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# **GHOST BRIDE**

**by Ron Schaefer**

Based on a North American Folktale

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# GHOST BRIDE

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## CHARACTERS

**6F /5M + Other Villagers**

GLOWING EMBER: The bride

WHALER: A suitor

STANDING TREE: The father

CROW CALL: A gossip

WOODBINE: Another gossip

WOLFHEART: A Medicine Man

GLEAMING ARROW: The handsome prince

SINGING BRANCH: A young girl

SCREECH OWL: An old woman

SNAKE: Another Medicine Man

BLESSING: The fussy aunt

OTHER VILLAGERS

## SETTING

*Somewhere along the coast in the American Pacific Northwest. A mainland village of living souls and a second village of the dead, with some excursions into a cave and forest.*

## TIME PERIOD

*Back in the days of legends*

## RUNNING TIME

*Approximately 90 minutes*

Ghost Bride  
by Ron Schaefer

**ACT ONE**  
**Scene 1**

SETTING: *A Village on the coast waters of the Northwest coast Indians.*

AT RISE: *GLOWING EMBER, a girl of marrying age, is off with a young man interested in her, WHALER. STANDING TREE, the girl's father, and village chieftain, appears to confront her.*

STANDING TREE

Come. Come with me now.

GLOWING EMBER

What's wrong?

STANDING TREE

You come with me now. *(To WHALER)* And you, stay away.

GLOWING EMBER

Why? What's the problem?

STANDING TREE

Do not stand here asking questions. I said come. You come.

GLOWING EMBER

*(To WHALER)*

I'm sorry.

WHALER

If you must.

*STANDING TREE yanks GLOWING EMBER aside. WHALER remains, but is confused as to what to do next.*

STANDING TREE

I don't want you seeing that boy.

GLOWING EMBER

Whaler? Why?

STANDING TREE

I don't want you seeing any of the young men in the village.

GLOWING EMBER

Any?!

STANDING TREE

Your Mother, only dead a few sunsets, and you're out chasing boys! Have some respect.

GLOWING EMBER

I wasn't "chasing boys!" I was only talking to Whaler.

STANDING TREE

I know where these talks lead. You are to stay at home and tend your duties there.

GLOWING EMBER

I have not been neglectful! Whaler lives here. I cannot avoid him. Nor can I avoid any of the young men in the village.

STANDING TREE

Do not encourage them. You do not need the company of young men. You are to stay at home and take care of me, understand?

GLOWING EMBER

But, Papa! I do tend you, and yet, if I am never to leave, how may I find a husband and set up my own home?

STANDING TREE

You will never leave. You are to see to me into my old age. You will not marry. You will take care of me. As your father, I need your service night and day. As village Chieftain, I command it.

GLOWING EMBER

I am never to see anyone?!

STANDING TREE

Certainly not that one. He is poor, and cannot afford you. As I am the wealthiest, none of the young men can afford you, and I have no need of a bride price.

GLOWING EMBER

And other villages?

STANDING TREE

That goes for other villages too. No more of this! You come home!

But—  
GLOWING EMBER

STANDING TREE  
No more of this! Do not look back! Come!

*STANDING TREE yanks her out. She looks at WHALER pleadingly, but WHALER feels powerless to do anything. At their exit, he turns, looking sullen, and wanders off.*

**ACT ONE**  
**Scene 2**

SETTING: *Later in the Village.*

AT RISE: *GLOWING EMBER is sitting outside the door of her Father's lodge, doing some sewing and looking quite somber and unhappy. Two Elder Women: CROW CALL and WOODBINE, are passing by. STANDING TREE calls from inside the lodge.*

STANDING TREE (*Off*)  
Glowing Ember! What are you doing out there?!

GLOWING EMBER  
Stitching your cloak, Father!

STANDING TREE (*Off*)  
You don't need to do that out there! Come inside! Help me find my moccasin! I am missing one!

GLOWING EMBER  
Yes, Father!

*GLOWING EMBER resigns herself to going inside. The two women look to each other.*

CROW CALL  
Poor girl. That man is going to grind her into dust.

WOODBINE

Imagine, not letting the girl outside at all! How is the girl ever to marry, if he so restricts her movements?

CROW CALL

He probably ate his own moccasin just to give her something to do.

WOODBINE

How is she ever to set up a house of her own – raise children?

CROW CALL

He doesn't want grandchildren.

WOODBINE

Nooo!

CROW CALL

That's what I heard.

WOODBINE

But he's the village Chieftain! Wouldn't he want a grandson to follow him? He has no son of his own!

CROW CALL

He's not thinking of that. Since his wife died, he wants the girl all to himself to serve him. He's only thinking of his old age.

WOODBINE

He's rich enough to appoint whoever he wants – but, no grandson?

CROW CALL

And the girl suffers.

WOODBINE

Poor thing.

CROW CALL

I've been listening. Some of the others believe he has simply gotten too proud, too arrogant. He doesn't want to listen to anybody.

WOODBINE

Well...I know he loved Wren dearly. And it had to have been a bitter blow when she died. For both of them. But that's no excuse for keeping his own daughter prisoner like that.

CROW CALL

I'm telling you, you can see by the look on her face – if and when you can see her – she resents it. And sooner or later, I fear something unpleasant is going to come of the situation.

WOODBINE

Not to mention if he begins treating everyone in the same brusque manner, the village itself will find him intolerable.

CROW CALL

May be. But right now it's their problem. If it spills over onto others...? Let us hope for amicable resolutions.

WOODBINE

Poor girl. Poor girl.

*CROW CALL and WOODBINE  
move on. WHALER returns and  
creeps up to the lodge door.*

WHALER

*(Barely above a whisper)*

Glowing Ember! Glowing Ember! Can you step out?

GLOWING EMBER *(Off)*

Whaler! What do you want?

WHALER

Can you talk?

GLOWING EMBER *(Off)*

Wait! *(Opens door a crack)* Father's resting. What are you doing here?

WHALER

I came to see you.

GLOWING EMBER

Father has forbidden me to talk to you. To talk to any of the boys in the village. You can't come around here.

WHALER

Please, I need to see you.

GLOWING EMBER

I can't. Don't you understand?

WHALER

But he's being unreasonable.

GLOWING EMBER

That may be true, but there's nothing I can do about it. He's my father, and village Chieftain. What do you expect from me?



WHALER

We could run away.

GLOWING EMBER

Where? And do what? Would people here accept that? Would another village tolerate us?

WHALER

They might. Many men in other villages take wives from outside their own homes.

GLOWING EMBER

Not runaways.

WHALER

They might.

GLOWING EMBER

They might! And cause conflicts with others? How long do you think we could stay before Father would force a situation between us and them?

WHALER

Please, my sweet girl. Come with me, we'll find a way.

GLOWING EMBER

No! It's ridiculous to even think so.

WHALER

Then you'll have to confront him yourself. You must take a stand against him.

GLOWING EMBER

Whaler, I'm at his mercy!

WHALER

Well, if you won't, I will!

GLOWING EMBER

Don't do anything foolish!

STANDING TREE (*Off*)

Glowing Ember! What are you doing?!

GLOWING EMBER

Nothing, Papa!

STANDING TREE (*Off*)

Is there somebody out there? Who are you talking to?!

GLOWING EMBER

No one, Father!

STANDING TREE (*Off*)

Come away from the door! You've no reason to be there!

GLOWING EMBER

Yes, Father!

WHALER

I mean it.

GLOWING EMBER

Go away!

*GLOWING EMBER closes the door, returning back inside. WHALER stands waiting, wondering what to do. He eventually turns and leaves.*

**ACT ONE**  
**Scene 3**

SETTING: *The Coastline.*

AT RISE: *WHALER is working, somewhat roughly, on repairing his canoe. WOLFHEART, his father, appears.*

WOLFHEART

So, you spend your days working on your canoe. I wondered where you had disappeared to.

WHALER

It needs repair.

WOLFHEART

So I see. It seems more than the canoe needs repair. Careful you don't give it so much concern you wreck her.

WHALER

I'm not! I'm just...

WOLFHEART

Something has upset you. So you wander off into the woods for days only to take it out instead on the sea. Or your craft.

WHALER

It's nothing.

WOLFHEART

I see. It's nothing then that puts you in this surly temper.

WHALER

It's...Glowing Ember.

WOLFHEART

The chieftain's daughter. Uhh. A disagreement, perhaps, between a young man and a young woman.

WHALER

She will not leave her father's house.

WOLFHEART

And why should she?

WHALER

Her father forbids her to see me. He forbids her to see any young man.

WOLFHEART

Why? Does he somehow not know of the natural order of things?

WHALER

He wants to keep her permanently as his servant, now that his wife is gone. He forbids her to marry.

WOLFHEART

Is this true?

WHALER

She told me so herself.

WOLFHEART

And he specifically mentioned that you are forbidden to see her.

WHALER

Especially me.

WOLFHEART

He is aware that you are my son.

WHALER

How could he not?

WOLFHEART

Perhaps this is all just misunderstanding. I shall go to him. Talk to him father to father.

WHALER

No! He'll think I sent you after him. How would that look? I can handle my own battles, thank you.

WOLFHEART

And have you?

WHALER

He forbids me to go near. He won't talk to me.

WOLFHEART

Then how can you fight your own battle with a foe who refuses to meet you on the field? You will need an intermediary. When two enemies refuse to face, a third party must step in. Whaler, be calm. I will go to him. I will not try to belittle your presence in front of him. Only find an understanding where you may face him honestly. Go about your business. I will meet him. And have some mercy on your craft.

*WOLFHEART exits. WHALER returns to his boat.*

**ACT ONE**  
**Scene 4**

SETTING: *The Village again.*

AT RISE: *WOLFHEART stands in front of Standing Tree's lodge. WOLFHEART slaps the door.*

WOLFHEART

I would speak with the village leader.

*STANDING TREE steps out.*

STANDING TREE

What does the Holy Man want with the Chieftain?

WOLFHEART

A delicate and personal mission, Standing Tree. A misunderstanding, as I have come to believe. I have learned, if I am correct about this, that you have forbidden my son to see your daughter.

STANDING TREE

That's correct.

WOLFHEART

Is it? And that you have forbidden Glowing Ember from seeing any young man of the village.

STANDING TREE

Or any other village.

WOLFHEART

This seems harsh. But why?

STANDING TREE

I have no wife. She is to serve me the time I've left on Earth.

WOLFHEART

Standing Tree, you cannot mean this. To be so cruel to your own daughter? You know the way of young people. It is the natural order of things that they should seek each other out. How will the village grow if the young are forbidden from being young?

STANDING TREE

The village will do fine without Glowing Ember.

WOLFHEART

You cannot mean this. Has the loss of your wife turned your heart so bitter? To seek no son to follow you?

STANDING TREE

That is not for you to understand. Go back to your potions and spells, magic man, and leave my daughter out of it.

WOLFHEART

See here, Standing Tree, you've no right to speak to your own Medicine Man this way. And to forbid my son – you were aware Whaler is mine, aren't you?

STANDING TREE

That makes no difference to me. Did he send you here to have you whine his complaints in his stead?

WOLFHEART

I came of my own accord. And, I should say, on behalf of your own daughter. This unreasoning command of yours is likely to upset things within the village. You are not so rich, nor so powerful as to defy the wants and needs of the people under your sway.

STANDING TREE

You let me worry about that. You've said your piece, now go away. I will not have any more discussion on this.

WOLFHEART

You can't dismiss me and my family out with so much breath. I am a village Guardian, you know!

STANDING TREE

Go Guard somewhere and leave me in peace! Away with you! And keep your fool son away from my daughter, and my house!

*STANDING TREE returns inside,  
shutting the door in  
WOLFHEART's face.*

WOLFHEART

Stubborn fool! Stubborn fool! We'll see about your orders and your stone covered heart!

*WOLFHEART storms off.*

**ACT ONE**  
**Scene 5**

SETTING:

*A crystal cave; a grotto  
somewhere along the coast along  
the woodline filled with quartz  
crystals spread about in various  
places. Moss and tree roots hang  
heavy along the walls and ceiling,  
and water drips here and there  
into small pools. Waves from the  
sea can be heard crashing in the  
distance.*

AT RISE:

*WOLFHEART enters. He goes to  
a tiny pit that has been used for a  
fire previously and places some  
new kindling and wood on the  
charred embers and proceeds to  
light a fire.*

*As the fire brings forth its orange  
light and shadows within the  
darkened space, WOLFHEART  
sprinkles some tobacco incense  
on it, letting it smoke. Then with  
a large feather, blows the smoke  
in each of the directions.*

WOLFHEART

Spirits of the East, I offer you my prayer.  
Spirits of the South, I offer you my prayer.  
Spirits of the West, I offer you my prayer.  
Spirits of the North, I offer you my prayer.  
Skyfather, I offer you my prayer.  
Earthmother, I offer you my prayer.  
Let Spirit know, this is my prayer.

I come with a heavy heart.  
Our Village Elder and Chief has betrayed us in his ways.  
He has snubbed myself, your servant, and my son,  
in his selfishness to refuse his daughter  
to intermingle with the rest of the tribe;  
and caused us concern for his leadership,  
no doubt causing his child great pain in the process.  
Spirits, I ask this of you.  
If he will not let his daughter marry my son,  
nor any other long as he lives,  
then come for him, if it is his fate.  
And if he cannot be dealt with in that manner,  
then let the Spirits come, and marry his daughter instead.  
Let them show him their wealth, as it is his greed  
he is protecting. And it is wealth alone he will understand.  
This I beseech you, for this is my prayer.  
And I bring you this as an offering,  
in honor of my service.

*WOLFHEART places a pelt on the fire, which begins to smoke and burn. A Screech Owl sitting on a root somewhere high in the corner comes alive with its bright eyes and lets out a screeching wail.*

WOLFHEART

So. The Screeching Owl has heard.  
Omen of the Spirit World.  
So then be it. It is I Wolfheart, who offers  
thanks and blessing.

*Lights slowly fade.*

**ACT ONE**  
**Scene 6**

SETTING:

*The Village; night, quite dark. Even the Moon finds it difficult to peak through the tall trees above. Off in the distance can be heard singing voices, and the occasional thump of a drum.*

AT RISE: *Slowly, people begin to emerge to see what is going on. GLOWING EMBER peeks out from her father's door to listen.*

*Overhead, sitting high in the trees, the Screech Owl screeches, startling some of the people below.*

STANDING TREE (*Off*)

Glowing Ember? Glowing Ember! What's happening?

*Ignoring her father and the Owl, GLOWING EMBER, and the others head to the beach.*

*At the beach, GLOWING EMBER and the others watch as a fleet of canoes, filled with people holding torches, make their approach.*

CROW CALL

Who are they?

WOODBINE

They're coming from across the sound. The other side of the bay.

CROW CALL

Impossible! No one is from there, unless it's somehow from the Land of Spirit.

WOODBINE

Don't be silly. No one lives out there.

CROW CALL

Then who are they? From where? They've always said, the other side of the bay holds the other side of life.

WOODBINE

You're talking out of your head. Maybe a new clan settled out there, and we just never heard about it.

CROW CALL

Then, who are they, if you know so much?

WOODBINE

I don't know. But they don't seem threatening. It's almost like... Almost like... A wedding procession. Like they've come for a bride.



VISITORS (*Singing*)

*Oh in time we've come to call  
And bring with us however small  
In token of our love so dear  
The bride we've come to claim is here*

*In presence, our Chief is brave and tall  
In purpose, in gain, we offer all  
Uniting tribe with tribe is clear  
By Chief with daughter that has no peer.*

*Come Brave and Girl be joined as one  
Let families link and be it done.*

*The canoes arrive at the shore,  
and the visiting tribe steps out,  
led by a tall and handsome young  
man dressed in all his finery,  
carrying a torch. He appears to  
be their Chief. This is  
GLEAMING ARROW. He comes  
straight off the boat and up to  
GLOWING EMBER, never taking  
his eyes off her. The Screech Owl  
screeches and the music ends.*

GLEAMING ARROW

You are Glowing Ember, Standing Tree's only daughter?

GLOWING EMBER

I am.

GLEAMING ARROW

I am Gleaming Arrow, Chief of my people, from the Village across the bay.

GLOWING EMBER

I thought there was no village—

GLEAMING ARROW

And you would be wrong. It is just hard to see us, sometimes, because of the constant fog.

*Late to the party, STANDING  
TREE finally arrives after  
everyone else has already settled  
in.*

STANDING TREE

What is this? What's going on? Who are these people?

GLEAMING ARROW

You are Standing Tree, Village Chieftain?

STANDING TREE

I am. And who might you be?

GLEAMING ARROW

Gleaming Arrow. I am Chief of these people you see before you, from across the sound on the other side of the bay. We are Islanders.

STANDING TREE

Islanders? Across the bay? But no one...

GLOWING EMBER

He says they are hard to see. But there they are.

GLEAMING ARROW

I have come with one purpose in mind: to marry your daughter.

STANDING TREE

Now see here, whoever you are—

GLEAMING ARROW

Unload the bride price!

STANDING TREE

Bride price?

*Immediately, the people of the canoes start unloading a huge potlatch of gifts and placing it around STANDING TREE. Drums beat to accompany the delivery. WHALER runs up to STANDING TREE.*

WHALER

Standing Tree! You're not going to let this stranger just buy off Glowing Ember like this, are you?

STANDING TREE

Shut up! There's some extremely fine work presented here!

WHALER

Glowing Ember! Surely you're not going to let this – whoever he is – just buy you like this?!

GLOWING EMBER

*(Mesmerized)*

What?

WHALER

Glowing Ember!

STANDING TREE

Get out of the way, boy! Stop interfering! Leave my daughter alone! Everyone! Everyone! Let's help these good people gather up their offerings and offer them some food and drink as well! They've come a long way to be with us! Come this way, Gleaming Arrow, you say? Your people are most welcome, most welcome indeed! Go on, girl, take his hand, show him to our communal lodge! Offer him a beverage! He must be thirsty! Come, Come!

*The entire party, guests and residents, are led away from the beach. The song is taken up again as they all walk off. WOLFHEART is hanging out in the background, and is the last to leave the scene, but before he does so, he puts his arm around the sullen WHALER. WHALER, hurt, pulls away and runs off in another direction. WOLFHEART sighs, and with a nod to the Screech Owl, departs.*

**ACT ONE**  
**Scene 7**

SETTING: *The Village; a wedding feast and celebration.*

AT RISE: *Log drums pound, a chorus of chants fill the air.*

VILLAGERS (*Singing*)  
*See the handsome warrior  
With face as bright as sun  
See the lovely maiden  
As she happily has been won  
Together they will make a nest  
Like birds within the trees  
And from them come another batch  
To make our garden green*

*Hey hey-a heya heya  
Hey hey-a heya heya*

*Here we joy in two that mix  
And link by link our custom fix*

*The one from on the mainland cries  
The other seaward has his ties  
Village and village will be as one  
As two who've bonded hands have done*

*Hey-hey-a heya heya  
Hey-hey-a heya heya  
Hey-hey-a heya heya  
Hey-hey-a heya heya*

*The singing continues as the  
VILLAGERS circle around  
GLOWING EMBER and  
GLEAMING ARROW. Finally all  
cease. STANDING TREE steps  
forward.*

STANDING TREE

Little did I realize that one day I would lose my only daughter and the flower of my life.  
But little did I realize, just across the bay, hidden from our eyes so many years, I would gain a  
son – a prominent son – a *rich* son!

*Laughter and cheers.*

WOODBINE

*(To CROW CALL)*

Chiseler.

STANDING TREE

So soon after my dear wife has left, now my little girl leaves me too. And that makes me sad.  
But I have made so many new friends!

*Cheers and laughter.*

CROW CALL

*(To WOODBINE)*

And stuffed his home to bursting with supplies.

STANDING TREE

And so, I stand here wishing my daughter and her new husband the best wishes a father could  
wish; with the hope you will make many return visits, and maybe someday I will make the  
journey across the sound and visit you in your new home...

WOODBINE & CROW CALL

*(To each other)*

Hah!

STANDING TREE

...which I'm sure is as sumptuous as any seen. And now, I must say my departure to my own, my new son, and this glorious company! May the Creator give you always his blessing, and may happiness follow in your path everywhere you travel!

*Cheers.*

STANDING TREE

Anything to add, Wolfheart?

*WOLFHEART steps away from a very somber-looking WHALER and raises his Raven skull rattle.*

WOLFHEART

Spirits follow, Spirits bless,  
Land of Spirits, protect these guests,  
Find them home, safe and sound,  
And our departing daughter, keep her bound  
always within loving arms.  
Heyah.

ALL

Heyah.

*GLOWING EMBER gives STANDING TREE a kiss on the cheek. STANDING TREE sniffles back tears. GLOWING EMBER goes to WHALER, who turns his face away. She puts a hand on his shoulder, then returns to her husband, and all the departing guests head for the canoes. Waves and well wishes from all around. A mist begins to envelope the canoes as they shove off.*

WOODBINE

Who'd have imagined a grasping skinflint like Standing Tree would ever let go of his daughter?

CROW CALL

Well...if the price is right.

*Torches are relit to see through the coming fog. GLOWING EMBER, with her husband behind her, is the last seen as the canoes vanish onto the sea.*

*All now head home with STANDING TREE taking a long last look.*

CROW CALL

Think he feels regret?

WOODBINE

Up until he gets home and looks at his gifts. It's the natural way of things, he'll learn. What else could he expect?

*There is a surly squawk from above. They look up.*

WOODBINE

Has the screech owl been here the whole time?

CROW CALL

I haven't noticed.

WOODBINE

I like not that. Let's not stay longer.

*The two join the others in leaving the scene.*

STANDING TREE

I am grateful you did not make a fuss.

WOLFHEART

Make a fuss? What for?

*STANDING TREE slowly walks away. WOLFHEART watches his son for a moment still standing at the shore looking at nothing but fog. He goes up to him.*

WOLFHEART

It was not meant to be, Whaler. I prayed to the Spirits, and this is how they resolved it. We must all, in time, face things we may wish for but cannot change.

WHALER

My heart cringes.

WOLFHEART

I know, but wish the best for her. Things will not go so well for her either. Nor will Standing Tree be left untouched by events that just came to be.

WHALER

If you don't mind, I'd like to stay here a bit longer.

*WOLFHEART gives in and leaves. WHALER finds a place to sit, and stares into the fog. The Screech Owl squawks again, grabbing Whaler's attention, as lights fade.*

## **ACT TWO**

### **Scene 1**

SETTING:

*Later that night; The Island Village; Gleaming Arrow's village. It is an island far from the mainland.*

AT RISE:

*Drums beat as the canoes come to shore attracting the attention of the Villagers. GLEAMING ARROW helps GLOWING EMBER step from the canoe. VILLAGERS greet the Chieftain's wife with flowers.*

GLOWING EMBER

Hello! Hello! Happy to meet you all! Thank you! Thank you for this lovely greeting!

GLEAMING ARROW

My people, I wish you to meet my bride, Glowing Ember, from the village on the other end of the sound. Treat her well, as we want her to feel at home!

*There are cheers and praises of  
welcome. A girl goes up and  
takes Glowing Ember's hand.*

SINGING BRANCH

I am Singing Branch. I am to be your own maid and helper while you adjust to your new home.

GLOWING EMBER

Thank you, that is most kind.

SINGING BRANCH

I'll be happy to show you around our village and introduce you to some of our residents. You'll find everyone very friendly and willing to help.

GLOWING EMBER

I've noticed that already among your people.

SINGING BRANCH

You are so beautiful! And you are dressed in such pretty things.

GLOWING EMBER

Thank you. You are so sweet to say so.

SINGING BRANCH

It'll be such fun to care for you! And we'll play games, and get along splendidly. Oh, we're going to be great friends, I just know it!

GLOWING EMBER

I hope so, too. I'm looking forward to it.

SINGING BRANCH

Come. Let me show you to your new lodge.

GLEAMING ARROW

Singing Branch! Don't occupy all her time. She is my wife, remember, barely off the boat, and new to this land!

SINGING BRANCH

Of course! That's why I'm showing her!

GLEAMING ARROW

Well, come back soon!

GLOWING EMBER

I'm being led—



*SINGING BRANCH yanks a laughing, but perplexed GLOWING EMBER away to within the confines of the village while the men pull up the canoes and head to their lodges.*

## **ACT TWO**

### **Scene 2**

SETTING: *Inside the Chieftain's lodge.*

AT RISE: *GLEAMING ARROW sits, waiting for the arrival of his bride. SINGING BRANCH finally leads GLOWING EMBER into the lodge.*

SINGING BRANCH

...the best in dealing with the plants is Willow, she knows anything and everything about what to put in food, what medicines clear up stuffy noses, and when to pick the ripest berries. On the other hand, if you have need of help with weaving, Doe Ears is the one you should talk to. She has a knack for making the tightest bonds in reeds that make for the sturdiest baskets. We even use some of them for carrying water plants, they keep their shape so well. And for stitching hides, well, you can't go wrong talking to Hand Speaker. Everyone goes to her whenever there is a torn garment to fix, or if there is need of—

*SINGING BRANCH has suddenly become aware of GLEAMING ARROW staring at them.*

SINGING BRANCH

*(Cowed)*

I suppose I should leave you to your husband.

GLOWING EMBER

Thank you for all your help, Singing Branch.

*SINGING BRANCH sheepishly excuses herself and leaves.*

GLOWING EMBER

She's sweet.

GLEAMING ARROW

She's in need of a big sister.

GLOWING EMBER

I hope I fulfill the requirement.

GLEAMING ARROW

Did you enjoy your tour?

GLOWING EMBER

And then some.

GLEAMING ARROW

I'm afraid she gets carried away. *(Slowly approaching)* We live by night around here.  
Something of a habit. *(Removes his robe)*

GLOWING EMBER

You do all your fishing – everything – at night?

GLEAMING ARROW

*(Stroking her cheek)*

Everything.

GLOWING EMBER

You know, my father kept me close.

GLEAMING ARROW

I assumed. *(Begins undressing her)*

GLOWING EMBER

I mean...you're my first man.

GLEAMING ARROW

Other men are missing out.

GLOWING EMBER

How did you know about us? About me?

GLEAMING ARROW

A little bird told me.

GLOWING EMBER

And that was enough to convince you I am to be your wife?

GLEAMING ARROW

You need to stop talking. You've already spent so much time with Singing Branch, you're picking up her habits.

GLOWING EMBER

I was just asking about—

GLEAMING ARROW

We don't need to talk.

*He kisses her and pulls her onto his mat.*

GLEAMING ARROW, (Cont'd)

This part you learn by doing.

*Slow fade.*

**ACT TWO**  
**Scene 3**

SETTING: *Inside the Chieftain's lodge.*

AT RISE: *GLOWING EMBER dreaming. In the darkness, Death masks, ghostly images appear along with noises of groans and suffering, and the sound of the Screech Owl. She sees shadowy figures walking around her but cannot distinguish who they are or what they want.*

GLOWING EMBER

*(In her sleep)*

Who are you?... What are you doing here?... What do you want with me?...

*GLOWING EMBER awakens with a start. Light seeps in to the Chieftain's lodge. It is morning. GLOWING EMBER realizes she has had a bad dream, and tries to shake it off. She turns to the form sleeping beside her. She leans in, lovingly to wake him, and senses something odd. She pulls off the blanket and sees there is a skeleton lying next to her. She screams, and throwing the blanket around her, dashes out of the lodge.*

**ACT TWO**

**Scene 4**

SETTING: *The Island Village; daytime.*

AT RISE: *As GLOWING EMBER steps out, she sees a village in ruins: rotting canoes with big holes in them, and the bones of various skeletons lying around what was the village campfire. Rats can be heard squeaking and scurrying. Weeds are overgrown everywhere. She howls, accidentally stumbling, kicking, and crushing bones here and there. Clueless as to what to do, she sees smoke from someone's campfire off in the distance, and runs in that direction for help.*

**ACT TWO**

**Scene 5**

SETTING: *A lone hut in the woods.*

AT RISE: *An Old Woman (SCREECH OWL) cooks at a pot over a fire. GLOWING EMBER, in a panic, and still wearing nothing more than the blanket she took with her, staggers into the scene, looking for help.*

SCREECH OWL

Ah. I thought you might be coming. I've made a hot brew just for you. It'll calm your nerves.

GLOWING EMBER

There's a...there's a...a whole village of...

SCREECH OWL

You are the Island Chief's new bride. I know. I told him about you. Very anxious, he was. I hope you spent a lovely night together. I know he was looking forward to it.

GLOWING EMBER

You told him about... The village! They're all dead!

SCREECH OWL

Yes, I imagine it came as quite a surprise. I assume you are used to a day cycle. Theirs, of course, is a night cycle.

GLOWING EMBER

Night cycle? Who are you?

SCREECH OWL

Sit down, dearie. Have some of my beverage. And look, you were so agitated you ran off without your clothes. We must find you something. Mornings can be damp and chilly, you know. But drink, first, it'll warm you up. I am Screech Owl. I am a messenger of sorts. A go-between the living and the land of the dead.

GLOWING EMBER

Land of the Dead.

SCREECH OWL

Oh surely, that's where you are. Have you wondered why your people have never been able to see the island village from their boats when they crossed the sound?

GLOWING EMBER

It was always covered in fog.

SCREECH OWL

That's because it's not there. Not in your world. It belongs to another world. A place where people go after they have passed on. Those people, chose to live in such a place after they left the Earth – Earth in your terms. But they are all dead, all of them, even your husband. He was left without a wife. That's why he was so eager to meet you.

GLOWING EMBER

And you told him about me?

SCREECH OWL

Naturally.

GLOWING EMBER

And how did you know about me? Am I...am I also—

SCREECH OWL

Dead? No, my girl. And I'm afraid that's going to cause some problems for you. You see, once you cross over, you can't go back.

GLOWING EMBER

How did this happen?

SCREECH OWL

I didn't just find you, you know. You're young – too full of life. How would I even know about you? But I was summoned.

GLOWING EMBER

Summoned?

SCREECH OWL

Wolfheart. Your village Medicine Man. He did not take kindly to your father snubbing his son, and thereby himself. After all, he is a proud man, and carries as much weight and responsibility in the people's eyes as your father. Giving him and his son the brush off is like giving the back-hand to a corresponding chief. Few would take kindly to that. As for your father, well, there's another that's a little too proud, and perhaps a little too greedy as well. For all his selfish greediness towards you, he was willing to sacrifice you at the earliest opportunity when enough gaudy riches were thrown his way. Luckily, Wolfheart was at least wise enough to let the spirits in their own thoughtfulness manage the situation, rather than just putting a vengeful spell on either of you, killing you outright, or plaguing you both with some horrible affliction. That's where I come in. I knew of the needs of all parties concerned, and put the pieces together. However, while Standing Tree mourns your loss, once he recognizes what has happened, things may not go so well for him. But you – you must make a new life for yourself. For you are a living soul in a village of corpses. Alive in the land of the dead. Each sunrise they will return to their natural earthly state of being nothing but rotting bones. But each night they will revive as they were in life, until dawn the next day. As for you, you will remain alive but something of a prisoner within the space of the island. Once you leave, you too will die, permanently. And there is no guarantee that as a corpse yourself you will remain living with them. You are likely to be thrust somewhere else, with no chance of return. That is now your fate.

GLOWING EMBER

What am I to do?

SCREECH OWL

Well, you must learn to adjust to their way of living. You must sleep during the day, and awake at night. Those people are kindly, and your husband, I believe will be loving. They will treat you well. I would not have sent you off to some awful place. I've dealt with proud men and their passions before. I would not have let whatever foments between those two damage you beyond repair. Still, I have my limitations. Beyond that, I can't advise much other than to make the best of your situation. Don't look so sad. It'll take some getting used to. But we'll get you through this trying period as best we can. Finished with your brew?

GLOWING EMBER

Yes.

SCREECH OWL

Then let's get you some clothes. You can stay with me for today. But we must return you for the evening. Your new family will be worried about you.

GLOWING EMBER

I do seem to have a new baby sister.

SCREECH OWL

Ah. Singing Branch. Sweet little thing. Sad case. Burned to death in a fire. Uses her hair to cover up some of the scars on her head.

GLOWING EMBER

She kept her scars?

SCREECH OWL

Some. They all do so. But she hasn't been here long. The longer a spirit stays, the more such scars fade away. Hers will disappear eventually. Sad though, she had her whole life before her. Misses her family terribly. Anyway. Come. Let's get you fixed up.

*SCREECH OWL leads  
GLOWING EMBER into her hut.*

## ACT TWO

### Scene 6

SETTING: *Sunset at the Island Village.*

AT RISE: *As the stars slowly begin to come out, so do the people of the Island Village. GLOWING EMBER returns, escorted by SCREECH OWL.*

SCREECH OWL

Night is falling. Your new home will begin to look alive now. They'll all start to appear just as you met them when you first wedded yourself to their chief. And you'll find yourself in warm company, just as you experienced it before the dawn came, when you found yourself looking over a scene of death.

GLOWING EMBER

I hope so.

*It becomes evident that things are not as they seem, as the people who emerge are all hideously deformed: broken limbs, smashed in faces, crippled, twisted backs. GLOWING EMBER lets out a scream.*

VILLAGER 1

You did this!

VILLAGER 2

You did this to us!

VILLAGER 3

With all your bumbling, all your stumbling around!

VILLAGER 4

You smashed our bones!

VILLAGER 5

Broke our legs and arms!

VILLAGER 6

Cracked our spines!

VILLAGER 1

Crippled us!

VILLAGER 2

Mamed us!

VILLAGER 3

Maliciously damaged us!

VILLAGER 4

After we welcomed you!

VILLAGER 5

What cruelty! Can't you see we're suffering?!

VILLAGER 6

How could you do this to us?

*GLOWING EMBER is boxed in, surrounded by the suffering dead. SINGING BRANCH is the last to show up, she is all bent out of shape.*

SINGING BRANCH

*(Almost in tears)*

Why would you do such a thing? Why?

*GLOWING EMBER tries to turn from them and run away, but SCREECH OWL stops her.*

SCREECH OWL

Oh my! Did you step on their bones before you left?



GLOWING EMBER

They were all around! I was frightened! Bones everywhere!

SCREECH OWL

You may have caused some real problems! Not a way to endear yourself to your new neighbors.

GLOWING EMBER

I didn't know!

SCREECH OWL

I'll handle this. You fools! This is all your own fault! Didn't you realize the girl was unaccustomed to living among the dead? She is still a living, breathing human unlike the rest of you! Did you let her know? Of course not! You were too busy celebrating! It was your fault for not properly informing your new arrival of the rules and stipulations she must observe living in her new home! So obviously when she woke up with the sun, as is the custom of her own people, she got scared and went stumbling about on a field of bones she was not expecting to see. And what were you all doing out and about at sunrise so that she could stumble around on top of you instead of lying in your own lodges like you should have been? Too much celebrating going on to get yourselves to bed? You know the rules yourselves!

VILLAGER 1

We felt such joy and knowing our chief found himself a bride.

VILLAGER 2

We get such few visitors.

VILLAGER 3

It is our custom to celebrate while the chief enjoys his new bride.

SCREECH OWL

All night?

VILLAGER 4

Maybe it went a little long.

SCREECH OWL

These are all excuses, aren't they. Now look at you. And the new bride herself? Terrified of you. And right she should.

VILLAGER 5

We're sorry.

VILLAGER 6

Maybe it was our fault. Kind of.

*GLEAMING ARROW appears with a twisted head. GLOWING EMBER shrieks once again.*

GLEAMING ARROW

It is more my fault than anyone's. Not just as your leader but as her husband. I should have informed her properly. But I was so happy to see her – to make her mine. I...forgot.

GLOWING EMBER

You were just a collection of bones when last I looked.

GLEAMING ARROW

Yes, and in your hurry to depart, you knocked my head off. I had to put it back on myself. I may need help in getting it aright.

GLOWING EMBER

How do we do that?

VILLAGER 1

How do we fix any of this?

SCREECH OWL

Now, now, child, don't you worry. Don't any of you worry. Screech Owl will figure something out. Meanwhile, I suggest you all return to your homes, and stay there for the entire course of the night. This may take some doing, but I suggest you make no further moves until I tell you. No doubt a lot of you are suffering. I suggest you tend you hurts as best you can, stay quiet, and stay home. Go on! You'll do no good here!

*The VILLAGERS turn and, grumbling, moaning in pain, head back to their lodges.*

GLOWING EMBER

Gleaming Arrow...I'll do what I can.

GLEAMING ARROW

I know.

*GLEAMING ARROW leaves along with the rest of them. SCREECH OWL holds GLOWING EMBER back.*

GLOWING EMBER

Screech Owl, how do we fix this?

SCREECH OWL

Come back to my hut. First we must mix up a potion that will put the whole village to sleep. They will need extra rest from their suffering. And then second, they are dead, they are spirits, they are not so attached to their bodies – their bones – as they were when they were alive. Even they forget. They will heal naturally, as they did repairing themselves when they left their bodies on earth. But, it will probably be a slow, and somewhat painful process. I will make another potion for all that will speed the recovery. You will help me. Come. The place smells of death now, this is no place to dawdle.

*SCREECH OWL leads a worried  
GLOWING EMBER out.*

**ACT THREE**

**Scene 1**

SETTING: *Months later; night; the Island  
Village.*

AT RISE: *The Island Village is up and  
about as usual. VILLAGERS  
seem to have returned to their  
normal state, as most have  
recovered from their debilitating  
maladies caused by Glowing  
Ember's stomping through their  
bones; but a few still carry some  
of the wounds, if in an improved  
state.*

*GLOWING EMBER sits by the  
shore weaving a carrier for a  
baby. She is obviously pregnant.  
SINGING BRANCH comes and  
sits beside her.*

SINGING BRANCH

You weave handsomely. It will be a fine carrier.

GLOWING EMBER

You are healing nicely. I can hardly tell where you were injured.

SINGING BRANCH

Screech Owl's medicine really helped. Most of the people are almost back to normal. A kink here, a sore back there.

GLOWING EMBER

I'm glad it was only temporary.

SINGING BRANCH

We dead put up with a lot, as we plan to be here a long time; much longer than you would be at your own home.

GLOWING EMBER

I suppose that's how things work.

SINGING BRANCH

Do you miss them?

GLOWING EMBER

Well, of course. Don't you miss your family?

SINGING BRANCH

Yes. But I know they'll be here someday. I just wait for them. There's comfort in that. You'll see all your people again someday too. Maybe they'll come here.

GLOWING EMBER

There are other places for them to travel?

SINGING BRANCH

Certainly. You are given a choice as to where you would feel most comfortable, most at home. Being across the sound and beyond the mist, I imagine many would choose to come here. But, of course, you came here alive. That makes it different for you.

GLOWING EMBER

Just exactly how different will it be?

SINGING BRANCH

I don't know. That's not supposed to happen. But you were under a curse. And that changes a lot.

GLOWING EMBER

Am I going to grow old and die here – and then return to this place? People only grow old here if they died old. No one seems to age. You, for example, you're always going to be this young, cheerful girl. How I envy you.

SINGING BRANCH

Maybe. But it wasn't my choice to leave to begin with. I'd have much preferred to stay where I was, marry a handsome young hunter, and have lots of babies before coming here.

GLOWING EMBER

Couldn't you find someone here?

SINGING BRANCH

It's not the same. Two deathly spirits cannot create the same spark as when you are flesh and alive. It has worked somewhat for you, because you came here still as a living being. And I know Gleaming Arrow is forever grateful. But it's not the usual.

GLOWING EMBER

How did it happen, Singing Branch? Your...accident...I mean.

SINGING BRANCH

Oh. I don't want to talk about it. It happened at night while asleep. There was raid. Angry voices. Weapons drawn. A fire breaks out before I know it. The fire blocks my way. Everyone escapes but me.

GLOWING EMBER

I'm so sorry, Singing Branch. No one deserves that. Especially not someone like you.

SINGING BRANCH

Forget all that. Besides, speaking of babies...

GLOWING EMBER

Oh! He's doing fine.

SINGING BRANCH

Is it a He?

GLOWING EMBER

Gleaming Arrow swears it is. But that's the Chieftain talking.

SINGING BRANCH

Is he active?

GLOWING EMBER

Why, you want to hear?

SINGING BRANCH

May I?

*GLOWING EMBER positions herself so that SINGING BRANCH can lay her ear on Glowing Ember's tummy.*

SINGING BRANCH

There are lots of gurgling... He's moving around, I can tell. Does he kick?

GLOWING EMBER

Once or twice. Not often.

SINGING BRANCH

That's another thing. Being here...no babies for me.

*GLOWING EMBER puts a sympathetic hand on SINGING BRANCH who is suddenly quiet.*

SINGING BRANCH (*Cont'd*)

They told me to tell you, Snake, our village Medicine Man wants to talk to you. Your husband too. I told them I'd kind of break the news to you. I wanted to be the one...

GLOWING EMBER

What news?

SINGING BRANCH

About the baby.

GLOWING EMBER

What about the baby?

SINGING BRANCH

They're here already. I better let them speak.

*SNAKE, the Village Shaman, and GLEAMING ARROW approach the two.*

GLEAMING ARROW

My sweet, Snake, our Medicine keeper, and I, have something we need to go over with you.

GLOWING EMBER

It's about the child, isn't it? What about my baby?

GLEAMING ARROW

Singing Branch, if you could leave us for awhile.

*SINGING BRANCH dutifully makes her departure, finding some way to be unnoticed within earshot.*

GLOWING EMBER

What's wrong with my baby?

GLEAMING ARROW

There's nothing wrong with it – that we know of.

SNAKE

The child is a union of the dead and the living. It's an unconventional combination at best. The spirit of the child must make a decision when it enters its form.

GLOWING EMBER

Whether to be alive or dead?

SNAKE

Yes. If it is born here, it will be born dead.

GLEAMING ARROW

For it to live, you must return to the land of the living, to your own people, and birth it there.

GLOWING EMBER

But—

SNAKE

I can arrange to have your curse suspended, as it were, under these unusual circumstances. But there are conditions.

GLOWING EMBER

Conditions?

GLEAMING ARROW

It means you can never return. You must stay with your own people and raise your child there, if it is ever to have a chance.

GLOWING EMBER

And you?

GLEAMING ARROW

I cannot come with you. It means we must separate as long as you and he are alive.

GLOWING EMBER

You made the trip before.

GLEAMING ARROW

For one night only – for you. It was part of the condition of Wolfheart's spell.

GLOWING EMBER

Can't you work another spell?

SNAKE

Sending you back is already one reversal of the spell. I cannot work two. You go, save yourself and the child, or you stay here, birth a dead baby, grow old and fade away in this place.

GLOWING EMBER

If I die here, won't I stay here.

SNAKE

No. You'll be the only one here who ages. And when you are dead, you will not remain. Your spirit will travel to some place I cannot predict.

GLEAMING ARROW

You must return. And as soon as possible. For your own sake, as well as the child.

GLOWING EMBER

But...we will never see each other. You won't see your own son.

GLEAMING ARROW

I know.

GLOWING EMBER

Are you so eager to give me up?

GLEAMING ARROW

No. If there were another way, I'd beg you to stay. I can't think of going on without you. But it would be wrong for me to cling to you and to hold you here, not to mention destroying our child's chances for happiness.

*GLOWING EMBER throws her arms around GLEAMING ARROW.*

GLOWING EMBER

I can't go now. Now that I have everything I wanted! I love you! I've learned to love this place, this being here, among all of you.

GLEAMING ARROW

All of us dead. You're alive. Except for the curse, you shouldn't even be here. And the child certainly does not.

SNAKE

You have some time to think. But you must make your decision soon. You must leave before the baby comes. Once it is born, if here, that is the end of it. It will remain a dead baby forever.

GLOWING EMBER

You can suspend the curse.

SNAKE

Only as far as your making it back alive. I can, however, give you a proper sendoff of protection to make sure you are well and safe on your return.

GLOWING EMBER

Why was I never told this before?



SNAKE

You were always intended not to know. The curse was not against you, but against your father. You were a decoy, I'm sorry to say.

GLEAMING ARROW

Perhaps we should give her a moment. This is a lot for her.

SNAKE

You have my sympathies, my child. I shall offer myself at your disposal when you two have decided.

GLEAMING ARROW

My feelings haven't changed, you know.

GLOWING EMBER

Go. I want to be alone right now.

GLEAMING ARROW

I'm sorry.

SNAKE

The woods are full of spies.

*SINGING BRANCH is peeking out from the brush. SNAKE heads out, GLEAMING ARROW reluctantly follows him. SINGING BRANCH creeps up to GLOWING EMBER.*

SINGING BRANCH

*(Hesitant; confused)*

Can I listen again? No one here has a baby but you.

*GLOWING EMBER, hesitant at first, allows SINGING BRANCH to approach, which the latter does, somewhat sheepishly, crawling up to her and happily snuggling against Glowing Ember's tummy. Lights fade as GLOWING EMBER looks off into the distance, wondering what to do.*

**ACT THREE**

**Scene 2**

SETTING: *Still night; the Island Chief's lodge.*

AT RISE: *GLEAMING ARROW and GLOWING EMBER are lying on their mat.*

GLOWING EMBER

To have one, I must give up the other.

GLEAMING ARROW

It is unfair to the child to be raised in the isle of the dead. You must go.

GLOWING EMBER

But we will always be apart.

GLEAMING ARROW

Yes. But that is as it should be. We were never meant to be together. A trick of the spirits has led us here. It must be said about this, that when you leave earth, you can only glimpse it through the mist. And when you are on earth, you only see the mist. I have always wanted someone like you. Even if our time was short, it was something that I could believe in. Now, I must believe in the life of my son. You can give it to him. You must.

GLOWING EMBER

And leave you.

GLEAMING ARROW

And leave me.

GLOWING EMBER

*(Throwing arms around him)*

I don't want to go! I'm so happy here! Back there, my father will again make me his servant.

GLEAMING ARROW

Maybe he'll change. People do.

GLOWING EMBER

I wonder.

GLEAMING ARROW

Do you have someone waiting there for you?

GLOWING EMBER

Yes. That's what brought me here. Father was against him.

GLEAMING ARROW

He may be waiting still.

GLOWING EMBER

Don't talk about that. You're talking about someone to replace you.

GLEAMING ARROW

The child will need a father. Is he a good man?

GLOWING EMBER

He is.

GLEAMING ARROW

Well then.

GLOWING EMBER

How can you talk about this?

GLEAMING ARROW

Because I know any future is impossible. Not for us. And I would rather see you and the child cared for and happy, than be concerned with my own loss. Knowing you are well and cared for will make me happy. Please. This is what the dead always go through. You must give up your ties to me, or you will lose the ties to your son, and to the earth.

*There is the hoot of a screech owl somewhere outside.*

GLOWING EMBER

Screech Owl! I must see her!

*GLOWING EMBER dashes out into the village, looking for the owl. Screech Owl sits in a tree overhead.*

GLOWING EMBER

Screech Owl! You've come!

SCREECH OWL

Only to see you off.

GLOWING EMBER

See me off?

SCREECH OWL

You can't expect to stay with that life in your belly. I should have warned you such a thing might happen, but who knows for sure? Your time here is up, my girl. It was never right for you to be here in the first place.

GLOWING EMBER

Can't you arrange it so I can stay?

SCREECH OWL

That's not possible. Or advisable. You'll doom yourself and your baby.

GLOWING EMBER

Oh, please, Screech Owl! Is there any way?

*GLEAMING ARROW approaches  
GLOWING EMBER from behind  
and waits patiently.*

SCREECH OWL

There is one thing you can do. Take the time you have left to enjoy your moments with your husband. Leave him, and yourself, with fond memories to carry with you when you go. I will protect you on your way. I can do no more.

*SCREECH OWL vanishes.*

GLOWING EMBER

Oh please! Screech Owl! Screech Owl!

GLEAMING ARROW

Come. Let's go back inside. For your remaining time, I declare a period of rest and relaxation. Everyone is free to do nothing! Especially us.

*They head back to the lodge.  
SINGING BRANCH, once again  
listening in, lurches forward.*

SINGING BRANCH

You're leaving us?!

GLOWING EMBER

So it seems.

SINGING BRANCH

No! You can't!

GLEAMING ARROW

Singing Branch...

SINGING BRANCH

If you're going, then I'm coming with you!

GLEAMING ARROW

You can't. The dead must stay with the dead. The living with the living.

SINGING BRANCH

That's unfair!

GLEAMING ARROW

That's the way it is. Singing Branch, you're not so young as to not understand these things!

GLOWING EMBER

It will be alright. It is perhaps as it should be. I'm not happy about it either. But he's right. Unfortunately. And I must think of my child.

SINGING BRANCH

*(Embracing her)*

You can't go! I won't let you! What will I do without you?!

GLOWING EMBER

*(Pushing her off)*

You'll be a strong young lady growing wiser by the day.

SINGING BRANCH

Yes. And never grow up completely. I'll be this age forever!

GLOWING EMBER

Most people would find that envious.

GLEAMING ARROW

If you like, you may come with us when we take her to her village. But you will not be able to stay.

GLOWING EMBER

You can see how I live. Or how I used to. And will again.

SINGING BRANCH

Alright, I'll come. But I won't stop crying.

GLOWING EMBER

I'll cry too. We'll share tears. Like sisters do. But you will stop someday. So will I. And then all we'll think about are happy memories.

GLEAMING ARROW

Go on. I've declared a day of rest for everyone. Soon enough will come the time for her departure.

*SINGING BRANCH reluctantly  
leaves.*

GLOWING EMBER

I will cry.

GLEAMING ARROW

Tears are a good thing. It means something worthwhile has come between people.

*They head into the lodge.*

**ACT THREE**

**Scene 3**

SETTING: *The mainland and its village; night.*

AT RISE: *WHALER, folding his nets on the shore, sees a mist rolling in. He watches as torchlights begin to appear in the fog bank. Then turns to run to the village.*

WHALER

Visitors! Island Visitors! The Islanders return!

*A crowd emerges from their lodges and gathers a-buzz with anticipation as the canoes roll into shore. STANDING TREE and WOLFHEART stand in the background watching the activity. Drums beat. The ISLANDERS break into a chant.*

ISLANDERS (*Chanting*)

*Spread the song both wide and near,  
Bring we news of life and cheer,  
New to be born, new to arrive,  
A child we bring for here to thrive.  
Happy day, happy night,  
Two villages joined, a happy sight.*

*GLEAMING ARROW steps from his canoe and holds out a hand to help GLOWING EMBER from the craft. SNAKE follows soon after. SINGING BRANCH finds her way to sneak in.*

SINGING BRANCH

It's beautiful! This is your home?

GLOWING EMBER

This is where we'll stay.

*WHALER is the first to greet GLOWING EMBER, and happily so; but his face immediately turns ashen and he ducks away.*

SINGING BRANCH

Who was that?

GLOWING EMBER

A friend.

GLEAMING ARROW

I greet the village elders, the people, and their leader, Standing Tree. It is Gleaming Arrow and his escort from across the sound. I have brought with me my wife, and your daughter and native, Glowing Ember, with news we hope you will enjoy.

GLOWING EMBER

Papa?

STANDING TREE

My daughter! It is good to see you again! I was such a fool to let you go so quickly!

WOODBINE

She's here with a purpose, old man.

STANDING TREE

A child? A child! Everyone! I have a grandchild!

*There are cheers and congratulations all around. SNAKE steps forward.*

SNAKE

We have come here specifically with this in mind, that the child be raised here, along with her mother. I am the Medicine Walker from across the bay, and also represent these people. Is Wolfheart to be found?

WOLFHEART

I am Wolfheart.

SNAKE

As overseer of the people's spirits, we ask you to watch over the rise of the young soul. I have already placed a blessing on the child and its birth. As there is some concern regarding the union of these two people, and therefore its birth, we are counting on you to show proper

SNAKE (*Cont'd*)

oversight regarding this child, and be there any enmity between peoples, be they now at an end with its joyous birth.

WOLFHEART

As the heart of medicine for this, my village, and my people, I offer my blessing and my promise to give this child the welcome it is due, and give honor to the spirits for bringing it to us.

SNAKE

Know this. Our people are not like you, though we may look the same. We live by night, and return to the earth by day. We are much more involved with, indeed from, the spirit world than are your people. The child cannot be born among us, or it will die. It must stay here to live along with its mother. The fourth day after its birth, the child must be given a welcoming bath in purest water. It must then be wrapped among cedar bark and kept in a cradle for a full twelve days after its first arrival, which is this night, and eighth night from its bath of blessing. If at any time prior to that, the baby is removed, its wrappings uncovered, the child will instantly become a ghost. We now return to our own. The mother must remain here. She cannot return, nor may any of you visit us, nor may the child come to be with us.

STANDING TREE

Why so many restrictions?

WOLFHEART

They are all dead, Standing Tree.

*There is a gasp among the villagers.*

GLOWING EMBER

You married me into a family of ghosts, father.

STANDING TREE

Did I?

WOLFHEART

With help from me.

STANDING TREE

You? How?

SNAKE

Whatever conflicts you have between you, you must resolve peacefully yourselves, for child and mother's sake. Let this child of two very different worlds be brought up in peace, for that is the only way it will survive. And give wife and mother all the care you can, for she must leave her husband forever. And now, we go. Blessings of the spirits go with you.



WOLFHEART

And you.

*The ISLANDERS head for their canoes. The VILLAGERS, with some reluctance, still only partially understanding the situation, give them a tepid escort.*

GLEAMING ARROW

Now I leave you. And my love goes with you. And my son, who I will never see. May the spirits see fit to join us at some point in the afterlife, where all three of us can live together as we should be always. Always.

GLOWING EMBER

*(Embracing him)*

How do I let you go?!

GLEAMING ARROW

By embracing the life you've been given. *(Pulls away, sees WHALER in a corner)* Is that the one whom you were intended?

GLOWING EMBER

Yes.

GLEAMING ARROW

Seems a fine Brave. Let him fill your life. You and your child deserve that.

*GLEAMING ARROW peels GLOWING EMBER off himself, turns to WHALER, standing somewhat stupefied nearby, and gives him a nod, then goes to his canoe.*

SINGING BRANCH

*(Embracing EMBER, tearfully)*

You will always be my sister!

GLOWING EMBER

And I yours.

SNAKE

Singing Branch! Come!

*SINGING BRANCH rips herself away from GLOWING EMBER and ducks into the canoe, burying*

*her head. The drums pound, but this time no chant, as the canoes push off and disappear into the mist. The drums then fade.*

WOLFHEART

I have given you a bad choice, my child. Forgive an old man.

*GLOWING EMBER buries herself within Wolfheart's arms. STANDING TREE is near and aloof, confused.*

STANDING TREE

*(Suspicious)*

What does this all mean?

WOLFHEART

Take your daughter home. I will send women to attend her. Right now, she needs your care, not you hers.

*STANDING TREE puts his arm around GLOWING EMBER and leads her to his lodge. WOLFHEART looks at WHALER.*

WOLFHEART

We have all been fools.

### **ACT THREE** **Scene 4**

SETTING: *The mainland shore.*

AT RISE: *VILLAGERS stand watching. GLOWING EMBER holds the baby in her arms. STANDING TREE, and, at a distance, WHALER, are there. So is BLESSING, the child's great aunt, who sneaks in late. WOLFHEART is pounding on his drum. He wears a great bearskin cloak.*

WOLFHEART (*Chanting*)

*People of the sky, I call you.  
People of the earth, I call you.  
People of the waters, I call you.  
People of the fires, I call you.  
Oh Great Spirit, I call you.  
Protect this child from harm.  
Protect this child through life.  
Let him be as one of us.  
Let him be a soul we trust.  
Let him take his mother's care.  
Let all who watch him close beware.  
Bless this child as one of us.  
Oh Spirits of the woods and sea,  
Hear me call for all to see.*

*Hey-hey-hey-ya-hey-ya-hey.  
Hey-hey-hey-ya-hey-ya-hey.*

*WOLFHEART sets aside his drum  
and sprinkles some of the sea  
water on him.*

WOLFHEART, (*Cont'd*)

Until you are older and ready to bear a proper name, I call you Little One, and welcome you to our village.

*WOLFHEART takes the child  
with him and holds it up to the  
sky.*

WOLFHEART

I announce Little One to the care of our village totem, the Bear, for all to see. Let Bear be his guide in these early days. And let him grow up with the courage and fortitude of the Bear. So I, Wolfheart, state to the Creator and all the Spirits. Hey-yah!

*He reaches into the sea and grabs  
several handfuls of water,  
dribbling them on the baby.  
Then, he hands the child back to  
GLOWING EMBER, who wraps  
him in a knap and cedar bark  
wrapping. WOLFHEART shakes  
a rattle over him as she does so.*

WOLFHEART, (*Chanting*)

*Blessings on this child of ours.  
Blessings on our newest life.*

*Blessing on this child of ours.  
May mother and son be under our keep.*

*WOLFHEART sets the rattle  
aside.*

WOLFHEART, *(Cont'd)*

It is the fourth sunrise since his birth. You know the conditions. 12 days he must remain in the village. Four days gone, eight remain. Remain must he be in his wrappings and cradle until all time has passed. Mother and Son, we give thanks to this birth.

*Cheers go up around the  
watchers as the baby is placed in  
the nearby cradle carved out of a  
slice of tree trunk.*

GLOWING EMBER

Thank you, Wolfheart.

WOLFHEART

May you and he be joined as mother and son, barring no exceptions. Alright, everyone! Let's leave the new family in peace!

*VILLAGERS start walking off.*

WHALER

You need help carrying him home?

GLOWING EMBER

I think I can manage, but thank you, Whaler.

WHALER

Well...if there's anything you need...let me know.

GLOWING EMBER

I will.

*WHALER drifts away.*

STANDING TREE

My daughter, you will have whatever you need. I will make sure the entire village is at your disposal.

GLOWING EMBER

Thank you, Papa. That won't be necessary.

BLESSING

Of course it won't! Because I'm going to look after our new mother – and her little blossom!

STANDING TREE

Blessing! When did you arrive?

BLESSING

Just in time to catch him being dipped. Oh he's a cutey! We're going to get along fine you and I!

GLOWING EMBER

Aunt Blessing! How did you hear about it?

BLESSING

I live just down shore, you know. Word gets passed from village to village pretty quickly around here. Of course I heard about Little One's arrival! I heard about your marriage too. A rather strange character, your husband.

GLOWING EMBER

How much do you know?

BLESSING

Enough to know, you and child have been dumped.

GLOWING EMBER

Well, not exactly—

BLESSING

Well, it doesn't matter. He's not here is he? Thought not. Don't let it trouble you. Aunt Blessing is here to make your life – and our little darling – much easier! Now come along, let's head you home. Don't bother yourself! I'll take the child! It's time we got ourselves acquainted. Yes, indeed. We need to get acquainted, don't we, little pumpkin!

*BLESSING grabs the cradle and walks off with it.*

STANDING TREE

*(Following)*

Now just a moment, Blessing! We weren't prepared for your visit!

BLESSING

Prepare now!

STANDING TREE

And let me take the cradle, I'm the grandfather!

BLESSING

What for? You're an oaf! How my sister ever had a child with you is beyond me!

GLOWING EMBER

*(Looking up, sighs)*

Spirits, stay listening. Spare me all the help. *(Follows the rest out)*

**ACT THREE**

**Scene 5**

SETTING: *Daytime; the shore.*

AT RISE: *WHALER is by his canoe bringing in catch. GLOWING EMBER steps down to the shore to toss some small woodland flowers into the sea.*

WHALER

*(Hesitant)*  
How's Little One?

GLOWING EMBER

Fine. Quiet. Kind of sad.

WHALER

Sad?

GLOWING EMBER

Well...he's an unusual baby. Stares a lot. I was told to expect that. He's half ghost, you know. He should be as giggling as any normal child in a few more days. But right now, he's still got a lot of that ghostly energy in him.

WHALER

How was it...living among them?

GLOWING EMBER

Frightening at first. But I got used to it. They are all very nice people. At night. You saw.

WHALER

I tried to stay out of the way.

GLOWING EMBER

Yes. I know. I'm afraid events were not kind to you. Maybe I wasn't kind.

WHALER

I guess you couldn't help it. *(Pause)* What are you doing?

GLOWING EMBER

Every morning, I pick a few flowers from the woods while my aunt watches over Little One. I toss them into the sea with a prayer to let them know across the bay that he and I are alright, and that I miss them.

WHALER

You do miss them.

GLOWING EMBER

Yes. I imagine it is hard for some to understand. But I was treated with great kindness while there.

WHALER

But you can never return.

GLOWING EMBER

No.

WHALER

Does that upset you?

GLOWING EMBER

Yes.

WHALER

You know, you have people here who treat you kindly too. Who care for you.

GLOWING EMBER

Whaler...I can never see my husband again. I did love him. But that does not mean I am incapable of loving again. Please be patient with me. I have a young son to care for now. A lot has happened to me. Little One will need a father. I will need someone of my own. You know I care for you, that hasn't changed. Just give me time.

WHALER

Yes. Yes. Of course. Anything I can do for you—

GLOWING EMBER

You've already mentioned that.

WHALER

*(Pause)*

I have a good catch today. Would you like some fish?

GLOWING EMBER

Please. Leave some with Blessing. She'll clean it for us.

WHALER

Yes. I will. *(Starts to go)*

GLOWING EMBER

Whaler? Thank you.

WHALER

Sure.

GLOWING EMBER

Aren't the whales going to be returning soon?

WHALER

I'll save something special for you. (*Exits*)

GLOWING EMBER

(*Tossing her flowers*)

Let those who are on the other side know, we are healthy and happy, and miss them all terribly.

*She stares out at the sea for a few moments, then goes.*

### **ACT THREE**

#### **Scene 6**

SETTING: *Outside Standing Tree's lodge.*

AT RISE: *BLESSING is sitting in front of the lodge, the cradle nearby, working on a rabbit-skin tunic for the baby. GLOWING EMBER steps out of the lodge, a basket in hand.*

BLESSING

Moss gathering again?

GLOWING EMBER

Every day. You know I must change the moss layer in his cradle on a daily basis.

BLESSING

I feel so sorry for him having to stay all covered up in that cradle all the time.

GLOWING EMBER

He's so little, I don't know how much he notices yet. Tomorrow he'll be free. He can squirm around naked all he wants without having to be confined to a wooden box.

BLESSING

He's born the waiting more than I have. It seems like he's been stuck there endlessly.

GLOWING EMBER

Only one more day, Blessing. Only one more day. Then the other world can't snatch him away.

BLESSING

What was it like...living among...them?



GLOWING EMBER

Like here. Only all activity goes on at night. During the day, they return to their normal state.

BLESSING

And their normal state is...?

GLOWING EMBER

What can I say? What would you expect? I found out the hard way. You don't want to disturb them.

BLESSING

They really are...ghosts?

GLOWING EMBER

They're not on Earth at all, not as we regard it. And the smell is awful in daylight.

BLESSING

What was it like – having a husband who was—

GLOWING EMBER

Ghostly? I loved him. I wished I had met him when he was alive. But as it was, I was grateful for the time given us.

BLESSING

But you had to sleep with him.

GLOWING EMBER

When I was there, it was more of my own spirit residing in that place than my body. So I hardly noticed a transition.

BLESSING

All the same...a ghost for a husband...*ihhhh!!* And I thought my husband was revolting.

GLOWING EMBER

It's not revolting, Blessing. Not when there's love. It produced him.

BLESSING

You going to tell him about his father?

GLOWING EMBER

When the time comes. It may give him a certain sense of power. We will see as we watch him grow.

BLESSING

Yes, well we do have him. And I guess we have the spirits to thank. Peace be ours but your father and that silly bones and rattles man did not help you any with your life choices.

GLOWING EMBERS

*(Looking over cradle)*

I don't know. I think I got rather lucky after all. I'll be back in a little while.

BLESSING

Just a moment. Does he look a little sickly to you?

GLOWING EMBER

He always looks like that. He's a bit pale, but then he is his father's child.

BLESSING

You sure? Maybe it's the light. Has he lost weight?

GLOWING EMBER

No. Gained some. He's nursing properly. He's not feverish. Sleeps quietly. He barely cries. All in all, he's a very good baby.

BLESSING

He's too quiet. And he has those big, staring eyes. Not inquisitive eyes, just staring ones – like there is no spirit occupying that body.

GLOWING EMBER

I was told that was to be expected and not to worry. After his twelfth day on earth he would immediately develop all the aspects of a normal baby. But he is the product of a ghostly marriage. And he is going to exhibit some characteristics of the people that he came from. That is why it is important to keep him bundled here in the village for twelve full sunrises and sunsets. Yes, I know, he has always looked a tad ghostly. But he has always behaved like a normal baby otherwise. It won't be too long before he's chasing squirrels around the forest like a normal boy.

BLESSING

I know what it is. It's this awful cradle he's confined too. I would look rather deathly if I was kept still for so long too.

GLOWING EMBER

That's you, not him. You keep him covered up. I'm going to get some more moss to change his cradle with. I'll be back in a little while.

He's resting, so just keep him warm and comfortable. I'll be back to feed him before long.

BLESSING

If you say so.

*GLOWING EMBER leaves with a slight sigh. BLESSING goes back to her work, then stops and stares at the cradle.*

BLESSING

You are the quietest baby. Are you sure you are feeling alright? I don't know. Your mother says you have no fever, but... Well, of course you have no fever. You're cold! I don't know how you can stay in that cradle all the time. That's not good for you. Maybe if I just take you out for a little while. Just to warm you up. You're such a sickly runt. Only those blank, staring eyes indicates any life in you at all. This is ridiculous. I'm pulling you out. You come to Auntie Blessing. I'll give you a nice warm up if you tuck yourself in next to me. Enough of this medicine magic hokum. You're a child not a ghost!

*She picks the baby out of the cradle and he immediately falls apart away from his cedar bark wrappings. A fleshy, somewhat rotting head with staring eyes falls to the ground, followed by a loose collection of tiny bones.*

BLESSING

*AAHHHHHHH!!!!!! HE'S DEAD!!! HE'S DEAD!!!*

*STANDING TREE runs out of his lodge. Some of the other VILLAGERS appear also.*

STANDING TREE

Blessing! What have you done?!

BLESSING

What have I done?! The child is dead! He's nothing but a...rotting corpse!

**This is Not the End of the Play**  
**Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes**