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*Dramatic Publishing*

# THE ICE WOLF

An Inuit Tale

by

JOANNA H. KRAUS

Originally published in 1963 by New Plays, Inc.,  
under the management of Patricia Whitton Forrest.



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(THE ICE WOLF)

ISBN: 978-0-93272-035-1

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# THE ICE WOLF

A Play for Young People in Three Acts

## CHARACTERS

### STORYTELLER

ANATOU, a girl born to Inuit parents. Her skin is pale and her hair blond; a phenomenon in the village

KARVIK, her father

ARNARQIK, her mother

TARTO, her best friend, a village boy

KIVIOG, Tarto's father

ATATA, an old man of the village but a good hunter

SHIKIKANAQ, a village girl

MOTOMIAK, a village boy

VILLAGER 2, a woman

VILLAGER 2, a man

WOOD GOD, the god of the forest

A BEAVER

A FOX

AN ERMINE

## PLACE AND TIME

The entire action of the play takes place in a small, isolated Inuit village, Little Whale River, and the forest, a few days inland. It is located in the Hudson Bay area of Canada.

The time is long before the missionaries established their settlements, long before white man had been seen. A time when the spirits and the Shaman, or the wise man, ruled.

# Prologue

*It is the end of January. In foreground we see an expanse of white spread out. It is broken in a few places by hillocks which rise up like seal's heads from the plains. There is an atmosphere of cold beauty and awesome space.*

*The STORYTELLER enters on the apron of the stage. He is dressed, as all the Inuits, in the attire of the Hudson Bay Inuits, but somehow there is the quality about him of excitement. He is no ordinary hunter.*

STORYTELLER. Far beyond the world you know—

Of sun, rushing rivers, and trees  
Is the Northland  
Where the winter snow is gray,  
There is no sound of birds  
Nothing but the stillness of space  
Of endless snow  
And endless cold.  
There, the child Anatou was born  
In the village of Little Whale River.  
It was small, beside the sea.  
But the search for food never ended.

*(Lights up on igloo, Inuits in circle, one beating drum, chanting.)*

Aja, I remember. It was one of the coldest nights of the year, so cold the dog team had buried themselves in the snow.

ATATA. And the seal-oil lamps trembled before the Great North wind.

KARVIK. Just before dawn, when the baby came, Karvik had to go out and repair their home. His fingers seemed to freeze at once. Never had there been such a storm in Little Whale River.

*(Lights up on KARVIK cutting a snow block and fitting it into dome.)*

ARNARQIK. Inside, Arnarqik sewed the caribou skins she had chewed. She was making new clothes for Karvik. Only once did she dare to look at the small child beside her wrapped in skins. It was strangely still, strangely quiet. It was unlike any child Arnarqik had ever seen.

STORYTELLER. Atata was at the seal's breathing hole.

*(Lights up on ATATA crouched by breathing hole, poised, ready with harpoon.)*

...waiting...waiting until the seal came up for air. For days there had been no food in Little Whale River. He thought the birth of a new child might bring him luck! Then...he struck with his harpoon!



*(ATATA harpoons seal.)*

ATATA. Aja. Nuliyuk, now everyone will eat!

STORYTELLER. He took the choice bit of meat, the seal's liver, to return to the seal goddess, Nuliyuk. The Shaman, the wise man, had told him to do this so she would feast on it and then remember to send more seals to the hunters of Little Whale River. Atata rushed back. Now there was something to celebrate. A new child, a fresh-caught seal. There would be drum chants and dancing and stories in the long white night.

*(Drum chants begin. They break off abruptly.)*

But there was no singing or dancing.

KARVIK. It was long ago...

ARNARQIK. Just about this time.

STORYTELLER. It was a pale dawn...

ATATA. Like this one...

STORYTELLER. When Anatou was born.

# ACT I

## Scene i

*The interior of KARVIK and ARNARQIK's home in Little Whale River. Masses of thick, heavy caribou skins are spread about. Seal-oil lamps, made of soapstone, light the home.*

*At rise, the sound of dogs howling. A strong wind is blowing. VILLAGERS come in from all sides dressed in their habitual furs. They crawl through the passageway and lights come up on the interior of the igloo. KARVIK and ARNARQIK are seated. Their new child is beside ARNARQIK on a caribou skin not visible from the entrance.*

KARVIK. Welcome! Welcome all of you!

VILLAGER 2. Aja! Your first child. Of course we'd come.  
(*To others.*) We must sing many songs to welcome it.

KIVIIOG. And if it's a man child, Karvik will already have made him a harpoon, a sled, and a whip.

VILLAGER 1. By the next moon he will be able to use them. Wait and see! (*They laugh.*)

VILLAGER 2. Good, he can hunt a seal with us this winter and the caribou next fall. If he's as good a hunter as Karvik, we'll get twice as much.

KIVIOG. And he'll be a companion for my son, Tarto, born under the same moon.

*(They all laugh except KARVIK and ARNARQIK, who are strangely quiet.)*

VILLAGER 1. Karvik! Arnarqik! You are silent. Show us the man child. We've come a long way to see him.

*(ARNARQIK moves slowly.)*

ARNARQIK. It is a girl child...but we are glad.

KARVIK. She will be good.

ARNARQIK. It is true. There is joy in feeling new life come to the great world.

VILLAGER 1. A girl! Ah-ah. That means more care.

VILLAGER 2. And more attention.

KIVIOG. She cannot hunt.

VILLAGERS *(politely)*. But let us see her anyway.

*(ARNARQIK moves away troubled, then points to the caribou skin.)*

ARNARQIK. There, look for yourself.

*(KARVIK has turned away. VILLAGERS crowd around the child, move back abruptly and whirl on KARVIK and ARNARQIK.)*

VILLAGER 1 *(in low horror)*. Her hair is white!

VILLAGER 2. Her face is pale.

KIVIOG. She cannot be an Inuit.

VILLAGER 1. She cannot be one of us!

KARVIK. Of course she is. Her hair will get darker. Wait.

VILLAGER 2. But her face. Look at it. No Inuit child was ever born as pale as that.

VILLAGER 1. She's a devil.

ARNARQIK. No!

VILLAGER 1. She will not live one moon.

ARNARQIK. She will live.

VILLAGER 1. She will bring bad luck.

ARNARQIK. She's only a baby.

KIVIOG. Put her out in the snow now, before she turns the gods against us.

VILLAGER 2. And our stomachs shrink.

VILLAGER 1. And our dishes are empty.

VILLAGER 2. It's happened before. We all know it. Get rid of the child before it's too late.

KIVIOG. She will offend Nuliyuk, the goddess of the seals. Nuliyuk will stay at the bottom of the sea, and keep the seals beside her, and we will all go hungry. Put the child out into the snow or we will die of famine!

ARNARQIK. No! She will be a good Inuit.

VILLAGER 2. Then let her grow up in another village. We don't want her here.

KIVIOG. She doesn't look like us. She won't think like us.

VILLAGER 1. She doesn't belong here.

KARVIK. Then where does she belong? Where should she go?

VILLAGER 1. Put her out in the snow. (*Starts to grab her.*)

ARNARQIK. No! No! No, I can't. Don't you understand? She is our child.

VILLAGER 2. Then leave our village in peace. Don't anger the spirits of Little Whale River.

KARVIK. But this is our village and you are our people. How can we leave it? Wait! She will be like the others. You'll see. She'll sew and cook just as well as any Inuit girl. Better! Arnarqik will teach her.

KIVIOG (*holds up his hands*). Very well. We will watch and wait. Perhaps you are right, and we will see her hair and cheeks grow darker. But we have no gifts or good wishes to welcome a white-faced child—a white-faced girl child!

(*VILLAGERS exit. ARNARQIK tries to run after them.*)

ARNARQIK. Come back! Please wait. Don't go yet. Oh, Karvik, what will we do?

KARVIK (*slowly*). Her hair should be as dark as the raven's wing.

ARNARQIK. It is as white as the caribou's belly. Karvik, what if they are right? She is different. Karvik, why is her hair pale? Why doesn't she cry? She is so still! It's not natural.

KARVIK. She is frightened already. The Fair One will have a hard journey. (*Looks out the passageway.*) Arnarqik, the villagers spoke wisely. (*Looks for a long time at his wife.*) She would never know. It would not hurt if we put her in the snow now.

ARNARQIK. No, Karvik! You mustn't ask me to.

KARVIK. But if we leave, will the next village think she looks more like an Inuit?

ARNARQIK (*shakes her head*). No, she is Anatou, the Fair One—she will not change. But I will teach her, Karvik. She will be a good Inuit girl!

KARVIK. But will they ever think she is like the others?

ARNARQIK. Yes. Yes. Of course they will. Let us stay here. Who knows what is beyond the snow?

KARVIK. Then we must be strong. We must teach Anatou to be strong. Only then will our home be her home and our friends her friends. It won't be easy, Arnarqik.

(*ARNARQIK is beside the baby.*)

ARNARQIK. Oh Karvik, I couldn't leave her. Not like that! (*Abruptly she changes.*) Look, Karvik...she is smiling. (*Picks her up.*) Oh, Karvik, we mustn't let them hurt her. We must protect her.

KARVIK. Sing, Arnarqik, sing the morning song. Bring Anatou luck. She will have a hard journey.

ARNARQIK (*sits, sings or chants*).

I rise up from rest  
Moving swiftly as the raven's wing  
I rise up to greet the day  
Wo-wa  
My face is turned from dark of night  
My gaze toward the dawn  
Toward the whitening dawn.

(*Lights fade.*)

STORYTELLER. But her hair did not grow dark as the raven's wing. Instead, each day she grew fairer. They called her the "different one," and when the blinding

snow swept across the North or when the hunters returned with empty sleds, the villagers whispered, “It’s Anatou. She’s the one.”