

1-1-1990

The Children's Hair Turned White (Original play)

Paul "Red" Shuttleworth
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds>

Repository Citation

Shuttleworth, Paul "Red", "The Children's Hair Turned White (Original play)" (1990). *UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations*. 120.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.25669/okzg-dxuc>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Scholarship@UNLV with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

U·M·I

University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Order Number 1344893

The Children's Hair Turned White. [Original play]

Shuttleworth, Paul "Red", M.F.A.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1991

U·M·I

**300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106**

THE CHILDREN'S HAIR TURNED WHITE

by

Paul "Red" Shuttleworth

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre

Department of Theatre Arts

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

May, 1991

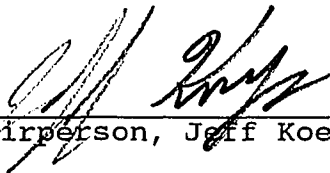
©

1991


by

Paul "Red" Shuttleworth

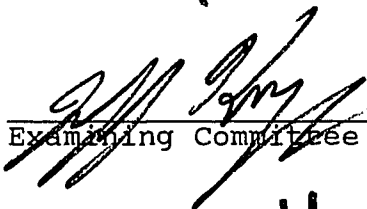
The thesis of Paul "Red" Shuttleworth for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Theatre is approved.



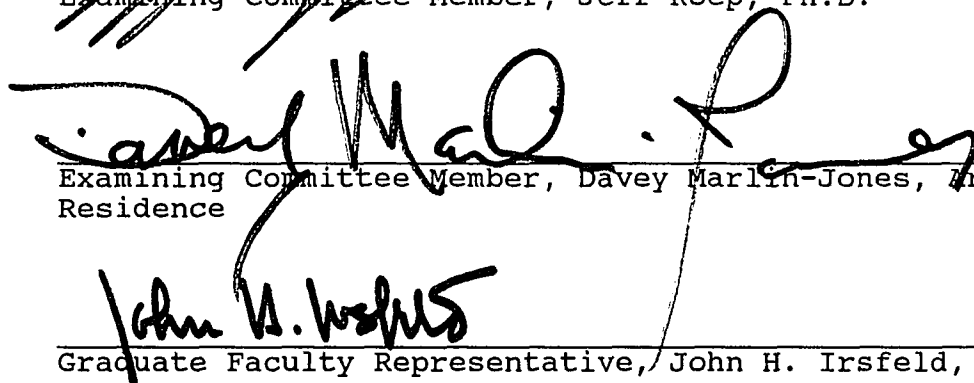
Chairperson, Jeff Koep, Ph.D.



Examining Committee Member, Jerry L. Crawford, Ph.D.



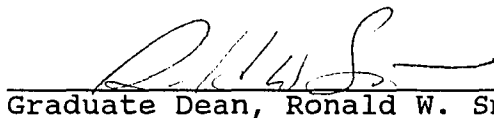
Examining Committee Member, Jeff Koep, Ph.D.



Examining Committee Member, Davey Marlin-Jones, Artist in
Residence



Graduate Faculty Representative, John H. Irsfeld, Ph.D.



Graduate Dean, Ronald W. Smith, Ph.D.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

May, 1991

The Children's Hair Turned White. Paul "Red" Shuttleworth,
M.F.A., University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1991. 78 pp.
Major Professor: Jerry L. Crawford: Professor of Theatre
Arts.

This thesis is an original play, set on the Jornada del Muerto (now known as White Sands Missile Range), about five people who witnessed the detonation of the first atomic bomb in 1945. The play deals with the long term effects of radiation exposure, with the issues of private versus public responsibility, while at the same time being a love story. As the characters (Webb, Ellen, Sage, Thorn, and Frosty) work out their fate, they are confronted by the god of death. The play features use of Butoh dance, which is to be freshly choreographed with each production, a post-nuclear art form.

Acknowledgements

The Children's Hair Turned White opened on November 7, 1990 at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, with the following cast:

Voice	Charles Supin
Atomic Sun Goddess	Shannon Ryan
Old Sun Goddess	Lucy Dixon
God of Death	Aaron Abbey
Coyote Dancer	Noelle Martines
Coyote Dancer	Annelisa Blake
Ellen	Suzanne Hildebrandt
Webb	Scott Loomis
Frosty	Kymm Gant
Sage	Nicole Sottile
Thorn	Michael Ward
Moon Goddess	Sabrina Ward

The following were vital to the production:

Director	Davey Marlin-Jones
Choreographer	Shannon Ryan
Composer	Kim K. Kameran
Set Design	Stephen R. Woody
Lighting Design	Noelle Mleczko
Costume Design	Michelle Rodda
Stage Manager	Gregorio Zuniga
Rodeo Events Advisor	Luke Appling Shuttleworth

Work on this play was supported by a Nevada State Council on the Arts Playwriting Fellowship for 1989-1990.

This play, rooted though it is in the testing of the first atomic bomb at the Trinity site on the Jornada del Muerto in New Mexico on July 16, 1945, is not a history play, nor is it an update play. This is not "Theatre of Fact." The characters and events in this play, so far as I know, are fictive.

The seed image for this play is a boy on a horse, riding into a "snowstorm" of nuclear fall-out. I found this image in Ferenc Morton Szasz's history of the Manhattan Project, The Day the Sun Rose Twice (University of New Mexico Press, 1984). It seems that a few hours after the blast, Charles Raitliffe, who was about ten at the time, saddled up his horse and rode from his grandparents' two-room adobe home at Hot Canyon (so named later for the high levels of radioactive fall-out which contaminated it) and into Bingham. I became curious about what happened to the boy. As weeks passed, I spoke by telephone several times to Dr. Szasz, but he had no idea what happened to those who witnessed that detonation, for he had worked off government documents. I tried to locate pertinent documents and found that most are still classified, particularly those documents concerned with possible health risks to civilians. At that point I began constructing my play. Before the first draft was completed, I was able to reach, by telephone, several New Mexico cowmen who had witnessed the blast. Special

thanks go to Holm Bursum, Lee Coker, and William Wrye. They survived to tell me their anecdotes. As for Charles Raitliffe, the boy on the horse, I was told by the ranchers, "I think somebody saw him drivin' a truck. Haulin' cattle. Somebody mentioned he was seen in a cafe in Socorro." I hope so. His grandparents, with whom he lived, are deceased, as is his sister, Lagotha. But the picture of that boy, on that cow pony, with all that atomic debris falling, will live in my memory: the journey had begun.

"And this is the same way
we're lured towards love or fame,
arriving at ruin instead, forced
to asylums we cannot leave or
finally believe in--like heaven,
like hell."

--Paul Zarzyski

Time: The present.

Locale: Jornada del Muerto (White Sands Missile Range),
New Mexico

Characters: Voice

Atomic-Sun Goddess

Old-Sun Goddess

God of Death

Coyote Dancers

Ellen

Webb

Frosty

Sage

Thorn

Moon Goddess

-1-

PROLOGUE OF VOICES

(Lights up on Ellen.)

ELLEN

Today is the first day. It's April 4, 1943. The first day of my life, and I'm eight years old.

(Lights up, too, on Webb.)

Your daddy's goin' to drill us a new well. But if you rope me with that grass rope, you're in for trouble, Webb.

(Ellen into darkness.)

WEBB

Hey, Thorn!

(Lights up on Thorn.)

Thorn, what're we goin' to be when we grow up?

THORN

Ropin' sons-a-guns!

WEBB

What else?

THORN

Wild bull riders!

WEBB

Soon's we can, it's down the road we go!

(Webb into darkness.)

Thorn

Sage, where are you?

(Lights up on Sage.)

SAGE

Over here. Look at this coyote pup. I think it'll tame up.

(Sage into darkness. And
lights up on Frosty.)

FROSTY

See this doll, Thorn? Don't tease now, but someday you an' me's gonna have a baby. An' you'll own the biggest cow outfit in New Mexico.

-2-

(All into darkness. Projections of the following subtitles:

**July 16, 1945

**5:30 A.M.

Suddenly there is bright, white light, then time-lapse projections of the Trinity detonation of the first bomb. Then lights up on Ellen.)

ELLEN

The sun! It's risin' in the west!

(Lights up on Webb.)

WEBB

No matter what, I got to saddle up. I got to ride down into Bingham. For the summer school camp.

(Lights up on Sage.)

SAGE

Oh, God, that red stem of boilin' stuff... that's only nine miles from here! The sheep. My pet coyote.

(Hands to her face.)

My face is turnin' red. It's blistering.

(Lights up on Frosty.)

FROSTY

The heat. It's hot!

(Loud thunder clap knocks her down.)

There's hot metal in my mouth! Help! It feels like burning electric wires in my nose!

(Black out. Right away another subtitle:

**That evening.

Lights up on Thorn.)

THORN

Dad, that white stuff comin' down. It looks like snow. Look up on the roof of the house, up on the barn: it looks like we white washed.

(Pause.)

It's night. Dark. And everything's glowing. The barn glows. Our house glows. The cattle, their backs, it's all glowing like a wristwatch dial. Sure, daddy, I'll go back inside.

-3-

(Lights off Thorn and up on Ellen.)

ELLEN

But, momma, if you burn all my clothes, what'll I wear?

(Pause.)

Momma, I'm goin' to throw up. I got a headache.

(Lights off Ellen, and up on Thorn.)

THORN

It's late of an evenin', all right. And that white stuff, up there on the mountain. It's settled on itself. It's comin' down like bible flood waters.

(BLACK OUT and right away projected subtitle:

**Two weeks later.

Lights up on all five.)

FROSTY

Thorn, you look funny! All your hair's fallen out.

(Gulps and moans.)

All of us kids, all our hair's falling out.

WEBB

(To Thorn.)

What's that government man sayin' to your daddy?

THORN

(To Webb.)

He says it's some flares and an ammo dump, explodin' in Alamogordo. But we know different. Hell, the government's up to somethin'. Them coming' round, lyin' to us, and us not even askin' any questions yet.

SAGE

(To Ellen.)

What's that soldier doing with that thing-a-majig?

ELLEN

He says he's checkin' for radioactivity.

SAGE

But your folks don't even allow a radio in the house.

(A glassy green curtain descends.)

-4-

ACT ONE

(Between the audience and the territory, is a glossy, glass-like green, green-grey curtain, dimly lit.)

VOICE

Good evening. Welcome to New Mexico. Welcome to the Jornada del Muerto.

(The audience is shown projected photographs of the Jornada del Muerto, then Mescalero Apaches and Geronimo.)

The Apaches defeated Kit Carson's cavalry in Dog Canyon. The outlaw Baldy Russell lived here and Billy the Kid more than passed through.

(Photographs of Billy the Kid, grazing Hereford cattle are projected.)

Most importantly, science was served here. On July 16, 1945, we detonated the first atomic bomb. Right here.

(Time lapse pictures of the first bomb are projected.)

We had no idea, really. Imagine 20,000 tons of TNT going off. The sand was fused, turned to lovely greenish glass.

(Projected photographs: Hereford cattle, President Roosevelt with Vice President Harry Truman, Truman as President, and a postcard of the El Rio Motel in Socorro.)

The El Rio Motel sold the glass, called trinitite, to tourists. A Santa Fe bank give trinitite samples to customers, cautioning, "Don't hold near your body for more than a day at a time."

(A guitar plays simple chords, like the lead to a Lefty Frizzell song as a 1940's photograph of New Mexico is projected.)

(Projected are the words "Manhattan Project," then "Trinity Test Site," followed by "Classified" and finally the words "Ground Zero.")

VOICE (continued)

...some may fear that this nuclear necrofable may be a breach of national security.

(The sound of radio static for a moment.)

But the rumors may have reached you anyway.

(The following date is flashed a couple of times: July 16, 1945.)

Most stories, when you boil them down, are simple boy meets girl, or, in the larger sense, boys meet girls.

But what the Los Alamos scientists called "The Gadget" did go off that morning. Right here at the place now known as White Sands Missile Range.

In addition to weapons research, other research is allegedly done here, too. Top secret work. Brain study, for example.

(Lyric guitar music returns. Suddenly, photographs of the first atomic bomb explosion are shown. After fifteen bright-as-possible seconds, darkness comes.)

Most ranchers and their families were long evacuated. Most. In a nuclear explosion, glass turns purple, then blue and then pink, and then it explodes.

(Rapid projections of purple, then blue, then pink. Then again the time-lapse pictures of the first atomic bomb.)

(Guitar music. Projections of photographs from 1944 and 1945. Now the music is helped along by the sound of bones tapping bones. The music fades.)

VOICE (continued)

Ranchers stood under the fall-out. Cattle grazed under the fall-out. Lesions and scabs, from the beta burns, formed on the tongues and mouths of the sheep and cattle.

There was an epidemic of hair loss.

Hair came back. Frost white hair replaced teenaged russet. Frost-white fur replaced black kitten fur. Frost-white fur replaced Hereford-colored hair.

(The music of guitar and bones returns, joined by the sound of bone whistles and animal hide drums.)

And then there were the rancher's children. Their children with frost-white hair. These children became eligible for the government's life-extension research project.

The White Hairs went to a special school here, very slowly grew up, and they tried to be like other children. Right here on the Jornada del Muerto. Day's Journey of the Dead Man. There are five living White Hairs today.

(The music returns, fades.)

Once a year, the White Hairs are medically examined. They are given their annual dose of life extension chemicals. If Geronimo had been there that morning in July of 1945, he would have seen the rising of three gods: the sun goddess out of the east, the new atomic-sun goddess out of the west, and the god of death from the earth itself. And the coyotes, maddened in the blinding light and heat, ran bleeding, blistered and blind over the place where Pat Garrett died in a gunfight.

(The music returns and the dance begins. It's out of the style of the Japanese Butoh, dance of the dark subconscious, but a version grounded in the animism of the American West.

From the west rises the atomic-sun goddess with leaps, jumps, crouches, and more leaps. She is mirrored by a weaker, surprised old-sun goddess. Between them comes the god of death: a man with long

dark hair, charcoaled eye sockets. The god of death has a face the color of old plaster, and the rest of his skin is purple. He wears a tea-stained shroud. All the dancers come as if from beneath the ground, as if from the soil or from within massive rocks; they rise in intimacy with the desert and one may ask, at first, if they are not snakes.

They dance to a music that is from bone to bone, bone whistles, and from hide drums.

The god of death dances his love for the sun goddess. The sun goddess dances her fear of the atomic-sun goddess, who in turn dances to seduce the god of death.

A pack of coyote dancers enters; they are quick, yet stooped and entranced. They bark, making anguished, short, high-pitched canine sounds. The music reflects their entrance, for it has the pulse of four-legged running. The coyote dancers first seek the deadly radioactive heat of the atomic-sun goddess, but they are repelled. The god of death offers them a dead jack-rabbit, but they fear it. Now the atomic-sun goddess boils upward, boils and boils, spins and spins, and then descends and exits.

The coyote dancers go muzzle to muzzle, as if they decide something. The god of death tries to pacify them with a dead rabbit or two. The old-sun goddess crosses westward and exits.

-8-

Anguished, barking, the coyote dancers tear apart the trinitite-colored curtain. As it is torn, a lightning storm comes up. Then darkness. A subtitle is projected:

**The Present.

And then morning.)

(Ellen is folding a quilt. She holds it to her cheek. Webb enters. Ellen sees him, shakes herself in a horse-like manner, sets down the quilt. Webb is holding out flowers, and we walks them to her.)

ELLEN

No thanks.

WEBB

These are your favorites.

ELLEN

They're not.

(Looks at them.)

Damn, they're plastic!

WEBB

Well, they'll be your favorites.

ELLEN

It's not my birthday.

WEBB

But it's the day before Forever Young Day.

ELLEN

Christ, Webb, you know what tomorrow is, but do you know what a week from tomorrow is?

WEBB

I ain't thinkin' past tomorrow. That's enough.

ELLEN

It's not enough. Something has to come after tomorrow, to make it worth a damn.

(Webb holds out the flowers.)

I don't want your flowers.

WEBB

These flowers are better than a rabbit's foot. I coulda brought you a rabbit's foot. I was at the State Fair. So I coulda easily got one a them dyed-pink rabbit's feet. Fake luck pieces.

ELLEN

What would I have done with a rabbit's foot? I tossed out the last ten you brought me.

WEBB

Sure, exactly. I remembered that. Ya know, it gets me excited. Forever young, like the song. They dose us. We stay young. Look at us. We're both around fifty-five years old. Do I look it? Do you look it? Ellen, these flowers'll make you laugh when you're sad.

ELLEN

You think it's worked out.

(Webb shrugs.)

We're sucked into it, held onto, and stuck here.

WEBB

Not really. Two of us can leave at one time. Only three have to stay.

ELLEN

(Picks up and shows him the quilt.)

You have any idea how many of these I make every year?

(Webb shakes his head.)

Look at this quilt!

WEBB

I'm lookin'.

ELLEN

This is the first one. The one I made that first time you went off. It was to be for our wedding bed.

WEBB

Then why'd you never put it on the bed?

ELLEN

Why don't you ever come home for good?

(No response from Webb.)

Don't you remember the bed sheets getting ripped off in the blast? How about the windows shattering, that fall-out cloud shaped like a giant hook, the horses shivering in the afternoon heat?

-10-

WEBB

Ellen.

ELLEN

Don't you ever look at the ground around here? Don't you ever see, see the carbonized shadows on this pounded, boiled ground, shadows of snakes and mice and even coyotes?

WEBB

That's why I brought you these trick flowers. See this rubber bulb? To make it work, you put them in water and squeeze the bulb and then...

ELLEN

(Overlapping.)

And then they hide us away. All the white haired kids. No other kids. Just us. They chemigate us. No parties or proms. No school teams and cheerleaders. No proms. Don't you ever think about what being forever young costs?

WEBB

Try the flowers.

ELLEN

I hate them.

WEBB

Try 'em.

ELLEN

Try 'em? Christ, like how I tried reading Pro Rodeo Sports News? To hell with that. One week, then another. Pretty soon it's a blur. No matter what name you use in the world, it's the same blur. Webb riding this or that bull. Then Webb the rodeo clown. Then Webb with a bull's horn in his side. And me stuck here, praying and praying until there's no reason to pray, no reason I can think up. How's that?

WEBB

But I never stopped being with you, not in ways that count.

ELLEN

(Pause.)

Webb, you should move out.

WEBB

Somebody else been with you? Thorn? One of the Air Force guys? While I was on the road?

-11-

ELLEN

It doesn't work. No more. I make quilts, as if each one is going to be a magic one, straight to your heart. You come in for the annual dose, stick around a few weeks, then I watch you hitch up the horse trailer. Sometimes I don't hear from you for six months. This just doesn't work.

WEBB

(Placing an arm around her waist.)

Beautiful morning sky, Ellen.

ELLEN

(Takes the flowers.)

You bought these here in New Mexico?

WEBB

State Fair.

(Pause as he touches her hair.)

I got a plan to get us a corral full a money. Big bucks.

ELLEN

(Stepping away.)

These flowers are useless.

WEBB

Try 'em. I got them loaded with water. Let's learn to laugh more.

ELLEN

What I'd like to try is someone who wants to take me dancing. What you want from me is more of the same. You want me to take a dose, then watch as you drive off. You want to have me wait for you.

WEBB

Don't you like staying young?

ELLEN

Only if it promises something, something that'll pan out. Something to build on.

WEBB

This time I'll hang around longer. I'll fix up our place. Maybe one of the others'll want to go outside.

ELLEN

Don't plan on that. Today I want all your stuff moved out.

WEBB

Lover, I just got home.

-12-

ELLEN

Not really. When you get to the pre-fab, you'll see the lock on the door is changed.

(Webb exits. Frosty, lugging a bale of straw and a bareback riggin', enters.)

FROSTY

I swear, Ellen, but this is the last time. The last time I'm helping.

ELLEN

Webb can go to hell.

(Ellen tosses down the flowers.)

FROSTY

Come here.

ELLEN

What for?

FROSTY

Compromise time. I'm gonna show you how to ride this bale. You're gonna really drive the hooks to it.

ELLEN

Not me. I don't want that part of him.

FROSTY

If Webb knows you can sit a bronco...

ELLEN

(Overlapping.)

I'm not getting up on any bronc!

FROSTY

Non one's asking you to. All you gotta do is learn how to ride this bale.

ELLEN

That's not me. I'm apple pies, warm quilts, and early to bed and early to rise.

FROSTY

Look, straddle this bale, as if it's a bronc. Practice spurring it. Webb'll be impressed. He'll come roaring back.

-13-

What's in it for you?
ELLEN

If you get Webb back?
FROSTY

Yeah.
ELLEN

Nothing. But if you lose him next time... I may not be around.
FROSTY.

You're going into the outside world?
ELLEN

You can move outside. Or you can move into a world inside yourself.
FROSTY

You are going!
ELLEN

Straddle this bale.
FROSTY

You and Webb?
ELLEN

Not me and him.
FROSTY

I get it: you're helping me so that Webb'll stay. You're going to get Thorn to leave with you.
ELLEN

See how caught up you are? They have us in a crazy bind. How many years have we been playing this hostage game with the Feds? What if all of us just said we're leaving, and then we left? We'd be free.
FROSTY

Then we'd die.
ELLEN

No, we'd get old.
FROSTY

Same thing.
ELLEN

-14-

FROSTY

(Picking up the quilt.)
The dreams you had for this quilt, that's getting old.
(She cradles the quilt.)
It's the memories, years of memories. We are old.

(Ellen moves out of the light.
A subtitle is projected:
**The Spring, 1955.
Frosty is now cradling something. Thorn enters, goes to her.)

THORN

Frosty, please give it to me.

FROSTY

It's my baby.

THORN

We have to give it to the doctors.

FROSTY

I won't.

THORN

It's not well.

FROSTY

My baby's goin' to be fine.

THORN

Frosty, look at it.

FROSTY

I love her. I already looked at her.

THORN

Please, Frosty.

FROSTY

Don't try to take it. A daddy ain't supposed to steal his baby.

THORN

The doctors'll take good care of it.

FROSTY

Hell, no!

-15-

THORN

Look at it! It's born without eyes! It's twisted 'round.
You can see the heart beatin' through the papery skin!

(Frosty shrieks, backs away
from Thorn, then hands him the
bundle. Thorn exits. A new
subtitle:

**The Present.
Frosty is hunched.)

ELLEN

You feelin' bad, Frosty?

FROSTY

We're old anyway. Just so doped we don't know it.

(Pause.)

Get onto the bale, Ellen.

ELLEN

Why can't Webb see? It's not so bad here. We could have a
nice quiet life. Go dancing, right under the stars. With
the car radio. We could pretend every night -- pretend it
was our prom.

FROSTY

Maybe you can have that. Maybe not. But to get Webb, you
better listen to me.

(Ellen mounts the bale.)

ELLEN

Which hand do I use?

FROSTY

Which free hand would give you better balance?

(Ellen starts to stand, but
Frosty shoves her back down.)

Stick with it!

ELLEN

He's not this dumb.

FROSTY

Webb fights bulls, right? But watch his eyes during the
bronc riding. If you share his love of wild horses, and
love is a kind of prayer, a head thing...

-16-

ELLEN

(Overlapping.)

Then he'll keep bringing me dumb, fake flowers from state fairs. Forget it.

FROSTY

Don't you want another chance at Webb?

ELLEN

I don't need this to have it.

(She picks up the flowers,
gives them to Frosty.)

Maybe I need to go outside, find a young guy to take me dancing.

FROSTY

They'll cut you off your life extenders. Then what? For every year that kid ages, maybe you'll age three. Damn it, prom days are over. And we never had one!

ELLEN

What if I can find the right man? Or what if I can change someone into the right person?

(Pause.)

You don't believe I can do it? I can. I can go outside and do it. I don't need Atomic Energy Commission medicine!

(Pause.)

Frosty, what'll happen to us, if they stop dosing us every year?

(Ellen exits. Frosty tosses the flowers aside. She sees someone coming and mounts the bale. Webb enters, looks her over, sings a couple of lines from a rodeo song.)

FROSTY

I'm ready.

WEBB

(Like a rodeo announcer.)

Comin' outta chute number three will be Frosty. She's a bronc stompin' beauty outta Bingham. A wild hoss, atomic town. She's gonna ride ol' 1945, otherwise known as "The Gadget."

(Pause.)

Say, where'd you get my old riggin'?

FROSTY

Don't spoil the mood, Webb.

-17-

(Frosty grips the riggin' with her left hand, moves up on it, chin down, sort of hunched, with her right hand raised high. She extends her legs so that her heels are at either forward side of the bale, toes out.)

WEBB

You got your holts?

FROSTY

Yeah.

WEBB

Make sure to ride with your heels in.

FROSTY

Okay, okay.

WEBB

When you're ready to shake your face for the gate, lemme know.

FROSTY

(Squirms around, up on the riggin', and gets set.)

Not yet!

WEBB

I'll count off the eight seconds to the tooter, with my hand.

FROSTY

Sure.

(Squirms, sets.)

Uh, huh...

(Nods for the gate and shouts.)

Let's git!

(Frosty begins her spur licks, hard and fast as she can. As she rides the bale, Webb slowly counts off the eight seconds by slapping his hand against his leg, while shouting encouragement.)

-18-

WEBB

Spur his ears off!
Give him a hardware shower!
Spur wild 'n win a prize!
Seven...and...eight!

(At the word "eight," Frosty gives it a couple more quick spur licks, then ungrips her left hand, pulls free of the riggin' and does a leap off the bale. Webb rushes to her. Frosty and Webb go into an athletic, high adrenalin make-out.)

FROSTY

How'd I do?

WEBB

Good ride. Seventy-five point ride.

FROSTY

(shoves him away.)

That's all? Seventy-five points?

WEBB

What'd you think?

FROSTY

At least an eighty-one!

WEBB

Okay.

(Grabs her.)

FROSTY

(Pushes him away.)

Hey! Get your hands off a me!

WEBB

What's wrong?

FROSTY

Seventy-five is way wrong! That's what's wrong.

WEBB

Then I'll take my riggin' back.

(Webb starts to take his riggin' off the bale. She puts her hands over his hands.)

-19-

FROSTY

Wait. I'll ride again.

WEBB

(Continues taking off the
riggin')

No re-rides today.

FROSTY

Thanks for the fun.

(They look at each other.)

You should do this for Ellen, you know. You could do this
and it would make you close, like before. It'd be like a
gift.

(Frosty exits. Webb moves
downstage, hunkers down onto
the balls of his cowboy boots.
He responds to the sound of
the wind hitting wires, a
change of weather or time of
day. Without Webb noticing,
Sage sits down on the bale,
mimes driving. Webb starts at
the blast of a car horn.)

SAGE

(Calling out.)

Hey!

(At the sound of Sage's voice,
the coyote dancers bound up to
and around Webb. They are
playful, but he swats at them
with his hat. The coyote
dancers dance around Sage
until she motions them off.)

WEBB

(Looking at the exiting danc-
ers.)

Howdy, Sage.

SAGE

Hurry up, Webb, if you want a ride. I gotta get home to the
den.

-20-

WEBB

(Now beside her on the bale.)

I was kinda hopin' to get a ride north.

(Pause.)

You wouldn't want to head out, would ya?

SAGE

Just home to the den.

WEBB

I can pay the gas, if you want to roll to the Laramie show.

SAGE

Be faithful to Ellen would you?

WEBB

You haven't changed.

SAGE

A little thicker in the paw pads. More certain.

WEBB

Paw pads do get thicker.

SAGE

Do you forget who you are when you're out there?

WEBB

Who I am out there is who I am. It's here, behind a fence, that I gotta be something someone else wants me to be. You can live with coyotes all you want, Sage, but the Feds know exactly who you are, right down to the smallest blood cell.

SAGE

You want to be dropped off at Ellen's?

WEBB

(Looks closely at her nose.)

What's that?

SAGE

What's what?

WEBB

(Touching her nose.)

That!

SAGE

(Slaps at his hand.)

Get your hand off! Lemme drive.

-21-

WEBB

So what is it?

SAGE

Christ, I don't know. My breakfast? Rabbit brain sprayed up at my snout?

WEBB

Naw, naw, here.

(He touches it again.)

SAGE

Stop that pawin' me!

WEBB

Sage, you got a little puncture scar there. On your nose.

(Silence.)

You get shot with a pellet gun?

SAGE

That? I never got shot there.

WEBB

But it's a scar.

SAGE

That's from when I got a bead stuck up my nose. I was two or so.

WEBB

Yeah... Okay, that's normal.

(Pause.)

And what's that scar on your throat?

SAGE

Let me drive!

WEBB

Funny. Never noticed that neck scar. Bad run-in with a fence? Or did ya stray off the missile range, get roped? Naw, you must've hit barb wire on a moonless night.

SAGE

I had an operation when I was two. To get a weed out of my throat.

WEBB

That scar's recent.

SAGE

(Puts on the brakes.)

Webb, out you go.

-22-

Why? How come?
WEBB

I'm gonna turn.
SAGE

There's nothin' here.
(She does not respond.)
I was only lookin' for the scars. Scars make it significant.

Like in mating?
SAGE

Kinda.
WEBB

(Thorn enters, holding a shotgun and a large canvas bag.)

WEBB
(To Thorn.)
Been lookin' all over for you.

THORN
(To Sage.)
Hi.

WEBB
Thorn, you ever miss it?

THORN
(To Webb.)
Never.

WEBB
Come on, hoss. We run off that time and had it all, man.

THORN
I got a good job. Atomic Energy Commission copper.

WEBB
With time off for huntin' 'n fishin'.

THORN
I'm working on the inside, figuring it all out.

WEBB
But don't you miss the adrenalin?

-23-

THORN

You were lookin' for me? Well, you found me happy to be working.

WEBB

Lookin' for you. Lookin' for old times. Lookin' for the old Thorn.

THORN

(Hands him the shotgun.)

Go hunt something up.

WEBB

That how you handle it? Ordering people around? Shootin' up the place?

THORN

Lots of game out there. And it's all ours.

(Webb shakes his head and exits. Sage picks up the flowers and squeezes the bulb on the stems and squirts water at Thorn's face.)

(Thorn sits wearily on the bale, sets down the bag: a couple of pheasants fall out.)

THORN

Poachers.

SAGE

I sure hope you'll share those with me.

THORN

I'm gonna dump 'em into the freezer. Turn 'em over to the game warden.

SAGE

He'll eat them. Same as we can.

THORN

It's the law.

SAGE

Share them with me.

THORN

I can go get a bag of burgers.

-24-

SAGE

They'll be cold.

THORN

So how many burgers should I go get?

SAGE

What about those pheasants? They're not even native, just another experiment.

THORN

That's evidence.

SAGE

Anyway, I was heading for the den.

THORN

I went to a lot of trouble. Ticketed a couple of South Dakota chicken farmers.

SAGE

If we de-feather two, no one will ever know.

THORN

Only if you think you'll get a real kick out of it.

SAGE

Just one or two.

(Sage tears into one of the birds with her teeth, pulling feathers, and trots off with it. Thorn picks up the fake flowers, squirts himself in the head and falls over. Frosty walks by, twirling a rope; Thorn grabs her leg.)

FROSTY

Let go.

THORN

What for?

FROSTY

Because I said so.

THORN

Now then, I am not sure you have the right attitude.

FROSTY

Let go!

-25-

THORN

Actually, I don't have to.

FROSTY

Go eat your Colt .45.

THORN

Look, I'm the law around here now. Isn't that what we agreed on? We needed someone to stick up for us.

FROSTY

Thorn, they bought you cheap. You used to question them.

THORN

(Holds out his badge.)

They'll listen to us now. I can represent us.

FROSTY

What is it, some old time West replica? A Franklin Mint kinda badge?

THORN

This is for real. Authentic. Present time West.

FROSTY

So let go of my fucking leg!

THORN

What if I got a warrant?

FROSTY

What if I kick the shit out of you with my other leg?

THORN

Actually, I've been meaning to talk to you about that.

FROSTY

About what?

THORN

This sense I have of your...uh... renewed physical fitness. Is this from all this new dancin' alone?

FROSTY

What're you talking about?

THORN

Nothin' I guess. Hell, I probably just dreamed it. Just a dream of you dancing alone at dawn every day. Strippin' off your clothes and dancing in some kinda warpaint.

-26-

FROSTY

See you later.

THORN

Where you going?

FROSTY

To find Webb, for Ellen.

THORN

Stay out of that wrangle. Let it end.

(Pause)

Think about you and me, again.

FROSTY

I do think about us.

THORN

So do I.

FROSTY

Every time I go past the fucking graveyard I think about you 'n me and what it all came to. Every time they dose us up.

THORN

I wanted that baby, too.

FROSTY

And that was you 'n me.

THORN

I don't think so.

FROSTY

I do.

THORN

There's more to us. You know it. You still got my last name.

FROSTY

I can't ever move back in. You see, I got this truth that's growin' inside me.

THORN

Screw the truth for once, and facts, too. Let's just have ourselves like it used to be.

FROSTY

Like playing house or something?

-27-

THORN

That'd be fun.

FROSTY

Deputize me.

THORN

I don't need a posse.

FROSTY

Only me. A deputy. You need a deputy.

THORN

For what?

(Frosty ropes him.)

FROSTY

In case somebody ropes your sorry ass.

(She lets go of the rope,
starts to exit.)

THORN

Hey, you forgot your rope.

(She returns and they kiss.)

There was this goat I rode when I was three years old.

FROSTY

We kiss, and you think about a goat?

THORN

Nope, nope, nope.

FROSTY

You just said, "goat."

THORN

A mental slip.

FROSTY

Thorn, you ass, give me back my rope.

THORN

(Takes off the rope, but holds
onto it.)

Webb 'n me, we're in a corral. Wearin' our first hooks.
I'm on this stanky goat, givin' it a hardware bath. These
old guys are hootin' 'n tossin' money. A leather dog leash
is cinched around the goat, 'n I'm spurrin' great. Then the
leash slips. I'm caught underneath the fuckin' goat. He
kicks the shit outta me. Like my nose: it's a mess a torn
skin 'n blood.

-28-

FROSTY

No one pulled you out?

THORN

Yeah, but I'm hung up for a moment. I eat hoof salad. Now I don't wanna cry in front a Webb 'n these cowboys.

FROSTY

Hand over the rope.

THORN

Soon as we kissed, I got this strange feeling all over me.

FROSTY

Yeah?

THORN

I tried to fight it off. Like right this moment, your kiss has me wired, like I just rode a freight train of a bull.

(Frosty takes the rope and exits. Ellen enters, goes to Thorn.)

ELLEN

I want to get out an injunction on Webb.

THORN

What's that?

ELLEN

You gonna do it?

THORN

Depends.

ELLEN

You got the badge now. You got the doin's to do now.

THORN

I understand that.

ELLEN

No one's gonna take me to the prom at this rate.

THORN

I see.

ELLEN

You gonna invite me?

-29-

THORN

I could, but that's Webb's territory, ain't it?

ELLEN

The prom is long gone.

THORN

There's always another one.

ELLEN

That's what I told Frosty. So I want to get out an injunction.

THORN

But you won't tell me why.

ELLEN

Webb's been wrongin' me.

THORN

He's that way.

(Ellen moves into darkness.
Webb enters, after the following subtitles are projected:
**Five Days After the Bomb
**Get Rich Quick
**July 21, 1945)

WEBB

Hey, you up to some work?

THORN

I'm sick.

WEBB

Cowboy work.

THORN

Naw.

WEBB

I said, cowboy work.

THORN

Maybe next week. I feel like puke.

WEBB

Too late.

THORN

My hips hurt on a horse.

-30-

WEBB

You goin' to let the grown-ups make all the loot?

THORN

What loot?

WEBB

Gover'ments comin' round, buying all the blistered animals.

THORN

You better ride back on home.

WEBB

Here's the deal. You 'n me: we ride to near the crater. We look for cows. Anything loose we run in. Before we get to highway 380, we have a burnin' barrel set up. With hot runnin' irons in it. We do art work on the brands. Then we run 'em into the gover'ment corrals. Sell 'em. There's probably a few cows out there still alive. Near the crater.

THORN

That don't sound honest.

WEBB

So?

THORN

Frosty was up close when it happened. She looked into that cloud. She says she seen dancers in it. Giants.

WEBB

She's crazy.

THORN

She seen the ghosts of Apaches out there.

WEBB

She'll get over it.

THORN

Frosty seen Geronimo's ghost ride out of the cloud of dust, the one that was the skirt of the tower of fire.

WEBB

Thorn, you have no idea! The soldier boys are takin' people out to the crater. Chargin' money. We can do the same thing.

THORN

You'll get sick, don't you know?

WEBB

The soldier boys ain't gettin' sick. Only rich.

(Goes into his pocket and
takes out a trinitite bead.)

See this glass. They're callin' it trinitite. The explosion made it with sand! We can ride out to the crater. See, I been ridin' out there. Scoutin'. We load up saddlebags. Then we sell it.

(Thorn takes the trinitite
bead from Webb, looks at it.)

THORN

I got a hunch. You and me. And Ellen, Sage, and Frosty. All us young kids, we've been fused, too. Like this green glass made of sand. There's a rumor: they're gonna put all us kids together. In some kinda school, where we get doctored all the time. We're fused-up. Permanent. Maybe it's time for us to think about all of us as one.

WEBB

They'll have to head 'n heel me, between two tough horses, 'cause I ain't goin' to no special school. You trust the gover'ment? Don't seem like they're worryin' about us much. Up at our place, that fake snow ain't meltin'. Anything with no hooves -- like cats 'n dogs -- has burned feet. The gover'ment ain't brought us drinkin' water, but they say we got to stop drinkin' cistern water.

(Webb goes into darkness. A
subtitle is projected:

**The Present.

Ellen goes up to Thorn.)

ELLEN

You're sweating.

THORN

One of the spells.

ELLEN

Can we get to business?

THORN

Can't we let this Webb thing settle itself, like it always does?

ELLEN

I won't take a No from you.

-32-

THORN

Can't we wait for Webb to go the cycle? For him to spend his money and head back down rodeo clown highway?

ELLEN

I don't want him to go. Only three-quarters of the time.

THORN

So for a percentage of the time, if I get this right, you want Webb to either do or not do something?

ELLEN

Sure.

THORN

This a physical thing he's doing?

ELLEN

You do like to sniff 'round, don't you?

(Webb enters, goes to Thorn.)

Webb

Skin shakes when she runs.

(Webb exits.)

ELLEN

Goddamn it, Thorn! Arrest him. Don't let him walk away.

THORN

Arrest him?

ELLEN

You hear him or not?

THORN

Yeah.

ELLEN

My skin shake?

THORN

(Reaching toward her.)

Where do I check this out?

ELLEN

(Slapping his hand.)

Webb says my skin shakes when I run.

-33-

THORN
You sure he's talkin' 'bout you?

ELLEN
Who else has got him?

THORN
Now you're sayin' you got him.

ELLEN
Thorn! You heard him! I know it! He says my skin shakes when I run!

THORN
I think he's talkin' 'bout a rodeo bull.

ELLEN
Then how come he's not otherwise nice to me? Let's stop kidding and teasing, Thorn. I've waited decades for him to grow up. It's like he has deliberate amnesia. In the old days, when we were radiation sick, he took care of me. I took care of Webb. How can he forget? Remember how they gathered us that first time? I'm crying. I know I'll never see mom and dad again. He's crying, too. We hold hands. Webb fights the docs when they try to take me into the examining room. He was like that: caring.

(Suddenly: the sounds of desert wind. The coyote dancers enter, move in zig zags and rapid curves. Ellen pets one of the coyote dancers.)

THORN
(To Ellen.)
What the hell is Sage up to?

(The dancers continue, until Sage appears; she beckons to them and they exit. Sage goes to Thorn and Ellen.)

SAGE
(To Thorn.)
It's Webb. Again.

THORN
He promised to be good.

ELLEN
Maybe he will.

-34-

SAGE

Look at us. We look only in our twenties. What is this?
1990-something? Maybe we should refuse the dose tomorrow.

THORN

(To Sage.)

Who wants to look fifty-five years old?

ELLEN

We're not fifty-five! Not our bodies.

THORN

(To Sage.)

And Webb refuses to act fifty-five.

SAGE

But that's how old we really are!

ELLEN

Not me!

SAGE

We are all in our fifties!

THORN

(To Sage.)

You want to stop taking the medication? You want to age at
the normal rate?

ELLEN

I don't!

SAGE

This isn't natural. I feel like we've... violated some-
thing.

ELLEN

Sage, we're the ones violated. We're the ones who got atom
bombed in 1945.

SAGE

We don't have to keep taking the medicine.

THORN

It's a trade off.

ELLEN

That's right. We get youth. They took away our normal
lives. We're reservation kids. Captives.

THORN

Wait a minute, Ellen. You can leave if you want.

SAGE

Oh no! We agreed. This is where we stay, where we try to support each other.

THORN

But we're free to change our minds.

SAGE

And go out there and make mutant children? Listen, Webb's back and trying to drag us closer and closer to towns. I thought we'd go along with the group vote.

(Pause. She looks at them.)

Look, none of us has leukemia. None of us gets sick anymore. No new tumors in twenty years. Yet something's wrong. We know it. Instinctually. That's why we don't get along anymore. Dying and suffering brought us close. The miracle drugs are killing off our ability to care. Webb is up to something anyway, something to end the dosing. So let's all just vote to quit the life extenders. Then live it out as best we can, here.

THORN

You're over-reacting.

(Thorn exits.)

SAGE

My coyote brothers and sisters know something is wrong. Webb is trying to ruin it all. He wants one of us to go out with him, outside. He has some angle. For himself.

ELLEN

(Pointing offstage.)

Look!

(Lights up on Frosty, who rises off the ground, above Sage and Ellen. Frosty is wearing a pale pullover blouse and a pale calf-length skirt, and Apache legging boots. Frosty's face has lightning streaks painted on it, and her hair is held in place with a two-inch wide rawhide headband. Frosty has in one hand a trinitite necklace, which she puts on as she begins to dance.)

FROSTY

I've done the vision quest.

-36-

ELLEN

No, Frosty, no!

FROSTY

I've been to the other side. My baby's there. My baby warmed at my breast.

SAGE

Not this way, Frosty.

FROSTY

(Eyes rolled upward as she dances.)

My baby's coming back. She's not dead. She's on the other side. Waiting to come back.

SAGE

(To Ellen.)

Find Thorn!

FROSTY

Only by dancing in the manner of the earth...

ELLEN

Frosty, let me help you.

FROSTY

(To Ellen.)

Yes, dance with me. Dance to the dark one.

ELLEN

Noooo!

(Ellen rushes Frosty, grabs an arm, loses purchase on it, but grabs the other arm and holds tight.)

FROSTY

Let go! You couldn't even have a baby!

(Ellen lets go and sags down.)

SAGE

(Grabbing Frosty.)

Calm down! Dancing isn't needed! Live like a four-legged, don't mimic one.

FROSTY

Dance is the way to purity. A dance with Death. An animal dance, a mountain lion dance, a bear dance.

-37-

SAGE

There is no animal purity! Haven't I passed that on from the coyotes?

FROSTY

I will dance with the God of Death. For my baby. For us.

SAGE

Dance with him and wake up hollow!

(To Ellen.)

Run to Thorn!

(Frosty sways, almost out of control of Sage's grip on her.)

FROSTY

I'll dance death to exhaustion, for a gift.

SAGE

Don't tamper. I'll show you how to live a four-legged life.

FROSTY

Ceremony!

SAGE

No! It's in the living, Frosty. That's how we win.

FROSTY

(Breaks free.)

Without ceremony, without a dance of danger and invitation, there's no life.

(She dances.)

I see it: a life of blood and teeth.

(Ellen stands, holding herself.)

ELLEN

(To Frosty.)

It's not me! Webb! Webb can't have a baby!

(The God of Death appears, dancing a Butoh dance, his initial steps as if he is shuffling down from a swirling atomic cloud. Frosty and Ellen retreat, exit. Frosty, at first awed, only watches the God of Death as he dances -- awed and swaying. We hear bone whistles, bones

clattering on bones, the pulsation of hide drums. The God of Death dances with jerks and spasms and shudders. Slowly, Frosty begins to dance, as if a horse inside her cannot outrun nuclear death, a wild horse who has to bear that rider for thousands of miles. In this dance, Frosty is the prey. Frosty then pulls off her blouse and underneath is an aged red thermal undershirt. As Frosty dances, she takes off her skirt and below it is a breechcloth that is white. She finds and puts on a 19th century blue cavalry shirt or jacket that has sleeves ripped off. The dance becomes one of mutual seduction, of sexual ferocity, and they jerk and twist into and out of embraces. Frosty rips the shroud off the God of Death and he is wearing a white G-string and his skin is white from a coating of rice powder. From opposite ends of the stage, fields of lightning briefly flash off the dancers. Finally they are overwhelmed by projections of the first atomic bomb detonation.)

FADE TO BLACK.

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

(Simple guitar chords are again played as darkness descends. Photographs are projected, old black and whites -- a series of pictures of a ten year old boy riding a horse across a ghostly New Mexico landscape, pictures taken around 1945. In the photographs there is a haze. Now the black and white pictures of the boy ahorseback have subtitles:

- ** Early Morning Ride
- ** He Slept Through the Bomb
- ** The Ride to Bingham was Uneventful
- ** The Fall-out Smelled Funny
- ** Weeks Later His Hair Fell Out
- ** He Was Ten Years Old
- ** The Water Was Radioactive
- ** His New Hair Came In White
- ** The Horse Lost Its Hair
- ** The Horse Grew White Hair

Now photographs of the boy are mixed with pictures of the bomb going off at the Trinity Test Site.

Then those black and white pictures are alternated with color pictures of Frosty dancing with the god of death. As the atomic world is added visually, the music changes, too, to bone and hide music. At the nightmare of crescendo, there is sudden silence and another subtitle:

**Autumn 1945: Webb & Ellen Webb lugs an old stock saddle on and is met halfway to centerstage by Ellen, who has a cardboard box. Webb points at the bale of hay.)

WEBB

Bet there's a snake under it.

-40-

ELLEN

You like to scare me.

WEBB

I like to warn you.

ELLEN

You must be the dumbest ten year old Boy in all of New Mexico.

WEBB

From the look of me luggin' this saddle you'd think so.

ELLEN

Where's yer horse, cowboy?

WEBB

That's what grandpa wants people to ask.

ELLEN

He got his wish.

WEBB

Them eggheads came out and gave our land a new name: Hot Canyon.

ELLEN

Where's yer Apaloosa?

WEBB

Guess.

ELLEN

It died.

WEBB

No.

ELLEN

It stayed bald.

(Laughs.)

Webb's got a bald horse. Webb's got a bald horse. Webb's got a bald horse. Will you ever believe it!?

WEBB

Naw.

ELLEN

You sure are dense.

WEBB

What's in the box?

-41-

ELLEN

Oh no, you ain't goin' to slip me up!

WEBB

The damn horse has white hair. Grandpa's still mad I saddled up that mornin'. How was I to know white stuff was gonna fall outta the sky all day? All I done was ride down into Bingham, waste a day, 'n ride back home at sundown.

ELLEN

(Pause.)

We didn't sleep through it like you folks. We was outside, with the sheep. Got blown right off our cots!

WEBB

You seen it, huh?

ELLEN

One of daddy's hands --he's a Mescalero Apache-- he says, after we get the sheep back together, he says that this flamin' sun at dawn is an Apache god.

WEBB

God or no god, I still gotta lug this stock saddle to school every day, to remind me a bein' stupid enough to get a horse to go bald 'n have its hair turn white.

ELLEN

But you could ride the horse?

WEBB

Sure.

ELLEN

He's okay?

WEBB

Just white.

ELLEN

If it was me, I'd saddle it up, 'n teach your grandpa a lesson.

WEBB

It ain't worth the whippin'.

ELLEN

Bet the bus driver won't let you bring the saddle on the schoolbus.

WEBB

Then I ain't goin' to school.

-42-

ELLEN

Bet you will!

WEBB

Play hookey with me.

ELLEN

And do what?

WEBB

Let's pick up that green glass, and sell it to tourists on highway 380.

ELLEN

Nope. I got show 'n tell.

WEBB

Nothin' super is my guess.

ELLEN

I got somethin' real good.

WEBB

Let's see.

ELLEN

You got to wait.

WEBB

I thought you were friends with me.

ELLEN

I am.

WEBB

Naw. You been laughin' at me and this stock saddle.

(Ellen puts down the box.)

ELLEN

I'm gonna demonstrate that new milk replacer.

WEBB

What do you know about it?

ELLEN

The gover'ment come 'n traded us some milk cows for the blistered-up sheep.

WEBB

Now you're an expert. A stuck-up expert.

-43-

ELLEN

I am not stuck up!

(Ellen takes a plastic, quart and a half bottle out of the box, then a metal screw-on lid that has a rubber nipple on it. Webb squeezes the nipple, and she pulls away.)

WEBB

If grandpa saw that rubber thing, he'd call it a...

ELLEN

(Overlapping.)

Shut up! Don't say anything dirty!

WEBB

What else you got?

ELLEN

(Taking out a coffee can.)

I got the powder in here.

WEBB

The powdered milk.

ELLEN

Right.

(Ellen takes out another jar, filled with water.)

WEBB

I can see this is gonna be a real show.

ELLEN

I'm gonna mix it all up.

WEBB

How's that gonna be important?

ELLEN

I didn't think you'd like it. But one a the other boys'll like it fine.

WEBB

You gonna ask anybody to drink it?

ELLEN

I might.

-44-

WEBB

Nobody's gonna drink that stuff.

ELLEN

One a the other boys might.

WEBB

Not on your life.

ELLEN

If someone was my true friend, they'd help me.

WEBB

Yeah?

ELLEN

And drink some outta the rubber nipple. But you're too scared.

WEBB

Hell, if you was to mix it right up here and now, I'd drink it.

(Ellen shakes powder into the plastic bottle and adds water from the jar. Then she screws the lid on and shakes it up.)

ELLEN

Okay, big man. Drink.

WEBB

(Takes the bottle from her and looks at it.)

How much you wanna bet? Some Bowman baseball cards? Maybe I'll win me a Luke Appling card.

ELLEN

You better know that that water is full a rado stuff.

WEBB

"Rado?"

ELLEN

Yeah, it's from the cistern. Dad calls it "rado" water. The gover'ment says we got radio in our water in the cistern.

WEBB

(Looks at the bottle.)

Yeah. Us, too. Since we collect it off the tin roof.

ELLEN

Dad calls it Gene Autry water. So much radio in it that it sings.

(Webb hoists the bottle up, takes the rubber nipple into his mouth.)

Don't, Webb. I believe you.

(Webb takes a drink, wipes his lips on his shirt sleeve.)

WEBB

(Handing her back the bottle.)

I ain't scared a nothin'. Not water. Not white horses. I'm gonna run off 'n be a rodeo clown or ride broncs. That's better'n sittin' round here the next time the gover'ment sets off one a their balls of fire, better'n watchin' the dead-wagon come for all the blistered sheep 'n cows.

(The sound of radio static comes up loud. That is then overlaid by the sound of desert wind, and, finally, comes the music of bone on bone, bone whistles and hide drums. Webb and Ellen, taking their things, exit. Almost at the same time, Frosty and the god of death appear, to continue their dance of seduction. Both move with spasmodic steps, groping for each other, eyes rolled upward, and they move in and out of contorted embraces. They dance to the music, to the time-lapse projections of photographs of the atom bomb detonation at the Trinity Test Site. And like the nuclear cloud, they boil upward and outward, and they fall to ground together, fused in green, green-grey glassy light, sweaty. The god of death exits in a jerky dance of strobelight-like sensuality, leaving Frosty on the ground, and she rocks back and forth, as if seeking the womb, as if seeking a hole in the

ground. Then, in zig zags and curves of movement, and in leaps, and with snouts cautiously checking the breeze, the coyote dancers come to Frosty. The coyote dancers cover her with a black shroud, and they carry her to an up-stage platform-mesa, where they leave her to rest, to sleep and dream, and, as the music fades, the coyote dancers exit. There is a sudden crash of thunder, a crack of lighting is seen.

Thorn enters with a flashlight, searching. He spots Frosty, who appears to be asleep or dead.)

THORN

Frosty.

(Pause.)

Frosty, babe.

(Pause.)

It's me. It's Thorn.

(Frosty rolls to where she can see Thorn, covering herself up with the black shroud. She sits up.)

FROSTY

I have a message.

THORN

Okay, babe.

FROSTY

Instructions.

THORN

Come on down.

FROSTY

From Geronimo.

THORN

Lemme take you to a safe, warm place.

-47-

FROSTY
Don't let it happen to you.

THORN
What? What happen?

FROSTY
The fake law. The badge.

THORN
You can't stay up there.

FROSTY
You're the one who needs to listen.

THORN
I'm listening, Frosty.

FROSTY
I have the instructions.

THORN
Okay.

FROSTY
How we take back the desert.

THORN
We'll do it. Lemme get you to the clinic.

FROSTY
Place arrowheads in water.

(Frosty stands, one shoulder
and arm outside the shroud.)

THORN
You want me to climb up? Help you down?

FROSTY
Geronimo says to place arrowheads in water.

THORN
Yeah. In water. Just step towards me.
(He beckons to her.)

FROSTY
Wash your head in that water. In the arrowhead water.

THORN
We'll do it, together.

-48-

FROSTY

Wash your head in the arrowhead water.

THORN

Sure, babe. But we need to sleep. We get these spells.

FROSTY

Then we pray to the god of stone, for wisdom, for scalps.

THORN

That's the way we'll do it.

(Thorn leaps up to her, pulls a pair of handcuffs and tries to cuff Frosty. She fights him off and escapes, leaving Thorn falling to the ground. Webb enters laughing, followed by Sage. Webb sits down near Thorn.)

WEBB

(To Thorn.)

I'm stoked, man, ready.

THORN

We got some problems here. I'm gonna need your help.

WEBB

Naw.

SAGE

(To Thorn.)

Webb raided my den.

THORN

(To Webb.)

That true?

WEBB

It's time to go on down the road. To rodeo. Forever young!

SAGE

(To Thorn.)

You want to be our law, then do something!

WEBB

(Looking at Sage, but to Thorn.)

Who you gonna believe? Me or a girl who eats mice 'n sick calves? Me or a girl who runs down little fuzzy bunnies?

-49-

(Sage leaps, growling, snarling at Webb. Thorn pulls her off.)

SAGE

Some night I'll come to you...

WEBB

(To Sage.)

Great.

SAGE

And bite my way through your windpipe!

THORN

(To Webb.)

You know what you did was wrong, don't you?

WEBB

Write me up a bill! Shit, I'll pay for it.

THORN

(To Sage.)

That good enough?

SAGE

No.

THORN

But that's what I'm gonna do.

(Thorn takes a pencil from a pocket, and a scrap of paper, and he begins to write.)

SAGE

I don't want money.

THORN

Damages?

SAGE

He ate food.

WEBB

Some scrawny chickens.

SAGE

And an apple pie Ellen gave me.

WEBB

It was really meant for me.

-50-

THORN

Okay.

(He finished writing.)

I reckon a restitution payment of twenty buck is fair.

WEBB

That's way too much. There ain't a chicken that's worth twenty, not even to some half-coyote mutant girl.

THORN

(Hands Webb the paper.)

And it covers the fine, too.

(Pause.)

Pay up, Webb!

WEBB

(First eating the paper.)

Yep, it was delicious. The chicken. The pie. The bill. This kind of food, taken in the great outdoors...

SAGE

(To Webb.)

I'm gonna eat you, cook you first!

WEBB

(To Thorn)

You should take Frosty to Sage's den for dinner sometime; make lots of mutant babies and bring them, too. By then Sage will make club sandwiches outta the mice. The Rabbits are always fresh, excellent. Just wash it all down with beer.

THORN

Webb, gimme some money for Sage!

WEBB

Actually, my rodeo money is all gone.

SAGE

Give him peyote, Thorn. Make him vomit it all up.

WEBB

But like the rest of us, I got money comin' Yep. I got two-grand comin'. When we do the annual test at Trinity. When we drink the life-extender shit. Gover'ment money. Reparations money. That's where I got it comin' from. Just like you two. Treasury Department green. But, you know, like the gover'ment is always late.

THORN

You ain't got a dime?

-51-

WEBB

Naw, I figured you could sport us to some entry fees, hoss.
Let's rodeo.

THORN

You go into Sage's home and take food and don't replace it
or pay for it?

WEBB

I was showin' my desperation for affection.

(To Sage.)

Don't you feel you should feed the ones you love?

SAGE

Love? You run from love, Webb.

WEBB

At least we have a common past. That's almost like love.

(A cloud covers the sun: that kind of light. Webb, Sage and Thorn look up. The music begins; bones rattled against each other, the sound of bone whistles and then hide drums. Frosty, naked with her black shroud, dances before them. The god of death swirls before Frosty a couple of times in a series of spasmodic stumbles and gropes at her, then swirls by himself and departs. Frosty dances in halts and starts, contorted, seemingly disfigured, stopping momentarily to sing the following incantation.)

FROSTY

Other world. Other World.
The Shadow People.
The Vapor Children.
Other World. Other World.

Other World. Fire World.
We burn on El Camino Real.
Burn on El Camino Real.
Fire World. Other World.

Death God I am here.
Death God fetch my soul.
Spirits, Brothers...
Spirits, Sisters...
Death God, I am here...

(The dance and the incantation
has induced sleep-- Frosty is
barely awake. The others
watch as she sags to the
ground. The music softens,
fades, but stays.)

I am a White Hair.
A White Hair.
A child of two suns.
Child of Vapor.

(All three go to Frosty, but
Sage motions them away after a
beat. Webb and Thorn step
back. Sage helps Frosty up,
and they slowly, in a weaving
dance, exit. The music ends.)

WEBB

I got a memory. You think I got a memory?

THORN

Later.

(Thorn starts to follow after
the women, but he is blocked
by Webb.)

WEBB

I remember everything I see, everything I hear, everything I
read.

THORN

Frosty needs me.

-53-

WEBB

Nobody needs you!

THORN

She does!

WEBB

Rinse that outta your head.

THORN

(Shoving Webb.)

Move!

WEBB

(Blocking him.)

The only people who need you are the ones you can still help.

THORN

That's what I'm doing.

WEBB

Man, we can't help each other. All we can do is watch each other's mutations.

THORN

We have to rise outta that.

WEBB

That's what I'm tellin' you.

(Pause.)

Listen: Calf Horse. Eleven-year-old black gelding. Solid. Sound. Seasoned. Lots of speed. Stops Hard. Very Athletic. Scores Excellent. \$6,000. No bad habits. \$6,000. Has hauled college and PRCA. (505) 836-6161.

THORN

No more.

WEBB.

You don't like that event no more? Great. How's this: For Sale. Two Good Practice Bareback Horses. And one bucking machine. Will deliver anywhere in the Southwest.

THORN

Where in the hell do you...

WEBB

Remember? Sure I remember. I make a mental note.

THORN

Never again! That's not me.

-54-

WEBB

I remember the ads. Think about 'em is what I do. Keeps my mind off the bomb. You 'n me: we rode off with our annual money. Almost twenty years ago. Team roping. Dancin' with the buckle bunnies.

THORN

And no friends.

WEBB

We had each other.

THORN

And no one else to talk to. If I talked, I'd betray the girls. They're back here. They want to live. Out there we have to keep quiet, drift when others age, so no one figures out who we are. We don't make friends out there. We had the bomb for breakfast. I can't explain that.

WEBB

Let's sell the story for a million bucks.

THORN

I'll kill you if you do that.

WEBB

Because you feel grateful?

THORN

Yeah. They didn't know what they were doing. No one knew about fall-out or radiation. They came out and found us, took care of us.

WEBB

Only five of us are alive. Count the White Hairs that're dead.

THORN

But you and me, we're alive. The life extension project...

WEBB

We're lab rats! Sure they feel guilty. We play on their guilt. Why don't we ever talk about how the Brits nuked Australia? Are we the only disaster?

THORN

But we got cared for!

WEBB

Is that a fact? At what cost? Through the fifties we said nothin' when they bombed Nevada. Fall-out? Here it was nothin'. But I saw it up in Utah, 1953. I'm on a ropin' horse and I catch the smell. I know right off what's comin' down. What'd we earn from Trinity, a special dispensation from the truth? You shoulda seen it in Utah: thousands a dead sheep and the Feds saying, "It ain't radiation." Hell, Thorn, the lesions, the beta burns -- they were the same as they were on the sheep here. Why do we keep silent?

THORN

And your only answer is roping calves, getting drunk, and getting layed.

WEBB

You enjoyed it.

THORN

There wasn't a woman out there I'd fuck again.

WEBB

Oh no?

THORN

Not even with King Kong's dick.

WEBB

I'm living for all those who died!

THORN

And you hand out fake names to all the women you meet. You ever go back to those small rodeo towns, see if you've made any babies? You ever check to see how many mutations of you are out there? Born without eyes. Born with extra nipples. Born with withered arms. You ever check?

(Pause.)

Look at me, Webb. I ain't the one who bombed us with fall-out. Why can't you be one of us? Why can't you help us help each other? You want to sell us out, expose the whole deal we cut to stay alive? That's stupid. The deal we cut was to help everyone in this country.

WEBB

Don't run that ol' red, white 'n blue up the flag pole for me. All we ever got done was keeping crazy researchers off the streets.

THORN

You don't think they're going to use what they learned on us to help tens of thousands of people some day?

-56-

WEBB

Is that what you think?

THORN

Yes.

WEBB

Then why haven't they done it? One question, Thorn: are we messed up genetically from the radiation, or from the life extenders? You know what my guess is? My guess is that the illness from the fall-out wasn't so bad for us, and that's why we lived. They've lied to us all along.

THORN

Nobody's lied. You can see your medical records anytime you want.

WEBB

They lied. The only reason the life extenders work on us is that we were fairly healthy to start with.

THORN

Webb, you had radiation sickness. I saw it. I was sick, too. There's been no conspiracy. The life extenders don't cause mutations; radiation does. You've got it all twisted.

WEBB

Only the horses twist out there, Thorn.

(Pause.)

Think: freedom is only out there.

THORN

(Starting to exit.)

You want to sell us out. For all the money. I gotta ask myself, why? For the power of it. You have a power desire.

WEBB

Power? Not me. You maybe. You're the one who got a badge from the Feds. Think! Why after forty-five years do they give one of us a badge? What are they up to now? No, I'm not the power hungry one.

(Grabs Thorn.)

I say you and me, we give ourselves to the rush of adrenalin. We go play rodeo. We have some fun. Can't you have some fun? Can't you learn to enjoy life?

(Ellen enters.)

-57-

ELLEN

(To Webb.)

Ask me those questions.

(Thorn exits.)

The future questions.

WEBB

In the future, you and me?

ELLEN

That was the promise. Don't run from it.

WEBB

I ain't runnin'. I'm ridin'.

ELLEN

(Hands him his riggin'.)

Shake your face for the gate 'n go.

WEBB

Then pull the gate.

ELLEN

I can give you up.

(Webb exits. Ellen starts to follow him, but she is stopped by Sage.)

SAGE

Learn to live alone.

ELLEN

Alone? You don't live alone.

SAGE

Then learn to live with a four-legged.

ELLEN

I'd be lonely. I can admit it.

(From off in the distance, there comes a rising ululation, a single coyote's call.)

Sage, I can't live in abandoned cars and caves. I need more than calf carcasses, lizards, snakes and grasshoppers to eat.

SAGE

You prefer government commodities? Canned pineapple juice? Powdered eggs and potatoes? Where's your dignity?

-58-

ELLEN

I have dignity. The government is paying me off!

SAGE

You like canned pork, canned beef? Not me. I'll take it on the hoof, hot and fresh.

ELLEN

And mice?

SAGE

Hell, you eat mouse food? That damned yellow government cheese.

ELLEN

Sage, I'm not an animal. I'm a young woman!

SAGE

(Pause.)

We're not young. We're only purchased.

(Pause.)

Join us. Learn to run on barefeet. Give up on Webb. He can't change.

ELLEN

I can change him.

(Pause.)

You and me... We used to be close.

SAGE

We are.

ELLEN

Not since you ran away to the coyotes.

SAGE

It was to bring something back. I always come back.

ELLEN

Bring back? What do you bring back?

SAGE

Ask for something.

ELLEN

You don't have anything.

SAGE

Ask.

ELLEN

Webb.

-59-

SAGE
Will you be pleased? Are you sure?

ELLEN
Make him stay.

SAGE
You're the one who has to take that step.

ELLEN
But you just said...

SAGE
I may be able to help.
(Pause.)
But then you help me. Help me get this sickness out of us,
this sickness of youth.

ELLEN
No! It's all we have.
(Sage begins to exit.)
Wait!

SAGE
(Returning.)
Spin a web.

ELLEN
What?

SAGE
Spin a web like the spider.

ELLEN
Isn't there another way?

SAGE
Like a food or medicine?

ELLEN
Yes?

SAGE
See? What have I been warning us about? Look what's become
of you.

ELLEN
Help me, please.

SAGE
(Pause.)
My way may not be right for you.

-60-

ELLEN

I'll do it.

SAGE

Maybe.

(Starts to exit.)

You'll have to steal something sacred.

(Webb drags on Frosty. Frosty is in a flowing black shroud and her face and exposed skin are whitened with rice powder. Frosty is trying to dance and Webb is preventing her from doing so.)

WEBB

Cut it out.

FROSTY

Leave me alone!

WEBB

Stop or you will die.

(Sage exits.)

ELLEN

(Going to Webb.)

What are you doing to her?

WEBB

(To Ellen.)

We have to restrain her.

(Frosty breaks loose and goes into her dance. The bone on bone music comes up. As the beat from the hide drums intensifies, we hear thunder, and suddenly there's lightning. The god of death enters and dances with Frosty. Webb takes Ellen aside and shields her.)

ELLEN

She wants to die.

(The dance continues.)

-61-

WEBB

(To Ellen.)

Go get Thorn.

(Ellen does not move.)

Get outta here!

(Sage and the coyote dancers enter. Sage joins Frosty in her dance, mirrors it and slows its pace to almost a freeze. At the same time, the coyote dancers encircle the god of death and do a coyote dance, which includes lunges and nipping and snapping at the god of death. The coyote dancers drive off the god of death. Webb rushes to Frosty and holds her as she begins to sag to the ground. Frosty regains her will and bursts away from Webb.)

FROSTY

It is coming.

It is coming.

The Other World. The Fire World.

Spirits, Brothers...

Spirits, Sisters...

SAGE

(To Frosty.)

I am your sister!

FROSTY

(Not paying any attention to Sage.)

I am a White Hair.

A White Hair.

A child of two suns.

Child of Vapor.

WEBB

(To Sage.)

We have to take her somewhere safe.

SAGE

(She pulls a leather pouch out from beneath her hides.)

I'll give her something.

-62-

WEBB
(To Sage.)

Is that an upper or a downer?

(Thorn enters.)

THORN
Webb, I want you to go to my place. Consider yourself under arrest.

WEBB
Go to hell.

THORN
I had Frosty secured.

FROSTY
I am in the right moment.

THORN
(To Ellen.)
Take Webb home.

SAGE
(To Frosty.)
I have something for you in my medicine pouch.

THORN
(To Sage.)
What are you talking about? I'm the person all things have to be cleared with.

FROSTY
It smells funny here. It's the fall-out from the bomb.

ELLEN
(To Frosty.)
No, Frosty. That was long ago.

FROSTY
The fall-out will blister us. I can smell it coming. Strontium. Half life: twenty-eight years.

SAGE
(To Frosty.)
Listen to me, Frosty. I have sacred medicine for you. Mesquite beans. Food of the holy coyote.

THORN
(To Sage.)
No. Get away from her.

-63-

WEBB

(To Thorn.)

Lemme drive her up to Santa Fe, to a doc.

SAGE

(To Thorn.)

We agreed. A long time ago. We take care of ourselves. Ourselves alone! These mesquite beans will bring her to her senses.

THORN

(To Sage.)

Are you canine? Are you truly canine? You got fangs? No! It's all bullshit! Are you a coyote? Hardly!

WEBB

(To Thorn.)

Are you through?

THORN

(To Webb.)

You're in the wrong place. I told you to get outta here 'n let me handle things.

WEBB

I'm a White Hair, too.

THORN

But you're always runnin' off, leavin' me to hold the bag.

FROSTY

(Now aware of Webb.)

Are you gonna make us laugh?

WEBB

(Softly, to Frosty.)

Sure, babe.

THORN

I am the authority here.

ELLEN

Who put you in charge, Thorn?

THORN

I cut a deal with the Atomic Energy Commission.

(The others look at him.)

They put me in charge. We're getting out of hand here. We agreed, a long time ago, to go along on this set up together.

-64-

SAGE

(To all but Thorn.)

That's right. Thorn is immune to radioactivity. Sure. He can chew up uranium and spit out china dishes. At least trinitite, huh, Thorn?

(The sound of the bone music comes up softly.)

FROSTY

Geronimo is coming back.

THORN

No, Frosty. That's never gonna happen.

WEBB

(Softly, to Frosty.)

You hear him coming in?

FROSTY

He's riding into Dog Canyon now. I hear the unshod horses.

WEBB

Yeah. I can nearly hear him, too.

THORN

(To Webb.)

Damn you! Don't feed her delusions.

FROSTY

You know the car they gave him?

WEBB

He's driving a car?

FROSTY

The keys to his old Buick: the keys are tied to his horse's mane.

THORN

(To all of them.)

This gathering is illegal! I want everyone to disperse.

ELLEN

Come on, Thorn.

SAGE

I'm outside the law.

THORN

Disperse!

-65-

(Sage opens her pouch and hands Frosty a mesquite bean, but Thorn slaps it out of Frosty's hand and then empties the pouch of beans. Frosty goes to her knees to gather the beans and Thorn kicks her. Webb pulls Thorn away.)

WEBB
(To Thorn.)

That was real weak!

SAGE
(To Thorn.)
Who the hell are you to kick us around?

THORN
(To all of them)
We're only exhibits, experiments. We signed on for that. To live! We're catalog pieces. We have to cooperate. Act right.

WEBB
(Helping Frosty up now.)
And Crazy Horse? Is he with Geronimo?

FROSTY
Only Geronimo. The keys to the Buick... they're on the mane. They reflect two rising suns.

(They freeze, as if in time, and pictures are projected rapidly of Mescalero Apaches around 1900 on their reservation, and of Geronimo.)

THORN
I won't have it! Sage, you have to think about what we're doing. They're gonna keep us young. We can't go nuts now.

FROSTY
(To Sage.)
This bean? This is good?

(Sage nods.)

THORN
(To Frosty.)
Come on, Frosty, go on back where I had you safe.

-66-

(Webb and Frosty and Sage
start chewing mesquite beans.
Thorn goes to Ellen.)

ELLEN
(To Thorn.)

Everything's gonna be okay.

FROSTY
(To Webb.)

Now I don't know.

WEBB
What?

FROSTY
About Geronimo.

THORN
Geronimo's dead and gone. No Santa Claus. No Easter bunny.
No ghosts, Frosty. Geronimo is packed in Oklahoma dirt.
Geronimo's just a pile of dust. It's simple. Science.
That's all there is.

FROSTY
I heard him. I heard Geronimo's horses. Sometimes I hear
the hooves clear as my own footsteps.

(Lightning. The god of death
comes dancing, spinning, arms
outstretched as if to hold up
a mushroom cloud. He spins.
While the others avoid him,
Frosty begins to dance as the
music rises. She is seemingly
liquid in her movements, mov-
ing like a barn swallow, flu-
id, yet agitated and quick to
change direction. She is a
bird, and woman. They twist
and jerk in and out of embrac-
es born of pain. Fields of
lightning illuminate the dance
until projections of the first
atomic bomb explosions flash
and flash and flash.

BLACK OUT

INTERMISSION

ACT THREE

(We hear the desert wind. Darkness gives way to blue-grey morning light. Now we hear the sound of coyotes briefly, and then the god of death dances on, dragging a metal trap. He blows on a predator whistle. Bone music fades in and out. He blows on the whistle again as he dances a Butoh dance, and from a distance comes the high-pitched response of the coyotes. He dances and blows the whistle, and now Sage enters. His dance has a hypnotic effect on Sage, and she joins the dance, almost seduced into stepping into a leghold trap. As Webb enters, the god of death exits. Webb has a rope and ropes the trap, snapping it, and its loud metallic sound echoes. Suddenly out of her trance, Sage looks at the trap.)

SAGE

Don't ever set traps again. Not around here.

WEBB

(Coiling his rope.)

Good thing I came along.

SAGE

You ever do anything not rooted in showing off?

(She starts to exit.)

WEBB

(He grabs her.)

Look at yourself! Pellet gun scars. Look at this one: I bet someone tried to skin you out. You show off for some hunter? That hunter musta loved it. Bet if I check your legs, I'll find a trap scar. If you was a real coyote, you woulda chewed through one a your legs.

(Sage snarls.)

Yeah, mean coyote bitch.

(Sage growls, tries to bite him.)

Okay, you win.

(Sage circles Webb, looks for an opening. He avoids her lunges. The bone music returns and Sage and Webb freeze. Escorted by the god of death, Frosty enters, religiously holding aloft a stainless steel canister: they weave around each other, moving to the upstage mesa, where Frosty sits cross-legged with the canister in front of her. Webb goes to Frosty as the god of death exits. Sage, too, approaches Frosty.)

FROSTY

I am a White Hair.
A White Hair.
A child of two suns.
Child of Atomic Fall-out.

SAGE

Can I climb up there with you?

FROSTY

Death God I am here.
Death God fetch my soul.

WEBB

Frosty, what do you have?

FROSTY

Shoot your arrow.
First time the bird jumps.

I am here, open-armed.
First time the bird jumps.
Shoot your arrow.
The bird is weary.
The bird is weary.

WEBB

Frosty?

FROSTY

(Now looks at Webb, as if coming out of a trance.)

Webb. The rodeo clown.

WEBB

Sure, that's me.

-69-

SAGE

Frosty, I'm coming up there.

FROSTY

No, I have to be alone.

WEBB

Show us what you have.

FROSTY

(Lifts up the canister.)

This is my womb.

WEBB

(To Sage.)

Let's hope that ain't plutonium.

FROSTY

My baby is inside.

SAGE

Frosty, where did you get that?

FROSTY

My baby. Geronimo is coming back. Through me.

WEBB

Put that thing down.

FROSTY

I was dancing. For us. For you, Webb. We are pilgrims on the desert.

SAGE

(To Webb.)

Move off. I'll get her down.

(Thorn enters wearing a crown of trinitite. Webb and Sage go to him.)

SAGE

(To Thorn.)

Maybe you can talk Frosty down.

THORN

Soon as Ellen gets here, we'll elect a leader.

FROSTY

A leader will come.

-70-

WEBB

(To Thorn.)

You got a badge. Now you got a crown. What the hell you need an election for?

THORN

We need one spokesman.

WEBB

I'm supposed to vote for you, have you represent me?

THORN

If you can get Sage and Ellen to vote for you, you take over. But we can't split up. If we split up, no one will feel responsible for us.

WEBB.

I'm packin' my war bag after the dose.

THORN

No way, Webb. No more leaving the rest of us hostage.

SAGE

(To Thorn.)

Let him run away from home.

THORN

He's going to run to the TV and magazine people.

WEBB

Join me, Thorn.

THORN

You can't make that decision alone. All of us have a vote. Let's elect one spokesman.

WEBB

(To Thorn.)

Who you gonna represent. Genetic engineers? The brain dissection squad?

(To Sage.)

When you die, you want 'em to slice you up, divide you into a dozen jars?

THORN

We already signed on for that. What they learn from us will help millions.

WEBB

Ain't gonna help a soul.

-71-

THORN

(To Sage.)

He's gonna sell us out. Then we'll get cut off. We'll have to sell ourselves as freaks. Atomic freaks. Sage-the-coyote-girl. Circus time.

SAGE

(To Thorn.)

I don't want another dose.

THORN

Ellen and I do!

WEBB

Thorn, we can stay young, but not without medicine. Let's crack out on a couple of rank bulls. That's what being young is. This sit-around and wait-for-the-dose routine, that's old age.

FROSTY

(Lifts up the canister.)

This is my womb.

THORN

(To Webb.)

We're White Hairs. That makes up kin. You're stuck with that.

WEBB

Thorn, I got white hair because I didn't wash fall-out from my scalp. None of us washed! A simple hosing off woulda taken care a the hair change! That does not make us kin!

THORN

See this crown on my head?

SAGE

We gonna open a theme park?

THORN

One of us has to wear it, to show we'll never forget. And they'll keep treating us right. They'll never forget they owe us.

(Very brief pause.)

Webb, be rational. We're going to live a long time. We need security.

FROSTY

I will give birth to Geronimo. He's coming back.

THORN

Frosty, come home with me.

-72-

FROSTY

Death is giving me a gift.

THORN

You'll get better. I promise.

(Ellen enters.)

ELLEN

No medicine. It's over.

SAGE

Good.

THORN

Who said? That can't be. I'm supposed to get it today.

ELLEN

Frosty went to the labs. She busted up the place. She has one of the frozen brains.

THORN

No, no... They have security there.

ELLEN

Stole it right out of the freezer. One of our parents. Maybe a friend.

THORN

(To Webb.)

Now you see, don't you?

WEBB

(To Thorn.)

We shoulda been with Frosty.

SAGE

I'll get it from her.

(Sage climbs up with Frosty,
puts an arm around her.)

THORN

(To Webb.)

They ain't gonna let us just walk off. We got to go along with them. You got to trust me. We'll have to plead with them. I can work it out. We can cooperate again.

(Thorn approaches Frosty and
Sage.)

Frosty, hand down the canister.

-73-

FROSTY
(To Sage.)

Want to see my baby?

(Frosty takes the lid off, and the canister slips out of her hands. Thorn fails to catch it. The brain falls out.)

THORN
(Looking at the brain.)

Shit.

WEBB

Let's bury it.

THORN
(Kneeling.)

I better pick it up.

WEBB
Treat it like it's your mother's brain! Cowboy-up!

ELLEN
That's the sacred thing. I was supposed to steal something sacred.

SAGE
I didn't mean that.

THORN
(Quickly scooping dirt and placing it over the brain.)
Bet I live to regret this.

FROSTY
My baby...

THORN
(Stands, turns to Frosty.)
We'll work that out.

ELLEN
(To Webb.)
Guess you'll be gassin' it out of here.

WEBB
It's better to be from where you're going, not where you're from.

ELLEN
Bull rope 'n bell?

-74-

WEBB

(Takes the crown off Thorn's
head and puts it on.)

What a gimmick! I'm the King of Trinitite. The Plutonium
Kid.

ELLEN

I'll be leaving, too.

SAGE

Ellen, you can stay with me. I'd be willing to try a house
again.

WEBB

Ellen, Sage... Look, I'll hold off on the story. You two go
to the media first. Tell how you stood with the dolls under
the fall-out. Tell about the government deal. You'll be
rich for awhile.

SAGE

Not me.

WEBB

Ellen, talk to the TV people! The deal here is through!

(Thorn quietly exits.)

ELLEN

(Embracing Webb.)

I can get along without you. That's the picture, right?

FROSTY

Thorn went to see death.

(Pause.)

I am called.

(She starts to dance, but she
is exhausted, and Webb easily
stops her.)

Called to dance. To bring back what used to be.

WEBB

(Holding onto Frosty.)

Let go of it.

FROSTY

My baby is buried.

(Frosty begins to weep on
Webb's chest.)

SAGE

Frosty, it's time to make something new.

FROSTY

I hear it, the dancing one, the dark one.

(She starts to pull away, but
Webb hold her.)

I have to go, far away.

WEBB

(To Frosty.)

Refuse it.

(Webb holds onto Frosty, and the bone music rises. The god of death dances on, tries to get Frosty to dance with him; she tries but is restrained by Webb. Ellen and Sage huddle together and hide their eyes. But then Sage lets out a high-pitched coyote howl and the coyote dancers enter. Sage and the coyote dancers dart in and out at the god of death, becoming more aggressive, snapping and growling. The god of death darts at them, but they evade him. Frustrated, the god of death bites himself as he dances, and the coyote dancers drive him off and they, too, exit. Frosty kneels and scoops more dirt over the brain/baby.)

SAGE

(Kneeling, too, to comfort
Frosty.)

Don't invite him again.

(Thorn enters with a large
beaker filled with a dark
liquid.)

THORN

All we gotta do is guess what the dose is. That'll work for a year.

SAGE

No more!

(Webb touches Ellen's cheek.)

-76-

THORN

How about the rest of you?

ELLEN

(She goes to the beaker, looks at it.)

Three gulps, right?

SAGE

Hasn't that stuff cost us enough?

THORN

We'll all drink it, and stick together.

SAGE

We can be together, but no more doses!

ELLEN

As long as we're young, we have hope. We can hope they'll fix up our damage.

WEBB

No more for me.

FROSTY

(To Thorn.)

And we can try again, to have our baby?

THORN

Yeah, Frosty, drink some!

(Thorn hands the beaker to Frosty. She looks into it.)

FROSTY

He's inside! The dark one!

(She trembles, starts to dance, and lets go of the beaker.)

This is the life I don't need!

(Thorn rushes to Frosty and holds her.)

ELLEN

(Going down on her hands and knees, as if to lick or suck up the liquid.)

Oh no!

-77-

(Webb pulls Ellen up. Thorn
and Frosty exit hand and
hand.)

SAGE

(To Webb.)

I'll take care of Ellen. You're free.

WEBB?

(To Ellen.)

Come with me.

ELLEN

You don't want me.

WEBB

(Takes off his crown, tosses
it to Sage, who looks at it
and puts it down.)

See... You make me feel drunk, like a newborn calf on first
oxygen.

ELLEN

Is that love?

(Webb nods.)

WEBB

(To Sage.)

Come with us.

SAGE

This is home.

(Webb and Ellen exit, their
love reborn, kissing. The
bone music begins. But it is
overcome by simple guitar
chords. To simple music, Sage
dances alone, but soon she is
joined by the coyote dancers.
They dance to the sound of
guitar, wind, rain, clouds. A
moon goddess appears up on the
mesa, to join their dance. The
colors of light and frost and
fur, and then darkness comes,
slowly, as the music fades.
FADE TO BLACK.)

-78-

SAGE (Her Voice)

We are each other's true family. We'll always be together.

THE END