

ZACHUSTR

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Characters:

Zachustra
Witch
Little Red Riding Hood
Maskers
Dancers

Note: *Throughout the text, Zachustra is described as "He". It is for lazy convenience. Zachustra could just as easily be "She" - or even "It".*

Setting:

The sun shines. The sky is blue. It is warm. The stage is a field of sunflowers - each plant eight foot high or more, but of various heights. Everything is idyllic. There is a separate stage area from which the Maskers usually operate. This should be quite distinct - separate from the main stage. The feel of every area - in setting and lighting - should be Arcadian. The audience should be left with feelings of colour and loveliness - greens, wheats, earths, mauves... The fantasy lighting can be over the top.

1. MUSIC FOR INTRODUCTION

Zachustra enters through the sun flowers.

Zachustra: Zachustra's not my name. Not my name at all. I'm no one, just no one. Just a load of shit. I made the name up.

I made it up because I might as well make it up. Other people call me names, so I might as well make one up too. It's not my real name, but who cares. It's not my name.

These sunflowers. This sunflower field. Seeds in the earth. Someone must've planted them. But before they grew. Long ago. No one comes here now. Not even to see what they planted long ago. They may have died - out there - the seed planters that is - and never seen them flower.

They're lovely - the sunflowers. So protective. I come here because no one can see me. I'm hidden - here in the sunflowers. I'm free. Free. Here in the sunflowers. I don't have to pretend.

He does a helpless gesture.

Zachustra. Neat name. Listen! It's so quiet here. Secret place.

2. MUSIC FOR ENTRANCE OF WITCH

A Witch enters, and scatters moon dust. The lights change to fantasy - it is as if the Witch has pulled them into change with her charms and spells.

Zachustra: *(this speech goes from very loud to very soft and in one breath)*
See how the humped clouds rumble through the sky on this fine, beautiful day, through the leaves of sunflower, rumbling their way away in blue sky to a meeting somewhere where thunder's forged.

Silence. Zachustra yawns.

Zachustra: I'm tired.

Zachustra sits on the ground. Silence.

Zachustra: Tired.

Witch: *(trying to get into his mind)* Let me in. Let me in your head.

Silence.

Witch: *(beside herself, jumping up and down, frustrated)*
Skin of a bee
Tongue of a gnat
Pip of a berry
Tit of a rat.

The Witch laughs. She goes through the sunflowers and around still cackling. Zachustra stares at the tallest sunflower stem. He stands. He breaks it off so that it is shorter. The lights change suddenly to sunflower field when he breaks the stem.

Zachustra: There! Heh! Heh! *(This is not a laugh, but a kind of grunt).*

The Witch looks devastated/destroyed - as if a spell she has cast failed. She moves desperately. The Witch reacts to every thing he says. The Maskers appear on their stage area in chook masks. They react to Zachustra's story with hen clucks. They should not mime the story.

Zachustra: When I was a little boy I had chooks. I used to sell my mother the eggs. They were her chooks, but I'd sell her the eggs. And half the day I'd spend chasing the rooster off the chooks because it was hurting them. "Why do we need roosters anyway?" I asked my father. And he said if there were no roosters you wouldn't get any chickens - and I liked chickens. Then he explained to me - using words like "fertilize" and "inject". I had no idea. We were standing by the gate I remember. Outside, by the gate. Then a day later at school we all had to study something out of the Encyclopaedia Britannica and I got the volume starting with S and read all about salmon. I liked fish, and insects and things. In fact, I collected insects. I knew where every cock-a-bully in every stream was in our district, and the nymphs and water-boatmen. So I strode up to the teacher at the desk with my finger on a word in the salmon book. "What, sir", I declared to the teacher in a voice loud enough for the whole class to hear, "what does the word fertilize mean?" He leaned back on his chair and said "Um". Just "um". But I know what it means, I cried! It means "to inject". I knew because my father had told me and not the others. It means to inject. Oh there was ... The class went deathly quiet. *(The chook noise stops suddenly, as if Zachustra's script demanded it)* I was so embarrassed. It was so embarrassing. Because you see, a bit before ... Some time before that ...

The Chooks become totally demented, throwing chook seizures, and lying down dead with their feet up. Zachustra sinks into a reverie. Lights change suddenly to fantasy.

3. LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD MUSIC

Little Red Riding Hood crosses the stage. Lights change to normal when she has gone. Zachustra come out of his reverie. The Maskers have removed their chook masks and make buzzing wasp noises. They put on insect masks. They mime the story.

Zachustra: *(changing the subject)* Do you know how to kill wasps? I'm not going to talk all the time, but I just want to get this bit over with. Our district had a wasp plague. You've got to find the nest first before you kill them. You get a bottle and put some honey in the bottom, and loosely loop a lasso of cotton around the bottle mouth. In goes the wasp. It eats the honey. Out comes the wasp, slowly through the bottle neck. First its little antennae, then its head and legs, and then swiftly, swiftly, just as its body comes out, in the skinny part, you gently pull the cotton ends so that it closes around the wasp. The wasp is heavy with the cotton, and *(he begins to follow the wasp around the stage - following his hand which is waving up and down as if it were the cotton laden wasp)* distressed, and slowly you can follow the wasp to the nest.

There! Up that tree! A huge nest! I had found it! And I was a hero! A complete eight year old hero. *(Wasp noise becomes very loud, then stops suddenly)*. And then I had to mess it up by asking the teacher in a loud voice what the word "fertilize" meant. It was so embarrassing. So embarrassing. I used to hide at lunch time, it was so embarrassing. Probably every one was talking about it, laughing about it. It's so embarrassing. I'm no one, just no one. Just a load of shit.

The Wasps become totally demented, throwing wasp seizures. They die.

Zachustra: But here, in the sunflowers, it's safe. It's lovely.

The Witch comes to him to calm and embrace him in a gentle gesture. The Maskers have removed their insect masks.

Maskers: *(from a pile on the floor, tauntingly, cruelly)* Unco! Unco!

Zachustra reacts uncomfortably in the Witch's arms, and gradually pulls away from her, becoming distraught.

Zachustra: I used to hide at lunch time. I'd forgotten how to walk. You forget how to walk if people watch.

Maskers: Unco! Unco!

Zachustra: *(speaking low)* Stand with legs apart. Feet apart. I couldn't catch a ball.

Maskers: Unco! Unco!

Zachustra: ... that it was ... It was ...

That's the trouble, isn't it? Dear me, that's the trouble. I'm just a load of shit.

That's enough talk. Eh? Enough talk.

Zachustra sees another sunflower plant higher than the others and breaks it off. He sighs. The Maskers exit. He sits and thinks the next scene. The Witch controls it.

Lights change to fantasy. The Witch scatters some magic dust. Dancers dance and mime the following story:

4. THE JUDGEMENT OF PARIS I

Discord (Eris) enters angrily and throws a golden apple on the floor. She exits.

Mercury, with hair of silver, enters in a rich cloak. He holds a rod, and has winged sandals. He takes the golden apple.

Hera appears with a diadem of gold and veiled and a sceptre in her hand.

Athene appears with a silver sallet bound with olive branches on her head, and holding a silver shield.

Aphrodite appears, painted white, in a thin blue gown that moves with the air.

Paris, the shepherd, enters richly clothed in skins and golden mitre.

Mercury gives Paris the golden apple, and then departs.

Each goddess in turn dances before Paris, signifying to him that he should give her the golden apple as a judgement of beauty.

(Extras can be added - such as Hera's attendants wearing helmets of stars; Athene's attendants with swords and trumpets; and Aphrodite's attendants as lithe and body beautiful with garlands of flowers).

Hera's dance offers Paris wealth.

Athene's dance offers Paris power.

Aphrodite's dance offers sexual gratification.

Paris gives the golden apple to Aphrodite.

Paris and Aphrodite leave together.

Hera and Athene dance with contempt and shame.

All exit. The music dies.

Light changes back to sunflower field. Maskers enter their stage wearing audience masks.

Maskers: That was very nice.

Maskers: Lovely costumes.

Zachustra: That's all they said.

Maskers: Like the lighting.

Maskers: It was a satire - like "King Lear".

Maskers: I thought "King Lear" was a comedy.

Maskers: No. It's a Romance.

Maskers: What's it about? I liked our one better.

Maskers: Loved the puns. The sense of humour. It was so ... so original.

Zachustra: *(waking, in another place)* There's this story, and the truth was, she didn't get on all that well with her son. At least, she didn't get on well since he'd reached puberty. They couldn't seem to talk. And now he was eighteen. So it was particularly special when he asked her to come to a social afternoon at one of his mate's houses to celebrate a marriage engagement. "Just my mates and their Mums", he said. "And bring something to eat." It was their way of getting food.

Maskers: I liked our play.

Zachustra: I liked mine too.

Maskers: It was nice, but I liked the other one.

Zachustra: That's what they said.

Maskers: The other one.

Maskers: Not yours.

Maskers: Our one, you stinking dumb shit.

Zachustra: The mother rather liked his friends, but he never brought them home. All the other parents seemed to have their share of the young ones, the youths, calling around at their homes. Not that they necessarily socialized with them - but at least they were there and, somehow, relevant. She had felt ... well, left out. She thought perhaps they scorned her behind her back.

Maskers: Egg-head.

Maskers: Major catastrophic wank.

Maskers: I like our play, so there. I could understand it.

Maskers: Yes! Melodramatic soap.

Maskers: That's what I like best.

Maskers: That's what everyone likes best.

Maskers: That's what everyone said.

Maskers: I want massive slop.

Maskers: Give me slop of the greatest magnitude.

Maskers: Celestial slop.

Maskers: That's what people want. That's bums on seats.

Zachustra: But now the son had invited the mother. "Bring something to eat", he'd said. "Bring something to eat." In some silly way (at last! at last!) she felt as if she was wanted.

That morning she boiled some eggs with a song in her heart, and forked the eggs to a paste and made some egg sandwiches. She arranged them on a plate with a piece of parsley.

Maskers: *(now getting catty, and scornful, and stamping selfishly)* The other one's better. Our play's better than yours.

Maskers: This one doesn't make sense.

Maskers: I'm going to cough loudly in the wrong place. I'm going to laugh at the wrong place.

The Maskers throw coughing fits, then stop.

Zachustra: The mother was a little bit scared. Since her husband had left quite a few years back, and she was left to manage alone, she never quite knew how she was doing. This little party was her way of saying - perhaps without anyone noticing - "This is my son. I think I've done a reasonable job."

Maskers: Yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah.

Zachustra: The little social started, and she felt so proud of her son. He walked in with her and said to everyone as they entered, "This is my Mum", and he seemed to mix so nicely and casually with everyone. She had a lovely conversation too with one of his mates - about fishing, and where the best trout places were in the river. Later she heard someone say, "Shit, who made the fucking egg sandwiches?" And, when at the end of the afternoon she went to get her plate to go home, she noticed that no one had eaten anything she'd made.

He takes on the world's embarrassment.

Zachustra: Oh it was awful. Awful. Awful. Just awful.

He breaks off several sunflower plants.

Maskers: Yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah.

Zachustra: *(turning on the Maskers)* Well get your teeth into this, you bastards.

Lights violently change as the Witch goes berserk. The Maskers mime her story. It should be spoken as if it made sense (which I suspect it does!)

Witch: Ol ot muw toxlim ur tivimlim yiert tomci o tew the qaim uf fremci, thim the deaphemit el virteossit. And tarisy mivir soghlid um thot urb - whoch thi herdsy tinid lu luach - e nuri disoghlfas votoum.

Maskers: It seems to make sense, but I can't understand it.

Witch: O fortl tew hir jatl ebuvi the hurozum, dicurelong and chiromg the isivelid sphiri thi hed jatl bigam lu nuvi om; gsollirong soki the nurmomg tler - fass uf sofi and tpsimduar and juy. Bal, uh, whel e rivusaloum!

Maskers: Maybe we're thick.

Witch: And whel e hierl natl o hevi lu cumlinpseli wolhual inuloum, that isiveloum and that fess. Sollsi dod o drien, om e meloum uf gessem nim, om e meloum uf nim uf humuar, and uf cevesoirt.

Maskers: I think it's just nonsense. Stupid nonsense. Our play's better.

Witch: O thuaghl lim thuatemd twurd t wuasd hevi frun thior tceberdt lu evimgi ivim e suuk thel might lhrielimid hir wolh omtasl. Bal the egi uf chovesry ot gumi. Thel uf tuphotlirt, icumunotlt and cescaselurt het tacciidid, and the gsury uf iarupi ot ixlomgaothid furivir.

The Maskers freeze as if struck by a spell. Zachustra snatches the Witch's hat off her head.

Witch: Give me my hat! My hat! You can't do that.

They chase each other through the sunflower field.

Zachustra: You're not a witch at all. You're ordinary, like every one else.

Witch: Give me my hat! Why do you want to destroy me?

Zachustra: You're just pretending to be a witch.

The chase continues. The Witch loses more and more of her witch's clothing each time Zachustra dives at her. Eventually she is left blubbing on the stage in only her contemporary clothes.

Zachustra: False! False! It's all false! I feel... I feel... They're getting here. They're getting here - the consensus. It's awful. It's awful. I'll destroy you yet - you stupid bitch of a witch.

Witch: You've broken my spells now. There's no more magic.

Zachustra: I didn't do it. They did it. They ruined the magic.

He breaks off a sunflower stem. The Witch remains blubbing on the ground. The Maskers wake from their freeze - the spells having been broken.

Maskers: (*exiting*) Yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah. Our play is better. Our play is better because we're making more noise. Yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah. Our play is better because we wrecked the magic.

Zachustra: His name was ... His name was ... His ... (*Frustrated*) Ah! I was as good as them. Just as good. Creative enough. But I was as good as them.

One day they said to me, "You're better than us". No I'm not, I said. Yes you are, they said. I'm not, I said. You are, they said. I'm not. You are. I'm not. When you succeed we feel so small (they said). We feel like shit. We hate it. We're only telling you

because we're jealous, they said. When you did the Greek dance and the judgement of Paris we felt ... we felt so sorry.

And then they cried. They cried.

You see, I couldn't. I couldn't. I couldn't after that. They were my friends. I mean, I didn't want to hurt them. But ... the magic had died.

I tried to do things. I tried again, and when ever I thought it was good I'd screw it up and throw it away. I couldn't ... But ...

I'd cancel it. Cancel it. It's too much hassle. I hated being as good as anyone else. I hate being as good as anyone. It's too much hassle. I hate it. It's so embarrassing. I hate it. So I came out here. Into the sunflower field. It's safe here. They're protective. I told you that. Maybe I didn't tell you why. Eh?

He breaks another sunflower stem. And another. And another. He becomes extremely agitated and neurotic. He sits. The Witch rises from the floor and gathers her witch's clothes and puts them on.

Witch: I can't take too many beatings. I can't.

Lights change to fantasy. The Witch scatters some magic dust. Dancers dance and mime the following story (perhaps backwards):

5. THE JUDGEMENT OF PARIS II

Discord (Eris) enters angrily and throws a golden apple on the floor. She exits.

Mercury, with hair of silver, enters in a rich cloak. He holds a rod, and has winged sandals. He takes the golden apple.

Hera appears with a diadem of gold and veiled and a sceptre in her hand.

Athene appears with a silver sallet bound with olive branches on her head, and holding a silver shield.

Aphrodite appears, painted white, in a thin blue gown that moves with the air.

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(Extras can be added - such as Hera's attendants wearing helmets of stars; Athene's attendants with swords and trumpets; and Aphrodite's attendants as lithe and body beautiful with garlands of flowers).

Hera's dance offers Paris wealth.

Athene's dance offers Paris power.

Aphrodite's dance offers sexual gratification.

Paris gives the golden apple to Athene.

Discord enters and angrily snatches the golden apple off Athene.

The others dance with contempt and shame. They exit.

Discord smashes the apple on the floor and looks pleased. She exits. The music dies.

The Maskers enter the main stage. They shake hands with Zachustra.

Maskers: Nice play.

Maskers: Nice job.

They turn to the audience and snort. They turn back to Zachustra and shake his hand again.

Maskers: Nice play.

Maskers: Nice job. Loved the movement.

They turn to the audience and snort. They turn back to Zachustra and shake his hand again.

Maskers: Nice play.

Maskers: Nice job. Thought it could've done without the dancers though.

They turn to the audience and snort. They exit.

Zachustra blubbers and breaks all the sunflowers down bit by bit, trying to make it all the same height, until everything is at ground level. He sits on the ground and continues to blubber. He sleeps.

6. LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD CHORD

Little Red Riding Hood enters. She joins the Witch in reconstructing the sunflowers.

Witch: *(to Little Red Riding Hood)* There was a tree in the Garden of Eden whose fruit, if devoured, gave knowledge of good and evil. (That's the tree that caused the fall of humanity) and it was cursed to grow from then only in Hell. But it never bears fruit now. For whenever the time of ripeness comes, it cuts itself down, so shamed it was. So shamed it once was for bearing fruit.

7. SAD LITTLE DANCE OF WITCH

The Witch does a little sad dance, pulling the lights into fantasies. Zachustra wakes. Perhaps the sunflowers rise in a rain storm.

THE END