

# Shaman

A Play

By David Cornberg

# Shaman

## Sequence:

### Act I.

Scene 1

Scene 2

Scene 3

### Act II.

Scene 1

Scene 2

Scene 3

### Act III.

Scene 1

Scene 2

Scene 3

### Act IV:

Scene 1

Scene 2

### Act V:

Scene 1

Scene 2

Scene 3

Scene 4

Scene 5

## Characters, in order of appearance:

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Dancers           | Water, sea plants, sea creatures                        |
| Sigvana           | Inupiat female shaman                                   |
| Dancers           | Eels  |
| Sedna             | Sea goddess, Mother of Sea Creatures                    |
| Dancers           | Seals and whales  |
| Two Inupiat men   |   |
| Two Inupiat women |   |
| Kunuyaq           | Inupiat man   |
| Nigliq            | Inupiat man, Kunuyaq's brother                          |
| Iqiasuaq          | Inupiat woman, Nigliq's wife                            |
| Child             | Nigliq and Iqiasuaq's daughter                          |
| Dancers           | Caribou, lemmings, polar bears, killer whales,<br>raven |
| Kackilack         | Tlingit male shaman                                     |

|                         |                               |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Russian lieutenant      |                               |
| Three Russian sailors   |                               |
| Aleut male shaman       |                               |
| Shaman's assistant      |                               |
| Russian ship's captain  |                               |
| Russian Orthodox priest |                               |
| Three Aleut males       |                               |
| Aleut translator        |                               |
| Kackilack's assistant   |                               |
| Tlingit warriors        |                               |
| Tlingit chiefs          |                               |
| Sandra                  | Contemporary Athabascan woman |
| Grandfather             | Sandra's grandfather          |
| Frankie                 | Sandra's son                  |
| Lulu                    | Sandra's daughter             |
| Sister Margaret         | Catholic nun                  |
| Father Larry            | Catholic priest               |
| Aunt Ella               | Athabascan older woman        |
| Aunt Mary               | Athabascan older woman        |
| Numinous Being          | Athabascan male shaman        |
| Johnny                  | Drunken Athabascan man        |
| Leroy                   | Drunken Athabascan man        |
| Louise                  | Drunken Athabascan woman      |

Act I. Inupiat Shaman (female).

Scene 1. (Opens and takes place on the bottom of the Arctic Ocean. Dominant color throughout this scene is sea-bluegreen. Throughout this scene, dancers dressed as water, sea creatures, and sea plants move and respond to the action. An Inupiat female shaman, in skin-colored tights to simulate nakedness, enters from stageleft. She moves slowly and deliberately towards the mouth of a large undersea cave, upstage right. At center stage, she stops and begins to clap her hands.)

Sigvana: (sings) O Sedna, bluegreen beauty  
of the terrible water world  
Mother of fin and scale and spout  
Do not cast Sigvana out  
Do not cast her out  
Hear and grant poor Sigvana's plea  
Our elders turn to skin and bones  
Our children's eyes grow weak  
Send the seal and the whale  
Send the food we seek

(Sigvana repeats the song, and before she is done, Sedna swims slowly from the cave, preceded by long, menacing eels. Her body is fin and scales with long streamers of seaweed. Her hair is long tangled bluegreen weed. The eels part and Sedna approaches Sigvana, who backs up then moves forward. The two dance into a wrestling hold. They clinch, slither, slip from each other's grasp and then close again; when they close and hold, the sea creatures move in closer, trembling, and then skitter away as the two break apart. They wrestle until the shaman pins Sedna near a coral tree, breaks off a branch of coral and begins to comb and untangle her hair. This calms Sedna as the shaman removes from her hair the vermin caused by the taboo transgressions of humans. As Sigvana removes each vermin, she names it and casts it away.)

Sigvana: There goes murder! There goes greed! There goes adultery!  
There goes impiety! There goes dishonor to Sedna! Your precious hair is  
cleansed again of human error and evil. (chants)

You are the greatest beauty  
You are the most powerful spirit  
You are the mother of sea life  
You are the giver of our life  
I, poor Sigvana, serve you  
I, poor Sigvana, heard the hungry cries  
of little ones and elders

And came to you to plead  
For animals to eat  
I cast the evils from the people  
I cast them into freezing night  
I cast them from the iglu's heat  
I cast them from the people's heart  
Hear my plea, O mighty Sedna, give  
us animals to eat

(Sedna rises slowly. Sigvana stays seated but watches warily. Sedna moves slowly toward the cave mouth. At center stage, she stops, whirls three times counterclockwise, then claps her hands four times)

Sedna: (calls out towards the cave)  
Come seal, come whale,  
Come whale, come seal,  
Sigvana has made good  
The violations of her people  
She has cleansed the mother's hair  
Of foul and bloody deeds  
Now your time of giving comes  
My sleek and supple friends  
Now you shall become the answer  
To the people's needs

(Slowly from the cave swim several seals and whales. They circle slowly around Sedna. Sigvana rises and moves to downstage left, where she turns and faces Sedna)

Sigvana: O Sedna, O mother of all sea life, not the sun in the summer sky, nor the light in my first son's eye, not the berries ripe on the branch, nor the fat eggs warm in the nest, could please me like the sight of your living children. Now they are here. I see them here before me. The sea has not lost its savor; the night has not lost its stars. But please do not delay. Tell these your children and friends to go to my people, where they huddle in bitter hunger, losing hope as each oil lamp burns down.

Sedna: (turns slowly with the creatures circling her) My children, my friends. Of my flesh you came, with my spirit you go. Follow this woman, Sigvana, to her people. Let them not die and cease to honor you and me. Let them take you to their young and old. You are their life as I am yours. Go now with Sigvana. (Sedna moves to her cave and disappears inside as the seals and whales follow Sigvana offstage left. End of Scene 1.)

Scene 2. (Opens and takes place in an iglu during the day. It was "a chamber roughly ten feet square made of driftwood logs from the ... beach. Entry was through the quanitchaq, a whalebone passage with access to the chamber through a katak, a round hole in the chamber floor. In addition to its function as a cold trap, the quanitchaq was a storage area, with cooking and sleeping alcoves set in its walls. The iglu was lit and partially ventilated by a skylight covered with seal gut and a small hole called 'the nose.' Beneath the skylight and set into the north wall was a sleeping bench for the household elders; under the bench and at the katak the women and girls tended seal-oil lamps. Insulated on the outside with thick layers of sod, most iglus were surmounted by storage racks to keep meat and equipment from dogs and foxes" (Tom Lowenstein, *The Things That Were Said Of Them*, xxviii). The audience sees into the iglu through a side cutaway so that the entire built structure is visible, including the racks on top and part of the earth around the iglu. The shaman is asleep under a polar bear robe on the sleeping bench, centerstage right. Two men sit stageright near the katak; one of the men is carving a piece of ivory into a spearpoint. The other one watches. An older and a younger woman sit stageleft near the katak, sharing muktuk. From downstage right, three adults enter carrying a child. Two men, Kunuyaq and Nigliq, carry the child between them in a skin wrap; a woman, Iqiasuaq, walks behind. They stop before entering the iglu. They converse in low tones so that no one inside hears them.)

Iqiasuaq: (opens the wrap to caress the child's face) Do not be afraid, little one; we are at Sigvana's iglu. She knows you and us and she will take care of you.

Nigliq: But how much muktuk, how much seal oil, how many fox furs will she want? Our shelves are almost empty, wife--how will we pay her?

Iqiasuaq: We will pay her first with fine words and later with oil and meat. She will not sit by with idle hands and let the young one suffer until you kill a fat whale!

Kunuyaq: She speaks well, Nigliq. Sigvana does not hurt her people, like some shamans; she helps them. She has been known to heal with nothing given to her in exchange. It was unheard of, but she did so, and the people thought much of her. We should not be afraid to walk right in and ask her for help.

Nigliq: Then we must do so. (They re-wrap the child and enter the iglu, Iqiasuaq going first. When they reach the katak, the two women rise and move to stand by the bench near Sigvana. Kunuyaq and Nigliq step up onto the floor of the iglu and lay down the child in front of Sigvana, who has awakened and is sitting up under the robe. The two men stay seated and watch.)

Iqiasuaq: (to no one in particular) Someone with great power and a warm heart awakes. Someone who knows the suffering of children awakes. Someone with the means to heal awakes.

Sigvana: (sitting up and looking at the bundled child) Someone comes to my iglu in need. Someone comes to my iglu with pain. Someone comes for help.

Nigliq: (addressing Sigvana) Healer of our people, we are poor and have little. We cannot lay meat and furs at your feet. Please do not refuse us for our youngest daughter is very ill.

Sigvana: We will speak of meat and furs later, Nigliq. Unwrap the child. (Nigliq and Kunuyaq unwrap the girl, who wears a skin jacket, and sits up looking frightened and uncomfortable.)

Sigvana: Iqiasuaq, what is wrong with the child?

Iqiasuaq: She is blind and has lost her voice. She hears but she cannot see or speak.

Sigvana: How long has she been this way?

Iqiasuaq: Almost two weeks.

Sigvana: (stands in front of the bench) Why have you taken so long? Why didn't you bring her here sooner?

Iqiasuaq: We hoped her powers would return. We did not want to bother you with our poor problem.

Nigliq: And I have not been well, Sigvana. Do not blame me. My brother Kunuyaq has been with me. We have hunted the seal and the bear but have killed nothing. After you returned from Sedna, the seal and whale were many. But I got few. We are poor; we do not have much meat or fur.

Sigvana: I hear of your plight, Nigliq. Sedna is generous but not all hunters are lucky. What did the child dream before she lost her powers, Iqiasuaq?

Iqiasuaq: She told me of only one dream that she had several nights and then she lost her powers.

Sigvana: What was the dream?

Iqiasuaq: There were great seabirds flying above ice and rock. She was on the back of one of them. Its feathers were shiny and black like the orca's skin. But when it turned its head, it had no eyes. There were live coals where the eyes should have been. And when it opened its beak, it made no sound. Steam like the breath of the angry bear came from its throat.

Sigvana: A rule has been broken. When the rule was broken, the skin of power around the child protecting her and keeping her cracked. Her soul has wandered and now flies with things of the other world.

Kunuyaq: Someone sees things far as though they were near and speaks things hidden as though they were here. Indeed, a rule was broken. Before my brother, Nigliq, and I last went hunting, we neglected to give good meat to Sedna at the edge of the ice. We had little to eat and thought it wouldn't hurt just once not to sacrifice.

Sigvana: What have you done since?

Nigliq: What could we do, Sigvana? We had only scraps of muktuk, and when we returned with one poor seal, we gave both flippers to Sedna.

Sigvana: You were instructed to give before, not after. Your poor seal was Sedna's way of expressing pity for your poverty and contempt for your impiety.

Nigliq: But our child! Will our child live? Her mother can barely manage without her, and with me sick, and my brother, Kunuyaq, who must soon return to his own village.

Sigvana: Your child will live. Her loss of powers is only a warning to you. (Sigvana goes to the katak and brings back from a shelf there a drum and a very large caribou skin blanket. She throws the blanket completely

over the child then crawls under it with her drum. She begins to drum and make wordless sounds. The child begins to cry, sobs, screams and kicks beneath the blanket, then sobs more quietly. Finally, she is quiet and Sigvana stops drumming and singing. Sigvana throws the blanket back. The child rubs her eyes and looks for her mother. Her mother comes to her)

Iqiasuaq: Someone sees again! I heard you scream, daughter. Speak to me.

Daughter: I was scared, mother, and I'm hungry. And I need to pee.

(The others laugh and comment.)

Sigvana: Take her home and feed her whatever you have. Then give the rest to Sedna. Afterwards, you may hunt again.

(Iqiasuaq takes her daughter by the hand, helps her down the katak, and is followed by Nigliq and Kunuyaq. They exit the iglu and leave stageright. End of Scene 2.)

Scene 3. (Opens and takes place with Sigvana standing, back to audience, facing a frozen ocean. She drums and chants occasionally. The backdrop goes steadily through changes of light that signify dawn, day, dusk, sundown, night, dawn, day and on for several days and nights until animal dancers begin to appear. She sings a different song before the appearance of each different species of animal.)

Sigvana: Come prickly tines and curving horns  
come slender legs and calves new-born  
I call for lean and far-eyed deer  
I honor caribou--no fear! (Caribou dancers file in from  
downstage left, form behind and around the shaman then file off upstage  
right.)

Sigvana: Come tiny furred and creeping friends  
come twitching snouts whose whiskers bend  
I call for beady eyes so near  
I honor lemmings--no fear! (Lemming dancers scurry on from  
downstage right, creep and sniff around Sigvana, then scurry off upstage  
left.)

Sigvana: Come huge seal-killing bear

come tooth and claw and snow-like hair  
I call for black-eyes, tiny ears  
I honor polar bears--no fear! (Three polar bear dancers enter from downstage right, move slowly and stately in patterns around the shaman, then exit upstage right.)

Sigvana: Come black and white ocean king  
come thick teeth in a killer ring  
I call for sleek skin's breath to hear  
I honor killer whales--no fear! (Two killer whale dancers enter from downstage left, circle and weave around Sigvana, then swim off upstage left.)

Sigvana: Come black wing, bright eye, raucous fun  
come wings that bronze in evening sun  
I call for ravenous beaks that tear  
I honor raven--no fear! (One large raven dancer glides and flaps on from upstage right, circles and swoops downstage, right and left, then upstage around Sigvana, then off upstage left. After the raven leaves she slowly slumps down and into sleep as the sun goes down once again. In a half-light of dream her violent death as a Tlingit shaman (Act III, Scene 2) takes place in slow motion downstage center with mime and lights only.)

Tlingit shaman: (stands downstage right, waving a war club and mouthing screams of curses).

Russian lieutenant: (standing downstage left, in front of three Russian sailors armed with rifles, raises his sword, points at the shaman, mouths "Ready!-Aim!-Fire!," drops his sword on "Fire!").

Sailors: (standing together, upstage left of the lieutenant, raise rifles and fire as one at the shaman).

Shaman: (hit by the bullets, stays on his feet but backs out of the spotlight and off downstage right).

Lieutenant and Sailors: (as shaman starts to back up, all four back out of the spotlight and off downstage left. Dawn breaks as dream players exit).

Sigvana: (startles awake, wipes her eyes, shakes her head, looks around, rises, stretches, and exits stageleft). End of Scene 3, end of Act I.)

## Act II. Aleut Shaman (male).

(This act opens and takes place on the ground outside an Aleut house. The background is sod covered walls with a ladder sticking up out of the entrance/smoke hole on top. There are no windows. The Aleuts in the scenes either squat or stand, the squatting position--"hunkering" as we call it--is effortless for them but very uncomfortable for the Russians, who restlessly alternate positions. On the ground are various human figures carved from whale bone and wood. There are also a few iron implements, and various carved wooden pieces that represent the shaman's things. The Aleuts wear fish-skin parkas that come down to their knees. The shaman's additional attire is a necklace of bones and a belt of hair, grass, and seaweed; his hair is long and uncombed.)

Scene 1. (The shaman squats on the ground, centerstage right; his assistant, holding a drum, squats behind him. There is commotion from stageleft. The shaman looks up but doesn't rise; his assistant rises and lifts a spear. The only light in this scene comes from a fire burning in a fire pit downstage center, and a lantern that one of the sailors carries. Two sailors carry and drag a third Russian sailor, who is doubling over in pain, moaning and crying. Three Aleut men come in behind, followed by a Russian Orthodox priest and the captain of a Russian trading vessel. The only distinguishing marks of the captain are a large sword and some braid on his shoulders. The captain also carries a long gun. Otherwise, the captain is as roughly dressed as the other sailors. The priest wears a long black robe over a high-collared white shirt, a cylindrical black hat, a large iron cross around his neck, knee-high black boots and carries a large bible in his hands. He and the captain closely observe the shaman throughout this scene with occasional sharp, charged glances at one another. Throughout this act, the language is English, but one Aleut is the translator, as though the sailors, Captain, and Priest speak and understand only Russian and the shaman speaks and understands only Aleut.)

1st Sailor: (releases sick sailor and takes hold of Aleut translator's arm)

Our mate is bad sick, see? He ate some of the foul garbage of this forsaken place and now he's close to dyin'. You tell that witch doctor of yours to heal him, or there'll be hell to pay. (pushes the Aleut roughly toward the shaman) Now do it!

2nd Sailor: Easy. Remember, you don't understand a word of their awful tongue! They could be sayin' anything.

1st Sailor: (snarls) I don't have to understand a damn thing! If he dies, so do they! (looks back at the captain who gives him a small but perceptible nod).

Shaman: (motions to his assistant to put down the spear; looks only at the translator as he speaks) Do the uncouth ones hurt you, brother?

Translator: (cringes) Be careful! Black robe may understand a word or two.

Shaman: I have seen him before. He understands only his own world.

Translator: They have taken my father and wife prisoner and threaten to kill them if this one does not get well. I have told them of your great name and powers. They doubt but they have no medicine people of their own and the black robe is good for only words. I would not disturb you, powerful one, but they have killed many of us already on lesser grounds than this.

Shaman: You speak truly. Tell them to bring the sick one here and lay him on his back in front of me.

Translator: (turns to the other sailors) The powerful one says to bring him here and lay him on his back in front of him.

1st Sailor: (grips his sick mate) C'mon mates, just a few more steps to the doctor. (He and the 2nd sailor position the sick one as directed. The first sailor pushes the translator away and stands across the sick man glaring at the shaman.)

Shaman: (stares back at him) Your breath is foul and your energy is bad.

1st Sailor: What'd he say?

Translator: (shakes his head).

1st Sailor: (with a threatening gesture) What'd he say?!

Shaman: Tell him to stand back. He is interfering.

Translator: He requests that you move back a little to give the sick man more air.

1st Sailor: More air! He's on his back in the middle of nowhere!  
How much more air can he get?

Shaman: Tell this objectionable person that I need to concentrate on his friend. Tell him to stand back.

Sick Sailor: (moans and holds his stomach; cries out in pain).

2nd Sailor: He's just talkin. He ain't doin' shit.

1st Sailor: (to translator) Tell him to get to work--now!

Translator: (blurts out) The powerful one says you must stand back. You are interfering. Stand back!

(The priest and the captain tense and step forward. The 2nd sailor looks from the 1st sailor to the shaman then steps over and takes the 1st sailor by the arm)

2nd Sailor: C'mon. Back off. This talkin' is gonna kill him, not heal him.

Shaman: At least one among them has some sense.

1st Sailor: (steps slowly back but without taking his angry eyes off the shaman).

Shaman: (reaches out and gently grasps the sick man's hands, removes them from his stomach, places his own hand on the abdomen, presses it and watches the sick man react; motions to his assistant, speaks to his ear then waits as the assistant goes up the ladder, and disappears down the smokehole).

Captain: (aside to the priest) This "powerful one" is known all over the islands. They say he can travel underwater and commune with the dead.

Priest: (crosses himself) Works of the devil. Our savior damned all false powers to hell. God looks on this repulsive savage and writes his fate in black rock. My orders are to bring these people to the true faith. I cannot perform my holy office as long as charlatans and demons like this one pervert the people's innocence.

Captain: You cannot convert the dead.

Priest: And I will not be subverted by the living.

Captain: Perhaps this "powerful one" would work for you, rather than against you. Many of these people hunt the otter for us without a word of dissent. Their silence seems like satisfaction. Perhaps you could bring this one into the fold. It would be a triumph for the Mother Church (both cross themselves) to have him serve you in your holy work.

Priest: Umm. There is some reason to your words. If I could get a cross around his neck....

Captain: The translator doesn't do too badly. You could return and have a talk with the "powerful one."

Priest: (looks at the captain in silence; before he can reply, the assistant comes up the smokehole, down the ladder, carrying a small gut bag full of liquid; he goes to the shaman and hands him the bag; the shaman takes it, as all look on intently, holds it before him with two hands and begins to chant as the assistant drums; the shaman then rises, hands the bag to the assistant, picks up a rattle, and sings and dances with the rattle around and over the sick man, who is doubled up in silent pain.)

Shaman: (to translator) Tell the impatient barbarians that their sick friend is to drink the infusion.

Translator: The powerful one says he has to drink it.

1st Sailor: (steps forward and takes the bag from the assistant, smells it and makes a bad face, hands the bag to the 2nd sailor who does the same; 1st sailor takes back the bag and motions the 2nd sailor to kneel down with him by the sick man; the 1st sailor passes the bag in front of his nose and he grimaces and spits; the 1st sailor gestures to the 2nd sailor to prop him up) Here, mate, don't be fussy now. This is the piss of the devil himself but it's all we got in this heathen world to help you. Now put off your fine tongue and gulp it down like a salty dog.

2nd Sailor: We'll be better in no time. Just drink the green stuff and you'll feel like spring again. (They help the sick man to hold the bag to his mouth; he takes a small sip, coughs, and spits it out).

Shaman: Tell them it will do no good on the ground.

Translator: He says the sick man must swallow it, not just taste it. He says it is meant to heal him, not to please him.

1st Sailor: Why? If he's so damn powerful, why doesn't he tell us what ails the man? Why does he just give him this shit?

Translator: He asks the powerful one what ails the man.

Shaman: He has eaten bad shellfish. If he can vomit the meat out soon enough, the poison will not kill him.

Translator: He says the man has eaten bad food. If he doesn't throw it up, he will die.

(The 1st and 2nd sailors look at each other then grip the sick man, force his head back and pour the infusion down his throat; they lay him down and he begins to heave; after powerful retching, coughing, sweating, and spitting, he becomes calm and is able to stretch and sit.)

2nd Sailor: You didn't die, mate.

Sick Sailor: I thought that green junk was gonna kill me worse'n what I ate.

1st Sailor: Can you walk?

Sick Sailor: Aye, like a man on the poop deck in a gale. Give me yer yardarms, mates, and let's get the hell outta here. (The other two help him up, and without a backward glance, take him off stageleft. The captain and the priest exit behind the sailors. They leave and the scene ends with the shaman and his assistant, squatting again, and the other Aleuts, including the translator, trailing off behind the Russians. End of Scene 1.)

Scene 2. (Same set as Scene 1 but takes place in daylight; no fire burns in the fire pit. The shaman and his assistant squat as in Scene 1. From stageleft comes the priest, dressed as before, with the bible in his hands, following the same translator who carries a large sea otter skin. The translator stops center stageleft and the priest stands beside him.)

Priest: Why do you stop here?

Translator: To determine the readiness of the powerful one to meet with us. (The translator lays down the skin between him and the shaman.)

Priest: (whispers loudly) Why do you put that down there?

Translator: It is for the powerful one.

Assistant: (At a nod from the shaman, the assistant walks to the skin, picks it up, fingers it then looks at the translator) Your aim was true and your wife's tanning skill was good. But you have brought the fur, not the blackrobe. Does the blackrobe understand that the powerful one helps only the one who brings the gift?

Translator: Your praise is undeserved. It is a poor enough fur. (shakes his head) No, the blackrobe does not understand. No matter, he does not come for help.

Assistant: Then for what?

Translator: He insists that he must talk with the powerful one. He says he has a greater power to show him.

Assistant: Does he speak with threats?

Translator: He does not.

Assistant: (Nods and takes the fur back to the shaman; he hands it to the shaman then stands behind him facing the translator and the priest.)

Priest: But--but why do you give him that?

Translator: (looks at him with disdain and shakes his head).

Shaman: (looks up at the translator; nods).

Translator: The powerful one still evokes the curiosity of these people. Again I have been taken from my life to disturb your peace. May he not think ill of me or of my family. The blackrobe is stubborn and insistent about talking with the powerful one. Perhaps the blackrobe, too, has eaten bad food.

Shaman: The blackrobe has eaten nothing bad but I am afraid his beliefs will make us all sick. He is one of those foreseen by the old ones who

foretold the coming of pale skins and different ways that would change us forever. They knew that not all change is good but that some comes as surely as night and day. This one dresses like night and has a look in the eye like a wounded sea lion bull. No peace will come from such rigid suffering. But the old ones told us that we must learn to live with this kind of human.

Assistant: His presence does not please you, o powerful one. And neither do I like his look. Shall I take the spear and send him to his ancestors?

Shaman: No, his ancestors may not welcome him. And besides, the captain and his violent men are still here. They would kill us all with smiles.

Assistant: Shall I tell him you are busy on other matters?

Shaman: No, he would not understand my other matters. and I would not reveal them to him. Let him come forward.

Assistant: (turns and goes to translator, ignoring the priest who stares hard at him) Bring the blackrobe forward. (The assistant turns and resumes his position standing behind the shaman. The translator and priest walk forward to within a few feet of the shaman. The translator squats; the priest stands.)

Priest: Tell him that I serve the Creator of all things and that this book is the word of the Creator.

Translator: He brags of himself, powerful one. He claims to serve someone who created everything. And he claims that someone speaks in that thing he holds in his hands.

Shaman: Tell him to let me hear his master's voice.

Translator: The powerful one wants to hear your master's voice.

Priest: He...he cannot do that! He is not baptized, he has not been given the sacrament, and he does not know the holy word. Only I can bring him to God.

Translator: He seems to name his creator "God."

Shaman: "God" "God."

Priest: Yes, and amen (crosses himself). And this is his holy word. I want to preach it among your people.

Translator: He still insists that his paper thing has the voice of his god. And he wants to tell the people about his god.

Shaman: Ask him what good it will do us.

Translator: He wants to know what good your holy word will do our people.

Priest: What good! It will save them from everlasting hell, from the fires of damnation, from the tortures of the devils, and from the darkness away from the love and light of God. It will give them everlasting life after death.

Translator: He says they will live forever after they die and they will not be hurt.

Shaman: Ask him how he knows this is so.

Translator: The powerful one wants to know how you know the things you say.

Priest: Our knowledge is faith. We do not dare to assume to know the mind and will of the Almighty. We pray that he will, in his infinite grace, save us. We believe in his divine love and grace. Our belief is our rock and our hope.

Translator: He doesn't know it. He believes it.

Shaman: What kind of god is it that creates everything?

Translator: He wants to know what kind of god you believe in.

Priest: The one and only true God of the world and the universe. The ruler and creator of all things and all souls and all beings. He is one, divine, infinite, good, and all-powerful. He knows all and governs all things with his infinite wisdom.

Translator: He answers small breezes with big winds. He says some things I do not understand. But I get that his god is one and only, that it is everywhere all the time and that its power is like a sea without horizons. He says it is good.

Shaman: Ask him if his god made the bad shell fish that the sick sailor ate.

Translator: He wants to know if your god made the bad food the sick sailor ate.

Priest: God is all-powerful. He knows all and is the creator of all things. He makes tears and laughter, he makes night and day. He makes the grains of sand and the stars in the sky. He makes the fish in the sea and the birds in the air. Nothing would be without him.

Translator: He says yes.

Shaman: Ask him what would hurt someone after they die.

Translator: He wants to know what you think would hurt a person after they die.

Priest: The devil. In his infernal regions, he tortures the damned souls for infinity. He splits their skin and pours molten lead in their eyes; he tears out their nails and breaks their bones. The devil is the name and progenitor of evil. He hurts people during life and after death unless they are protected by communion with the Holy Church (crosses himself).

Translator: He uses a word I do not understand. It sounds like "dehveel."

Shaman: "Dehveel"..."dehveel."

Priest: (squatting eagerly) Excellent, excellent. You have spoken the name of God and the Devil. Now you are ready for the holy teaching that only I can give you and that can save your soul from eternal damnation.

Shaman: What does he want?

Translator: He wants to teach you.

Shaman: (laughs) But he has nothing I need. What should I learn from him?

Translator: The voice of his god.

Shaman: (laughs again) I neither like nor understand his voice. How should I like and understand the voice of his god?

Translator: He will teach you from his paper thing.

Shaman: Perhaps. But first ask him where this "dehveel" came from?

Translator: He wants to know who made the devil.

Priest: (stares in surprised silence at the shaman, then speaks slowly)

God is all-powerful. God is the creator of everything. The devil was an angel who fought against god's will and was cast out of heaven into the fiery pit. There he must stay forever, and there the unbaptized and unchristian souls rot and scream.

Translator: God. God made the dehveel and the dehveel fought god. God threw him out of his house into a fire pit. He has to live there and hurt people who don't agree with the blackrobe.

Shaman: Ask him if his god is good and powerful.

Translator: The powerful one wants to know if your god is good and powerful.

Priest: God is good and powerful beyond any mortal man. His goodness is infinite and unlimited and his power is without bounds. Mere humans can only grope to fathom his greatness.

Translator: He brags on his god. He claims that his god's goodness and power are without horizons.

Shaman: Tell him he speaks in riddles. How can someone who is good and powerful without horizons create bad shellfish and a dehveel that fights against him and hurts people?

Translator: O powerful one, do not be displeased with me, but I fear the blackrobe is upset. He does not look at you with kindness.

Shaman: Have they hurt your father or your wife?

Translator: No.

Shaman: Fear not. You are too valuable to them. Very few of our people understand their horrible sounds. Ask him as I said.

Translator: Very well. The powerful one wants to know about your god who is so powerful and good. He wants to know how such a creator could make bad food and a dehveel that hurts people.

Priest: Your "powerful one" has asked me enough questions. Now I am going to question him. Have him tell me what these things are (sweeping his arm at the carved figures sitting on the ground).

Translator: The blackrobe does not answer your question. He asks about the stone and whalebone carvings. He wants to know what they are.

Shaman: (surprised) Does he not know of the old ones?

Translator: Do you not know of the old ones?

Priest: Old ones--what old ones? Who are the old ones.

Translator: He does not.

Shaman: Has he no ancestors.

Translator: He asks if you have parents.

Priest: Of course I have parents. Every man has parents.

Translator: He does. But he expresses the odd belief that women have no parents.

Shaman: No doubt his god made their women after it made the dehveel! (The shaman, translator, and assistant all laugh.)

Priest: (looks on, puzzled and frustrated) What does he say?

Shaman: Tell him they are the signs of our great ancestors.

Translator: He says they are the signs of our great ancestors.

Priest: They are ungodly idols that misrepresent the divine power. In my religion, the one true religion which I am bringing to you and your people, such icons are forbidden. Only the faces of the holy personages may be shown in our temples. Mere mortals can only look and pray.

Translator: Do you say you do not worship your ancestors?

Priest: We love our parents but we do not worship them or our ancestors.

Translator: The blackrobe does not worship his ancestors.

Shaman: Ask him what he holds in his hands.

Translator: He wants to know what the paper thing is.

Priest: "The paper thing" is the holiest book of all, the Bible. It is the true word of the living god, given to man by his chosen prophets and by his son, Jesus Christ (crosses himself).

Translator: It is the voice of his god and the voices of his assistants.

Shaman: What it is made of?

Translator: It is paper, o powerful one.

Shaman: And what is paper?

Translator: It is made from wood.

Priest: What does he ask?

Translator: He asks what the voice thing is made of. I told him it was made of paper and that paper was made of wood.

Priest: (smiling, eager) Yes, yes, this is the holy book. It was made in my country by fine craftsmen who took the wood of the trees from God's creation.

Translator: It is made from the wood of trees by people in his country.

Shaman: (to his assistant) Bring me the great-great-grandfather mask. (From a skin bag upstage center, the assistant draws a large, rough mask of an Aleut male and puts it on the ground in front of the shaman. The shaman addresses the priest) This, too, was made from the wood of a tree.

Translator: This was made from the wood of a tree.

Priest: Fine, fine, but it is not to be worshipped as though it were divine. We make statues of our people from wood and stone, but we do not worship them. Worshipping these idols is wrong and sinful.

Translator: The blackrobe attacks our carvings.

Shaman: (shakes his head wearily) I am nearly out of patience with this rude and ignorant man. But let him stay a little while longer for our amusement, since his teachings leave me cold. Ask the blackrobe why he dislikes our carvings so much.

Translator: The powerful one wants to know why you attack our carvings.

Priest: You understand the word "devil." Now I will teach you another word--"evil." Evil is the work of the devil. These carvings are the work of the devil; they are evil.

Translator: He says that the one who fought with his god, and hurts people, made these carvings. He says that whatever the dehveel makes is eevul.

Shaman: "Eevul"..."eevul."

Priest: (rubs his hands together) Excellent, excellent.

Shaman: Are the blackrobe's hands cold?

Translator: No, powerful one, I have seen that gesture before. I think it means he is happy.

Shaman: Ask him, then, what this eevul is?

Translator: He asks what this eevul is.

Priest: Excellent question. Excellent question. Evil, my children, is being eternally absent from God's grace. In this case, it consists in acts such as polygamy, infanticide, eating of raw meat, human sacrifice, taking of scalps, and producing and worshipping idols.

Translator: He speaks too quickly and uses words I do not understand. But I get that he dislikes our ways. He says having more than one wife, eating uncooked meat, and other traditions are eevul.

Shaman: (stands and glares at the priest who also stands; the assistant rises and lifts the spear) Ask this offensive person how he knows these things are eevul.

Translator: He wants to know how you know these things you say are eevul.

Priest: (triumphantly thrusting forth the Bible) From God's word!

Translator: The voice of his god told him.

Shaman: Did his god not create everything? Did he not then create us and our ways? We are not dehveels. So we must be good. But how could our ways be evil? The blackrobe speaks in riddles. Ask him where this eevul comes from.

Translator: The powerful one wants to know where your eevul comes from?

Priest: From the devil.

Translator: From the dehveel.

Shaman: And the dehveel came from his god?

Translator: And the dehveel came from your god?

Priest: (shrinking and fidgeting) Yes.

Translator: Yes.

Shaman: Then eevul also came from his god.

Translator: Then eevul also came from your god.

Priest: (backs away; scowls and crosses himself; walks off stageleft with an angry backward glance at the shaman. End of Scene 2.)

Scene 3. (Opens with only the shaman and his assistant on stage; they squat as before. The light comes from a fire).

Shaman: I have dreamed the same thing several times. I am a woman, a medicine woman, with great power to talk with the sea creatures. But I don't live here. I live in another place, far to the north. There is ice everywhere. I go under the sea and meet a strange and terrible creature who is the mother of all sea creatures. Then it fades and there is ice and more ice.

Assistant: O powerful one, what does the dream mean?

Shaman: I feel that the woman is before me, one of my great ancestors. I feel that I got power through her...when I was her.

Assistant: Where is this place of ice?

Shaman: You must travel with the incoming tide many days to the great land. Then you must follow the edge of the great land for many months toward the setting sun. Soon, they tell me, the edge turns toward the fixed star and the high, cold winds. Along that edge live the people she belonged to.

Assistant: Perhaps I will go there some day.

Shaman: (looks long at the assistant, then sighs) My spirit has felt cold these days. Its life-fire yearns to go elsewhere.

Assistant: (abashed) You mean--you mean...?

Shaman: Yes. I feel that my life will not be long.

Assistant: But what of mine? How can I live without you?  
What will I do?

Shaman: For now you will assist me in practicing my death song. (The assistant drums, the shaman shakes a killer-whale rattle and sings)  
Now the sun has skipped  
across the dark'ing waves

(From stageleft enter five armed sailors followed by the captain and the priest)

Now the sky has filled  
with heavy threat'ning clouds

Captain: There he is. He is the one who poisoned my man and the other one made the poison. There is only one just punishment for attempted murder.

Shaman: Now the moon will rise  
upon the great ones' graves

Priest: It is regrettable, Captain, but the man is ignorant, savage, and incorrigible. He is a clear danger to God's work among these poor people. We must stop his exploitation of their weakness and innocence.

Shaman: Now the time has come  
to walk the path of foam  
Now the time has come

Captain: As legal authority on this island, I declare the adjudged guilty and hereby sentence him and his accomplice to death. Sailors--ready! Aim! Fire! (They shoot down both the shaman and his assistant, turn heel and exit. End of Scene 3, end of Act II.)

Act III. Tlingit shaman (male).

(This act opens and takes place inside a Tlingit shaman's house at night. The audience sees two tiers of benches along the back long wall, with carved wooden boxes on them. Center floor level is a fire pit, bordered with sand, with a fire burning.)

Scene 1. (The shaman, a male, crouches on the floor near the fire facing stageleft, where the front entrance of the house, a low hole in the wall, is located. He has unwashed and uncombed hair down to his knees, and wears a feather headdress, a necklace of bones, and a skin apron with a rattling fringe of deer hooves [e.g., George Thornton Emmons, *The Tlingit Indians*, 369]. On the bench near him are a wolf rattle, carved sticks of different sizes and shapes and a carved wooden box for storing and carrying his things [Ibid., 377]. His assistant, dressed only in a red cedar apron, is seated near him steadily beating a drum with a long carved stick; the drum is a skin stretched on a wooden hoop. The shaman holds a raven

rattle in one hand and a carved wooden war club in the other. Heavily painted and armed Tlingit men sit and stand in the remaining space.)

Shaman: (begins to shake the rattle, rises, wails; his wail becomes a blood-curdling screech; he stands, spreads his arms, and holds the rattle and the club above his head) I have been to the camp of the hairy white devils. They are ignorant, poorly armed, and unaware. They sleep and eat as though we did not exist. They burn their fires bright so anyone can see them. They stack their arms in a small room and walk about like women, unarmed and unprotected. They think that we fear them and that their big house of logs will protect them. They do not reckon with us. We, the great Tlingit people, to whom Wolf gave this land from time out of mind, must not allow their trespass and their arrogance to poison our air and water. We, the great Tlingit people, to whom Killer Whale gave the sea from time out of mind, must not accept their measly bits of iron and cloth. We, the great Tlingit people, to whom Eagle gave the sky from time out of mind, must not accept their blackrobes and their white women.

They pay us little, consider us inferior and stupid, and take our land and our animals from us. They use our women and young men for their pleasure and their work, then throw them away like worn out boots and shirts. They make their camps on our land and force us with their fire sticks to hunt the furred creatures for them. They think that we are stupid and cowardly.

O Skaoushleoot, great one whom the white devils call "Mikhailof," you have only to order your warriors, and our fierce brothers from other tribes who have come to fight with us, into action, and the wretched Baranof and his people will be defeated and humiliated, and the land will belong again to the real people, the right people!

Warriors: (cheer and sing, with the shaman's assistant beating the drum; while they sing, three chiefs, distinguished by fine fur capes, carved and painted war helmets, and large, elaborately carved and painted war clubs, meet with the shaman downstage right)

I am wolf, I am eagle, I am bear  
I fear no walking, flying, swimming thing  
I break the bone and tear the flesh  
I eat the liver and cook the heart  
My legs move like wind  
My arms fall like trees  
My eyes find like hawks and owls  
I talk to death and tell him many stories  
I walk with death and calm his fear  
I laugh at death and meet the enemy

Meet the enemy!          Meet the enemy!  
I am ready to meet the enemy!

Shaman and Chiefs: (nod as one, raise war clubs and shriek).

Warriors: (yell and scream with shaman and chiefs; then everyone but the shaman and his assistant, who beats the drum until the last warrior leaves, rush out through the entry hole, center stage left).

Scene 2. (The shaman and his assistant are eating by the fire.)

Shaman: I had a dream last night. I was born as a woman in a time far ahead.

Assistant: (grunts) Is this a good sign?

Shaman: Every life is needful. Something is to be learned there. The power does not care if it is male or female.

Assistant: Was this woman a Tlingit or some other?

Shaman: Some other.

Assistant: (grunts) Is this a good sign?

Shaman: Others have medicine people. None are as strong or as powerful as the Tlingit. But others also have medicine people.

Assistant: So you have told me. But I myself have never seen one. I have seen only you and one other real medicine person. Where was this woman medicine person?

Shaman: In a time far ahead. There was a river, smaller trees, and many hills. The sea was far away. She was like us but different. She was like our inland cousins, who worship Raven above Wolf, Bear, and Eagle, and who live in skin houses beside great rivers and meet us in the mountain passes to trade, feast, and fight.

Assistant: Why do you say it was a time far ahead? What did you see?

Shaman: I saw animals like huge bears with skin like crabs. The people sat inside them and made them carry them and their goods from place to place. We do not know those animals; they have not been born yet.

Assistant: This dream goes beyond my mind. What happened to the woman medicine person?

Shaman: I do not know, I did not see. I tried to see but the sky lowered and my eyes filled with fog. Then the dream ended. (There is a commotion of voices outside the door then several warriors, one of them wounded, rush in through the entry hole. The shaman drops his food, grabs his war club and stands ready to fight; the assistant clutches his food and cowers behind him.)

1st Warrior: (stops and spreads his lowered hands) We do not come to fight, o Kackilack.

Shaman: What has happened?

2nd Warrior: The white devils broke the silence of their iron mouths and rained iron fire on our great house. No walls were left standing. But we were gone. We followed your advice and left during the night.

1st Warrior: There were many white devils and we feared their pursuit. They had many iron mouths and fire sticks. We feared that they would follow us and by the sound of our children's crying they would find us and kill us.

2nd Warrior: Before we left the great house last night, we again followed your advice, o Kackilack. We killed our children silently, carried their bodies into the night, and buried them deep. But while we rested and slept in the morning, the white devils came upon us. They attacked and we fought. Many of us were killed but they chased us and now they are on the outskirts of this, our most secret village. (At this, the assistant drops his food and runs for the door, through which he leaps without a backward glance.)

Shaman: You have brought living toys to the child of death! You have brought cringing rabbits to the fire-eyed eagle! You have brought the pups of a seal to the jaws of the orca! You have brought a new born deer to a den of wolves! The power of the totem and the ancestor rules. We will not run before these foreign devils like foam before the wind. We will stand in their faces and fight! (Some of the warriors follow in the footsteps of the assistant. Some stay. Soon shots and shouting are heard. Some bullets hit the outside wall. The mayhem draws near. Loud pounding on the wall and shouts of death to the shaman precede the entrance of armed

Russian sailors. The warriors kill the first two or three but then guns are fired into the house through the hole, killing several warriors. Sailors swarm in and hand to hand fighting ensues. The shaman retreats to the upper bench, beating his drum. When the warriors are all killed, a lieutenant calls the sailor-soldiers to order)

Lieutenant: Hold your arms, men! Hold your arms, I say. We have overcome the beast and found the heinous criminal we sought. (points to the shaman) There, my brave soldiers, cast your eyes upon the man who fomented the rebellion against Baranof that killed many of our friends. He has lived on the spoils of his bloody deeds for too long. We are here to ensure that he will never plot to kill another pious Russian.

Shaman: The tooth, the talon, and the fluke will bite and tear and beat you and all of your generations! The storm, the fire, and the stone will waste, burn, and crush you and all of your generations! You violate the space of Kackilack, the great wolf shaman! Your days will be full of hunger, sickness, and blood!

Sailor: What's he screamin' bout, sir?

Lieutenant: It means nothing. We will seal his fate and his mouth. Soldiers--ready! Aim! Fire! (The shaman is shot down in the midst of one more scream. The Russians exit. End of Act 3.)

#### Act IV. Athabascan shaman (female).

(This act opens and takes place entirely inside a contemporary Athabascan Interior village living-room. There is a large wood stove, a large, old couch, a couple of easy chairs, a wooden table with a few chairs around it, a large color TV beside a door leading into a back hall and facing downstage center, a tall corner shelf with trophies, family pictures on the walls, curtained windows in the end walls, a couple of colorful rugs on a linoleum floor, and a few Catholic objects, such as a cross and a picture of the Virgin on the walls. Upstage right, part of the kitchen can be seen, with an electric coffee-maker on a counter along with cups, food, and dishes.)

Scene 1. (Sandra, an Athabascan woman, mid-forties, public school teacher in the village, single mother of two adolescents, is asleep on the couch and the TV is on with no sound; there is a small electric lamp lit on the table. Except for piles of papers and books on the kitchen table, the house is clean and neat. The woman is deeply asleep under a colorful

afghan; a dream-light sweeps the stage and colorful animal images mixed with mask faces from all four Alaskan Native groups begin to move across the TV screen.

Then, in varying colors and patterns of light, the Inupiat shaman with the animal and undersea dancers come onto and across the stage, the Aleut shaman with his drumming assistant follows, and then the Tlingit shaman with his drumming assistant. Each group has its own moves, sounds, and lights. After the last group leaves, the stage is dark until daylight begins to come in through the window.)

Grandfather: (enters through front door, downstage left, with an armload of split wood and some kindling; walks to the stove, opens it, and begins to stoke it.)

Sandra: (wakes up slowly, yawns, sits up, stands and folds afghan, stacks it and her pillow on one end of the couch, goes to the kitchen, starts a coffee-maker for fresh coffee, puts dried fish, strips, pilot bread, butter, and jam on the table. She then sits at stageright end of table, and folds her arms, holding herself and watching her grandfather who finishes with the fire and comes to the table, sits at stageright end facing her; she speaks quietly to him) Grandpa, I had dreams...one dream, especially, just before you came in.

Grandfather: (helping himself to food) Early morning, just before I wake, I have strong dreams sometimes.

Sandra: This was a strong dream. I saw so many images--faces, masks, animals. I saw people, a woman and two men, dancing and drumming. They were from the time long ago, Grandpa. They wore claws, and teeth, and skins.

Grandfather: (picks up empty coffee cup in front of him, peers into it, then puts it down) Did you dream this before?

Sandra: Coffee's almost ready, Grandpa. (She thinks awhile.) No, not exactly--I mean, not the same images and things. But I heard the music, you know, the singing--or chanting, maybe it was, and the drums. And I saw the woman. She's Eskimo, I think. I felt very safe when I saw her, but I felt even stronger when I saw and heard all three. Who are they, Grandpa?

Grandfather: Medicine people. You are being called. You can be a medicine person.

Sandra: (grips a cross around her neck) But I'm Catholic.

Grandfather: Some priests are medicine people, some medicine people are priests. Don't worry about what you call them. Some have the power and some don't.

Sandra: (gets coffee and pours a cup for each of them, puts the pot on the stove, then sits again facing him) What power, Grandpa?

Grandfather: It is very mysterious, Sandra. Like the mystery the priest does on Sunday, with his wine and cracker.

Sandra: (laughs) I know you call it cracker, Grandpa, but it's a wafer.

Grandfather: (chuckles) I know that Father Larry ran out of wafers one time. He got some of those crackers--Ritz crackers--and everyone had communion with Ritz crackers. I call them crackers ever since. (They drink coffee, and eat a little.)

Grandfather: Medicine people. They could do many strange and wonderful things. Sometimes they help us, sometimes they hurt people. But they helped us lots. That power--it doesn't care. Like a good knife. You can cut bread and meat with it, or--(makes a stabbing gesture).

Sandra: How would learn how to do it?

Grandfather: They will teach you.

Sandra: Who?

Grandfather: The people in your dream. They call you in the old way. They don't use no telephone or mailbox. They come direct to you and call you.

Sandra: Why me?

Grandfather: (drinks coffee; she gets up and pours him another cup; he eats a little fish and pilot bread) My wife's mother had the power. Not alot, but she could see things before they happened, and sometimes she could help dead people.

Sandra: (shivers) Help dead people?

Grandfather: It's good that you shiver, Sandra. If you're not afraid, you'll get hurt being foolish. (Looks into his cup) She could help dead people. Some dead people die wrong--I mean, they die when they don't want to...they're scared to go. Sometimes they hang around and bother people. She could help them go; they used to ask her to every stickdance. There never was a stickdance around here when she was alive where she wasn't there. People knew her. But they were a little afraid of her.

Sandra: Why were they afraid of her?

Grandfather: She had power. People knew it. They didn't understand. They thought she might hurt them. She probably could've. But she never did. I don't think she ever did.

Sandra: Grandpa, what if I don't do it...what if I just--say no, and don't answer the call...?

Grandfather: That's up to you. They're only calling, they're not telling.

Sandra: You mean, they're not ordering me...?

Grandfather: No, granddaughter, they do not order people to become one of them. We had missionaries, I remember, who yelled and shouted in their tents about hell and fire and devils, and told people what to do. Medicine people don't do that. You can take it or leave it.

(Two adolescents, Frankie and Lulu, come onstage from the back of the house, still in pajamas. They sit on the couch and listen quietly. The boy, who is younger, picks up the remote TV channel control and starts looking at it and playing with it. His sister whispers to him and he nods and sits still.)

Sandra: And what if I take it?

Grandfather: I think you will do good. But it's a long road. It's not for everyone. And even the ones it's for have--problems...(They look at each other for a long minute, mutually agreeing to stop the exchange now that the children are present.)

Frankie: Can I turn on the TV?

Sandra: (looks at the clock) After you get dressed and ready for school, you can watch a little. Now both of you, good morning, and say good morning to grandpa.

Lulu: Good morning, Mom. Good morning, Grandpa. (She skips over and gives both of them a hug and a kiss.) Can we have pancakes, Mom?

Frankie: (drops remote control on couch and walks over to Grandpa) Oh boy! Pancakes! Can you stay for breakfast, Grandpa? (Hugs him).

Sandra: (looks at big clock in kitchen) Well, tomorrow's Saturday. I'll make pancakes for all of us tomorrow. Now there's only time for your cereal. So go get dressed and I'll put your food on the table. Hurry, now, or you'll be late for school!

Lulu: (laughs) Hurry, now, mom, or my teacher will be late for school, too!

Frankie: (as he runs off upstage center) I'm gonna watch one cartoon before I go to school.

Lulu: My mom helped me do the homework she assigned. I guess I'm pretty lucky. (Hugs Mom and Grandpa again and exits after brother.)

Sandra: (Starts getting children's breakfast ready as lights go down. End of Scene 1.)

Scene 2. (Same interior as Scene 1, except there is a Christmas tree, with colored lights and other decorations, near the TV at center stage right. There are brightly wrapped presents under the tree. Sandra is seated at the kitchen table leafing through a mail order catalog. There is a knock at the front door, downstage left.)

Sandra: Come in. (A Caucasian nun, Sister Margaret, opens the front door, enters, closes the door behind her, and walks to the table. Sister Margaret is dressed in casual, warm clothes, including a parka, hat and gloves which she takes off and puts on a chair. The only sign of her office is a dark wooden rosary worn around her waist.)

Sandra: Hi, sister. Gee, you look better. Over your cold?

Sister Margaret: (Sits down in chair, facing stageleft) Yes, much better, thank you. How are you Sandra? And how are Frankie and Lulu?

Sandra: Oh, we're all fine, so far (knocks on the wooden table three times). That last influenza was tough, but we just got little colds. Nothing major. They're visiting Uncle Walter today. They like spending Christmas eve with him. Gee, Sister, I've never seen you wear your rosary like a belt before.

Sister Margaret: Oh, it's just a sentimental piece of the old-time habit. I just feel like getting into the old way sometimes. There are special occasions, too.

Sandra: Well, I guess a Sister's job is like a mother's job--never done.

Sister Margaret: Father Larry came in. Did you hear the plane?

Sandra: Oh, about an hour ago? Yes, and I wondered who it was. Did he come for his Christmas eve visit?

Sister Margaret: Yes, and we're visiting people to let them know that he's going to give midnight mass here this Christmas.

Sandra: Gee, we're lucky. We'll be sure to come.

Sister Margaret: (after a silence) Sandra, your sister Betty came and talked to me the other day.

Sandra: Betty? What did she want?

Sister Margaret: She was concerned about you. She said you had been having some dreams...and that you were trying to make a decision. I asked Betty if I talked to you could I tell you that she came to me. She said I could.

Sandra: (Closes catalog and gets up, pours out old coffee and starts a new pot with the coffee maker, gets out two cups and sits down.) I'm glad you asked, Sister. I didn't want to bother you or Father, but I thought I should talk to you.

Sister Margaret: What's going on?

Sandra: Grandpa says I'm being called through my dreams to be a medicine woman. He says he thinks I'll do good but that it won't be easy. He says that I don't have to answer the call or accept the call, but that I can choose one way or the other.

Sister Margaret: How do your kids feel about it?

Sandra: Well, Sister, I'm being called, not my kids. They're going to have to accept it if I do it. It was hard for them when I decided I wanted to get my teaching certification. They were pretty young and it took me away from them. But they adjusted. We're a strong family. (Gets up, pours coffee for both of them, puts the pot back on the coffee maker, sits down).

Sister Margaret: I know you are. I would never doubt you. But, what are these dreams? Can you tell me anything about them? I have interesting dreams sometimes, too.

Sandra: I see old-time medicine people doing things--drumming, singing, healing. I've even seen some being killed by white men with guns. I feel as though I'm being called and warned at the same time.

Sister Margaret: (after a pause) Is this something you want to do?

Sandra: I'm still thinking about it, feeling about it.

Sister Margaret: (after a pause) Have you prayed about it, Sandra?

Sandra: Yes, I have.

Sister Margaret: And what happened?

Sandra: Silence. I got a silence that was neither yes nor no. It's like I'm being allowed to choose for myself. I'm not being forced either way, and I'm not being forbidden from doing it. (There is a knock on the front door.) Come in. (A Caucasian male Catholic priest, Father Larry, and two old Athabascan women, Aunt Ella and Aunt Mary, enter through the front door at downstage left. The two old women sit together on the couch. The priest walks to the table. The only sign of the priest's office is a white collar under his wool shirt.) Hello, Father. (She rises and shakes his hand.) How are you? Please sit down. I just made fresh coffee.

Father: Fine, just fine thank you. (He takes off his outer clothes and sits facing stageright.)

Sandra: How are you Aunt Mary, Aunt Ella?

Aunt Ella: I'm good, Sandra.

Aunt Mary: Oh, she's good, as usual. But my rheumatism kicked in again last night and I hardly slept.

Sandra: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. I have some willow bark tea. Can I make you a cup?

Aunt Mary: Can you put a little brandy in it?

(All laugh. Sandra gets up, fills a tea kettle with water and puts it on the propane stove which she turns on. She gets out clean cups for everyone, pours coffee for Father Larry, then sits between him and Sister Margaret facing downstage.)

Father: You look well as usual, Sandra. I saw Frankie and Lulu back at the airfield. They seem to be enjoying the holiday. How is the new teacher doing?

Sandra: Oh, he's had such a hard time. First his textbooks didn't come until three weeks into the semester, then he got a terrible flu and ended up with walking pneumonia. And the kids really tease him about his name.

Sister Margaret: Really? I didn't know. What's his name?

Sandra: (suppressing a giggle) Jack Sprat! Somewhere the kids learned that old nursery rhyme about "Jack Sprat could eat no fat, his wife could eat no lean." They sing it to him and he laughs at first then gets mad. Nobody's met his wife yet, but we're starting to wonder.... But basically they like him even though he says he's just hanging on by his finger nails. He walks by me--runs by me in the hall usually--he's always in such a hurry--and puts one finger under his nose and whispers, "It's right there, Sandra. The shit's right there!" We get a good laugh but I'm glad this isn't my first year.

Aunt Mary: A teacher shouldn't swear in school. (The tea-kettle whistles; Sandra gets up and makes willow bark tea for Aunt Mary and

regular tea for Aunt Ella, then pours coffee for the Priest the Nun and herself. She sits.)

Father: How is your grandfather, Sandra?

Sandra: Oh, he's fine. You know, he has to take it easy. He gets so bored staying in town all the time, but nobody will let him go out alone. He just waits till Walter has time to bundle him up and take out for a ride.

Sister Margaret: I heard a really interesting story about your Grandpa. I was visiting River Town and went to the Elder Nutrition house. Grandma Sally was there and she just got to telling stories. She said one time his family took him out moose hunting. It was just after he had healed from his broken hip. I think he was already ninety at that time, but he just bothered people until they took him out. They were in the boat, just coming into the mouth of Twenty Mile slough when Grandpa spotted moose tracks going up the bank. He told them to stop there. They asked him why, there wasn't any moose around. He told them to stop. He told them to camp there and the moose would come back in the morning. Sure enough they camped and shot a big bull the next morning.

Aunt Ella: That's the old way, sister. No planes and binoculars, just sense.

Sister Margaret: Sense.

Sandra: Like...like what you call sixth sense.

Father: What do you call it in Athabaskan? (Long silence.)

Sandra: I don't know if there's one word for it. Maybe just...power--medicine power.

Aunt Mary: It's gone now. It used to be. Strong medicine power. But it's gone. They hurt people. One downriver medicine man used to kill children and keep them in his house. People were so afraid of him. He lived off by himself. People said he took the children's spirits for his power. He lived alone on a lake. He died and was buried there. When people go there, they never stop on that side, where he's buried. He was too strong. (Silence. Sandra and Sister Margaret look at each other, both start to speak, then stop, then start again, then break out laughing.)

Father: Really, have we come in on a private joke between you two?

Sandra: Go ahead, Sister.

Sister Margaret: Not a joke, Father, but a mighty strong coincidence. Sandra and I were just talking about some dreams she's been having. Can I tell him, Sandra, do you want to tell him?

Aunt Mary: Don't think about us. The old man already told us about your dreams.

Sandra: Go ahead, Sister.

Sister Margaret: Well, she's been seeing medicine people in her dreams--you know, people with medicine power. And her grandfather thinks that she's being called to become a medicine person.

Father: Really? That's very interesting. I remember the second year I was in Salmon Village. I had heard people talk now and then about a medicine woman who had lived there years ago. They said she was buried somewhere near the town, but nobody knew where. Some of the stories they told about her were not nice. But one night I had a very vivid dream. A Native woman came to me and made me look at a map of the town and then at a place on a hill, back of the town. I told some people about the dream and they got an old faded photograph of the medicine woman. It was her. There was no doubt in my mind that she was the one who had come in my dream. I told people about the hill and they said it was one place no one ever spent much time. People had a cold, eerie feeling about the place. We decided that was where she was buried.

Aunt Ella: They don't just die and go away.

Sandra: I've heard that, too. I've heard that they sometimes would leave part of their power somewhere, like in a portage, or on an island, or by a lake, and people could feel it whenever they went there. That interests me--intellectually, and spiritually.

Father: (shakes his head) Power. There is so much talk about power these days. But who knows where their power comes from? What do you think about medicine power, Sandra?

Sandra: (Drinks coffee, refills their coffee cups, sits and speaks quietly.)  
It's there. I know what Aunt Mary means. Some of them hurt people, like some people hurt people today. But that wasn't the power, that was them. They were bad people.

Father: How do you know it wasn't the power?

Sandra: Grandpa told me. He said it's like a sharp knife--you can cut bread with it or you can cut somebody. It's not the power, is how I understood him, it's what you do with it.

Father: Do you know what temptation is, Sandra?

Sandra: I think so.

Father: Do you remember when the Evil One took our Lord up into a high place in the desert, showed him kingdoms, and riches, and power, and offered them to him?

Sandra: I remember.

Father: Do you remember what Jesus told the Devil?

Sandra: I only remember, "Satan, get thee behind me!"

Sister Margaret: That's enough. (laughs) That will get you through. (Aunt Mary laughs and nods.)

Father: My own experience and the stories of many other people convince me that the power is real. We would be foolish not to acknowledge its existence. But not knowing where--or who--it comes from...and exploring it, learning it, using it--these are quite different matters.

Sandra: Medicine people also healed, and found game, and foretold things to come that helped people.

Father: Our savior did all of those things in the name of God, Sandra. But he was the Son of God, and he came here to glorify God and save Man. He never claimed power as a man. Would your power glorify God and save Man?

Sandra: I'm not comfortable with your calling it "my power," Father. Grandpa said it's like water and wind; it doesn't really belong to anyone and it doesn't matter what anyone calls it.

Sister Margaret: The true religion, Sandra, has holy names.

Father: And the names people use tell you where their allegiance is and who or what they are loyal to.

Sandra: My allegiance? I guess my allegiance is to...to my family and my people. I guess I am loyal to myself and my kids and my family. But the power, the medicine power, can be used to help anyone. They don't have to be family.

Aunt Mary: It can also be used to hurt anyone.

Sandra: Do you really think that I would try, that I would go out of my way to hurt someone?

Aunt Mary: (shakes her head and drinks her tea).

Father: Ah, please Sandra, don't think that I am questioning your character or your intentions. I know you are a fine teacher, a good mother, and a hard worker for the causes of your people. I have no quarrel with silent and private worship.

Sandra: Do you have a quarrel with something else, Father?

Father: You know me, Sandra. I don't thump the Bible or yell at people from the pulpit. I have a peaceful, orderly parish and I want it to stay that way. (silence) I have heard that one of your great uncles was a well-known medicine person.

Aunt Ella: Uncle Simon.

Sandra: Gee! I didn't know that. That's the first I've heard. Grandpa told me that his grandmother had power but I never knew that Uncle Simon did, too.

Aunt Mary: They used to tell a story about him. When guns first came into the country. He had no use for them. He could hit an owl in the dark with an arrow. He could call caribou right to his skin house. He hated the noise of the guns shooting off. He went to town one winter, for dance and potlatch. He met a man with a new gun. One of those repeaters, one of those--"lever actions," they were called. It was new and shiny and the man was proud. He told Uncle Simon he could kill anything with it. Uncle Simon laughed and told him, "Anything but me." The man laughed at Uncle Simon and Uncle Simon told him to go outside. They went out to the

bank. He told the man to shoot him in the chest. The man shot him and Uncle Simon went down on one knee. He coughed and spit blood into his hand. He coughed again and spit the bullet out into his hand. He stood up, shook himself like an old bear. He handed that bullet back to the man who shot him and said, "Thank you. Now I know I don't need a gun."

Sandra: He didn't die?

Aunt Mary: He didn't die. He got pretty sick. He didn't dance too good that night, they say, but he ate ok, and when the potlatch was over, he left town for his camp on snowshoes, just like he came in.

Father: There is no glory to God and no salvation for Man in that kind of power. It must've been a kind of pride that drove him to do such a dangerous thing.

Aunt Ella: Not pride. He taught that other man a lesson. The other man was too proud. Uncle Simon just showed him that some things were stronger than guns.

Father: But--why?!

Aunt Ella: His power was our way, the gun was not. The gun came from other people who told us it was more powerful. Uncle Simon didn't believe it.

Sandra: I think I understand. Uncle Simon didn't want to lose the old way just because there were new things to use. He knew the old way and had lived by it. He wanted to prove that it was still good.

Sister Margaret: Aunt Mary, how did Uncle Simon die?

Aunt Mary: Smallpox.

Father: Why didn't the old way save him from smallpox?

Sandra: (after a long silence; very quietly) We don't know. The old way didn't save us from smallpox, or influenza, or alcohol and drugs. We don't know why. Indians got very scared and depressed. Hundreds died and the medicine people couldn't help them or stop it.

Father: Only vaccines stopped the diseases. And the vaccines came with the explorers and the missionaries.

Sandra: But alcohol, drugs, and venereal disease also came with the outsiders, Father. And the outsiders didn't bring us anything to cure those, or to save us from suicide and depression and poverty and welfare. The new way, as I guess we're calling it, brought us many new things and many new kinds of power. But it also brought us many new problems that it isn't helping. Maybe we need a new-new way--or, a new-old way. I don't know--that's silly. I still believe what Grandpa told me--it doesn't matter what you call it; what matters is how you use it.

Aunt Mary: (rapidly and almost under her breath) You might end up using it in hell!

Sandra: (after a pause) I've never talked with you about this, Father, but I think that my people, in the old times, didn't believe in a heaven or a hell. I think they believed other things. Like, that people have more than one life, that they come back and are born again, and then die and live again. (Aunt Ella nods her head.)

Sister Margaret: (crosses herself) Reincarnation, Sandra--the church teaches that that is an incorrect belief. The church teaches that we have one and only one chance to make peace with our Maker and earn our place in the Everlasting.

Sandra: I know what the church teaches, Sister. I'm just telling you about what my people used to think and teach.

Father: (stands) Do you have a decision to make, Sandra?

Sandra: My grandpa says I do.

Father: Is it a decision that you wish to make?

Sandra: I think so.

Father: Your children are knowledgeable about your situation. That is clear from the news that has traveled around town. I don't know that I would have told them myself, but I respect your feeling for their maturity and for sharing these difficult things with them. I hope that it is not too much for them. (The nun stands. Aunt Ella whispers to Aunt Mary then stands and helps Aunt Mary to stand.)

Sandra: I can never be anything but honest with my children, Father. My husband, their father, used to lie to them. He said he was protecting them. But really he was protecting what they thought about him. That's no good. I can't do that. My children know me better than anyone in the village--except my Grandpa.

Father: You are fortunate to have such a strong family. I'm sure they will stand beside you in your moment of need. But we, Sister Margaret and I, and Aunt Ella and Aunt Mary, are also parts of your family--your spiritual family. I hope that you will trust and listen to us before you make your decision, as well.

Sandra: Most of all, Father, I must listen to my heart.

Father: Of course. Now, we have more people to see before preparing for mass tonight. You are coming tonight, aren't you, Sandra?

Sandra: Of course. The children and I enjoy Midnight Mass.

Father: Good. Thank you for the coffee..

Nun: Thank you, Sandra. (All exit through front door, downstage left, leaving Sandra musing into her empty coffee cup. End of Scene 2.)

Scene 3. (Same house interior. Stage is dark except for a dim electric light burning offstage in the back of the house. Light comes up on Sandra asleep on the couch. The TV is off, there are piles of papers and books on the kitchen table, and a numinous being stands far stageright. It is dressed as an old Athabaskan shaman, in finely sewn and beaded fur jacket, pants and boots, with a heavy chest-piece of teeth, bones, feathers, claws, and beads. The being is old and could be either male or female. Its voice could be either male or female. This scene is scored with drum, rattles, and flute that weave in and out of the dialogue and the action. Sandra sits up, pushes invisible fog away from her eyes, and looks at the figure.)

Sandra: Who are you?

Numinous Being: I am one who calls you.

Sandra: Why do you call me?

Numinous Being: You can do the work.

Sandra: What work?

Numinous Being: The work of healing and helping.

Sandra: Healing and helping who?

Numinous Being: All beings.

Sandra: Healing what?

Numinous Being: False divisions, false unities.

Sandra: False divisions I think I understand. But false unities--what do you mean?

Numinous Being: Many people live with small differences. They live in single electric seasons and think that the change of a TV channel is more important than the change from winter to spring. They live on single asphalt paths and think that everyone should do so. They do not understand that life lives on in diversity. They do not understand that their desire for unity is a death wish. They do not understand that their desire for everyone to be equal and the same is a death wish. Our death, the death of our people and of our ways.

Sandra: You're not just talking about life here in the village. You're talking about this whole civilization that we're living in. How can I do anything about that?

Numinous Being: By being who you are, deep in your own roots.

Sandra: Part of me is Russian, part of me is French, and most of me is Indian. Which root am I supposed to be?

Numinous Being: The roots of a tree are in the soil. The leaves of a tree are in the air. The tree needs both to live. You need all of your roots to live. But each one is different. Living with different roots, living with differences, is the work.

Sandra: But there are so many differences and there is so much that can be done. Isn't there too much? How can I do anything? Aren't there other people who can do this--this work? Why me?

Numinous Being:        You can do the work.

Sandra: (leans toward it, staring hard) Are you...are you--an ancestor?

Numinous Being:        I have had many names. Some have known me as Uncle Simon.

Sandra:     Uncle Simon! We were just talking about you last weekend. I just learned that you had the power. They told me fantastic stories about you. Were the stories true?

Numinous Being:        The stories were true. The power is everywhere. It is in everything. Smell the stones, listen to the leaves, taste the light, and stroke the air. It is everywhere. Few know this and fewer still can use it.

Sandra:     But this is so strange. I feel as though I am dreaming but...can I find you--someplace, during the day?

Numinous Being:        I am buried at Crescent Lake. Near the outlet behind the old beaver house. If you stay there, we will meet again.

Sandra:     Uncle Simon, where does my power come from? (The Inupiat shaman dances slowly across the stage from right to left, drumming and chanting softly.)

Numinous Being:        You have many ancestors.

Sandra:     I have been here before?

Numinous Being:        Everyone is both eternal and new. Everyone is both unique and the same. Your words will not comprehend it. Your names will not catch it. It is the game the spirit hunts that sets its own traps. It is the game the spirit plays that keeps its own score. You may ask and every answer will take you further on the trail.

Sandra:     I don't understand. I hear your beautiful words, and I am trembling with fear and--and joy. But Grandpa said that fear is good, that I would get hurt without fear.

Numinous Being:        Your path is winding and rough. Do not be surprised by anything that happens.

Sandra: You mean, if I accept the call, my path will be winding and rough?

Numinous Being: Accepting the call will not change your path.

Sandra: What? Then, what will it do?

Numinous Being: It will increase your burden.

Sandra: Then--then why would I do it? I have so much to do already--why would I take on more?

Numinous Being: The work is there to do and you can do it.

Sandra: Where does my power come from? (The Aleut shaman dances across the stage from left to right, shaking a rattle and singing.) Are these my past?

Numinous Being: You see them now--they are your present. Differences in sex, dress, or language are like different leaves on one branch, or different branches on one tree. Time is not serious. The ones you see are like still pools, mirrors of yourself. Look into them and know yourself.

Sandra: But I don't see a mother or a teacher. I see people of power, medicine people, with power to hurt or to help, power to heal or to hinder.

Numinous Being: The mother and the teacher both have such power. You become tangled in names. Names are like handles of knives--close to the edge, but they cut nothing.

Sandra: (stands and reaches out one hand) Are you a dream? Or are you...?

Numinous Being: (its luminosity increases) A dream is a door with many locks. Most never unlock this lock. You are learning to do so in spite of your doubt.

Sandra: And my fear! (pinches herself lightly, then again, then a third time so hard she winces) Are you as real as...as Father Larry and Sister Margaret?

Numinous Being: We are all real in our own way. The things you say and hear are like tracks in snow and mud. Words are not things and things themselves are only signs. All things move as one but their dance has many steps. Father and Sister are steps--for you and for the people. They have their work to do; you have yours.

Sandra: But you--I'm asking about you--Uncle Simon, oh, forgive me for being so demanding. I just don't know what to think. I don't understand. I feel like a child in a new school. I feel right about your being here...and, and I feel right about being called. I'm just not sure. If only I could really see where the power is coming from! (Tlingit shaman dances through, vigorously drumming and singing loudly.) Oh! They all seem so strong. But I've dreamed--seen--dreamed--is it dreaming or seeing? Are you a vision? Am I having a vision?

Numinous Being: Others will understand you if you say so. But some will condemn you for saying so.

Sandra: (sadly) Yes, Grandpa told me that it would be hard. The power seems so--so joyous in being able to help people...but the work is hard--I guess. I don't really know yet, do I? But, but it's so clear....(Sits down on the couch again and shakes her head, holds her chin on her fists.)

Numinous Being: You know but you have forgotten. When you were younger, you used to take care of your brothers and sisters. You used to calm them by holding them. When your mother and father were sick, they used to ask you to sit on the bed with them and hold their hands or put your hands on their head. You did it willingly but you were always very tired afterwards.

Sandra: Yes, I remember those times. But I didn't feel like I had any choice. My brothers and sisters were upset so I took care of them. My mom and dad told me to be with them so I did. But I would just fall asleep there sometimes. I remember.

Numinous Being: Then the power worked through you because choice was not an issue. Now you may choose. No one does the work against their will. (It begins to fade from sight) You may choose. No one does the work against their will. You may choose. (It fades from sight.)

Sandra: (yawns and stretches) I am so tired. This has been such a long, long dream...a dream...? (lies down and falls back to sleep. End of Scene 3.)

Scene 4. (Same house interior. Sandra, shaking with rage, stands right of center stage facing a drunken Athabascan man, who stands left of center stage facing her and behind whom stand another Native man and woman.)

Sandra: Get out of my house, Johnny!

Johnny: Oh, get yer power outta yer ass and throw me out, witch. You ain't so big time. Just another smart-ass woman thinks she boss me aroun'.

Sandra: I'm not bossing you around. I'm standing in my own living room telling you you're out of bounds. You need to leave. Now go!

Johnny: I'm outta bounds! I'm outta bounds? (turns to others, laughs) She sshays I'm otta bounds. What'sit mean? What the hell she talkin bout?

Man: She's a witch, like you said, Johnny. Don't let her scare yuh. Tell her what we think.

Woman: Yeah, she's scared. She's shakin'. Don't stop now.

Sandra: Leroy and Louise, I don't know why you're doing this, but I wish you would take Johnny home and let him sober up. You know you're welcome in my house any time, but not when he's acting like this. He's been drinking for days already. He's your brother, Leroy; you should take care of him.

Johnny: Sober up? Sober up? I don't wanna sober up. (laughs) I wanna drink more! I wanna tell you you gotta stop talkin witch shit to your kids. Cuz they come and talk witch shit to our kids.

Sandra: I don't talk "witch shit" to anyone, Johnny Frank. I share my thoughts, and dreams, and visions with my children because they're my children. If they talk to their friends, that's their business. You don't even have any kids in this town, Johnny. They all left because you're such a drunk.

Johnny: (raises his fist, but man and woman grab him, they wrestle, he settles down) Nah, doan matter I have kids or no. You stop talkin that witch shit, or somebody gonna get hurt. (turns to others) There now, there now--I said what I said. Now let's get the fuck outta this place.

(They all turn and stagger out the front door, downstage left, leaving the front door wide open.)

Sandra: (She collapses at the table sobbing. Her two children come out from backstage, the boy goes to Sandra, the girl goes to the door and slams and locks it, goes to each window and closes its curtains, then goes to her mother. They hold her and she pulls her head up from the table and embraces both of them.) Oh, I'm so sorry you have to hear all of that. Johnny's a good man when he's not drunk. And you are the two best children ever. (They hug each other silently.) Grandpa said this would be hard...if I decided to--to become a medicine person, but I never realized how hard. So many people in town have turned against me.

Lulu: Against us, mom. The kids don't treat me the same.

Frankie: And they say bad things about you, even when I'm there and I can hear everything. They're bigger than me...but if they weren't--

Sandra: Oh, honey (looks at her son) don't fight about it. That's not what the power's for. It's not for hurting people. It's to help and heal people, our people.

Lulu: Then why are people fighting it, so much? We go to church but still Father and Sister look at us weird and act--cold.

Sandra: They don't understand. They've forgotten the Native ways. They think I'm doing something bad, wrong, evil. It's all in their heads, children. Don't let it get into your heads. Listen to Grandpa and remember Uncle Simon. He was a good strong man. He helped lots of people and he had the power. That's the Native way. It's not to divide people up and turn people against each other. (There is a firm but quiet knock on the front door.) Come in!

Lulu: I locked it.

Sandra: Look out the window and see who is it.

Lulu: (from window) It's Grandpa! (runs to door, unlocks it, takes the old man's hand in both of her and leads him to the table, where he stands, looking at Sandra and smiling).

Sandra: (looks up at him, a long pause, then smiles) You were right, Grandpa. It's hard.

Grandfather: (sits down).

Sandra: (to daughter) Get us coffee.

Grandfather: I heard Johnny was here.

Frankie: And Leroy and Louise, too, Grandpa.

Grandfather: I heard, I heard. (The daughter pours coffee, puts the pot on the table then pulls a chair around to sit upstage between Sandra and Grandfather with the son seated in a chair to the right of Sandra.)

Sandra: Oh, he made me so mad. He doesn't understand. People tell him lies, he drinks, and then he takes it out on someone. This time it was me.

Grandfather: People know you have made a decision. They know you have made a choice.

Sandra: I couldn't say no, Grandpa.

Grandfather: And so...

Sandra: And so--and so I have to live with it. I've always been taught to live with the consequences of my actions, and my choices. I can't do anything else with this one. But it's so hard on the kids. Their friends are turning on them. The parents are making it hard for the kids even to play together.

Grandfather: They don't understand yet. They will. When they see that you're not hurting anyone, that you're helping people, they'll come around.

Sandra: (breaks down in sobs again, hugs her children and then Grandfather, wipes her eyes, blows her nose, and drinks coffee).

Grandfather: They used to tell a story about a woman who dragged her bag. (The children perk up, eyes bright and glued on Grandfather.) In the time long ago, young girls, before they became women, when they were just turning into women, they had to stay by themselves. They couldn't speak or sing. (drinks coffee)

Lulu: You mean they couldn't see anyone, not even their friends? That's mean. Why did they do that, Grandpa?

Grandfather: The old people thought it was bad luck. But one young girl, strong-willed and smart, didn't see it that way. She thought she could talk or sing any time and so she got in big trouble with the people. She didn't want to hurt anyone, but she just couldn't sit still and do nothing.

Frankie: That sounds like you, mom.

Grandfather: Well, the way the story goes, bad things happened in her village and she had to leave. And the bag she was dragging, that was the bag with her few little things in it that she took when she left her house. They called it a sled-bag. It was made of caribou leg-skins, sewed the long way, so they made a kind of bag. They were laced up and the bag was dragged along behind like a sled.

She met a cannibal, who was eating people in a winter camp. She escaped from that one! She used many tricks to outsmart and escape the cannibal. He followed her and made camp with her. He ate part of a body while she ate dried fish and dried meat.

Lulu: A body. That's gross, Grandpa. Is that really the way the story was?

Grandfather: Yes. She pretended to sew up his boots and mittens. But she put hot coals in them so when he tried to chase her he got burned real bad. Then he froze to death in a snow storm. She met a man, and lived with him, and had a child with him. She had a good place there. She was brave, she went on her own, and took a long time to find her place. She was different than the other people. Somehow, she knew herself like other people didn't.

I thought the winter had just begun and now I've chewed off part of it.

Sandra: (shakes herself) Thank you, Grandpa. You always make me feel like myself again, strong, like when mother was still alive. Teaching was so hard for me at first. I couldn't understand schedules and papers and meetings. I couldn't understand why everyone had to be on time, and do all their work. I learned. I learned to teach and to help other people understand. I know I can do this. (hugs Grandfather) But, please, don't stop telling us stories. (empties coffee cup, looks at clock) Oh, speaking of stories, there's a good movie on Channel 23. The Indians win and help everyone in this one. (pats her kids on the shoulder) Turn on the TV and

sit with Grandpa. I'll start dinner. (As the people move, the lights go down. End of Scene 4.)

Scene 5. (The backdrop shows faint Northern Lights. The stage is covered with white. Sandra sits facing downstage on a heavy blanket, dressed in her warmest winter clothes. A pair of snowshoes and a small backpack lie on the snow beside her. She holds a drum.)

Sandra: (drums softly and speaks rhythmically)

The power is everywhere, in everything.

I smell the stones, listen to the leaves,  
taste the light, and stroke the air.

It is everywhere but few know this  
and fewer still can use it.

The clear light of dawn fills my dreams

The soft light of dusk fills my dreams

Words of the elders whisper in the power

Now is the hour to speak of our way

Silence will serve us no longer

Shyness will serve us no longer

Denial will serve us no longer

Now we must stand on the stage of time and space

Now we must know and be the human race

(She drums to silence, puts down the drum and takes a thermos and food from the backpack. She mimes pouring tea, warming her hands with the cup, drinking, then eating. She stands to stretch and as she turns, the Northern Lights flare into color, shimmering across the backdrop. She faces upstage, raises her arms, then sits down slowly as the stage lights begin to dim. One at a time, the shamans and the numinous being walk in and sit in an arc behind her, facing the Northern Lights upstage. Stage lights go down to dark, and Northern Lights flare, shimmer and dance then slowly fade to black. End of Scene 5, End of Act 4, End of Play.)