

Holding Up the Sky
Written and adapted from traditional stories by
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Scene One

The BLIND MAN and the BOY enter.

BLIND MAN: Here we are at last.

BOY: Where?

BLIND MAN: Home. Tell me what you see.

BOY: Stones...earth...nothing. What is this place?

BLIND MAN: The only place I've ever known...and nowhere that I've ever been.

BOY: What do you mean?

BLIND MAN: There are many stories of how it all began....

Lights change to reveal many figures curled on floor with poles. The first creation story, based on a Pima legend from North America, begins with the ENSEMBLE alternating lines.

BLIND MAN: First there was only darkness and water, Pregnant with possibilities.

TIM: The darkness lapped against the water,
Until at last there emerged a Being.

SHAWNA: Though She was alone with no one else to ask the where or why of it,

COURTNEY: She knew Herself.

AFTON: Placing Her hand upon Her breast,

SHAWNA: She drew forth a walking stick and made Her way through the
Nothingness.

CAITLIN: When She was weary, She leaned upon the stick, and drew forth pitch. She
shaped the pitch into a ball and stood upon it.

COURTNEY: Rolling the ball beneath Her feet, She danced the world into being and
sang: *(sung)* "I make the world, and lo! The world is finished!"

COURTNEY: So She sang, calling Herself *(sung)* "Maker of the World."

COURTNEY: Wearying of the darkness, She drew a rock from Her body
And, breaking it into tiny pieces, hung stars in the sky.

TIM: But the light they shed was not enough.

AFTON: She placed some ash at the tip of Her stick, and drawing it across the sky,
She made the Milky Way,

SHAWNA; But the light it shed was not enough.

LINDSAY: She drew a round stone from Her body and called it

COURTNEY: The moon.

LINDSAY: But even the light it shed was not enough.

AFTON: At last She fashioned two bowls from Her own clay, filling one with water
and covering it with the other.

COURTNEY: She sang over it and the water turned hard and sparkling like a ball of ice.

CAITLIN: Her song warmed the ice and it began to flicker with light, the rays shining
out of the cracks between the two bowls.

TIM: Lifting off the top, She threw the ball of light into the east.

SHAWNA: It bounced and became the sun, moving upward into the sky.

AFTON: It has never ceased its moving, going around the world each day

SHAWNA: And bouncing upward in the east every morning

COURTNEY: Everything the Maker needed, She drew from her body even as She had
drawn the stick from Her heart.

CAITLIN: Longing and Love,

AFTON: Imagination and Memory,

BEN: Fear and Compassion,

LINDSAY: Accord and Discord.

TIM: Everything it takes to make a world.

She returns to her place among the ancestors. The BLIND MAN and the BOY appear again, the child looking wonderingly at the adults.

BLIND MAN: There are many stories of how it all began...

The second creation story, this one adapted from Chinese lore, begins.

BLIND MAN: The universe was once enclosed in an egg, and
The egg was suspended in a vast emptiness.
The pulse of the universe beat in time, asking:

ALL: Where is the earth?

ALL: Where is the earth?

ALL: Where is the earth?

ALL: Where is the sky?

ALL: Where is the sky?

ALL: Where is the sky?

COURTNEY: Inside the egg, a giant awoke. His head bore a great horn,
Fur covered his body, and it teemed with fleas.

TIM: Scratching and stretching, he broke free of his cramped sleeping quarters.

CAITLIN: The egg that had cradled him was cleaved in two.

AFTON: Half became the earth and the other half, the sky.

SHAWNA: The giant stood upon the earth,

TIM: And lifted the sky upward on his shoulders.
With a chisel, he carved the path of the rivers and stacked the mountains.
When his work was done after many thousands of years,

AFTON: He despaired of his solitude.

TIM: Where are the others?

COURTNEY: Where are the others?

LINDSAY: Where are the others?

TIM: The earth is too empty, the sky too heavy, the burden too great!
My back is aching!

COURTNEY: My limbs are breaking!
My strength is gone

TIM: And I am done!

AFTON: He lay down upon the earth and died.

BEN: His bones became rocks,

CAITLIN: His hair became the forest,

LINDSAY: His muscles the soil,

SHAWNA: His blood filled the rivers,

AFTON: His two eyes became the moon and stars.

TIM: And the fleas that had covered his body became all the creatures
of the earth.

The BLIND MAN and the BOY appear once more, surveying the landscape.

BLIND MAN: There are many stories of how it all began...

The ancestors alternate saying the lines as the third and final creation story, based on an Australian Aboriginal legend, is spoken as a benediction to this opening.

BLIND MAN: The earth was still --- unmoving, without shape or form—

SHAWNA: The ancestors slept underground.
Beneath the crust of the world

CAITLIN: Eyes opened to the wonder of Creation.
Between one heartbeat and another

TIM: They came from beneath the earth to live on the earth
The eternal ancestors woke up and began to walk about....

COURTNEY: With a new wanting, a new awakening

Scene Two

Movement sequence of the people exploring/ searching and coming together as they discover each other as one tribe. ELDERS speak to the group.

BLIND MAN: Time has passed and there are too many for this patch of earth.
Let us separate into tribes, each tribe seeking to care for its own lands.

BLIND MAN: We will return to this place each year for the children of our nations
to court one another and to share the wisdom each tribe has earned.

The ancestors separate into two groups, one giving birth to YOUNG WOMAN and the other giving birth to YOUNG MAN. When the two tribes come together again, these two catch each other's eyes and in walking past each other again and again, begin a dance of longing. Periodically they stop and speak to one another.

YOUNG MAN: *(surprised)* I have seen you...in my dream.

YOUNG WOMAN: *(delighted to discover this)* And I have heard your voice in mine.

They move past each other but stop and speak again when they can.

YOUNG MAN: In my dream, you were like a beautiful bird just ahead of me on the path.
The very sight of you drew me on and on.

YOUNG WOMAN: In my dream, your voice encircled me and I knew I was home.

They move past each other but stop and speak again when they can.

YOUNG MAN: I have come to you through all the forests I have ever entered.

YOUNG WOMAN: I have summoned you from the only place I have ever called home.

They move past each other but stop and speak again when they can.

YOUNG MAN: *(smitten)* I offer you the strength of my people.
We are guardians, hunters and explorers.

YOUNG WOMAN: *(also smitten)* I offer you the wisdom of my people.
We are gatherers, harvesters and bringers of peace.

They stop a final time and the others gather around them.

YOUNG MAN: The ancestors have brought us together today.

YOUNG WOMAN: The children are calling to us from tomorrow.

BOTH: We say “yes” to them both.

YOUNG MAN: Let us merge the calling of our two tribes...

YOUNG WOMAN: ...becoming guardians and gatherers...

YOUNG MAN: ...hunters and harvesters...

YOUNG WOMAN: ...explorers and bringers of peace...

The movement transitions into a ritual that symbolically unites the YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN.

CAITLIN: May the Ancestors provide you with the power to subdue your enemies, good fortune in the hunt, and the wisdom to be good stewards of all that is placed in your keeping.

TIM: May the blessings of our Maker be held in great reverence, and may those blessings flower and prosper in the field of your lives, providing you with peace in abundance.

YOUNG WOMAN: In the presence and in the memory of those who have loved me, and whom I have loved, I pledge myself to this man.

She is given/hands him a fetish bag with seeds to be worn on the neck or at the waist.

TIM: We approve and accept your choice. He will bring his wisdom to our community and add his strengths to our family.

YOUNG MAN: In the presence and in the memory of those who have loved me, and whom I have loved, I pledge myself to this woman.

He is given/hands her a fetish bag with seeds to be worn on the neck or at the waist.

CAITLIN: We approve and accept your choice. She will bring her strengths to our community and add her wisdom to our family.

Each ties the fetish bag at the neck or at the waist of the other.

SHAWNA: By exchanging these tokens, you have pledged yourselves to one another for this lifetime. *(to everyone who has gathered)* This man is now one of us through his pledge to this woman.

AFTON: The tokens symbolize surplus in the harvest, a fruitful and harmonious life, and care for the needs of others – the roots that anchor and nourish community.

SIRIUS: When at last you die, the seeds in the bag will be planted in celebration of the abundance you brought into being during your lifetime.

Happy cheers and shouts from all who are gathered. A wedding dance is performed.

The Elders from her tribe come together to give YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN their charge.

LINDSAY: Our wedding gift to you is a treasure on the tongue.

If a variety of languages/translations are used, the ensemble members may speak in pairs to tell this folktale from China:

AFTON: One day an elephant, walking in the forest, saw a hummingbird lying flat on its back on the ground. The bird's tiny feet were raised up in the air.

TIM: "What on earth are you doing, Hummingbird? I almost stepped on you!"

AFTON: The hummingbird replied: "I have heard that the sky might fall today. If that should happen, I am ready to do my bit in holding it up."

TIM: The elephant laughed and scorned and mocked the tiny bird saying, "You? You are only a tiny bit of fluff and feathers! Do you think THOSE little feet could hold up the sky?"

AFTON: "Not alone, but each must do what he can. And this is what I can do."

All applaud the story. The YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN speak privately.

YOUNG MAN: A story is such a little gift. Is there not more than that?

YOUNG WOMAN: A story *is* a little thing, but do we need more? It is a good gift and, though it weighs little, it is brimming with knowledge and power. We will carry it with us into our lives.

YOUNG MAN: I am strong and would be willing to carry more. My back is used to bearing tools and weapons.

YOUNG WOMAN: Words can be both tools and weapons...Perhaps the story will grow heavier with time. Wait and see.

YOUNG MAN: In my village we hunt to honor the bride and groom. It's our custom to offer game to one another.

YOUNG WOMAN: Game is a good gift when your stomach is empty. But we have just enjoyed a feast. Savor the gift we have been given. If nothing else, it is a sign of welcome from my people.

YOUNG MAN: *(trying to understand this new way of doing things.)* Welcome, yes. The ways of your people are new to me. My tribe values strength, skill and cunning above all else. If there is more to learn about being in the world than I have learned so far, tell me. I want to know it now!

YOUNG WOMAN: *(smiles knowingly)* Impatience is a tedious companion on a long road. My people know this. You are one of us now. We will teach you. And you will teach us.

YOUNG MAN: *(surprised by her words, changes subject)* Then, take me to your brother. The Headman says he is the wisest person in your village. I was taught that power resides in wisdom. I'm eager to see him display his strength!

YOUNG WOMAN: His power is great, though it may be different than what you expect. He is known as The One Who Sees Beyond What Others See. I'll bring him to you.

They approach the BLIND MAN who holds a stick, which is both a sign of great honor, and his guiding tool. The story that unfolds in part is based on a folktale from Zimbabwe.

YOUNG WOMAN: Brother? My husband hopes to spend time with you to know you better. Husband, this is my brother, the seer of our village.

The YOUNG WOMAN places the YOUNG MAN'S hand on her brother's shoulder, urging him to speak to him.

YOUNG MAN: *(trying to make a good impression)* You are exalted among your people, so I trust your status is well earned. *(His competitiveness gets the better of him.)* They say you are a teacher of wisdom. I want you to teach me.

BLIND MAN: *(reaches out to touch the face of the hunter)* Surely we have much to offer each other, for a man has need of learning till the end of his days. I am honored to call you "Brother." My sister speaks with pride about your prowess as a hunter. I have been in the woodland many times, but have never gone hunting. To know you better, I would like to hunt with you.

YOUNG MAN: *(proud)* A man who has never hunted? I will tutor you -- though hunting is not a skill to be learned in one day. In my tradition we trap birds to celebrate a wedding. Come, we will set traps together before nightfall.

BLIND MAN: Sister, can you spare your husband so soon into your marriage?

YOUNG WOMAN: As long as you bring him back by the time darkness has fallen.

BLIND MAN: *(laughs)* Darkness has already fallen for me, my sister!

YOUNG MAN looks confused.

YOUNG WOMAN: *(also smiling)* You are teasing our guest. He does not know that you see without your eyes.

YOUNG MAN: *(taking this in)* A blind seer? I would not have guessed! How is it that you find your way through the forest? Even I can get lost when darkness falls.

BLIND MAN: I know the forest and the darkness equally well. To find my way, I listen, and use my guiding stick. I taste and smell the air and feel it against my skin to know where I am. *(lays down his stick)* If you will be my guiding stick, I will offer you my knowledge of these woods.

YOUNG MAN: *(intrigued but also a little affronted)* Come, then. We'll set traps before the afternoon sun gets away from us.

Scene Three

The BLIND MAN keeps his hand on the hunter's shoulder and they walk through the forest made of poles.

YOUNG MAN: How did you lose your sight?

BLIND MAN: My mother had a fever when I was in her womb so I was *born* into darkness. She saw a light behind my clouded eyes, and taught me to open my other senses to the world...Patience and listening *closely* teach those who are determined to learn... *(He stops)* Wait! There is a nest of warthogs just there...

YOUNG MAN: Where?

BLIND MAN: I can hear their noises -- there.

They "watch" the passing of the warthogs in front of them on the path.

YOUNG MAN: *(startled by the effectiveness of this other way of seeing.)* Incredible! What else do you hear?

BLIND MAN: That bird is preparing to fly. Listen to the sound of its wings unfolding...

YOUNG MAN: Your sense of our surroundings is impressive for a man who lives in darkness. Many hunters would notice less in the bright of day.

BLIND MAN: How did you become a hunter?

YOUNG MAN: *(proud to be asked)* It is a good story: The ancestors gave me a gift of dreaming how the animals live. These visions tell me how to think like my quarry – to imagine myself in the skin of my prey – in order to know how to catch them. When there is a hunt, I'm sure to bring home meat. There is no one who can match me when it comes to...

BLIND MAN: *(cutting him off)* ... Ah! I smell water. We are close to a pond...

YOUNG MAN: *(surprised and a little perturbed by his companion)* Yes, here it is!

They kneel at the waterside to prepare their traps. The hunter builds his own trap first and gives his brother-in-law the materials that are left over.

YOUNG MAN: Feel the shape of the trap that I'm setting, then use these sticks and sinews to adjust your own snare. Though we are brothers, it will be sporting to see who catches the more worthy prey...

BLIND MAN: Yes, of course...

The BLIND MAN does as the YOUNG MAN has said. He finishes his trap, which the Hunter eyes with some unspoken scorn.

YOUNG MAN: Don't be disappointed if you catch nothing the first time. It has taken me years to perfect my skill... Ah, the sun is setting. My bride is waiting for me.

They depart.

Scene Four

DISCORD, a trickster, appears in the forest and with great glee places a beautiful bird in the blind man's trap and a drab bird in the trap of the hunter. DISCORD hides himself to witness the beginning of chaos.

Scene Five

The YOUNG MAN and the BLIND MAN return to the traps.

BLIND MAN: I hear birds in the traps! What did we catch?

The YOUNG MAN bends to the traps and examines them closely.

YOUNG MAN: *(struggling with his feelings, he gives into temptation to deceive his brother-in-law)* We have both caught birds.

The hunter moves to the BLIND MAN's trap, drawn by the colorful feathers of the bird within. He takes that bird and puts it in the pouch he has brought.

YOUNG MAN: Having a new bride has brought me luck! I caught a beautiful bird to give to my new wife.

The BLIND MAN has heard all of the movements, and understands that the bird in the hunter's hands is his.

BLIND MAN: *(choosing his words carefully)* And in the other trap?

The hunter takes the bird from his trap and hands it to his brother-in-law.

YOUNG MAN: A fine, plump, brown bird. It will make a good stew.

The BLIND MAN pauses and then takes the bird and puts it into the pouch he has brought.

YOUNG MAN: *(trying to dispel his own uneasiness at what he has done by puffing himself up)* Be pleased that today we are both brothers and hunters! How often does a blind seer trap a bird for his supper?

They walk through the forest to the edge of the village where the hunter's bride awaits them both with her brother's stick in her hand.

YOUNG MAN: *(trying to change the subject)* I have shared my skill with you; now share your wisdom with me. Tell me more about how you have come to know the world.

BLIND MAN: The teachings say that each of us is fitted together like a puzzle. The hunter needs the quarry and the quarry needs the hunter. Today, as the birds were pulled from their traps, I had an opportunity to observe humanity -- how and why people are drawn together and how they are broken apart...

Now they are standing in earshot of the hunter's wife.

YOUNG MAN: *(uneasy, trying to make light)* You divined this from the cries of captive birds...*How and why men fight with each other?*

BLIND MAN: Yes, in a way...I will tell you only this: men fight because they do to one another what you have done to me in the woods today.

The YOUNG WOMAN comes to the BLIND MAN to offer him his stick. He is so deeply wrapped in his uneasiness about the interaction he has just had with the YOUNG MAN that her touch and voice startle him.

YOUNG WOMAN: *(having heard the end of the conversation)* Brother, what has happened?

BLIND MAN: *(shaking his head and saying in Spanish)* **The God of Discord...**

YOUNG WOMAN: What about the God of Discord?

BLIND MAN: *(in Spanish)* **He has come to our village today...**

YOUNG WOMAN: Discord in our village? Why has He come here?

BLIND MAN: *(calming himself and speaking in English once more)* I do not know why He has come. But I feel I must return to the forest to quiet my mind so that I do not encourage Discord to stay.

The BLIND MAN departs.

Scene Six

The hunter stands alone with his bride.

YOUNG WOMAN: *(accusing)* What have you done?

YOUNG MAN: *(defensively)* What makes you think I've done anything?

YOUNG WOMAN: My brother spoke of Discord...

YOUNG MAN: *(not prepared to accept responsibility for his act)* He didn't like the bird he caught. He's lucky he caught anything, but instead he's jealous of the bird I have brought you.

YOUNG WOMAN: *(disbelieving)* Jealous? That does not sound like my brother.

YOUNG MAN: Look, here is my wedding gift to you. A beautiful bird wearing a rainbow mantle. You can dress yourself in its feathers. It's a small gift, but a worthy one...

He indicates the bird in his pouch, but she resists his taking it out to show her.

YOUNG WOMAN: *(shakes her head)* Your gift comes at the expense of peace with my brother, so I cannot accept it. Besides, a feathered mantle looks best on the back of a bird, don't you agree?

Without accepting his gift, she walks away to seek out her brother. The hunter is angry.

YOUNG MAN: *(shakes his head in disbelief)* A hunter is a man of instinct and action!
There's no time to reflect in the heat of the hunt! How can I make her
understand that about me? *(wondering aloud, amazed and ashamed)* These
people are maddening! *(considering)* And now a lie surrounds me like a
wall without a foothold to scale it *(hears birdsong and is infuriated by it)*
In this strange place, even the birds mock me! *(to the birds)* Silence!

The YOUNG MAN throws the pouch with the bird in it to floor and stabs it with his stick. The birdsong stops. Guiltily he looks to see if anyone is watching, then tosses it away. Aggrieved by his own actions, the YOUNG MAN walks to where the others are gathered and bangs his stick against the floor. His disquiet spreads throughout the village via percussion, and all assemble to perform a verbal dance that is the prelude to outright war.

Scene Seven

In round one of the war dance, each speaks of individual discord.

YOUNG MAN: You humiliated me.
YOUNG WOMAN: You betrayed my trust.
ENSEMBLE: You coveted my husband.
ENSEMBLE: You endangered my children.
ENSEMBLE: You stole my cattle.
ENSEMBLE: You trampled my fields.
ENSEMBLE: You dirtied my water.
ENSEMBLE: You take more than your portion.
ENSEMBLE: You disrespected my ancestors.
ENSEMBLE: You dishonored my gods.

In round two of the war dance, each speaks of village-wide unrest.

YOUNG MAN: We do not welcome strangers here.
YOUNG WOMAN: We want no alliances with you.
ENSEMBLE: Your chief has insulted our leader.
ENSEMBLE: These lands belong to us.
ENSEMBLE: We deny you water from our wells.
ENSEMBLE: Our tribes are not related.
ENSEMBLE: Your traditions are not our traditions.
ENSEMBLE: Your customs alarm us.
ENSEMBLE: Your rituals are blasphemy.
ENSEMBLE: You have desecrated our holy places.

In round three of the war dance, each speaks of global transgressions.

YOUNG MAN: You have invaded our land,
YOUNG WOMAN: Burned our fields,
ENSEMBLE: Slaughtered our cattle,
ENSEMBLE: Raped our women,
ENSEMBLE: Stolen our children,
ENSEMBLE: Enslaved our people,
ENSEMBLE: Murdered our elders
ENSEMBLE: Wronged our nation.
ENSEMBLE: Our gods demand vengeance.
ENSEMBLE: There can be no peace.
ALL: You have ignited a war.
You must die.

ENSEMBLE breaks out in fighting with sticks. At the end of the war scene, the landscape is littered with bodies.

Scene Eight

The YOUNG MAN arises from the battlefield seeing the devastation, death and emptiness. The YOUNG WOMAN begins to stir. He hurries to her.

YOUNG MAN: You're alive! I thought I had lost you!

YOUNG WOMAN: *(still dazed)* I couldn't find you in the flames and the smoke!

They embrace in silence.

YOUNG WOMAN: Where are the others?

YOUNG MAN: *(ashamed)* I saw no sign of anyone else alive.

The YOUNG WOMAN laments as the YOUNG MAN attempts to comfort her.

YOUNG WOMAN: *(surveying the damage)* My village...my brother...all gone? *(taking it in)* Except for you, my husband, I have nothing left.

YOUNG MAN: *(chastened but still proud)* I'll prove that I am enough...

YOUNG WOMAN: *(quietly wondering at it)* The air is so silent; the birds have all fled...The fields are ash and the streams have boiled away in the fires...Have we survived the war only to die of hunger and thirst?

YOUNG MAN: No! I swear I'll take care of you. Everyone, who can, has fled the village. We should go too.

YOUNG WOMAN: I'm afraid to leave this place behind.

YOUNG MAN: The village is in ruins, but we have escaped death. We are the fortunate ones!

YOUNG WOMAN: Fortunate? I am rocked with loss, and seared by grief! We have nothing...

YOUNG MAN: *(realizing)* We have each other...and the seeds in these pouches. They'll serve as a meal when we are hungry and a seed crop when we're settled again. It's a start. *(passionately)* Trust me. I'll build us a new life from the little we have.

They gather themselves together to go, but the YOUNG MAN realizes that the ruined landscape has no landmarks left.

YOUNG MAN: *(utterly perplexed)* The forests are gone! They have always been my guide. Without them I am blind.

YOUNG WOMAN: Which way do you feel we should go? Close your eyes and rely on your instincts. I will follow in your footsteps.

He closes his eyes...

YOUNG MAN: *(opening his eyes)* This way! We must go this way!

He starts forward, but she lingers so he turns back.

YOUNG MAN: I tell you, it's time to go.

YOUNG WOMAN: I want to take a guiding stick from my village to remember my brother by...

YOUNG MAN: *(acquiescing)* I'll carry it to honor his memory.

The two begin to pick their way through the landscape.

Scene Nine

The YOUNG MAN and WOMAN begin to pick their way through the landscape. In a new country a BEGGAR and her STARVING CHILD arise from the landscape.

CAITLIN: *(very softly for she is feverish and starving)* Please...we are hungry. Can you spare any food?...My child is starving. Can you spare a bit of food?

YOUNG WOMAN: *(to her husband)* That child is skin and bones...The woman can hardly stand...

YOUNG MAN: A pitiful sight. We'll pass them by quickly...

YOUNG WOMAN: Husband, we should share our seeds. It is not much, but at least we can offer a little...

YOUNG MAN: There's barely enough to sustain the two of us. This woman and her child are not your kin or mine.

CAITLIN: I ask nothing for myself...Please...my child is starving...

LINDSAY: No, Mother, you must eat too. *(to the YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN)* She has a fever. She needs something, anything...

YOUNG WOMAN: The old ones tell us that we are all related. We must help these people.

Against the YOUNG MAN'S will, the YOUNG WOMAN offers the STARVING CHILD some of the seeds from her bag, but the STARVING CHILD cannot eat more than one or two.

LINDSAY: It is enough. *(offers the seeds to his mother)* Mother?

CAITLIN: *(waving away any food)* Your kindness alone will sustain us for a little while longer.

BEGGAR gathers STARVING CHILD close and they begin to move away.

YOUNG WOMAN: Where are you going?

CAITLIN: To the village of my dead husband's brother...I will ask him to feed the last child of his kin.

YOUNG WOMAN: Is it far? You are so weak. I fear the two of you will not make it on your own.

CAITLIN: We have no choice but to go there...

YOUNG WOMAN: We are wanderers too. We know what it is like to lose everything...

CAITLIN: *(putting her hand on the arm of the YOUNG WOMAN)* Did your children die, one by one?

YOUNG WOMAN: No...we are but newly joined as husband and wife.

CAITLIN: I see...

YOUNG WOMAN: *(insisting both to the beggar and to her husband)* We will help you reach your relatives.

YOUNG MAN: *(as if in charge)* If the village you seek has food, we will gladly travel with you...

Scene Ten

YOUNG MAN leads them down the path following the fleeting figure of DISCORD. As they pass others, each one begs of them, but they do not stop.

They arrive at their destination. The uncle is not at home. His CRUEL WIFE greets them in his absence. The next story is found among the Inuit people of Alaska and also in Germany, collected by the Brothers Grimm.

CAITLIN: Please...is your husband here? My child is hungry...

SHAWNA Back again for more food? And where is the rest of your whining brood?

CAITLIN: Gone. All gone but this one. Dead from the fever that took my husband.

SHAWNA *(looking at all four of them)* Yet you bring hungry strangers to my door? My husband is not here and I see no reason to help you.

YOUNG WOMAN: How can you speak that way? The child is from your husband's clan and you can see that he is starving.

YOUNG MAN: *(joining in)* Those who have little can offer little. But yours is one of the few houses left standing in this village and you look well-fed...

SHAWNA *(to the BEGGAR)* If I feed you again, you will keep returning to my door.

CAITLIN: *(she knows her time is almost up)* No, I swear, I will trouble you no more.

The CRUEL WIFE leaves. She fills the bag with something till it is almost too heavy to carry, and brings it back to the BEGGAR.

SHAWNA Perhaps this will fill your bellies once and for all.

CAITLIN:: Thank you! May the ancestors repay you for what you have done.

The CRUEL WIFE turns away from them. The child attempts to lift the bag

LINDSAY: *(Amazed)* It is so heavy. I cannot lift the bag.

YOUNG MAN: I will carry it for you. Perhaps we can share...

They journey awhile till BEGGAR stumbles and falls. Her STARVING CHILD and the YOUNG WOMAN go to her.

YOUNG WOMAN: She has no strength left. Let's stop and give her some of the food in the bag.

YOUNG MAN: *(opening the bag, discovering the trick)* There is no food here! There is nothing but a pile of stones in the bag!

CAITLIN: *(shivering with fever, she gives up hope)* Then it is time to die. Come, my child, let me bless you first.

She puts her hand on the head of the STARVING CHILD.

YOUNG MAN: No, we'll go back and take from that woman what she's refused to give.

YOUNG WOMAN: It would be wrong to do that. She may have had no food to spare and been too proud to say...She may deserve our pity...

YOUNG MAN: We can find out if she deserves our pity or if she's simply a liar.

YOUNG WOMAN: Even if *she* lied, it is *our* custom to be generous in dealing with strangers...

YOUNG MAN: The world has been turned upside down! Giving stones to a hungry child is an act of war! Let's go back and take what we can!

YOUNG WOMAN: *(shocked)* Listen to what you are saying! The ancestors tell us...

YOUNG MAN: *(shouting)* Ancestors don't feel hunger or pain! Our bellies are empty and we've all suffered at the hands of another!

CAITLIN: *(Her child is holding her for she cannot stop shivering)* Stop! I want no more of war or argument. I am ready to die. And you, my child?

LINDSAY: Go on ahead, Mother. Do not worry over me. I will follow you in time.

Reassured, the BEGGAR succumbs to her fever.

LINDSAY: *(to his dead mother)* May you find a feast waiting for you among the ancestors.

YOUNG WOMAN: *(bending close)* Your mother is gone... You must come with us...

LINDSAY *(shakes his head)* No, my mother has joined my brothers and father in the land of the dead. I will to go there too as soon as I can.

Turning away from the YOUNG WOMAN, the STARVING CHILD gathers the BEGGAR up to await death. The YOUNG MAN is deeply chastened and gently pulls YOUNG WOMAN away.

YOUNG WOMAN: We can't leave them like this by the side of the road...The woman must be buried. The boy must be cared for...

YOUNG MAN: Their own people will see to them...

YOUNG WOMAN: What comes after deserting a child and neglecting the dead?

YOUNG MAN: *(encircling her shoulders and moving her along the road)* We have done what we could do. Come.

Either the STARVING CHILD carries his mother offstage or the ENSEMBLE members may come to clear the dead bodies from the roadside.

YOUNG WOMAN: *(she allows herself to be moved)* I am aching from all this sorrow.

YOUNG MAN: If we keep moving, we'll eventually come to a place where hope still lives.

YOUNG WOMAN: *(stopping)* If we cannot find such a place in our hearts, it is useless to look elsewhere...

YOUNG MAN: *(he goes ahead, not hearing her)* If need be, we'll claim a plot of land and build it ourselves...But, first, let's eat some of these seeds. *(opening his seed pouch, he turns and offers her some; compelled by hunger, she goes to him.)* Otherwise we will not have the strength to continue our journeying.

They eat in silence. Then they gather themselves up and move on.

Scene Eleven

The YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN come through the thicket and encounter a frantic RUNNING CHILD pursued by a WILD BOAR. They are shocked out of their lethargy, jolted by danger back into the here and now. The story that unfolds is from Saudi Arabia.

COURTNEY: *(looking over her shoulder as she runs)* Father, help me! Help me!

Her FATHER is not in sight, so she runs to the YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN for safety. The WILD BOAR comes leaping from the forest, scattering all three of them.

YOUNG WOMAN: Husband!

YOUNG MAN: Look out!

The YOUNG MAN attempts to drive the BOAR away from the child. It turns on him and he must defend against it, turning it back inadvertently toward the child. The child is gored and the BOAR returns to the woods. The YOUNG MAN drops to his knees beside the child.

YOUNG MAN: *(Frantically trying to staunch the bleeding)* There's so much blood... Look for yarrow to stop the bleeding... *(to the unconscious child)* Wake up! You have to stay awake!

YOUNG WOMAN: *(seeing the amount of blood lost)* She cannot hear you, Husband. She's already walking the road to the ancestors.

YOUNG MAN: *(humbled, looking at his hand)* What's happening to me? I've never failed to subdue an animal before... Whose useless hands are these?

YOUNG WOMAN: The hands of a man who tried to protect *someone else's* child.

YOUNG MAN: But I failed.

YOUNG WOMAN: Yes, a champion sometimes fails. There is no shame in that.

The FATHER of the RUNNING CHILD appears. He sees the blood and kneels to cradle the CHILD.

SIRIUS: *(in Mandarin)* **My child! My child!**

YOUNG MAN: You are the father of this child?

SIRIUS: *(in Mandarin)* **What has happened here? I only left her for a little while.**

YOUNG WOMAN: It only takes a little while for Death to come calling!

SIRIUS: *(in Mandarin)* **I was tracking a litter of piglets in the grass...**

YOUNG MAN: While you hunted piglets, the boar tracked *your* child... *(to himself, beginning to understand)* We are all parts of the same puzzle.

SIRIUS: *(wails in English)* Ahhhh! My child, my child! How can I tell her mother? How will we bear this loss? How does anyone bear such a loss?

YOUNG WOMAN: Others have. You will.

YOUNG MAN: *(chastened)* I cannot bring your daughter's life back, but I can help you carry her home. Perhaps my wife can comfort yours.

FATHER nods, and lifts the CHILD tenderly. But before they reach his home, he stops them,

laying the body down in their care.

SIRIUS: Wait here, while I prepare my wife for this news.

They place the body out of sight where his WIFE will not see it at first. She comes to him.

FATHER: *(in Mandarin)* **Wife, I have killed a boar so that we can make a feast for travelers.**

WIFE: A wild boar would make a good feast for our guests.

FATHER: *(in Mandarin)* **But the food can only be cooked in a pot that has never cooked a meal of sorrow.**

WIFE: Then to make this feast I will search among our neighbors to find a pot that has never cooked a meal of sorrow.

She goes from house to house in their village asking for such a pot, and is sent empty-handed from every door.

SHAWNA: Do you have a pot that has never cooked a meal of sorrow?

AFTON: *(shaking head)* We made a feast in memory of my husband who was murdered by rebels.

SHAWNA: Do you have a pot that has never cooked a meal of sorrow?

LINDSAY: *(shaking head)* We cooked a meal of mourning after the soldiers raped and killed our daughter.

SHAWNA: Do you have a pot that has never cooked a meal of sorrow?

CAITLIN: *(shaking head)* We prepared a banquet in honor of my son who was martyred in battle.

She returns to her husband.

SHAWNA: There is no pot that has never cooked a meal of mourning, no household that has not tasted sorrow.

The FATHER leads her to the lifeless CHILD.

SIRIUS: *(in Mandarin and then in English)* **Every household has tasted sorrow. Today it is our turn.**

The WIFE falls to the ground, covering her CHILD.

SHAWNA: AIEEEE! My baby!

The FATHER sinks to the ground beside them. After her sobbing, she looks at the YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN standing nearby.

SHAWNA: My child was my whole world. How do you carry on when a whole world has died? I thought we were the lucky ones, losing so little when our neighbors lost so much. We had no son to send to battle, only a daughter kept safe at home. And now death has made a special trip to carry her away...

(She looks at the YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN.)

SHAWNA: There can be no guests in our house tonight. Our sorrow is our own. So, turn them away, Husband, turn them away.

Scene Twelve

The YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN move away to continue their journey.

YOUNG MAN: The ancestors have withdrawn my gift. I am cursed...

YOUNG WOMAN: No, not cursed – we are blessed to have survived a war that claimed many lives. The elders say that failure can be an important teacher...

YOUNG MAN: *(Shaking his head)* Your words are hard to understand. My people say that failure is a weakness, that admitting failure is a greater weakness still.

YOUNG WOMAN: Even the gods fail sometimes. Because *they* are unreliable, we need our neighbors and our kin -- so that we can take turns lifting one another when we fall.

YOUNG MAN: I would have passed the beggar woman by...I would have stolen food...I left the dead unburied...and now a child has died because my hands were not quick enough to save her. Shame burns me with a cold fire...

YOUNG WOMAN: *(she puts her hand on his chest)* Then let me kindle another kind of flame in you...one born of yearning...for I have never loved you more than I do today.

YOUNG MAN: How can that be true?

YOUNG WOMAN: You opened the door to your heart and let a stranger's child come inside....

YOUNG MAN: *(heart-sore)* I would close it again if I could...I am weary of wandering, and weary of words.

YOUNG WOMAN: The sun is setting. We must find shelter and rest.

She leads him to a sheltered place.

YOUNG WOMAN: Come, lie close to me. We will find comfort in each other's arms.

Very tenderly they hold one another and make love.

Scene Thirteen

When dawn breaks, they hear the sound of a funeral procession, drums, ritualized wailing, song. A dead woman is carried on a litter, followed by her son. The procession is followed by the BLIND MAN.

YOUNG WOMAN: My brother, is it you?

The procession stops and the litter set down as the YOUNG WOMAN and her brother are reunited.

BLIND MAN: *(embracing her)* Sister, I feared that you were dead.

YOUNG WOMAN: No, I am safe.

BLIND MAN: And your husband?

YOUNG WOMAN: He is here, too.

BLIND MAN: I am glad you are together.

YOUNG WOMAN: Where have you been? Where are you going with these people?

BLIND MAN: When I left our village to cleanse myself of Discord, the journey was longer than I anticipated. My steps brought me here...

YOUNG MAN: And the woman lying there?

BLIND MAN: I will tell you her story.

Lights change. The story, based on a folktale from Peru, unfolds in a flashback.

Scene Fourteen

The BLIND MAN is walking along a path. The son of the dead woman approaches him.

BOY: Stranger, can you help me? My mother is ill.

BLIND MAN: Where is the rest of your family?

BOY: My father has been away for a long time, fighting. I am the only one here.

BLIND MAN: Take me to your mother. I will do what I can.

The BOY takes the BLIND MAN to the litter where he tends the sick MOTHER. (His ministrations as a healer provide an opportunity to speak in another language besides English). She stirs.

BLIND MAN: Her fever has broken now. She will be better soon.

BOY: Healer, don't go. There is a place in the yard where you can sleep.

BLIND MAN: *(to YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN)* The woman grew stronger, and she, too, entreated me to stay.

AFTON: *(getting up)* I am glad for you to keep the boy company. He needs the guidance of a man in his life.

BLIND MAN: *(to YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN)* At the end of each day, the woman took up her sewing by candlelight. The boy told me that a moth, attracted to the flame, fluttered at her side night after night.

AFTON: Ah, there you are, my own dear love. Did you come again for more conversation? I have missed you so much...Can you hear my voice across the miles that separate us? You would not recognize our son. You knew him as a baby and now he is old enough to be tutored in the ways of the world. His eyes are your eyes, but his heart is my heart. I have told him many stories of his father and when you come home, he will love you as I do...

BLIND MAN: *(to YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN)* From my place outside, I heard her pouring out her heart to the moth, saying all that she could not say to her absent husband.

The MOTH flutters about the house. The woman watches its flight and sighs with delight. The MOTH exits the scene.

BLIND MAN: *(to YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN)* She missed him with all her being, but he never knew how much.

It is late afternoon. The MOTHER stirs a pot. The BLIND MAN and BOY are sitting together in the yard. The FATHER approaches her from a distance. She sees him.

AFTON: *(coming to meet him)* Husband! You have come home at last!

TIM: *(barely responsive)* Yes.

MOTHER: Come into the house. It has been so empty without you.

The MOTHER embraces him. He balks as she tried to lead him inside.

AFTON: Don't you want to come inside? There is hot stew, a warm place to sleep.

TIM: *(with a hollow voice)* I am used to sleeping and eating outside.

AFTON: You are no longer on the battlefield...*(worried, looking into his face)* Or did you bring it home with you?

TIM: *(laughs harshly)* It's hard for a soldier to banish war from his heart....

AFTON: You must try. You need to rest. Please come in and let me tend to you...

He surveys the surroundings, taking in the BLIND MAN and the BOY nearby.

TIM: Who is that?

AFTON: Our son. Can you believe how much he's grown?

TIM: Who is the man sitting with him?

AFTON: He is a blind seer and a healer. He has been teaching the boy.

TIM: Send him away. I need no one else to teach my son.

AFTON: As you wish. *(calling)* Child, come and greet your father. Healer, my husband is home. From now on, he will teach our son. Leave us, please. We need privacy to celebrate his homecoming.

BLIND MAN: Of course. I will go to the river to give thanks for the safe return of your husband.

He withdraws to make his ablutions which are heard underneath the next scene.

BLIND MAN: *(softly in Spanish while the others are talking and interacting)* **Today a household was made whole again. A man returned from war. A husband returned to the loving arms of his wife. A father came home to his BOY. We know that the way back from the battlefield is a long and treacherous road. Let this man walk forward toward peace. His steps may be slow but let them be certain. May those who cherish him, lift their voices so that he will know the way even when darkness falls. May they give him the time and the comfort and the understanding that he will need to make the journey -- so that when he arrives home at last, he arrives whole.**

The BOY is loath to let the BLIND MAN go. He comes shyly forward to stand by his mother a little uncomfortable in his FATHER's unexpected presence. Brushing his WIFE aside, the FATHER approaches his son.

TIM: Do you know who I am?

BOY: *(looking at his MOTHER)* She says you are my father, so it must be true. She says...

AFTON: I have told him all about you...

TIM: *(sharply)* Go and leave me with my son.

She steps away from them. The FATHER indicates that the BOY should come closer.

TIM: How long has this blind man been here?

BOY: Long enough to teach me many things.

TIM: Where does he sleep?

BOY: In the hammock in the yard.

TIM: Does he – or anyone -- ever come into the house at night?

BOY: *(nodding enthusiastically)* Oh, yes, Mother's own dear love comes every night! It makes her very happy to see him!

TIM: Go, find the seer, and bring him to me.

The BOY leaves and the man enters the dwelling place and his wife comes forward to him.

TIM: *(pushing her away)* You speak of welcoming me when you give yourself nightly to another man?

AFTON: What are you saying? I've prayed every night for your return!

TIM: *(pushing her again)* You're lying! Our own child speaks of your betrayal.

AFTON: I don't know what words he spoke that made you think that...

TIM: *(grabbing her by the shoulders)* I will not listen to your lies!

AFTON: You're frightening me! I am your wife, not your enemy.

TIM: *(tightening his grip on her)* But you are. That's what all of you are...

AFTON: *(pleading)* You have misunderstood the words of a child. Your mind is clouded with all you have seen. Please! You are my own dear love...

TIM: *(grabbing her by the throat, he drags her to the litter/bed)* You speak the same words of love to me that you spoke to him!

AFTON: Stop...Let me go... I can't breathe...Husband...Our son...

Though she fights him, he chokes her to death. His anger spent, the FATHER sits beside her as the night falls. The BOY returns to the house alone.

BOY: The teacher is finishing his prayers. He will come soon. Is my mother sleeping?

TIM: Yes.

The fluttering MOTH returns. The BOY sees it, knowing how much his mother enjoyed its presence.

BOY: Wake her up! Her own dear love is here to see her!

TIM: What are you saying?

BOY: There! Can't you see it? The moth! Fluttering there!

The FATHER watches the MOTH. He understands the enormity of what he has done. The BLIND MAN approaches.

BLIND MAN: You sent for me.

TIM: Forgive me...Look after the boy...he trusts you...I am no longer his father for I have sent his mother to Hell...and I must hurry if I'm to catch up with her!

The FATHER presses the BOY into the BLIND MAN'S arms and then rushes past them to kill himself. The story has ended. The light changes and we are back at the funeral procession.

Scene Fifteen

BLIND MAN: *(to himself)*...The heat of war sears so much ground and so quickly -- the flame cannot be contained on the battlefield. Its embers take a long time to cool and nothing can be rebuilt till then...*(to his sister)* It's painful to admit...that pursuit of peace in my own heart made me abandon my village in a time of great misery...and that my coming to this place has resulted in chaos and death...I did not mean for any of this to happen...Why did I not foresee it?

YOUNG WOMAN: Brother, you judge yourself too harshly. I am grateful to find you alive. If you had been at home when the war came -- who can say? -- we might all have perished together. Instead I meet you here on the road and find that our family has grown by one...

BLIND MAN: *(Looking fondly at the BOY)* Yes, I have been given the gift of a boy to raise. But first, I must bury his mother.

YOUNG MAN: If you'll allow me, I'll help you.

The BLIND MAN touches his face.

BLIND MAN: Caring for the dead is a painful privilege. I will gladly share it with you. Sister, go ahead with the litter bearers to prepare the women's blessing. We will prepare our blessing, and meet you at the burial ground.

The YOUNG WOMAN departs with the litter to a location upstage where they freeze in place, lights are dim there.

YOUNG MAN: Before I can bless the dead, I must beg pardon from the living. I wronged you, stealing a bird from the trap you set so long ago. How can I make things right now? How do men become friends again after they have fought?

BLIND MAN: *(smiles)* They do for one another what you have just done for me. It takes a strong man to make amends. My sister chose well.

YOUNG MAN: She does not know...

BLIND MAN: I suspect she does. She loves you in the deepest way. Because of that, much is known and much is forgiven -- even without speaking.

YOUNG MAN: I'm grateful to call you my brother.

The two embrace. The BOY looks on with interest.

BOY: *(pointing at the YOUNG MAN)* Who is this man?

BLIND MAN: He is your uncle. Husband to my sister.

BOY: *(taking the YOUNG MAN'S hand)* You remind me of my father.

YOUNG MAN: *(stunned by this comparison)* It pains me to hear that, since I have heard his story...

BOY: I don't mean the man who killed my mother. *(he takes the BLIND MAN'S hand in his other hand, looking at him)* I mean *him*. I am glad that you're my uncle.

YOUNG MAN: *(humbled)* I'm glad as well.

BLIND MAN: Come, we'll compose our prayer as we walk...

The YOUNG MAN, the BOY and the BLIND MAN follow the path to the burial ground. Lights up there.

Scene Sixteen

YOUNG MAN: We ask forgiveness for the wandering soul of this boy's father. We know that it had left his body even before he came home from the war. We trust the river to guide him to a final resting place.

YOUNG WOMAN: We bless the sleeping spirit of his mother, victim of a bewildering violence. We ask the earth to welcome her body as food for future plantings.

BLIND MAN: Women and men are born of the soil beneath our feet. We entrust this woman back to the clay from which she came...

The DEAD WOMAN'S body is lifted into the grave. Music and chanting. The YOUNG WOMAN and YOUNG MAN comfort the BOY.

Scene Seventeen

At the end of the ritual, the litter carriers depart as the YOUNG MAN uses his stick as a shovel to fill the grave with dirt.

BOY: (to YOUNG WOMAN and YOUNG MAN) We are family now. Does that mean that you will stay with us?

YOUNG WOMAN: (looks to YOUNG MAN, who stops his work to nod in agreement) Yes.

BOY: How long?

YOUNG MAN: As long as we can.

BOY: How long is that?

YOUNG WOMAN: As long as we are welcome.

BOY: Good.

BLIND MAN: The villagers are preparing a funeral feast. My son and I will host the meal. Come with us, Sister. You can bring your husband some palm wine to cleanse his hands and lift his heart when he is done.

The BLIND MAN hands a pouch of coins to the YOUNG MAN for payment of passage to the underworld.

BLIND MAN: Take this. In the boy's clan, coins are dropped upon the graves to assure that the door to the underworld will be opened to the dead.

They leave the YOUNG MAN alone in the burial ground. Placing the pouch on the ground, he returns to his task of filling in the grave.

Scene Eighteen

Suddenly a MADWOMAN trailing broken fetters comes running into the scene. She spies the YOUNG MAN and calls out with urgency.

COURTNEY: Gravedigger – leave the earth open to receive me!

He blocks her efforts to jump into the open grave, capturing her with his stick from behind, pinning her arms to her sides and holding her close to him.

YOUNG MAN: What are you doing?

COURTNEY: (frantic) Let me go! I prefer the company of the dead!

ARMED GUARDS enter, followed by their LEADER who wears a small knife at his side. They are all armed with sticks wielded as spears.

BEN: *(sizing up the YOUNG MAN)* It's good that you caught this one. She's valuable property.

COURTNEY: *(fiercely)* I'm not your property!

YOUNG MAN: *(still holding her captive with his shovel/stick)* What right do you have to claim her?

BEN: We raided our enemy's village and captured their women. This one broke her bonds and escaped. She has the blood of a chief in her veins and should bring a good price in the marketplace.

YOUNG MAN: *(placating, trying to make peace)* If you've enough gold to barter a woman's life, take stock of your blessings. So many have lost everything. So many have died...

LINDSAY: Give her over, or one more will die today.

YOUNG MAN: I'm no trader in human flesh...but I'll purchase her freedom if I can...*(he indicates the pouch of money he was given for the burial)* Take what I have. It is money for the dead, but the living have more need of it.

LINDSAY: *(opening the pouch and looking over the coins)* This is far less than her worth. You insult us all! We will have her back.

LEADER throws the coins down. The GUARDS rush the YOUNG MAN to subdue him. One grabs the MADWOMAN while the other threatens the YOUNG MAN with his stick.

YOUNG MAN: Are there not women in your family? Would you have them dealt with so unjustly?

BEN: *(incredulous that the YOUNG MAN doesn't know this, he says with no little pride)* When my mother and sister were stolen in a raid, I paid what was asked to buy them back without complaining.

COURTNEY: *(with passionate determination)* You think that women should be grateful that you put prices on our bodies? That we accept our place as livestock to be sacrificed for your cause? I'm not grateful! I don't accept it! I'll die before I can be dishonored!

YOUNG MAN: Please put down your weapons...We can go to the village and collect more coins for your ransom...

COURTNEY: *(enraged)* I will not be bought! I will kill every one of you and myself besides!

In a fury, the MADWOMAN bites the GUARD who's holding her and he releases her. She throws herself on the LEADER and wrestles his weapon from him. She threatens all of them. The GUARD releases the YOUNG MAN and with his LEADER backs away. When the YOUNG MAN tried to reach out to her, she stabs him in the belly, and when he falls the LEADER and his

GUARDS grab her and, though she struggles mightily, they lift her off her feet and carry her away.

LINDSAY: *(kneeling down, pulling the knife out of the YOUNG MAN)* There now! Do you think your sacrifice a worthy one? Poor fool!

Scene Nineteen

The YOUNG MAN has pushed himself up into a seated position; his head resting on one hand, the other hand pressed to his bleeding belly. Shortly after the YOUNG WOMAN enters. When she sees her husband on the ground, she hurries to him. He looks up, his hand pressed to his belly.

YOUNG WOMAN: *(She gasps in horror)* Husband!...You're bleeding! *(she touches his face. Still, at first, she doesn't know how grievously he's been wounded)* Who has harmed you this way?

YOUNG MAN: *(He's in shock. Stunned from his wounding, he speaks haltingly)*...It doesn't matter...Her fate is worse than mine...

YOUNG WOMAN: May the gods take pity on her then...*(she sees the depth of his wound and understands that he's dying)* Your wound is so deep...

YOUNG MAN: *(flinching)* Too deep for cold water and cobwebs?...Stay close to me...

YOUNG WOMAN: *(determined, for she knows he will die very soon)* I will not leave you. *(hopeful, though she knows it's hopeless)* The others will come to look for us...My brother carries herbs that can stop the bleeding. We will wait for him together.

YOUNG MAN: Let me confess the wrongs I've done...

YOUNG WOMAN: Shhhhhh...Lie still.

YOUNG MAN: No, let me speak...You're the only beautiful bird I ever caught...I stole the other one from your brother's trap...

YOUNG WOMAN: It does not matter now...*(offers him wine to drink)*

YOUNG MAN: *(drinks and reaches out to touch her face)*...You are all I ever wanted...I hate to leave you...

YOUNG WOMAN: *(considering these words, she shakes her head)* Don't go, then. Choose to stay with me. Our child floats in my womb!

YOUNG MAN: ...Our child...

YOUNG WOMAN: Yes...a daughter. I saw her in my dream...

YOUNG MAN: You must teach her that one man's pride can kindle an entire village...

YOUNG WOMAN: ...Yes, she'll know humility puts out the flame of pride...

YOUNG MAN: ...Tell her a starving child mustn't be offered stones to eat...

YOUNG WOMAN: Yes, she'll learn that everyone deserves abundance.

YOUNG MAN: ...Will she be a willing student...or a stubborn one like her father...?

YOUNG WOMAN: She'll be willing...but I expect she'll sometimes be stubborn...

YOUNG MAN: *(smiling at the thought of it)* Yes, I expect so...*(shivering and slumping down)*...I'm so cold...

YOUNG WOMAN: *(trying to warm him with her own body)* Let me warm you then...
(pleading) Stay with us! Our daughter is calling you by name.

YOUNG MAN: *(half in this world, half in the next one)* Yes...I hear her voice...It's a beautiful birdsong...calling me.

The YOUNG MAN dies in her arms. She lays him down and weeps over his body.

Scene Twenty

A spring begins to bubble out of the ground where he lies. Slowly, she washes her husband's body with water and removes his fetish necklace. She makes him ready for burial. The water washes her clean as well.

YOUNG WOMAN: Mother Earth...Welcome this man back to your bosom, even as I will suckle his child within the year...

Scene Twenty One

The BLIND MAN returns with the BOY.

BOY: There they are, Father!

BLIND MAN: Sister, we were waiting for you to begin our funeral feast.

BOY: Shhhh! My uncle has fallen asleep.

YOUNG WOMAN: *(with quiet urgency so that her brother will understand what he cannot see)* Yes, my husband has gone to sleep in the garden of the ancestors.

BOY: *(kneeling to touch his body)* Uncle! Oh, Uncle! He's dead, Father!

BLIND MAN: But...

YOUNG WOMAN: It's true. We have need of another blessing, Brother.

The BLIND MAN comes close to bless the YOUNG MAN's body.

BLIND MAN: Ancient ones: We commend this man to you.

BOY: Father, why is there so much sorrow in this world?

BLIND MAN: We've not yet learned how to love ourselves and to cherish one another. Perhaps you will teach us how....

BOY: I am only a boy. What you ask is too hard.

YOUNG WOMAN: A difficult task is made up of many smaller ones.

As a call and response with the BLIND MAN, she begins to tell her wedding story. The BOY listens raptly.

YOUNG WOMAN: One day an elephant saw a hummingbird
lying flat on its back on the ground.
The bird's tiny feet were raised up into the air.

BLIND MAN: What on earth are you doing, Hummingbird?

YOUNG WOMAN: I have heard that the sky might fall today. If that should happen,
I am ready to do my bit in holding it up.

BLIND MAN: Do you think THOSE little feet could hold up the SKY?

YOUNG WOMAN: Not alone—But each must do what she can. And this is what I can do.

She looks at her brother and his child, surveys the landscape of this place.

YOUNG WOMAN: Brother, I'm carrying a child in my belly. I need the soil of our village
beneath my feet.

BLIND MAN: Yes. My son and I will go with you whenever you say.

YOUNG WOMAN: *(to the BOY)* You must help us to begin again.

BOY: Auntie, how do you begin again?

The YOUNG WOMAN takes off her necklace and presses a handful of seeds into his hand.

YOUNG WOMAN: We'll start by planting seeds...

She shows him how to dig with their sticks to plant the seeds from the bag. The forest becomes people again. Even the original ancestors are in evidence. In ones and twos, all come forward to dig and plant, using their sticks in unison. Once the planting is well established, the YOUNG WOMAN returns to the body of her dead husband, and sits beside him. Thunder is heard overhead and rain falls on them. Blackout.