



This script is part of the B!RTH project managed by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, supported by the Oglesby Charitable Trust and originally commissioned by the Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester.

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INDIA:

OUROBOROS

By Swati Simha

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

Seven & Thirteen	Two Adivasi women who were killed in sterilisation camps
Rima	Doctor
Boka	Mid-wife

The play is set in Jetiya village, Jharkhand. In the present.

All characters other than Rima are Ho Adivasi.

Ouroboros was commissioned for the BIRTH festival and first performed in October 2016 at the Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester UK with the following cast:

Rima Perveen Hussain

Boka Mina Anwar

Seven Nadia Emam

Thirteen Elizabeth Chang

Directed by Emma Callander

PROLOGUE

SEVEN Today we killed a snake.

THIRTEEN We shouldn't have.

SEVEN I wish we didn't.

THIRTEEN But she wouldn't leave!

SEVEN We tried/

THIRTEEN Stones.

We tried/

SEVEN Sticks.

We tried/

THIRTEEN Fire.

We tried/

SEVEN To send her back into the forest.

THIRTEEN Her forest.

SEVEN Her forest.

[Beat.]

We had to...

THIRTEEN We didn't want to.

SEVEN Could have held her by her tail and tossed her into the forest.

THIRTEEN Her forest.

SEVEN Her forest.

[They sigh.]

THIRTEEN But where was her tail?

SEVEN We never found it.

THIRTEEN She was coiling into herself.

SEVEN Her tail in her mouth.

THIRTEEN Turning into herself over and over again.

SEVEN Infinitely.

THIRTEEN She was immortal.

SEVEN A vicious circle.

[Beat.]

She was vicious.

THIRTEEN She was?

SEVEN She didn't fear fire!

THIRTEEN She was warming herself.

SEVEN She was going to lay eggs.

THIRTEEN She was here to lay eggs?

SEVEN While we can have only one she can have five at a time.

THIRTEEN And mothers are always aggressive.

SEVEN She could have bit us in our sleep.

THIRTEEN To warm her new born with our blood.

SEVEN Her diabolical tail would have whipped us out of our land. Our forest.

THIRTEEN First we threw a stone.

SEVEN That big red ore.

THIRTEEN We missed.

SEVEN She hissed.

THIRTEEN Charged at us!

[Beat.]

If you hadn't struck her with that rod...

SEVEN She would have bit you.

THIRTEEN Pulled my flesh out.

SEVEN Poisoned you.

THIRTEEN She wasn't poisonous...

SEVEN She could still bite.

THIRTEEN I would have died of fear.
[Beat.]
I thought the fire would keep her away.

SEVEN But she came back.

THIRTEEN She was bigger this time, I'm sure.

SEVEN Maybe she had even become poisonous.

THIRTEEN Definitely more fearless.

SEVEN Snuggled up beside the fire.

THIRTEEN Tail in the mouth.

SEVEN Turning into herself over and over again.

THIRTEEN Infinitely.

SEVEN She had to die.

THIRTEEN She had to.

SEVEN I struck her on her hood with a boulder.

THIRTEEN Then I

SEVEN Then I

THIRTEEN Then again

SEVEN Then again

THIRTEEN And again

SEVEN And again

THIRTEEN Is she dead?

SEVEN I can't be sure.

THIRTEEN Should we cut her up?

SEVEN The knife will serve her well.

THIRTEEN I cut her

SEVEN Then I

THIRTEEN Then again

SEVEN Then again

THIRTEEN And again

SEVEN And again

 [Beat.]

THIRTEEN Those bits had a beginning

SEVEN And an end.

THIRTEEN We tore her skin apart.

SEVEN Five eggs.

THIRTEEN Unborn to die.

SEVEN Wrapped in her skin.

THIRTEEN Dying before birth

SEVEN And living like the dead.

THIRTEEN Yellow and cold.

SEVEN I crushed them with my feet.

THIRTEEN The soil soaked in the vicious green.

SEVEN She was no more infinite.

THIRTEEN No more immortal.

SEVEN No more turning into herself over and over again.

THIRTEEN Today we killed a snake.

SCENE ONE

At a make-shift bus stop on the highway. Rima (aged 36) and Boka (aged around 70) sit at two ends of the bench.

BOKA Are you waiting for someone?

RIMA Yes. I'm the new doctor here. I'm waiting for someone called Raimuni.

[Beat]

I'm wondering if I got off at the right stop.

[Beat]

This is the closest stop to Jetiya right?

[Beat]

Do you know anyone called Raimuni?

BOKA Maybe.

Did you know Jetiya had three doctors before you?

RIMA I didn't know that.

BOKA Two months, one month and 15 days.

RIMA I hope I am able to stay longer.

BOKA How long?

RIMA I don't know. A few years at least?

BOKA Few years!

[Beat.]

RIMA Can you show me the way to Jetiya? You seem to belong here.

BOKA Are you sure I belong here?

RIMA I thought you did. Sorry.

BOKA No no. No need to be sorry. I've lived here all my life. But does that mean I belong here? I don't and neither do you.

[Beat.]

You don't belong here.

RIMA I know... I'm just/

BOKA You should be on the other side of the road. There are buses going back to Tata ever 30 minutes.

RIMA I'm not going back.

BOKA Why?

RIMA Because I'm not like the other doctors. I'm not here because I have to. I'm here because I want to.

BOKA And you would want such a thing only for a few years? And after this want fades away? You'll go back?

RIMA Let us hope this want doesn't fade anytime soon.

BOKA You are not well.

RIMA I'm fine. Thank you.

BOKA You're not here to cure us. You're here to heal yourself.

RIMA What did you say you were called?

BOKA What is time?

RIMA It is almost 3 o' clock.

BOKA I didn't ask what time it is. I asked you what is time.

RIMA I'm not sure what you're/

BOKA Always moving forward, dissolving the past and creating the future with every tick. You can only understand the ticking. The clock ticks so loudly in your head that you can never understand time, only clocks. You do not understand knowledge only books. You do not understand disease only pathology. You are no use to this village and this village is no use to you.

[Beat.]

There are no clocks in the village. Your watch will mean nothing.

[Rima takes off her watch.]

RIMA Here. Is that better?

BOKA You are too used to a reference of time, you will feel lost without it.

RIMA I will be fine.

BOKA I don't think so.

RIMA I'm sure.

[Beat. Searching for something in Boka's eyes.]

Why don't you want me to go to the village?

BOKA Because you do not understand.

RIMA Understand what?

[Long Silence.]

[Boka laughs]

BOKA ...our good fortune that we now have a doctor, why would I try to scare her away?

I'm only trying to understand if the disease and the doctor belong to different times.

RIMA What is this disease?

BOKA You will know once we get to the village.

Come let us go, I have been asked to take you to the Primary Health Centre.

RIMA You are Raimuni?

BOKA Come on quick. We have to cover a few kilometres on foot.

SCENE TWO

SEVEN Do you think she'll recognize us?

THIRTEEN She sees us in every woman these days.

SEVEN I'm exhausted.

THIRTEEN I quite like it. I like being busy. You know those moments...

when she saw that poster outside the primary health centre saying,

BOTH "School teachers will be paid 200 rupees for every woman they bring to the sterilization camp."

SEVEN "A small family is a happy family."

THIRTEEN What a workout, wringing her insides.

[Pause]

SEVEN How do you think guilt looks?

THIRTEEN What do you mean?

SEVEN I mean how do you think we look.
I had thought of myself only as a feeling, I never knew we could invoke visual receptors.

THIRTEEN Not to forget auditory and olfactory

[Seven starts smelling thirteen]

Don't be so literal.

SEVEN You think we both have different smells?

THIRTEEN That's not possible.

SEVEN How do you know?

THIRTEEN I just know.

SEVEN And taste? What flavour of guilt am I?

THIRTEEN It's bitter bile and we're both the same.

SEVEN If we're the same then why are we two and not one?

THIRTEEN Because... because we need to have a conversation.

SEVEN Which means we think differently. Which means you think like you and I think like me. Which means we have to look, smell, taste, feel different.

THIRTEEN We don't.../

SEVEN Yes we do!

THIRTEEN I was going to say we don't *have* to.

SEVEN Yes I *have* to. Only when I am whole as an individual can I participate and function optimally in this world.

THIRTEEN You're neither whole nor an individual if you don't have anyone around you. You only got this epiphany because you were with me.

SEVEN It's all about you isn't it.

THIRTEEN That's what you are saying.

BOKA Where are you? I can hear you!

THIRTEEN Who's that?

[Seven shrugs]

How is she able to hear us?

BOKA There you are.

SEVEN You can see us?

BOKA Yes.

SEVEN Do we look the same?

BOKA Listen...Tell me quickly... Why is she here? Did you bring her here?

THIRTEEN That's confidential information.

BOKA You have to help me. I have to know if I can trust her.

SEVEN We don't know anything about trust.

THIRTEEN We have a strict policy when speaking to strangers who can intrude other people's minds.

BOKA I want to know why she's here, I want to know why you're here. I want to know if there's hope.

SEVEN And you think it is guilt that brings her here?

THIRTEEN Perhaps it is duty.
When you have dirty hands, you cannot have clean feet.

SEVEN She was scrubbing them with a rock this morning. Her feet. She doesn't know what that rock is.

BOKA The more she scrubs the deeper it will colour her feet.

THIRTEEN She should know what it is. She saw the loaded train from the window of her bus yesterday. You can hear the horn of the train even here.

SEVEN Sounds more like a conch.

THIRTEEN There are four reasons

SEVEN 1 - 2 - 3 - 4

THIRTEEN Why they worship the conch.

SEVEN A symbol of fertility

THIRTEEN Of birth, of life.

SEVEN A harbinger of war

THIRTEEN Of blood, of death.

SEVEN A declaration of an occupation

THIRTEEN Or a call to surrender.

BOKA What does she hear when they sound the conch?

SEVEN She hears the shrill of guilt for being part of death.

THIRTEEN She hears a call of duty to be part of life.

BOKA Is she here for us or to save herself?

SEVEN We know we've brought her here.

THIRTEEN Perhaps she'll find a better reason to remain.

SCENE THREE

Boka is on her knees, scrubbing the floor with a wet cloth. It is clear that this is a difficult task for BOKA at her age. RIMA stands by her but is feeling very uncomfortable.

Boka continues to mop.

Rima wants to give an instruction but hesitates.

BOKA Did I miss a spot?

RIMA Leave it. Just...

You are a Dayi. You are the Midwife.

BOKA Yes. . .

RIMA Is there no sweeper? A Karamchari?

BOKA We Adivasis do our own work around here. We do not designate humiliation and neither do we inherit it.

RIMA Why don't you look into the ward. I'll do this.

BOKA You look. I am almost finished.
I'll clean the cupboards after this.

RIMA I cleaned them already.
Why had you kept vaccines out of refrigerators with twigs and dirt.

BOKA There is no electricity. No refrigerator.
What did you do with the twigs?

RIMA I threw them away of course.
And why keep vaccines if there is no refrigerator?

BOKA Checking happens every few months to see if the vaccines have been given. I empty them into the drains according to the numbers before checking happens.

Where did you throw the twigs?

RIMA They come to check if the vaccines are given but they can't come to check if you even have electricity!

BOKA It's not 'they'... it is also you.

And now it's not just me who doesn't have electricity. It is us.

RIMA Vaccines out of refrigerators are not even good for the drains you know... They could spread more disease.

BOKA I know.

Where have you thrown the twigs?

RIMA What twigs?

BOKA Where did you throw them? The twigs you found?

RIMA I don't know... outside...

BOKA You should not have thrown them.

RIMA What? Dirt that had piled up?

BOKA It was not piled up. I had collected them. The right size.

RIMA Why?

BOKA You will not understand.

RIMA Try.

BOKA You must bring them back.

RIMA Why?

BOKA I need them.
The children need them.
Bring them back.

RIMA Okay... Dayi, as long as I am in charge of this Primary Health Centre there will be no such superstitious activity. We will not collect twigs.

BOKA You are in charge of the PHC now?

RIMA I'm the doctor.

BOKA And I am not in charge of the PHC anymore?

RIMA I am the only doctor in the entire district. I need to have this health centre at my disposal.

BOKA You're a visitor

RIMA You don't know that

BOKA But you do.

[Beat.]

What doctorly deed have you done? You refused to see three people who had come for you today.

RIMA I saw five others.

BOKA You refused three.

RIMA I didn't *refuse* them. She was three weeks too late for an abortion.

BOKA Is it unsafe to remove?

RIMA It is illegal after the 3rd month.

BOKA So, it's about rules.

RIMA No... It's not good practice.

BOKA She's anaemic. Third child will kill her.

RIMA We can treat the anaemia.

BOKA What about the other two?

RIMA I can't help them.

BOKA You can.

RIMA This PHC isn't equipped to do a sterilisation surgery. I will not do it.

BOKA What does this poster say?

RIMA "A small family is a happy family"

BOKA Read this one.

RIMA "We've opted for the only method to stop children. We've opted for female sterilisation"

BOKA See how happy they look.

RIMA It is not the only method Raimuniji.

BOKA Are they lying?

RIMA They weren't telling the whole truth.
There are other methods.

BOKA Birth control pills and other measures men can take. I know. They know.
They were only humouring you by listening to your lecture.

[Beat.]

You do not understand disease only pathology.

RIMA I understand there can be social constraints. But pills... pills are easier
than surgery.

BOKA How many year? And if they miss?

RIMA It's not that easy Boka. The surgery. It's... it's...

BOKA What? Explain to me.

RIMA I can't. I don't know where to start. Just the way you can't tell me about
the twigs.

BOKA Long ago when there was neither human nor God,
neither life nor death,
neither blessing nor curse,
neither forest nor desert
there was a Banyan tree.

The Banyan tree tickled the clouds and caused the rains.
When it rained on the Banyan tree,
she spread her roots and created the forest.
Many years later, it was our people who found the Banyan tree.
"Who are you?" they asked her arrogantly.
"Vat, Bod-meri, Bargad, Aalad, call me what you like" She said,
"I am thousand years old and a thousand years young.
Immortal.
Taking root from the sky, giving birth to the earth.
I am time and I am timeless."
The people bowed to the tree,
"We are travelers old Bod-meri, we cannot stay to serve you. Please forgive us."
At that she laughed,
"It was I who let you free from my ties so you could travel and forage.
For at birth you were all tied to my umbilical vines.
But now you have forgotten.
You forget that the feet that walk the earth are made of the earth.
Do you not realize I can sense every birth and every death?
Even if you have forgotten me, I hear your every breath," she said.
And from that day on the people...

our people gave birth under a banyan tree.
They were so afraid of their memory that once the umbilical cord from the mother was cut,
an umbilical cord from the banyan would be plucked
and tied around the waist of the newborn.
Until the day of death,
when the string would be unwound
and buried back under the Banyan.

[Beat.]

There was a Banyan Tree opposite the PHC until last year.
When they cut it, I had collected the vines.

[Beat.]

So many babies have died in my arms.
I have been a better grave digger than a Dayi to this village.
I thought the twigs would help. I thought it would help the children live.

[Silence.]

BOKA You've gone quiet.

RIMA I am sorry.

BOKA Nah. It is only a story.

RIMA I will find them.

BOKA No. Perhaps your hands are what will save the children. Not the vines. You are my Banyan tree.

SCENE FOUR

Seven and Thirteen stand and watch RIMA as she sleeps.

SEVEN I'm bored.

THIRTEEN Sh...

SEVEN I can't see/

THIRTEEN Shhh...

SEVEN [Whispers] anything but mosquitoes

THIRTEEN Did you see that?

SEVEN See what?

THIRTEEN You aren't paying attention.

[Beat.]

I got a visual.

SEVEN What!? When!

THIRTEEN Wait.

[Pause.]

[Thirteen pulls out two veils and gives one to Seven. They drape the veil around themselves.]

THIRTEEN You're number seven.

[Takes out a plaster and places it on seven's stomach. Puts one on herself.]

I'm number thirteen.

SEVEN We were six beds apart?

THIRTEEN There was only no beds. Just desks.

You were lying in the corridor before she left. That's what she remembers. Nobody had come to pick you up. You told her your stomach was hurting, she said it would be alright. Six hours later you died.

SEVEN And you?

THIRTEEN I died the next day.

SEVEN You lived longer than me.

THIRTEEN How do you know? Maybe you were older than me?

SEVEN But in her head we were born on the same day.

THIRTEEN We must have an existence outside her head.

SEVEN In someone else's memory?

 [They think for a while.]

THIRTEEN At least we have a number now.

SEVEN We have more than that.
How do I look?

THIRTEEN Tie your hair up.

SEVEN Criminal Misconduct Petition No. 498

 Rima Mukherjee w/o Shri D.R. Mukherjee, 38 years
v/s
The People.

THIRTEEN Thak Thak Thak

SEVEN offence punishable for culpable homicide – causing death by negligence under the
Indian Penal Code section 304 clause ii.

THIRTEEN Dr. Rima conducted 78 laparoscopic tubectomies

SEVEN Unclean Sterilizations

THIRTEEN An unsterilized environment

SEVEN Outside the operation theatre

THIRTEEN On the desks of primary school classrooms

SEVEN 78!

THIRTEEN Thak.

SEVEN In 6 hours.

THIRTEEN Thak

SEVEN And two deaths

THIRTEEN Thak Thak Thak.

SEVEN It is the court's opinion that the entire case presented by the prosecution is in non-compliance with sec. 197 of the CrPC which clearly states that when a public servant who is not removable from office is accused of any offence while discharging official duty, no court shall take cognizance of such offence except with previous sanction. Since no sanction has been presented and the prosecutions' case has been in bad law, the court is unable to decide whether the accused is guilty.

[Rima wakes up, startled]

RIMA I'm not scared of you.

THIRTEEN We don't want you to be.

SEVEN [In a soft and genuine voice.] Doctor, I have a question.

Why is my belly swollen?

THIRTEEN There are four reasons

SEVEN 1- 2- 3- 4

THIRTEEN Why a belly would swell.

SEVEN When you've had too much to eat.

THIRTEEN Or nothing at all.

SEVEN When you are going to give birth.

THIRTEEN Or when you no longer can.

[Rima reaches out to touch their bellies. Just before she makes contact, lights go out.]

SCENE FIVE

RIMA Where have you been?

BOKA You had to be there Rimaji! A new life in my hands! I wanted to bring the whole village to your door!

RIMA Thank you for not doing such a thing.

BOKA I would have picked you up and paraded you if you were there.

RIMA Thank god I did not come with you.

BOKA It feels like the river has filled up after a decade of drought and I can now dissolve in it and flow again!

Thank you Rimaji. I will always be grateful.

RIMA I did my duty.

BOKA You did more than your duty. You brought back life in this village.

(Rima and Boka embrace.)

So, I have brought a little bit of the village life to you.

RIMA What is that?

BOKA Drink up, city girl!

RIMA Smells like stale rice.

BOKA When the rice rots
In the homes of us have nots
We beat our pots
Dumtaka taka taka tok
And brew haniya

Come on!
Drink up.

ROMA This smells like it is older than you!

BOKA Older than me!!

RIMA How old are you Dayi?

BOKA Older than your mother, girl.

RIMA My mother?

BOKA Yes. Glorious Mother India.

RIMA Isn't she your mother?

BOKA Can you be born before your mother?

RIMA Perhaps you were one of the mothers giving birth to India.

BOKA I could never give birth. I am the bad lands of the east.
Mother to no one. I have no bloodlines.

RIMA But your hands have given birth to so many Dayi. It makes you
a mother.

BOKA These hands have not given birth in a long time, girl.
But today I will not speak of that.
Today we will talk of birth! The birth of this Dayi born before her mother. Before India
knew it was India. Before the glorious independence.
Only, I didn't even know we were under occupation until much later.

RIMA How is that possible?

BOKA I always sneezed myself out of it.

RIMA What?

BOKA Really loud sneezes that make you go deaf!

When I was a kid, uniformed men had
come to the fields with pictures of a dark man with a white turban and a flaming torch in
this hand.

RIMA Birsa Munda.

BOKA Aaah... Birsa Bhagwan, now I know. Then I didn't.
The postman turned translator dutifully spoke the words of the uniformed men in Ho and
we cheered him for his ability to interpret foreign. The uniformed men were trying to tell
us that we had to take pride in the turban man and that they were going to name
something big after him... Name themselves? Name their uniforms? Name the stars on
their uniforms? And then it came... The word 'regiment'. The uniformed men were unable
to find an equivalent word in Hindi and the postman turned translator unable to translate
an untranslated word was forced to speak a tongue so foreign that it was foreign even to
the uniformed foreigners, so he stuttered and stammered and chocked and spat before he
said 'regiment'.

The saliva from the enunciation of the last syllable of the word flew right out of his mouth and landed on my nose. At that I sneezed so loudly that my ears go blocked. No amount of poking and probing activated them. So there I sat deaf to all that they were saying about all the things happening in the world. They probably spoke of it - independence. Telling us first we were occupied so they could tell us we were free.

RIMA What about all the things that were changing around you?
Didn't you ever wonder?

BOKA The color of paddy changed around me
like it changed every other season.

RIMA Nothing else changed?

BOKA Only much later. I must have been your age. There was
something new in the air, in the paddy, in the water, in the soil. The dust from the mine
made me sneeze again and again. I was almost always deaf. This wasn't going to go away -
An occupation of my lungs. How long will I keep sneezing? After a few years I developed
resistance to it. Freedom by learning to live with it.

RIMA Where did you learn to speak like this Raimuniji?

BOKA Where you learnt to listen to old women like me!

SCENE SIX

SEVEN You know we must have been such foolish women.

THIRTEEN Why?

SEVEN I did not even know how to sign my name on the consent form.

THIRTEEN Is that foolish?

SEVEN You don't think it is foolish?

THIRTEEN I am not sure.
First we didn't have the need and now we don't have surplus.

SEVEN But if we could read and be educated. We could make our own choices. We could have been so liberated!

THIRTEEN You know there is a big problem with us. We live in her head. We are bound by it. We can't think more or outside of what she thinks. You think it is liberating because she thinks so! It must have been so different to live in our own heads!

SEVEN How do we get out of here?

THIRTEEN First we need to stop thinking like her.

[They think for a while.]

Imagine it must have been completely foolish for us when people from the city dig iron ore to make a machine that will help them dig more iron ore!

SEVEN Or think it is completely foolish that city people think...
Think...

How can we think outside her head when we're still in her head? We're only going to be saying things which are within her frame of thought.

THIRTEEN May be we need to find others who knew us well. Those other memories we were part of. Maybe we can piece them together and be whole again.

SEVEN Not in the same way... but we could try.

THIRTEEN In some ways we are dead forever. Without a history. In some ways we are free. To write it all over again.

SEVEN And how will you write!

THIRTEEN Maybe that's just how she thinks. Maybe history doesn't have to be written at all.

SEVEN We'll call it Ourstory.

THIRTEEN What?

SEVEN If history is **his** story, then whatever we make up by piecing together different people's memory will be **our** story.

 [Pause.]

THIRTEEN We have way too much time on our hands these days.

SEVEN It was your idea.

THIRTEEN Our story? Really?

SEVEN What! You think it's lame because she/

THIRTEEN Don't. Don't even bother.

 [pause.]

SEVEN Yeah. She's too busy celebrating these days. She's a star. One successful delivery after another. I think there's no room for us anymore. No way she'll go back to feeling guilty about us now. She thinks she has fixed our problem by giving life to so many others.

THIRTEEN Are you saying we're... that I'll... we'll start to disappear?

SEVEN There I can't see your arm anymore, it's fading away!

[Thirteen screams. Seven laughs.]

 Kidding. This isn't *back to the future!*

THIRTEEN This is not a joke, seven. We need to find our way out of her head.

SEVEN What's your plan, thirteen?

THIRTEEN We can't fade away. We have to get thrown out violently so the momentum will propel us outside of her head.

SEVEN We kill that part of her where she has locked us up.

THIRTEEN Like the snake we killed.

SEVEN That we brutally murdered.

THIRTEEN We had to.

SEVEN

We have to.

SCENE SEVEN

RIMA Two women are here from Jamda.

BOKA Jamda is very far. They could have gone to some other PHC.

RIMA They said they had tried the one close by but the expectant mother seems to have a serious condition. They said the other PHC had sent them here and you sent them away.

BOKA You don't have to feel obliged. You're one doctor, you cannot see everyone.

RIMA Why did you send them back without telling me?

BOKA You can't be everyone's savior.

RIMA It is my duty to see every person who comes to this PHC.

BOKA You have turned women back before.

RIMA I don't believe I have.

BOKA What about the two women who came to tie their tubes?

RIMA I did not turn them back. I told them about birth control pills and Intra-Uterine Contraceptive devices.

BOKA And what did they choose after you told them all of this?

RIMA That is besides the point.

BOKA They still wanted to get their tubes tied.
Is that not your duty?

[Beat]

I know who you are.
I know why you're here.
I know why you won't tie their tubes.

And I understand your suffering.
You must also understand mine.

(Beat)

It is foolish to take up this case now. She is sick. She is very sick. There will be a broken mother and a dead child in my arms by the end of it with or without you. And I refuse to bury another child. I will not do it.

RIMA You don't know this will be a dead child.

BOKA 102. How many people do you know who has buried 102 new borns? I know this child will be lifeless.

RIMA You would knowingly let that woman suffer?

BOKA Would you knowingly let yourself suffer?

RIMA I am going to see this woman tomorrow.

The disease does not belong to this village, the doctor does.

SCENE EIGHT

Boka and Rima have come to the village to examine the woman in labor.

RIMA Take a deep breath.

 Stop it. Stop murmuring.

SEVEN Stop it.

THIRTEEN You stop it.

RIMA Deep Breath.

SEVEN It's not us.

BOKA It's her. Her heart murmurs.

 Beat

[Boka and Rima look at one another. They know the woman has rheumatic heart disease.]

RIMA Everything is alright.

 Did you have a fever when you were a child?

BOKA Everybody has fever.

SEVEN I had fever.

THIRTEEN Me too.

RIMA Did you have a rash?

SEVEN Poison ivy grows everywhere in the forest.

THIRTEEN It gives me rashes.

SEVEN If you don't pluck it from its root it will keep coming back again and again!

RIMA Did you go to the doctor to take penicillin shots?

SEVEN Doctor?

THIRTEEN What doctor?

BOKA It wasn't possible to take her at that time.

SEVEN Our time is a mixture of their space and their time.

THIRTEEN Their time is a mixture of our space and our time.

SEVEN I'm your past and still the present.

[Boka brings the Doppler close to the mother.]

THIRTEEN as WOMAN IN LABOR

There are things I have heard doctor and I shouldn't be rude. But is it alright if she doesn't touch my womb?

RIMA The baby's lungs are weak. It will need a hospital with intensive care.

SEVEN as WOMAN IN LABOR

What is wrong with him? If I knew her sight could kill I wouldn't have ever asked you to come here.

BOKA He will be fine. What better life support than the mother's womb?

THIRTEEN as WOMAN IN LABOR

Is that true doctor? Will he be fine?

RIMA You will be fine if you deliver soon.

SEVEN as WOMAN IN LABOR

And what about him? Is he going to be fine?

THIRTEEN A gasping mother won't live to see her little one breath on its own.

SEVEN A gasping child won't live to see a day outside his mother's womb.

RIMA Try to rest as much as possible, I will come back in a few hours.

[Doppler heart beat changes to white noise]

SCENE NINE

Primary Health Centre. After a few hours.

BOKA You will deliver early, yes? It is almost fully grown.

RIMA 30 weeks. But, its lungs are weak. It won't survive a premature delivery.

[Beat.]

BOKA You are going to terminate the pregnancy?

RIMA I have to. The mother has rheumatic heart disease.

BOKA Of course.

RIMA I'm sorry. This is protocol.

[Beat.]

BOKA Doctors have a protocol to obey. They never have to tax their soul to make a decision. It must be so easy.

RIMA I don't follow protocol because it is easy. I follow it because it makes sense. Because it is the most reasonable decision.

BOKA Then you admit it is a choice.

RIMA Protocol is to save the mother. If the mother isn't safe the child isn't safe. But if the child dies the mother can conceive again.
I'm not God Boka, I'm not going to decide who lives and who dies.

BOKA And yet you'll let your manual be God.

You will detach yourself from having any personal say while obeying protocol.
What happens when you fail within protocol? Who is to blame?

RIMA No one.

BOKA No one. Not you. Not your Gods. Your nameless faceless Gods sat around conference tables deciding who gets to live and die. This is the power of your institution. It doesn't just play the game and win. It has made the rules of the game.

You are what you are escaping. You are stuck in between the gavel and the block of wood in the courtroom that goes thak thak thak, unable to let yourself be judged. Unable because you won't accept responsibility for your action.

You do what you must. But don't you ever tell yourself that it wasn't a choice you made. You have chosen to obey the protocol. You have chosen to kill the child.

And you will bury the child. It will be your hands. Not mine. It will be your hands that are cursed.

SCENE TEN

SEVEN You're going to be the hero again.

THIRTEEN Rima the saviour!

RIMA I'm not here to save anybody.

SEVEN It's been a week and you haven't gone back to terminate the pregnancy.

THIRTEEN Let the baby grow bigger.

SEVEN Develop its lungs.

THIRTEEN Knowing well, the mother's lungs will burst when she will give birth to such a big baby.

SEVEN So, you're going to break protocol and save the child.

THIRTEEN Rima the saviour!

SEVEN It must feel so good.

THIRTEEN That's what you wanted right? To be hailed. To feel like God.

SEVEN Are you going to leave, once the baby is born?

THIRTEEN You can leave us here.

SEVEN We won't complain.

THIRTEEN Go back to your laparoscopies. Tie more fallopian tubes.

RIMA I thought I was doing the right thing.

SEVEN No. It wasn't your fault.

THIRTEEN It was the post-surgery pills.

SEVEN The rat poison in the pills.

RIMA I was trying to help. It was not my responsibility - They were supposed to have the beds in place, the hospital cleaned. The instruments sterilized. The staff in place. My responsibility was to do the surgery and sign your incentive forms. But when I arrived that morning there was... nothing. Just a hundred of you waiting to be operated upon. And what was protocol? In a situation like that where the scalpel had rust on it, the protocol is to leave. To hell with you women who have walked thirty kilometres for your incentive. To hell with your day's wages that you have

forgone. To hell with the fact that you will go hungry today if I didn't sign your incentives.

The protocol was to leave!

[A long silence. Rima thinks they are gone.]

SEVEN You were our hero!

THIRTEEN You paid for the beds

SEVEN And the meds

THIRTEEN Yourself!

SEVEN You operated upon all 86 of us.

THIRTEEN Single-handedly.

SEVEN With just one other nurse.

THIRTEEN Tied our fallopian tub

SEVEN Five minutes for each pair of tubes.

SEVEN & THIRTEEN

Our hero.

RIMA I didn't want to kill you.

SEVEN Does she really think we're here because she broke protocol-and chose not to walk away!

THIRTEEN She thinks we're ghosts who jumped out of her Indian Medical Association manual for medical ethics!

SEVEN That's the problem with these educated ones. Even mistakes are institutionalised.

THIRTEEN She can't even imagine she can make mistakes about matters outside of her practice.

RIMA Then why are you here? Why am I here?

SEVEN What do you do to street dogs?

THIRTEEN Aaau... Aaau... eating out of your garbage at midnight?

SEVEN You cut off their balls.

THIRTEEN What happens to dragonflies in a jar.

SEVEN Zzzzzzz....

THIRTEEN You tear their wings out.

SEVEN We are those dogs.

THIRTEEN Those flies.

SEVEN Ramming our heads against transparent reinforced glass.

THIRTEEN Bereft of the forest.

SEVEN Disallowed in the new world.

THIRTEEN Dying before birth

SEVEN And living like the dead.

THIRTEEN And all along you thought you were doing the world a favor.

SEVEN First you said population control because there isn't enough food.

THIRTEEN Then you said population control because there is too much poverty.

SEVEN Now you say population control for climate change.

THIRTEEN Hail the doctor who conducted 10,000 sterilizations a year!

SEVEN Even won awards for meeting targets.

THIRTEEN And never once saw your hands were tentacles of the state, operating on our
bodies

SEVEN Having more control over it that we ever could.

THIRTEEN When it is about population control

SEVEN even school benches are good enough

THIRTEEN And if we demand our right to contraception.

SEVEN You tell us it is technically difficult.

THIRTEEN Why would you give the reins of the cart to the horse!

SEVEN This isn't about food...

THIRTEEN We're eating far less than what goes in your garbage.

SEVEN This isn't about poverty...

THIRTEEN It only disturbs the aesthetic value of your beautiful country!

SEVEN This isn't about climate change...

THIRTEEN We're the people of the forest. We don't trash the world the way you do.

SEVEN And you know all of this.

 Truth is

THIRTEEN Truth is

 You are scared.

SEVEN The fear of those in small numbers.

THIRTEEN What if they grew faster than us!

SEVEN Fear that we will think outside your heads.

THIRTEEN Fear that we will find our own voice.

SEVEN Fear that we will control our own wombs.

THIRTEEN And you never once saw your hands were only tentacles of this phobia, operating on our bodies.

SEVEN And all along you told yourself, you were doing us a favour.

SCENE ELEVEN

BOKA You can't blame yourself.

RIMA We let her die.

BOKA And let him live.

RIMA Have you got what you wanted?

BOKA The circle is complete isn't it. You took a life out of that house and you gave a life back.

RIMA You have lost your mind.

RIMA When I first got here, I thought you needed the village much more than the village needs you. But now I see your real purpose. That dead woman was right. Your hands are cursed. You're a witch.
That is why you are Boka the fool. Boka the witch.

I blame you. I blame you for the death of his mother.

You were right.

I am lost without a reference of time. I need a clock.

I need to know that with each tick I am moving forward.

I need to know there is somewhere to go so I don't worry about what I have done.

I need institutions to call brutality civilization.

And when I don't have that... I will call you a witch.

It feels good. Witch!

You witch!

It is the cure for this village.

Witch!

SCENE TWELVE

Seven and Thirteen dig as Boka sings a lullaby.

BOKA I am the bad lands of the east
I am the drought
The hunger
The flood
I am chains that bind us to work
I am the plough too heavy on your shoulder
I am the dust from the mine

I am the gun that fired in a protest
I am the greed that cheated you
I am the priest who converted you
I am the money lender raping your wife
I am the slaver trading your organs
I am the failed uprising
I am the seed that doesn't grow
I am the plant that doesn't seed
I am that scar on your naked breast
I am the ambulance without wheels
I am the rust in the scalpel
I am your first disease
I am your death
I am the one who killed your mother my child.
I am the one who killed you again.

BLACK OUT.