—I still can't believe it. And suddenly it all seemed just so pointless and paltry. A bunch of guys hacking at each other and yelling. And god, it was so hot. Dust and sand getting into everything, storms of it blinding you. The bugs crawling around your sweaty skin beneath all the armor. Awful. And for what? Can anyone even remember?

The only thing that had a little shine to it anymore was Achilles' armor. It lay there bouncing light around his empty tent and waiting. Guys would go in and look at it. They'd see their own faces in it and think, oh, if only... Not that there was much suspense. Everybody knew. It was Ajax's. He was the next in line. Sure he wasn't maybe all that bright, not a sparkling conversationalist. But, by god, he got the job done.

There was a contest for the armor, votes were cast, and maybe, well, *maybe* there was some funny business with the ballots, I'm not saying, but surprise, surprise, he didn't get the armor, Ajax, no, it went to my buddy Odysseus.

And it's not like everybody thought Ajax would be *fine* with that, it's just that no one expected him to go completely bananas. Well, *they* didn't. I did. I knew exactly what would happen. 'Cause a guy like him, he's got a rudimentary but absolutely infallible sense of justice and when you take away from him the thing he's spent his whole life earning, you better duck. KABLOOEY! He's running around his tent in circles working up a head of steam that's going to send him off to kill, well, everybody, it's a long list. But the top of the list is Agamemnon and Menelaus, joint chiefs of staff, and Odysseus, of course. But he doesn't just want to kill Odysseus, he wants to torture him all night, and *then* kill him. Well, I can't have that. So when night falls, I drive him crazy. I've got him frothing at the mouth and I point him toward the corral and watch him run headlong into a flock of sheep and goats and cows. He spins there, plunging his knife and slicing, blood of his slaughter roping through the air, falling like veils over him as he works through the night. Neck by neck, he opens every animal. But when dawn comes, he's not done yet. He drags some of his victims back into the tent with him and he begins to torture them. Each one is another Odysseus. He gets to make Odysseus suffer again and again, now, now, now... Ajax smiles with every bellow beneath his knife.

(ODYSSEUS enters, tracking. During this scene, A.J., alone, cleans her rifle.)

ATHENA. What are you doing here, Odysseus?

ODYSSEUS. Athena! Dearest voice in my ear!
I hear you but can't see you.

ATHENA. Are you tracking something?

ODYSSEUS. Well, yes, in a way. But how can this be? It doesn't make sense. Could it have been the mighty Ajax who did this terrible thing?

ATHENA. What terrible thing is that?

ODYSSEUS. Last night someone fell upon our captured herds and killed them all. His long sword wet with blood, he chased his shadow across the moonlit sand, coming this way. I don't believe it, even now, even though the bloody tracks have led me here.

ATHENA. Ah, but it's true.

ODYSSEUS. He did this?

ATHENA. Yes. You've found your man.

ODYSSEUS. Why?

ATHENA. The armor of Achilles.

ODYSSEUS. Because it went to me instead of him?

ATHENA. It was a night raid and you and the brother generals were the prey he was stalking.

ODYSSEUS. But he killed the animals.

ATHENA. He thought he was killing you.

ODYSSEUS. Greeks? He was trying to kill *Greeks*?

ATHENA. He got to just outside the tent of the brother commanders.

ODYSSEUS. What stayed his hand?

ATHENA. I did. I flooded his head with madness, dimmed his sight. I reached down and turned his roaring head to look at the penned beasts and then just let him loose. I watched him hack away for hours, happy in blood. Finally he brought the last suffering victims back to his tent to finish them off. He's completely crazy in there. Want to see?

ODYSSEUS. Oh, no.

ATHENA. (*Calling:*) Ajax? What are you up to? Come on out here!

ODYSSEUS. What are you doing? Please don't call him out.

ATHENA. Why not? It'll be fun. Don't you want to see your enemy drunk with delusion?

ODYSSEUS. No, Lady. Please. Leave him where he is.

ATHENA. What are you afraid of?

ODYSSEUS. I don't want to look into the eyes of a man who could do what he did.

ATHENA. He won't even see you.

ODYSSEUS. But isn't he still Ajax, even now? Doesn't he look out of himself with the same eyes?

ATHENA. He's far gone. I can do that. He's locked inside the black box of his insanity. Let me show you.

ODYSSEUS. If you must. But I have no desire to see him like this.

ATHENA. (*Calling:*) Ajax! Don't you hear? It's me who is calling you.

(*AJAX, bloody, comes out of the tent.*)

AJAX. I see you, Daughter of Zeus! I shall glorify you with the bloody trophies I'm making for you.

ATHENA. You look like you're enjoying yourself. Did you kill them well?

AJAX. No one could have killed them better. Let them try to rob me now!

ATHENA. What about Odysseus?

AJAX. Oh, I saved him for last. He's my favorite. I wanted to take my time with him.

ATHENA. What are you doing to him?

AJAX. Oh, so many things. Whatever comes to mind.

ATHENA. You go too far, you should let him die.

AJAX. I'll do what you want in other matters. But not this. This is mine. I shall have my pleasure.

ATHENA. Well, let your pleasure have its way.

AJAX. You know me well, you know I will. (*He looks up at the sky.*) No rest for the weary, back to work. (*He exits into the tent.*)

ATHENA. And to think what a sober scout he once was. Now look at him. Isn't it amazing what the gods can do if we have a mind to?

ODYSSEUS. I can't hate him as he is now, Goddess, I look at him and I feel nothing but pity. That could be me.

That could be any one of us.

He's what we all look like to you, I guess.

Flickering shadows, settling dust, that's all we are.

I see that now.

ATHENA. That is what it is to be human. Only the gods are deathless. You people forget sometimes and talk too loud, step too far. You see what happens when a man crosses that line. All it takes is a day to make the difference between you and whatever that is in there. Remember that.

(*End of scene.*)

(Minutes after the poker scene, PISONI and CHARLES return to their quarters, the SERGEANT is there, listening to "Friends in Low Places.")

PISONI. Dude, my ears are crying, could we give Garth a rest for a minute? Or at least turn it down? *(He turns the music down.)*

SERGEANT. What's wrong with you? This man is a genius. *(He sings along to the song as the scene continues.)*

CHARLES. *(To PISONI:)* It's either that or Drowning Pool these days. His play list is like two songs long. Yodeling or screaming.

PISONI. What is it with everybody lately? The whole place is, like, chewing glass—

SERGEANT. This song was written for me. This is me at my girlfriend's wedding. Did I tell you? During tour number two, I leave her at home supposedly planning our wedding,

PISONI. *(Nodding:)* Yeah, you told us...

SERGEANT. I get the letter—turns out, she's getting married, but not to me.

CHARLES. Yeah, it stinks, it's the great saga.

SERGEANT. Same time, same day, same fucking *dress*, only difference is the chump in the tux.

PISONI. Yup. Well, count your blessings, man, she sounds like a real piece of work...

SERGEANT. But the best part is I kept my leave. Did I tell you that? I showed up anyway?

PISONI. Priceless.

CHARLES. Yeah, cut to you in the parking lot of the reception, too drunk to get out of the car.

SERGEANT. *(Laughing at himself:)* I wake up in my fucking truck at two in the morning, everybody's gone. I go and puke in the flower bed.

CHARLES. Well, that showed her.

PISONI. *(About the music:)* Seriously, man, please?

(SERGEANT turns off the music.)

SERGEANT. So why're you guys so pissy?

PISONI. Just got back from the lady tent and it's icy cold.

SERGEANT. Maybe you just don't know how to talk to them.

CHARLES. Give me a break, man, like you're making time with anyone.

SERGEANT. I don't have to ask. They're begging for it.

CHARLES. The only way any of them would beg you is if you put a gun to her head.

SERGEANT. You underestimate me.

PISONI. So how do you do it? They just go weak in the knees for all your shiny medals?

SERGEANT. I have to admit, it doesn't hurt that I outrank 'em all.

CHARLES. So the only action you can get is command rape?

SERGEANT. Hey, don't knock it 'til you've tried it.

CHARLES. (*Not sure if he's serious:*) And you don't worry they'll report on your ass?

SERGEANT. Please. My word against hers and where's her evidence?

PISONI. Come on, we'd know it if you were making time.

SERGEANT. Stealth and cunning, my friends. I know how to put all that training into use, that's all.

PISONI. Who is it?

SERGEANT. One very lucky lady is all I can say.

CHARLES. You're just bullshitting us, right?

PISONI. Right?

(*Pause. SERGEANT smiles.*)

SERGEANT. Yeah. What kind of sergeant would I be if I scored off my own troops?

CHARLES. Well, if you want some action from me, you *are* going to have to put a gun to my head.

PISONI. 'Course I'm easy. You just have to offer me candy.

SERGEANT. I'll bear that in mind, Pisoni.

Now here's the real shit.

(*He puts on something abrasive and loud like System of a Down's "BYOB."*)

(*End of scene, but music continues as we see the women's quarters at night. Women sleeping. Music stops. A.J. snaps awake. She looks around, checks that all the women are asleep and then carefully sneaks out, between the beds.*)

(As close to a black-out as possible. We hear the voices.)

SERGEANT. You're late, Soldier.

A.J. I can't do it anymore.

SERGEANT. Of course you can. Look, you're doing it right now. You know you want it.

A.J. I don't want anything. Except for this to stop.

SERGEANT. It's your fault. You drive me crazy.

A.J. Please.

SERGEANT. "Please" what?

A.J. Sergeant. Please, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. Please, what?

A.J. Sergeant. Please, Sergeant. Let. This. Stop.

(End of section.)

(ATHENA enters, then watches as the CHORUS enters, coming through the audience. Though they should be in modern fatigues, there should also be some indication in terms of their costume that they are the Greek chorus. They cautiously approach the tent. ATHENA speaks to us.)

ATHENA. Buddies. What does it take to make a buddy turn his back on you in wartime? Lots. You've got to go pretty freaky. After all, they came over here with Ajax. They're from his hometown island, Salamis. What are they going to do if the guy who brought them here is completely bonkers? They've heard the rumors. This is bad, bad news.

(Lines should be divided among the CHORUS.)

CHORUS. Do we go in?

How can we?

What if it's true?

What if he is crazy?

I can't believe it.

You saw what he did to the animals?

I'm not going in there.

Is he alone?

She must be in there.

Who?

Tecmessa, his war bride.

You mean she had to watch him do that all night long?

All night long.

She must have been there, where could she go?
How could she get out?
God, to be alone with that.

(They crouch, looking at the tent. A woman PATIENT in civilian dress is talking to a male THERAPIST.)

PATIENT. He doesn't go out. He doesn't talk. Since he got back this time. He's just... I mean, it's not like he was ever, you know, Mr. Party, even before. But that was because he was shy. I used to sort of like that. But it's a whole different...

THERAPIST. Is he sleeping with you?

PATIENT. Oh, no. He hasn't slept in the same bed with me for, oh, it's been a long time. There are a lot of reasons. Nightmares for one thing, he screams, most nights he has them, but other things...

THERAPIST. There are other things keeping him from staying in bed with you?

PATIENT. Well, he's...he's got... I don't know if I should say this.

THERAPIST. Is he armed? *(She nods.)* Knife? Gun?

PATIENT. He's got a gun. I don't, you know, understand it. Why he can't... I keep telling him you're safe now, it's not, nobody's gonna mess with you. But he can't, he knows it but he can't *believe* it, you know? He just, I make him, you know, lock it. At least that. It's got a safety, and he keeps that on. But I can't, I just can't sleep in the same bed with that.

THERAPIST. Does he understand?

PATIENT. No. Yes. He does, yes. Sort of. Not really. But yes. I don't know... I don't think he wants to sleep with me anyway, in the same bed. Not really. I mean, we...

(Cries.) He doesn't want to be like this. I know that.

(TECMESSA, spattered with blood, begins crawling out from under the side of the tent, trying not to make any noise.)

(Stops crying.) He can't even... He doesn't want to be left alone with the children anymore. At first I thought it was because he didn't think he could handle them, the noise and stuff, but now... now I think it's because he doesn't trust himself with them. He loves them, but he actually thinks he might... I don't know. We used to be able to like *laugh* about things, you know? Even after he'd been over there. The first two times, he'd come back and you know he was a little different but not, you know, he was still *him*, the guy I married. We could still have a good time. But now, no, no, it's just, I don't know...

TECMESSA. Homesick comrades, bad news.
The mind of mighty Ajax was broken in the night.

THERAPIST. Do you think you're in danger?

PATIENT. From him?

THERAPIST. Yes.

TECMESSA. He became a madman, sick with blood
Killing and torturing innocent creatures
Thinking he was slaughtering Greeks.

PATIENT. I don't know. I don't know anymore. I started locking my door. I still can't believe it. I didn't even use to lock my *front* door sometimes, that's the kind of place we live in. All the time he was over there, I always felt safe. Now he's home and I'm locking my door. My bedroom door. Against him.

TECMESSA. Please, please, talk to him.

CHORUS. But how can we speak to him now?
He is untouchable.
He is no longer Ajax.

TECMESSA. No. The storm is past.
The house of his mind is flattened.
He sits on the wreckage and looks around
At what the tornado left behind.

THERAPIST. Do you think he's in danger?

TECMESSA. He is in awe of the horror of his own sick rage.

PATIENT. Like is he going to hurt himself?

THERAPIST. Yes.

TECMESSA. I talk to him but he can't hear me.

PATIENT. Could be.

TECMESSA. Won't you try to reach him?
Call him back to himself.

PATIENT. Every night I come home from work and I think... Maybe this time, I'll come in and... It could happen. I think it every night. Every night.

THERAPIST. How would you feel?

TECMESSA. He doesn't remember who he is.

PATIENT. Unsurprised.

(AJAX cries out within.)

TECMESSA. Oh, it's awful.
I've left him alone in there with everything he's done.

(Another cry. End of scene.)

(ATHENA enters and speaks to us.)

ATHENA. I know what you're thinking. But I'm not a sadist. Well, I don't think I am. Of course that's exactly what a sadist would say, right? But I'm not doing anything other people wouldn't do if they had the chance. O.K., so maybe they don't actually *do* it. But they *think* about doing it.

You do. Even you. You know what I'm talking about. Even if you've never acted on it. The thought has occurred to you. It's like this:

(The women's barracks, women are lying in rows, occasionally moving in their sleep. Between the rows of women sleeping, men low crawl. Music. A.J. is having a nightmare, she thrashes in her sleep, making sound periodically.)

ATHENA. Some mud creature lifts itself from the silty bottom of your spirit, blinks its mud eyes open and starts to slither up the insides of you, until its scrabbling head is nuzzling up your throat and then birthing itself into your mouth. And then it stands on the plate of your tongue and looks up. It lifts a long, narrow finger, like a tendril from an old potato in the dark, and it puts it there, just there, that hairline crack on the roof of your mouth. And then oh, it's so quiet and so quick, the entrance into you, climbing up the ladders of your nerves until it's in every room of you. It used to be that there was nobody home but you in that head of yours, but now there are two of you. You and it.

And you share the house. You and cruelty.

(The men crawl off, just as A.J. wakes with a gasp and looks around her. The other women continue to sleep.)

So don't get too pleased with yourself. The difference between you and the person who can do unspeakable things? Not so great. Believe me. I can turn you in an instant.

(A.J., panting, continues to sit there, looking into the dark. End of scene.)

(Darkness. Two men are talking quietly. We should only barely be able to make out where they are. These are two characters we've never encountered before and will never see again. Actors who are cast in several roles will need to make sure that these characters don't sound like others they are playing.)

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK. You mad at me about something?

(Pause.)

SECOND MAN IN THE DARK. No.

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK. Seems like, I mean, I don't know—

SECOND MAN IN THE DARK. No, I'm—

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK. You just—

SECOND MAN IN THE DARK. It's not—

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK. You kind of turned away and I was asking you, I guess you didn't hear—

SECOND MAN IN THE DARK. —No, I—

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK. And then Easley came in and I didn't see you for, like hours, and I thought, 'cause when I saw you next, you were like... Are you sick or something?

(Pause.)

SECOND MAN IN THE DARK. Yeah.

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK. You're sick?

SECOND MAN IN THE DARK. Yeah, I guess.

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK. What kind of sick? Oh, man, don't tell me it's that thing Sandifer had when he was, like, trying to hock up everything he'd eaten since he was 5 years old, and—

SECOND MAN IN THE DARK. Why'd you have to do that?

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK. What?

SECOND MAN IN THE DARK. The guy told us everything he knew. He didn't know shit. You know that. We all knew that. It was pointless.

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK. I didn't know that.

SECOND MAN IN THE DARK. Yes, you did. He was nowhere near the place.

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK. *(Emphatic:)* I did not know that.

SECOND MAN IN THE DARK. He's not the type.

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK. What do you know about "he's not the type"? Like you know that about any of these / people—

SECOND MAN IN THE DARK. I know that, you know that, we all know that. You just know.

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK. *(Muttering:)* Well, I didn't.

SECOND MAN IN THE DARK. It's the kind of thing you're doing all the time now.

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK. Everybody's doing that, you think I'm the only one?

SECOND MAN IN THE DARK. Not everybody, man. Not every / body.

FIRST MAN IN THE DARK. It's common practice. (*Vicious:*) Grow up.

(End of scene.)

(ATHENA enters and speaks to us.)

ATHENA. You knew he was bonkers because it was all so uncharacteristic of Ajax, the whole business. I mean, it was a night raid. Sneaky stuff. Not like him at all. Because Ajax only ever had one prayer. He prayed for light. He wasn't a religious fellow, Ajax, he distained our help. Said he could do it all without us. That didn't sit nicely with any of us, frankly. But there was one time. It was in the thick of battle and Zeus decided to blot the sun out. And as the darkness swallowed the battlefield you could hear Ajax shouting, "Father Zeus, make bright the air! Give us back the day! If it is your pleasure that we must die, let us be killed in the light!" So what was he doing in the dark?

(Green light. Three soldiers move in a slow-motion dance, as if underwater, holding rifles. Sound swarms as they narrate a dream together.)

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. In my dream, I'm wearing the NVGs, NOGs

NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. Night Vision / Goggles

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. and I'm looking out at that sort of aquarium light / you see. The green film over everything?

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. And the black figures, the black figures, all the living things are—

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. black figures moving in this green light.

NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. And these sheep,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. there are all these sheep, you know?

NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. And they're looking at me and they've got / this fear,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. they're backing into each other and panicking,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. and I'm moving through them
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. and they're just stampeding each other
 / to get away from me and all the time I'm feeling this kind of *rage*
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. to get away from me
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. and all the time I'm feeling this / kind
 of *rage*
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. this *rage* moving up inside me
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. and I've got my M-16
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. and I begin butting / at them,
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. bam, bam, bam, but it's not doing it
 for me,
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. bam, bam, bam,
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. you know and then I'm shooting / into
 the herd,
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. bam, bam, bam,
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. just shooting and even then, it's like I
 can't / kill enough
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. it's like I can't kill / enough of them,
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. it's like I can't kill enough it's not /
feeling like—I mean,
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. it's not *feeling* like—I mean, there's just
 not / enough
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. just not / enough *real death*
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. just not enough *real death* that I can *feel*,
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. it's just not enough, no matter how
 much I shoot.
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. And the blood, because of the goggles,
 / it's not the
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. it's not the right color,
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. and I can't *hear* everything right either,
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. it's like when you're in a fire fight and
 you can't hear everything right because it's all just this storm?
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. And the anger,
 NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. I don't know where it comes from but
 / it just doesn't stop,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. I don't know where it comes / from

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. But it just doesn't / stop,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. it gets deeper / even,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. it just doesn't stop,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. I'm wading through the bodies I'm making,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. the only thing that slows me down is reloading / and even that

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. and even that,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. And then it's like I don't even have to reload

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. I can do it without the bullets stopping

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. I can do it without / stopping.

NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. Because the bullets never stop.

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. And even while I'm doing it,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. even in the middle of this fucking storm of whatever I'm in the middle of, there's this voice that's saying to me, "What are you doing? What the fuck are you / doing?"

NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. "What are you / doing?"

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. "What the fuck are you doing?"

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. And I can hear it, it's me saying that,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. but I don't care.

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. I'm going "This is what has to happen."

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. So I'm making it happen.

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. Because that's what I'm supposed to do.

NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. And the whole time, I'm thinking,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. / so this *has* to be a dream, right?

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. so this *has* to be a dream, right?

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. I'm going to wake up from this.

NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. And I know, or I think I know that I'm dreaming.

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. But also,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. and this is the thing,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. I'm also thinking,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. oh, god, when I wake up and look around at what I've done, this is all going to be so bad,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. so incredibly bad,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. in the light of day, you know?

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. Like the dream is also the truth, what I'm actually *doing*. I'm not only dreaming this but I'm also actually doing it.

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. *It feels real.*

NOG DREAM SOLDIER B. And I'm thinking, when I come to, / you know,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. when I come to, you know,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. when I come to, you know,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. when I take off the goggles,

NOG DREAM SOLDIER C. this is going to be bad.

VOICE. And that's when you wake up?

NOG DREAM SOLDIER A. I guess.

(End of scene.)

(MANGUS enters, speaks to us.)

MANGUS. It was a bad time. Lots of mortars coming in, we couldn't figure out where they were coming from. We'd go take out a house, two houses, three, sweep through a whole neighborhood, pick up dozens of weapons, arrest several suspects, think we must've solved the problem that day and then that night we're getting pounded again. People are going a little nuts. They're talking about just taking out the whole village, like they could just kill everybody, nuke them, you know. It's how people get.

And then A.J. goes out on a routine mission... She's driver for a team that's going out again, house to house, watching from the humvee while two guys go into a house, kick the door down. Suddenly two things happen: something goes off inside the house, some sort of explosion, and at the same time a sniper starts firing on the humvee. The other soldier, the gunner in the humvee, is hit right away, they take the head off him, so she's alone with the vehicle. Now she's under fire, calling some help to the area and trying to get her sights on where the sniper fire is coming from, but also driving the humvee to some kind of protection so she can be there if anyone comes out of the house. She gets the humvee to this wall near the house and

that's when the house just explodes, completely goes up, there's just no way anyone in there could survive the blast. What's incredible is that she survived it, but that's just because she got herself behind the wall. So what's she going to do? The understandable thing would be to just split, get the fuck out of there, let people come back and deal with the situation later, but she does this thing, which is that she goes into the burning building and drags out every single body from there, just in case somebody's alive. Nobody is, but she keeps going back in to find them and bring them out and she's still under fire while she's doing it. It isn't until she's bringing the last body out that she finally gets relief from another unit that comes in and takes out the sniper and takes over recovering the bodies. Now soldiers in this unit have done some remarkable things, heroic stuff, you know, it happens here just like anywhere else. But no one's ever done anything like that.

Back at the base, she's called into the sergeant's office.

(MANGUS exits as A.J. enters. She stands at parade rest, looking out. SERGEANT stands. Pause.)

SERGEANT. Been a long time since I've seen you alone.
Cleaned yourself up, I see.

A.J. Yes, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. I thought you'd come in here looking like a little blood and guts girl-Rambo. Rambette.

A.J. No, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. I'm so proud of you, Rambette. You're my little hero.
Come here. Let me smell you.

A.J. Sergeant?

SERGEANT. Come here, Rambette.

A.J. I...

SERGEANT. Get your ass over here, Soldier.

(A.J. takes a step toward the SERGEANT. He grabs her and spins her around so that he has her pinned from behind, clamping her throat with his hand, breathing into the back of her neck.)

Yeah, that's it, that's the smell I miss so much.

A.J. This isn't what I deserve.

SERGEANT. Sergeant.

A.J. Sergeant. This isn't what I deserve, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. Huh. So you really thought I was going to pin a medal on your tit? Is that what you thought when you came in here?

A.J. No, Sergeant, not you.

SERGEANT. Thought you rated a special little something.

A.J. No, Sergeant, I know I don't rate anything with / you.

SERGEANT. And you were right. 'Cause I've missed you so much all this time you've been holding out on me, and when I heard that you alone of all those fine men walked out of there, I said to myself, "Hallelujah, she's coming back to me."

(He releases her. She holds her throat, doesn't look at him. He unzips his fly.) Take your pants down.

A.J. *(Disbelieving:)* Sergeant?

SERGEANT. Pants down. *(Neither moves.)* Off.

(Suddenly A.J. goes for the door. He has been expecting this, swiftly grabs her from behind, takes her pants down and enters her from behind. It is fast and brutal and over in seconds. She makes no sound at all, staring out, simply enduring it. He zips his pants up.)

Well done, Rambette. Welcome home. Isn't life wonderful? *(A.J. numbly pulls her pants up and gets herself together.)*

Dismissed.

(A.J. is suddenly by herself. She has some difficulty breathing. As her breathing evens out, it becomes a sort of panting. She gathers her strength. The other women enter and fill in behind her, panting in unison. A.J. begins a ritual invocation of Kali, the women dance. The women join her on the word "Kali.")

A.J. KALI, You, the Devourer,

KALI, You, Time!

All things are brought forth by you, **KALI!**

All things are destroyed by you, **KALI!**

In the Mouth of Creation, **KALI!**

We shudder to look upon Mother End, **KALI!**

BRING YOURSELF FORTH IN ME, KALI!

GODDESS, LET ME SWING YOUR BLOODY AX!

(The entire company of soldiers is now on stage, men and women, behind A.J. They chant together, performing a Maori haka, or war dance. The dance ends in a shout and a black out. In the darkness we hear panting and unidentifiable cries, violence being done. Sudden silence. End of section.)

(We are at the closed tent again. TECMESSA speaks to the chorus.)

TECMESSA. It's time. You must look at this.
He can't be left alone with it any more.

(She lifts the tent flaps to reveal AJAX, covered in blood.)

AJAX. Look hard, Fellas,
Here's your old hero
Slick with the blood of farm animals.
What a joke.

CHORUS. Oh, Sir.
How has it come to this?

AJAX. I listened to my father telling war stories all my life
How he came out here and got himself some glory
So I came back to do him proud.
Oh, I did. I did for a while there.
The great warrior
Second only to Achilles
Bulwark of the Greeks
The man who rescued the fallen Patroclus
And went one on one against great Hector
Hero of the battle of the ships
One mighty tale after another
I show up in all of them.
What was it all for, if this is where I end up?
I'm ashamed of myself.
So are you. I can see that.

CHORUS. What can we do for you, Sir?

AJAX. Kill me.

(MANGUS approaches A.J., who is covered in blood.)

A.J. Who is it?

MANGUS. It's me.

A.J. Who?

MANGUS. Connie.

A.J. What do you want?

MANGUS. I just want to know.

A.J. What?

MANGUS. Why'd you do it?
I thought you loved animals.

A.J. I do. I did. I do.

MANGUS. You've wiped out his whole flock.

A.J. I did?

MANGUS. What was that for? What did that shepherd ever do to you?

A.J. Thought they were someone else.

MANGUS. Who?

A.J. A whole lot of someone else.

MANGUS. I don't understand.

A.J. I don't either.

MANGUS. What happened to you?

A.J. I don't know. I just became...

MANGUS. What?

A.J. While I wasn't looking, I went off and became a person who could do this.

AJAX. Where is my son?

TECMESSA. I sent him away.

AJAX. Why?

TECMESSA. When you were at the peak of the madness, I thought, I thought you might...

AJAX. Oh. Yes.

TECMESSA. Did I do wrong?

AJAX. No, he wasn't safe with me.

MANGUS. You're in so much trouble.

A.J. More than you know.

AJAX. No one is safe with me.

MANGUS. I don't know who you are.

AJAX. Least of all, me.

A.J. Neither do I.

(AJAX and A.J. stare out.)

AJAX. Where can a man run to when the person he flees is himself?
/ Look what I've done.

A.J. Look what I've done.

MANGUS. Everybody's freaked. No one knows what to do with you.

A.J. Well, when they figure it out, they should let me know.

AJAX. How can I ever live past this?

A.J. 'Cause I'm stumped, gotta say.

AJAX. I was so very busy with my knife.

Somewhere in this mess of bodies

Is the man I once was.

I killed him too while I was at it.

A.J. Huh.

It's just meat after awhile.

The only difference is there's meat with a pulse and meat without a pulse.

(She puts a finger on her neck.)

I've still got one. Banging away in there.

For awhile anyway.

MANGUS. They'll send you home. It'll be O.K.

A.J. Yeah, that'll work. I can just see it.

Hey, Mom, hey, Dad! Guess what I did in the war?

They'll be so proud.

AJAX. The Mighty Ajax.

When I am remembered now.

It will be for this. This.

A.J. No, I ain't going anywhere. This is where this ends.

AJAX. I cannot escape this.

What can I do?

Go home and stand empty-handed and painted in disgrace before my warrior father?

Fling myself against the walls of Troy and die there?

For what?

Further glory for my enemies and my convenient death?

No, there is only one choice.

If you can't live well you have to die well.

I'll take this thing into my own hands.

What am I waiting for?

TECMESSA. For me, you can wait for me.

Remember me and so remember yourself.

I did not choose this life.

I was once a free woman.

But that was before my parents died,

And my country fell to you.
Then you took me because you could.
But I have made the best of it.
And you have been my only protection.
In return I have given you my life and my loyalty.
I have shared your bed
Given you pleasure there
And borne you a son.
Have you thought of what will become of us without you?
Doesn't it matter to you that we would be slaves?
Haven't we earned the right to your care?
Think on us.
You have known kindness from me.
That should mean something if you are a man of integrity.
A man who doesn't value the kindness he's received is not worthy of
such tenderness to begin with.

AJAX. I'm beyond such things.

A.J. What's the point of me at this point?

AJAX. Death is all I want now.

A.J. You got any bullets? I'm out.

AJAX. Just to dip this red horror in the black stream of nothingness.

A.J. It's time for me to go.

AJAX. Hermes, dear messenger, come to me now.
Your shining helmet alive with the blur of wings
Your gray eyes searching out the dark corners
Let me take your cool hand
And follow in your swift flight
Down to invisibility.

A.J. Help me go. I gotta get out of here.

AJAX. Sweet darkness.
I am longing for you.

TECMESSA. No, Sir, / not you.

CHORUS. No, Sir, / please.

MANGUS. No, I just can't, A.J.... I'm sorry.

TECMESSA. Please don't leave / me.

AJAX. Quiet, woman. Let me think.

(Sound of sirens.)

MANGUS. The MPs are coming.

A.J. Well, then you gotta do something for me.

MANGUS. What?

(A.J. fumbles under her clothes for a photograph, it's laminated, a small school photograph. She wipes blood off of it.)

A.J. Keep it for me.

MANGUS. What is this?

A.J. It's my kid.

MANGUS. Your kid?

A.J. My son.

MANGUS. You never said you had a son.

A.J. He doesn't know. My sister's got him. Tells him he's hers. It was better that way. But he's mine.

MANGUS. What do you want me to do?

A.J. Tell him. Tell him that...

MANGUS. What? Tell him what?

A.J. Tell him that I had that photograph of him on me. O.K.? That's all he needs to know. Tell him that's the only thing personal I was carrying. It's all I ever carried. Just him.
O.K.?

MANGUS. Yeah. Got it.

(Two MPs enter and stand watching, one has handcuffs.)

A.J. You tell him that. Swear to me.

MANGUS. I swear.

A.J. O.K.

(She starts over to the MPs, who then take her off.)

MANGUS. O.K.

AJAX. Tell my brother to see to things.

Give him the child.

Let him rear him in the shadow of me.

Let my son be like me in all ways except in luck.

In that, let him be my superior.

(He goes back into the tent. TECMESSA stays onstage, just outside the tent. The CHORUS turns to us and speaks. They divide the lines among them, though they may sometimes echo each other or speak a word or phrase together.)

CHORUS. How many years have I been out here in this desert?

My life plays itself out
Shimmering in the heat

I hear the distant buzz of the television you are watching
The jumping square of light
Tiny loudness
Yammering in the other room of the world
Speaking to you

While all your life continues
Mine stays here.

Do you remember why you sent me here?
It was something that you wanted done.
But not so much that you would do it yourself
More like a toilet that needed fixing
A lawn that needed mowing
These things are always better done by someone else
That's where I come in
I'm the one you sent
And so I live here inside this impossible job
The job of war
It is, you say, never-ending
And so I dream
And when I dream I dream of:
 Greenness
 Fragrant
 Cool shade
 My body naked, but not punished
 Naked but not cringing
 Naked for love

Love

 Silence
 Kindness
 Safety

A clear horizon on a country road going no place bad
But then I wake up and I'm here again
Squinting in the blinding light
Waiting for the mortars to fall
The bomb to burst under my wheels
The sniper fire from the rooftops
Waiting for the worst to happen
Inside the war you sent me to
All those years ago.

(AJAX comes out of the tent.)

AJAX. Nothing surprises me anymore.
Things want to come to light.
They rise like fish from deep black water,
The circles of their mouths working,
They stare at us.
They dare us to look back at them
Before they fall away into invisibility again.

The mind of the world moves like the beam of a lighthouse.
In time, everything is laid bare.
At last I can see clearly.

I'm going now to wash the blood off of me
and to bury my sword for good.
I'll put everything away.
My anger,
My glory,
My old fashioned sense of justice,
It's time to stow that ancient gear and get on with things.

Everything gives way eventually.
Up in the northern mountains in the early spring,
the sound of the ice cracking is like gun shots,
Cannons echoing in the ravines,
Until the new water pelts down from the cold heights
into the sea-searching rivers.

No one has to worry about me anymore.
When my brother comes,
Tell him I've finally sorted myself out
And I'm on my way home.

*(He exits. CHORUS and TECMESSA watch him go, then exit.
End of scene.)*

(ATHENA enters.)

ATHENA. Why does anyone fight? You'd think I would know.
You tell yourselves all kinds of things. You find ways to justify killing,
the taking of life. You find words for the meaning you make of it.
Duty. Necessity. Glory. The Cause. But how does it sit with you on
the long nights when you've lived past the moment it made sense?

(DEBBIE, in fatigues, enters and speaks to us.)

DEBBIE. So we're out here getting our asses shot off and so forth, all
this terror going down. Years now this has been going on, years. So
why are we here? Why are we fighting this thing? You tell me. No
really. It's not like I haven't asked. I've asked. I ask everyone I meet.
Maybe 200 soldiers at this point—every level of the military. You

know what? Nobody fucking knows. Or really what it is is everybody knows but they know completely different things. You ask every single person in a unit and each one has a different answer. We're here to give them democracy, to give them capitalism, to help them keep their oil, to take their oil, to help them fight each other, to keep them from fighting each other, to get them all to fight somebody else, to control the Sunni, to destroy the Sunni, to control the Shia, to destroy the Shia, because we're in the pocket of the Saudis, because we don't want to be in the pocket of the Saudis, because Bush wanted to do his Daddy's war again and get it right this time, because Bush was so stupid he picked the wrong country to attack after 9/11 and now we have to stay here, um, protecting "American interests" in Iraq... Which means what? We're, like, driving these refrigerated trucks full of army meals and energy drinks around at 80 miles an hour, risking IEDs and worse, and we're basically here to what? Protect the energy drinks? But you know, that's what it feels like sometimes. 'Cause the energy drinks are real, just like the bombs and the mortars are real, and, well, Freedom? Democracy?—not so much. All I'm saying is, we don't have a fucking clue what we're laying our lives down for here. So I keep asking. Because I'd really like to know.

ATHENA. Do you think the soldiers on either side of the battle at Troy were fighting for some blonde? Some guy's whore of a wife who ran off with some prick of a prince? Hardly. Yes, she was pretty. Is anyone *that* pretty?

DEBBIE. Why are we doing this? Why am I doing this?

ATHENA. The soldiers at Troy were fighting for the same reason soldiers have always fought. They were fighting because the soldier next to them was fighting. That soldier is fighting for you and you are fighting for that soldier.

DEBBIE. Brothers and sisters is what it comes down to.

ATHENA. It's very, very simple.

DEBBIE. You might hate the son of a bitch when nothing's shaking, but still you love the soldier who fights next to you.

ATHENA. You will lay down your life for the person who would lay down their life for you.

DEBBIE. That's all I got.

(End of section.)

(FLETCHER, JUDY, and LARRY all in civilian dress, speak to us. Boston accents would be nice.)

FLETCHER. I'm here to speak to you today on behalf of the New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans and the more than half a million homeless veterans living in the USA today.

JUDY. We've got soldiers now out on their sixth tour of duty. Am I a patriot? Do I love my country? Yeah. But.

FLETCHER. Of all the adult homeless males you might see sleeping in a doorway, alley or what have you tonight, one out of three of them has put on a uniform and served our country. One out of three.

JUDY. I'll tell you something: the patriotism of a very few families is being exploited by the rest of the country. That patriotic spirit? It's being bled bone dry.

FLETCHER. Why are veterans homeless? Veterans in this country can't find jobs, they can't find a decent place to live, they can't get health care.

JUDY. You know those yellow ribbon magnetic thingies? "Support the Troops?" Every other car, you see them. People driving around feeling pretty good about themselves, thinking they pretty much did their bit because they slapped a sticker on their car. What is that about? So the families of the troops and the troops coming home, we're supposed to feel, I don't know, *supported* because somebody put a sticker on their car?

FLETCHER. And so many, so very many, are living with post-traumatic stress disorder.

JUDY. I don't feel supported.

FLETCHER. When you have to kill and watch others be killed you can't help but develop some kind of lingering memory that sits with you everyday.

LARRY. I lost all my guys. Every single one of my guys.

FLETCHER. You may not have to deal with it right away, but eventually you will have to make sense of what you did and what you saw as a combat veteran. This is almost by definition traumatic.

LARRY. When I got home at first, I couldn't deal with anything, anybody. All my home friends, I just—they just ended up leaving me alone. It wasn't their fault. I was an asshole, whacked, totally whacked-out. I couldn't be with anybody. I just wanted to be with my guys. And they were dead. I wanted...yeah, I wanted to be dead, basically. So I mostly drank.

FLETCHER. The success of the shelter is that it is run by veterans for veterans.

LARRY. And I start noticing, huh, there are a lot of guys in these bars I'm drinking in who look a lot like me. And they're drinking the same way I am. Like they're trying to crawl into those bottles and drown themselves. These are vets. They're all vets.

FLETCHER. There were nine of us at the beginning. The building was just an old abandoned bank with no front door and a dirt floor. We were just squatting there, guarding the place for each other so we could sleep. A bunch of homeless vets, looking out for each other. Brothers.

LARRY. And I start thinking, well, who's getting anything out of all these vets drinking their lives away? Not us, for sure, not us. But not any of their families either. Doesn't make anyone feel any better is the point here.

JUDY. I'm not saying that there aren't some people who mean well. But it's just so lonely for so many of us. It's like everyone else keeps forgetting that this country's got two wars going and they're being fought by this tiny group of people nobody wants to hear from anymore. But they're still fighting, they're still dying. That's all I'm saying.

FLETCHER. One fourth of July in the 80s, we took a trip to the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington. We found homeless veterans, *from Vietnam*, living there, in the park, next to their own memorial.

JUDY. You hear these people on television talking about sacrifice when they talk about the war. What do they know about sacrifice? What have *they* ever sacrificed? (*Exits.*)

LARRY. So it's not much, but this is what I do. I take them home. The ones I find lost in these bars. The ones everybody else is trying to ignore. 'Cause the average person? They look at these guys and think: he's fucked-up, get him out of my bar, get him out of my life. You know? They basically want us to shut the fuck up, they want us to go away.

FLETCHER. In Vietnam we never left our wounded on the battlefield. A lot of good men were killed trying to save those wounded. Still, you never leave a single man. You never do. So the ones who made it through all that came home. And this is where they were abandoned.

TEUCER. (*Off-stage:*) Where is my brother?

LARRY. Yeah, we're not doing so well, a lot of us.

FLETCHER. What kind of country does that?

LARRY. And nobody wants to hear about it.

FLETCHER. That a man or a woman can be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country and come home to nothing? That...that stinks. (*Exits.*)

LARRY. I listen to them if they want to talk. And then I take them home. (*Exits.*)

(*TEUCER enters. TECMESSA and CHORUS enter, having heard his call.*)

CHORUS. Teucer, you've come at last.
Your brother has gone.

TEUCER. Gone?

CHORUS. Off. Out.

TEUCER. Where?

CHORUS. To bury his sword, he said.

TEUCER. Then it's over for him.

CHORUS. Why?

TEUCER. If he'd only stayed with his people. Not gone off alone. The curse would have passed and he could have gone on with his life.

CHORUS. He is cursed?

TEUCER. Athena. She drove him mad and even when he came out of it he was still under her thumb. But only for the day. By sunset she would have lost interest, left him alone. Her rage is fleeting.

CHORUS. But he seemed so calm.

TEUCER. It's only because he knew at last. No more hesitation.

(*TECMESSA has been watching all this.*)

TECMESSA. (*Suddenly understanding:*) He had decided to die.

CHORUS. And he had to get away from all of us to do it.

TECMESSA. Because he had to be alone.

CHORUS. He knew we wouldn't have let him do it if he'd stayed with us.

TECMESSA. We have to find him.

CHORUS. If we can stay his hand—

TEUCER. Keep him breathing until sunset.

TECMESSA. Just an hour more.

CHORUS. By sunset he'll be free.

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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