The Zuni Man-Woman

A DOCUMENTARY DRAMA

BY WILL ROSCOE

The Zuni Man-Woman

BACKGROUND

In 1879, an expedition sponsored by the U.S. government traveled to the Southwest to collect artifacts and study the Zunis, a Pueblo Indian tribe in western New Mexico. On the expedition were two individuals destined to become leaders in the new discipline of anthropology — Matilda Coxe Stevenson and Frank Hamilton Cushing. Both were in many respects nonconformists, at odds with the prevailing values and social roles of their time. But their ideas about anthropology, and their ways of practicing it, were profoundly different. They became lifelong rivals. In the end, Cushing and Stevenson were profoundly changed by their experiences with the Zunis; and they profoundly changed the lives of the Zunis.

Two key members of the tribe were Heluta, governor of the village, and We'wha, a man who dressed as a woman, occupying a traditional third gender role. The relationships Cushing and Stevenson formed with Heluta and We'wha reveal the complex dynamics of intercultural contact — the understandings and misunderstandings, the sympathies and the prejudices, the unintended consequences. As their lives reveal living in a multicultural world is a daunting challenge for the simple reason that human relationships, which are always complex, are involved along with differences of knowledge and power.

The play is set in Washington, D.C. and Zuni, New Mexico in the years between 1879 and 1914.

CHARACTERS

Old Matilda Stevenson = Young "Tilly" Stevenson — one of the first women in the science of anthropology
James Stevenson — Matilda's husband, leader of the expedition
We'wha — a Zuni *lhamana* or man-woman
Frank Hamilton Cushing — fellow anthropologist and rival of Matilda Stevenson
Heluta — governor of Zuni
Robert Tapeya (= We'wha) — a contemporary Native American and graduate student

Minor

Emily Cushing = Clara True
Washington women (Mrs. Atkins, Mrs. Carlisle, Mrs. Logan) = Zuni women
Major Benjamin Tucker
Senator John A. Logan
3 reporters = Zuni young men = American soldiers

PRODUCTION NOTES

I envision the stage being subdivided into at least three areas, with scene changes accomplished by dimming one are and lighting another. I believe the settings — the village of Zuni and Washington, D.C. — can be established with simple (and easily moved) flats and props. Rather than attempting historically accurate reconstructions, this can be done of stylizations of native and American designs and images. Given the documentary nature of the play, projected slides of historical images might be used to evoke the old Zuni pueblo or 1880s Washington, D.C.

The play is structured in a cinematic way, with fairly quick scene changes. At certain points both Matilda Stevenson and Cushing address the audience directly, as if they were giving a lecture or talk. Often there is an explicit contrast between what they say in these speeches and what they've just done or are about to do. In some cases, action continues to happen on stage, while they are speaking. For example, to portray We'wha's visit in Washington, Matilda and Cushing read newspaper accounts, while We'wha appears in scenes described. Here I suggest using the style of the "tableau," a popular, dramatic form of the time, in which actors pose in dramatic, motionless scenes, the only action being the hustle and bustle as actors move from one pose to the next and then freeze into place.

PROLOGUE

Scene 1: The death of Frank Hamilton Cushing

Setting: 1914, a ranch house outside of Santa Fe, New Mexico. An old woman is stumbling around in the dark. We hear her mumbling and the sound of clinking glass.

Matilda: Clara! . . . Goddammit. . . . Where are you?

*

The home of Frank and Emily Cushing in Washington, D.C. While Emily speaks, Frank takes pinches of food from the various dishes, puts them into a small bowl, and prays.

Emily: The grocers' bill is due this week, Frank. You will need to sign a check for it. And Mr. Townsend came over to say that if we don't prune the tree it's likely to come down in the next storm, and it will probably . . . Frank . . . Must you perform these pagan rituals at the dinner table . . . it's so messy . . . and when you do it in public it's embarrassing.

Cushing [*quietly*]: Receive, my ancestors, and eat. By means of your knowledge, bring your hearts alive. Return to us the waters we need, the seeds of the earth, the means of fulfilling our roads.

*

The Stevenson ranch house.

Matilda: Clara . . . is that you?

Robert: Mrs. Stevenson?

Matilda: Goddammit, where are the glasses.

*

The Cushing home. Dinner has resumed. As Cushing tells the following story he becomes increasingly animated, acting out the various parts.

Cushing: Anyway, Emily, here is the best part.

Emily: Yes, Frank [*she has heard the story before*].

Cushing: Major Powell finally sent the old bag a telegram demanding that either she deliver the manuscript or repay the government the fees she had been paid and turn over Colonel Stevenson's original notes—which of course don't exist. Well, you could feel the air being

sucked out of Washington as she filled up her lungs and started marching down to the Bureau. Can't you see her Emily? Her eye clamped down on that monacle, busom heaving, fists shaking . . .

Emily: Frank, you told me this part . . . .

Cushing: In she comes, still clutching the telegram in her hand. Mrs. Colonel Stevenson, widow of the lamented James Stevenson, co-founder of the Bureau of Ethnology (she says), Washington socialite, scientist extraordinaire. She throws open the door to the Major's office and bellows, "Major Powell you are a goddamned liar." Well, the old man is outraged, but he can't bring himself to raise his voice to a woman. So he just stands there sputtering I- I- I- I-. Meanwhile, Windbags is just warming up. She goes all the way back to the beginning, to 1879. Every injustice, every affront, every slight — and, of course, everything she and the Colonel did for the Bureau. Then suddenly the Major grabs at his throat. . . .

At this moment Cushing chokes on a fish bone. He can't breathe or speak. At first Emily thinks it's part of the story.

Emily: Yes, Frank. The Major had a conniption fit and was carried out on a stretcher and Mrs. Stevenson had to be picked up and removed from the offices. Frank? . . . Frank?

*

A room in the Zuni pueblo. A Zuni song comes up. We'wha is grinding corn and Stevenson is taking notes with her back to the audience. We'wha stops singing to explain to Stevenson the meaning of the song, even as she continues to grind. The work is hard and We'wha is out of breath.

We'wha: The song is for rain, a prayer for rain. I sing about butterflies, dragonflies, flowers — everything beautiful and pretty. The way the world looks after it rains. Fresh and green. . .

*

As Cushing gasps for air Emily bends over him. Stevenson rises from the corn grinding scene and moves to the scene with Cushing. She is holding a large book. She takes Emily's place so that as Cushing gasps for air he looks up to see, not his wife, but his life-long rival. Stevenson starts berating him. He is unable to respond.

Matilda: Frank Hamilton Cushing, choking to death on a fishbone. Who would have believed it? But it's fact. Historical fact. Of course, you know what the Zunis will say. "Cushy stole our sacred offerings, and so his road was cut short." Meanwhile, your great monograph sits on your desk unfinished. And you had all the advantages. Powell fawned over you. Chief ethnologist on a U.S. government expedition at the age of twenty. Fame on the lecture circuit. Your hair-brained digging expeditions paid for by rich Boston lesbians. Thomas Eakins painted your portrait. I had to live on the pittances Powell doled out whenever I

turned in a chapter. You made anthropology into a circus, and the world came to watch. Well, my report is finished. “The Zuni Indians: Their Mythology, Esoteric Fraternities, and Ceremonies.” 634 pages plus index. *This* is anthropology. Science. Not wishful thinking, not pipedreams. Facts.

She slams the book onto his chest and the weight causes him to collapse.

Cushing: She’s a witch!

With the book pressing down on him, Cushing expires.

Scene 2: Interview with an anthropologist

Stevenson ranch house, 1914. We see a silhouette in Stevenson’s doorway. The profile is that of We’wha, and Stevenson gasps.

Robert [*off-stage*]: Mrs. Stevenson?

Matilda: Who is it?

The lights come up and we see a very androgynous native person in contemporary dress—a suit and tie but also with long braids, earrings in boths ears, and turquoise and silver jewelry.

Robert: Mrs. Stevenson, it’s Robert Tapeya. I’m a graduate student from Berkeley. Remember, I e-mailed you last month about an interview?

Matilda: What the hell are you talking about? It’s 1914. We don’t have e-mail. We don’t even have telephones out here. Do you think I’m a fool young . . . young man.

Robert [*moves into the light*]: But this is a discourse, ma’am. And, as Derrida would say, there are no fixed meanings in language, only the slippery play of one word off another. Authors fling out signifiers like frisbees and the audience catches some, drops others — the rest go over their heads. So, basically, there’s no reason we can’t have this conversation.

Matilda: I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about. But if you will find me a glass and pour me a drink, I’ll tell you about a play I was going to write once. About a maid and a youth who jump off a cliff to appease an angry god.

Robert: Sounds like a Zuni story.

Matilda: What do you know about Zuni?

Robert: I grew up there. My father is Zuni.

Matilda: Mother?

Robert: My mother is Sioux. Dad was a fancy dancer on the pow-wow circuit. I was born on the Rosebud Reservation, but when my mother started drinking Dad brought me back to Zuni. So, I'm kind of a half-breed. But I am FBI.

Matilda: What?

Robert: Full-Blooded Indian.

Matilda: Have you been initiated?

Robert: Well, no. Since my mother isn't Zuni, I don't belong to a Zuni clan.

Matilda: That's a shame.

Robert: Mrs. Stevenson, the reason I'm here is to interview you about your work. Growing up, I heard the old folks tell stories about "Cushy" and "Teems Okya." I've always dreamed of being able to ask you about them.

Matilda: Teems Okya? The Stevenson Woman? In my day, they called me "mother" and gave me the name "Little Flower" — Pu'tsinne Kapa.

Robert: Pu'tsinne Kapa? Oh [*turns away to hide a smile*].

Matilda: What's that? Why are you smiling?

Robert: Well . . . Mrs. Stevenson . . . Pu'tsinne Kapa means Big Butt.

Matilda: What?

Robert: You know how the Zunis like to tease . . . Anyway, the reason I wanted to interview you. . . . When I was in the Native Internship program at the Smithsonian I started working in the archives of the old Bureau of Ethnology—you know it became the Bureau of American Ethnology after you died.

Matilda: No, I didn't know that.

Robert: Anyway. I really became fascinated with your work and that of Cushing's. Your monograph on the Zunis is a classic.

Matilda: The most comprehensive study of a single tribe at the time it was publsihed. And there was no such thing as a degree in anthropology when I went to Zuni. We learned anthropology by inventing it.

Robert: And you were a woman.

Matilda: And I was a woman. When I graduated from finishing school in 1872 there was no college in the United States where a woman could study science. My father hired professors

to tutor me in our parlor while we sipped tea. I studied chemistry and biology for three years. James taught me geology. If I were a man I'd have two degrees.

Robert: One of the the things I wanted to ask you about, Mrs. Stevenson — it has do with your monograph. You name several Zunis as helping you, but in your report it seems that the person you mention most is We'wha.

Matilda: We'wha! So that's what this is about. You come here from eight decades in the future to ask me about We'wha!

Robert: I didn't realize it was a sensitive issue. I mean, you were pretty upfront about the fact that We'wha was one of your consultants . . .

Matilda: My what?

Robert: Consultants . . . today we call the people we work with "consultants" instead of "informants."

Matilda: Well . . . isn't that considerate.

Robert: We try to work with native people as equals — as collaborators. In the past, anthropologists acted like bearers of some superior form of knowledge and they used a lot of tricks to get people to reveal things to them.

Matilda: In the past?

Robert: Yes . . . well . . . in your time, I guess.

Matilda: I see. . . . So how *is* my work judged?

Robert: Well, no one has written a longer book than you have. But there have been a lot of books about us. There's a joke that the typical Zuni family consists of a mother, a father, children, and anthropologist. . . . [*Matilda does not respond*]. Anyway, you and Cushing are viewed as the key figures of colonial anthropology in the U.S.

Matilda: Of what?

Robert: Anthropologists like you and Cushing were funded by colonial governments. You helped create and implement colonialist policies like forced assimilation. The government demanded that Indians give up their traditional culture and become like white people.

Matilda: I see. 634 pages of detailed information on the pristine traditions and ceremonies of the Zunis. But it's all just so much propaganda for western civilization — "discourse." So why bother reading it? Is that how graduate school works? Well, the business of judging is a nice job if you can get it. In 1879, I was in the business of *doing*. In 1879, tribes like yours were living the fullness of a life who knows how ancient. But it was all coming to an end. In 1879, we knew we had to collect and preserve whatever we could before it was too late. . . .

ACT ONE

Scene 1: Stevenson and Cushing

The following speeches are given as if lecturing to an audience. Stevenson and Cushing compete with each other in trying to win over the audience, becoming more earnest with each exchange, while listening with disapproval to what the other says.

Cushing: In early 1879, at the tender age of eighteen I had been hired by Major J. W. Powell, founding director of the Bureau of Ethnology, to catalog the artifacts of primitive man at the Smithsonian Institution. I had little inkling of what the future held for me, until one winter night, as the wind whistled around my room in the old Smithsonian tower, I fell asleep before my desk. I dreamed that I was far away in a country I had never seen or heard of. . .

*

Matilda: In 1879, the Bureau of Ethnology was established by an act of Congress for the purpose of gathering and recording such artifacts and information concerning the aboriginal inhabitants of the West that might aid the government in the management of its new wards. In July, an expedition placed in charge of Mr. James Stevenson was sent to the Territory of New Mexico. Being so isolated and holding so tenaciously to their ancient institutions as to live, as it were, a life unto themselves, the Zunis were selected as the primary subject of the expeditions' research.

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Cushing: There the sun was brighter, the air clearer; the valleys, vast and twilit, were like cracks down to the foundation rocks of the world. The mountains rising from these ruptured plains were as flat as the plains they stood on, and at their tops were great craters yawning downward into darkness, where the voice of man or the cry of beast rolled back like the sonorous tones of Buddhist bells. On the edge of the smallest of these hollow mountains I was contending with two strangers, a rope around my body. They were holding me back and I straining forward.

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Matilda: It is the goal of this writer to describe the esoteric beliefs of these people, their rituals, habits, and customs. While I hope to explore deeply the subject of religion and to record the more important details of their philosophy, there are many fields to be worked, and an attempt at drawing final conclusions will not be made until more extensive studies of allied tribes can be completed.

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Cushing: Then all at once I was standing on the bottom of a crater. At my feet I saw a pagan altar surrounded by hundreds of painted wands, some with feathers fastened to them, fluttering in the chill, chill eddies of the subterranean air. All was so wonderful, so strange and silent and ancient, the whole land so solemn and weird and desolate and still that I was awed beyond measure, yet happy to the verge of ecstasy.

*

Matilda: For this work the passing hours are golden, for not only are the villages losing their old-time landmarks but the people themselves are changing. The Zunis, whose religion teaches them to speak with one tongue, to be gentle to all, and to subdue the passions, thereby winning the favor of their gods, are losing the restraining power of this religion.

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Cushing: Six months later I happened to be searching through files of old prints when my eye fell upon on a little water color sketch of a dancing Indian. The figure held up in its hand a wand precisely like the ones I had seen in my dream. Beneath it was written “Kachina Dancer of Zuni.”

*

Matilda: If that which I present serves as a basis for future investigation, and aids the Government to a better understanding of the North American Indians, the author will have succeeded in her purpose.

*

Cushing: Perhaps it was the chill of a windy winter night that caused me to dream of wild and desolate lands. Who knows? Be that as it may, my eyes were first turned towards Zuni by a vision of the night.

Scene 2: The meeting

An office in the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., July, 1879.

Matilda: But, James, I do the same work as a paid member of the expedition.

James. I know, Tilly.

Matilda: And you promised.

James: I know, Tilly. But the Major wants to use every penny of the appropriation to purchase artifacts from the Indians. Then the congressmen can walk over to the National Museum and see what the taxpayers’ money bought. The Major was happy to approve your title.

Matilda: “Recording Secretary.” It’s a lot more than that, James.

They realize that Cushing is standing at the door. He’s dressed in a ridiculous “out West” costume, holding a suitcase.

Cushing: Excuse me, sir. Frank Hamilton Cushing. The Major instructed me to report to you. [*Holds out hand*.]

James [*looking at papers, doesn’t shake hands*]: Yes, that’s right. The expedition leaves on tonight’s train.

Cushing: I’m ready, sir.

Matilda: [*steps forward*].

James. Oh, yes, excuse me. My wife, Tilly . . .

Matilda: [*Clears her throat*.]

James: *Matilda* Stevenson.

Cushing: Please to meet you, Matilda.

Matilda [*she does not take his hand either*]: You may call me Mrs. Colonel Stevenson.

Cushing: Yes . . . Mrs. Colonel Stevenson.

James [*to Matilda*]: The major has selected Cushing here to be in charge of ethnological investigations on the expedition.

As the following dialogue occurs, Matilda and Cushing check each other out, like two dogs sniffing each other’s behinds.

James [*to Cushing*]: Mrs. Stevenson has accompanied me on several of my previous expeditions. She assists me on all matters of logistics and research. . . . And your qualifications . . . ?

Cushing: Yes, well, for the past three years I’ve been cataloging the collections here at the Smithsonian. I’ve probably cataloged over ten thousand objects.

James: Studies?

Cushing: I was tutored by my father, sir. He was a physician. . . . I began collecting Indian artifacts in the forests near my home when I was ten. . . . Professor Abbott of Cornell University examined my collection and paper and declared it the finest work on the subject he had seen.

James: I see.

Cushing: I've always dreamed of being able to study a living tribe. I think we Americans sorely underestimate the intellectual capacities of our Indian brothers.

James [*exchanging a smile with Matilda*] : Yes. You understand how important our work is — for the Bureau, for all of us?

Cushing: Yes, sir.

James: History will remember every step we take, Cushing.

Cushing: Yes, sir.

James: Fine. Then, let's get going. Matilda?

James and Matilda exit, leaving Cushing on stage.

Cushing [*to audience*]: Thus it happened that, on a sultry afternoon in late September, 1879, by no means firmly seated in the first saddle I had ever bestridden, I was belaboring a lazy Government mule just at the entrance of a pass between two great banded red-and-grey sandstone mesas, in the midst of a waterless wilderness. Below and beyond me was suddenly revealed . . .

Matilda[*from off stage*]: Goddamit!

James [*walking on stage*]: Cushing, hold up. We've got a problem here. . . . It seems the wagon is stuck in the sand.

Matilda: James!

James: We could use another shoulder here, if you don't mind.

Matilda [*comes on stage*]: James, if you will listen to me . . .

James [*to Cushing*]: Good boy.

Cushing starts to go with James, but as James and Tilly argue he starts looking at the ground and picking up bits of what he thinks are pottery shards.

Matilda: James, you won't need to push the wagon at all, if you will do what I say.

James: Just let me take care of it Ti-, Matilda. If I recall, you are Recording Secretary not wagon master.

Matilda: James, sometimes you are just so . . . stupid! [*Stevenson ties her dress up between her legs and marches off stage. James follows. We hear her barking orders.*] Put the branches crossway, underneath the wheels. Yes. That's it. Now . . . [*Sound of a whip cracking and a horse neighing.*]

Matilda: Good girl!

James: Whoa!

James and Matilda come back on stage, brushing dust off and wiping sweat off their brows. Cushing is still looking at the ground.

Matilda: Now, can we get going, please. I'd say we have 90 minutes of sun left. I would prefer *not* to make another dry camp. And we would do well to avoid the bottoms of these arroyos, James.

James: That's it. We're heading out. Come along, Cushing.

Cushing: Colonel, do you realize that the very ground we're standing on is littered with the records of the ancient inhabitants of this land?

James: There's no time for that now.

Cushing: Look at this. Pottery shards. Everywhere. And each one with a distinct design. Made by a woman to feed and nourish her family. What stories this bit of clay could tell.

Matilda walks over, takes the shard from Cushing, and examines it.

Matilda: Volcanic tufa. Wouldn't you say so, James?

James: Yes, you're exactly right, Matilda. Worn smooth by erosion.

Matilda [*to Cushing*]: It's a rock. [*Throws it away*.] Now. Can we please head out?

James and Matilda exit.

Cushing [*continuing*]: . . . Below and beyond me was suddenly revealed a huge mesa, a thousand feet high and at least two miles in length. Dowa Yallane. Corn Mountain. Not far from the base of this mesa was a terraced hill, next to a small river that wound like a snake toward the western hills. At that moment, the sun was shining behind this hill, transforming it into a jagged pyramid of silhouette, crowned with a brilliant halo, whence a seeming midnight aurora burst forth through broken clouds. A banner of smoke balanced over this seeming volcano, floating off on the evening breeze. I did not realize that this hill, so strange and picturesque, was a city of the habitations of men, until I saw, on the topmost terrace, little specks of black and red moving about against the sky.

Near the river I met my first Zuni.

It's Heluta, he's working in his corn field. Heluta pulls himself up, smoothes his hair, and puts on a colorful headband. He gives Cushing a traditional Zuni handshake, clasping Cushing's hands together and breathing from them, then holding up his hands for Cushing to breathe from. Cushing is fascinated.

Cushing: We are looking for the Zuni governor. Where can we find the Zuni called Heluta?

Heluta: Look no more.

Scene 3a: Cushing starts research

Cushing wanders around pueblo but every door is slammed in his face and people giggle at him. He is watched by the governor. When he tries to sketch his drawings are snatched from him. When he pulls out another sketch book, Zunis surround him so he can't see.

Scene 3b: James and Matilda

At the same time, in a room in the pueblo, James and Matilda are buying artifacts from the Zunis, who stand in line holding various objects. We'wha is in the background, cleaning up, sweeping the floor, moving crates. James gives a Zuni a silver dollar for a large pot.

James: Pot, twelve inches diameter. Black and white. $1.00.

Matilda [*while writing*]: James, it's a waste of my time to be sitting here keeping track of every little trade you make with the Indians. You don't need me to do this.

James: Tilly, you are a great help to me. And I enjoy your company.

While they talk James makes more trades.

Matilda: Do you realize how much is going on in this village hidden from our eyes? The other night I was awakened by the sounds of bells, and saw a line of costumed Indians going down the ladder into one of those rooms without any doors. What do you think is going on in those chambers, James?

James: Let Cushing handle that. Who cares about strange rituals and superstitions? These collections will last an eternity, a testament to the Zunis long after they have they abandoned their primitive customs — or died off.

Matilda: Cushing is getting nowhere. The Indians laugh at him. And if that pimply teenager fails, we fail. Let *me* talk to the Zunis, James. They will let me into those chambers — the wife of Colonel Teemsy from Wa-sin-ton-a. In their eyes, I'm Martha Washington.

James: Well, why don't you take up with the women then, Tilly. That's a good angle. You can study how they raise children, make food, things like that.

Matilda: I want to know what goes on in those chambers.

James: The *women*, Tilly. Religion is Cushing's area. Let's not start a war.

We'wha makes a noise. James and Matilda turn around to find her standing and watching them.

James: Finished?

Matilda: Who's this?

James: I asked the governor to send me someone to clean out this room. This is We'wha. She helps the missionary's wife, and apparently knows some English. She doesn't seem to mind rolling up her sleeves. The strength of these Indian women is amazing.

Matilda continues to look at We'wha and We'wha looks back.

James: Now, Tilly, there's an Indian woman. Why don't you study her?

We'wha walks up to Stevenson and gives a Zuni handshake. Matilda is uncomfortable.

Scene 4: Cushing keeps writing

Cushing is sitting on a roof top, sketching. Heluta sits next to him, smoking a cigarette, examining each mark Cushing makes. Suddenly disgusted, he puts his cigarette out.

Heluta: It is not well for you to make any more marks on the paper.

Cushing continues writing.

Heluta: Hai! Why does Wa-sin-ton-a want to know about our gods. The Zunis have their religion and the Americans have theirs.

Cushing: Do you want Washington to be a friend to the Zunis? How can you expect a people to like others without knowing something about them? Some fools and bad men have said that the Zunis have no religion.

Heluta: You speak wisely, but many of my people are fools, too. You may find trouble if you draw the gods.

Stops writing.

Cushing: Governor, it's not only Washington that wants to know. *I* want to know. *I* want to understand. All my life I've felt out of place — as if I was born in the wrong country — or at the wrong time. The Zunis have a way of life in which spiritual values are supreme. Even your work — planting corn, making a pot — is a form of prayer. We Americans have signed over our destiny to purely material values — whatever can be counted, weighed, measured, and held. I want to show the world the wisdom of the primitive mind. . . . I want to make your ways live in me. . . . Please, governor, teach me how to be Zuni.

Heluta remains silent.

Cushing: What do you think about that?

Heluta: Tomorrow the gods are coming to dance. What do you think about *that*?

Cushing: I think it will rain.

Heluta: And *I* think that you will not see the gods when they come tomorrow.

Cushing: *I* think I *shall*.

Heluta: If you put the shadows of the gods on your paper, we will cut them to pieces!

Heluta leaves. Cushing resumes writing. Slowly, blanketed Zunis come and stand around him. Then suddenly a Zuni scare kachina appears and comes up the ladder toward Cushing. Cushing looks up and is frightened. Zuni voices shout, "Kill him! Kill him!" Cushing fakes a smile, sets down his sketchbook, and pulls out a penknife. Slowly he gets up, steadying himself against the pole of the ladder. He nervously laughs and waves his knife. Everyone freezes, then a voice says, "Kihe*!* Kihe*! He is a friend!" The scare kachina waves its war club in the air then breathes from it and withdraws, along with the other Zunis. Alone, Cushing's knees start shaking uncontrollably and he throws up. Heluta enters.*

Heluta: Yes, yes. It is good to empty your stomach after seeing the gods. That is how we purify ourselves. You already know how to be Zuni!

Scene 5: Stevenson starts research

On the roof of a kiva. Stevenson is trying to bully her way into a ceremony. She starts climbing down the ladder, and a group of men with blankets covering their heads emerge to block her. Heluta comes out of the kiva.

Heluta: Our fathers beg you not to enter their sacred chamber.

Matilda: Tell them that I come from Washington. That Washington wants me, the wife of Colonel Teemsy, to see and write about their ceremonies.

The priests talk among themselves then draw a line in the sand and sprinkle it with cornmeal.

Heluta: They say you must not cross this line.

The Zunis adopt a threatening stance. Stevenson responds. A tug-of-war breaks out. We'wha arrives. He speaks to Heluta, then to Stevenson.

We'wha: Mother, he says if you will come with me you can see the ceremonies. Come. Go through there.

Matilda: Here?

We'wha: Yes, go ahead.

We'wha blocks Stevenson into a room with a small window. They speak through the window

Matilda: What are you doing!

We'wha: Mother, please forgive me. You cannot fight the old men.

Matilda: Let me out of here! I demand it. Let me out of here at once. Goddamn you.

We'wha: Please mother. You must stay here until the ceremony is over or . . .

Matilda: Or what?

We'wha: Or the priests will tell the governor to send the expedition away. And there will be a big fight. And Wa-sin-ton-a will be angry with the Zunis.

Matilda: I must see those ceremonies. Let me out!

We'wha: No, mother. I cannot. Here, sit. Eat. Here are some dried peaches. We will talk.

Matilda: No.

We'wha: Zuni dried peaches are a great delicacy, mother. Do you know how the peaches came to Zuni?

Matilda: Tell me what's going inside that room.

We'wha: They are praying, that is all.

Matilda: What are they praying for?

We'wha: For everything, for the food-eaters — like you and me — for the seeds in the soil and for the creatures that live on the land and for the insects and worms that live in the earth — everything that the Mother gives us. She is the source of all life.

Matilda: But what do they *do*? What are the rituals? Do they use any medicines? Do they make offerings?

We'wha: There are many offerings. They are valuable. But the important thing is the prayer. What they wish and think.

Stevenson [*gets restless, starts pacing*]: Oh, We'wha . . . All my life, I've been waiting for a chance to do real scientific research. To learn about something no one knew before, to see my name on the page. I've been at my husband's knees for five years, writing his reports, seeing *his* name on the page. This is my chance to do something — maybe something great. If it wasn't for that damn Cushing.

We'wha: The one who has twigs for legs, and a bowl for a hat, and a brush on his lip?

Stevenson [*laughing*]: Yes.

We'wha: The one who fell off his mule, into the mud, when you came across the river? The Zunis wonder why Washington sent a boy to write things on a piece of paper about them.

Matilda: You have a sharp eye . . .

We'wha: I cannot help what I see.

Matilda: And a sharp tongue. . . . We'wha, haven't you ever wanted to do something, anything, really *well*? Or maybe do something that no one has ever done before, something they said you couldn't do?

We'wha: When I was young, my mother gave me a piece of clay and I started to play with it. My grandfather did not like it. He was the Bow Priest, the boss of all the Zuni warriors. He took the clay and threw it.

Matilda: Why, We'wha? Why did he take the clay? Aren't all Zuni women potters?

We'wha: I ran away. I ran to my auntie's house and lived with her and she taught me pottery. And then my parents died when the witches caused the skin sickness [*indicates pox marks*].

Matilda: Smallpox . . . I think your pottery is the most beautiful in all Zuni, We'wha. Your pots are so large.

We'wha: I find the shape within the clay, and I bring it to the surface. I give the clay life. And then I paint my pots with patterns I dream. The pots are made beings, mother, cooked people — like you and me.

Matilda: We'wha. . . . It's getting dark.

We'wha: Yes, mother.

Matilda: Please. I can't be here, in this room, in the dark.

We'wha: Soon the moon will rise. We can see Corn Mountain from here. It will be beautiful.

Matilda: No, We'wha. I . . . I . . . I really can't. [*Short of breathe*]. It just that, a small space, in the dark. I'm not given to superstitions or irrational fears, but . . .

We'wha: Mother, are you alright? There is nothing to be afraid of.

Matilda: It's just . . . it's just . . . something that happened when I was a little girl.

We'wha: What was that?

Matilda: The way my father punished me. He never struck me. But one time — I got so angry — I called him a bad name. And he locked me in the closet, in the dark.

We'wha: No Zuni would do that to a child.

Stevenson [*breathing hard*]: I don't know how long I was there. It must have been two days at least. I lost myself in there. I felt like I was constantly falling. I couldn't speak. I couldn't cry. Just fear, paralyzing fear. Can you . . . please, We'wha . . . I promise not to enter the kiva. You have my word.

We'wha: Mother, come out of there. I have never heard such words before.

Stevenson [*relieved*]: Oh, that's better . . .

We'wha: I will help you.

Matilda: What do you mean?

We'wha: I will help you. I know what they do in the kivas.

Matilda: But I thought only men belonged to the societies.

We'wha: *I* have been initiated. I will tell you what you want to know. And when the medicine society meets in my home, you will sit and watch, and no one will say anything.

Matilda: We'wha, that would be so helpful. Really. And I can teach you things, too. Things that will make your life here better.

We'wha: I just want to know one thing.

Matilda: Yes.

We'wha: Why must you see what the old men do in the kivas?

Matilda: Washington wants to understand you, We'wha, the mind of a primitive people. How you think, what you believe. I want you to teach me everything about your religion.

We'wha: Mother . . . how deep is the sea?

Stevenson [*writing*]: During my first days at Zuni, I obtained but the merest suggestion of this people's inner life. Over time, as I won their confidence, I discovered that primitive man's conceptions of the universe are altogether different from those of civilized man. Civilized man lives in a world of reality; primitive man in a world of mysticism and symbolism; he is deeply impressed by his natural environment; every object for him possesses a spiritual life.

The sturdy pine, the delicate sapling, the fragant blossom, the giant rock, and the tiny pebble — all play a part in their mystic world.

Scene 6: Cushing moves in

Cushing: Governor, Washington has sent me to learn everything about the ways of the Zunis, and I can only do that if I live as the Zunis do. I must stay with you in your home.

Heluta: And how long will you clutter my floor?

Cushing: Well, maybe three months?

Heluta: Damn! . . . but if Wa-sin-ton-a wishes it, what can *I* say?

Cushing sets his things down. Heluta goes away and comes back with a pot of Zuni stew. When Cushing tries to eat from the pot he burns himself. Heluta silently arises and searches about the room. He finds an old, dirty spoon with a broken handle. As he starts to give it to Cushing, he sees the look on his face and realizes the spoon is dirty. He puts it in his mouth and licks it clean, then goes to a water pot and rinses his mouth out (but not the spoon). As he hands the spoon to Cushing he thinks of something else. He picks up a rag from the floor and wipes the spoon. Then, with an air of self-satisfaction, he hands the spoon to Cushing. Cushing is aghast. He takes the spoon and stirs it in the stew for a long time, hoping to clean it that way.

Heluta: He-Who-Eats-From-One-Dish-With-One-Spoon.

Cushing: What's that.

Heluta: The Zunis will call you He-Who-Eats-From-One-Dish-With-One-Spoon.

Cushing: Could you say that again while I write it down? I want to understand your language.

Heluta: Just write "Cushy."

Cushing: Then, I will call you Heluta.

Heluta: No. You will call me older brother. And I will call you younger brother.

Cushing [*after pause for eating*]: Tell me, older brother, what are the Zuni words for your relatives . . . what do you call your wife?

Heluta: I just call her "woman." She calls me old husband.

Cushing: What do you call your wife's mother?

Heluta: Old Nine? I call her "mother-in-law."

Cushing: Nine? What does that mean?

Heluta: That is the number of husbands she has jilted. But, little brother, be sure not to call her that. She knows how to talk smarting words.

Cushing [*laughs*]: And her husband — what do you call him?

Heluta: Old-talks-himself-dry — I call him "father-in-law." Guard your eyes, younger brother, for he often rises from his sheep's robe in the morning already so busy with talking that he forgets to cover his nakedness.

Cushing: How do you address someone from your own clan?

Heluta: They are "brother" or "sister," older and younger.

Cushing [*pause*]: What about someone like We'wha? Isn't We'wha a member of your clan?

Heluta: I do not need words for someone I do not speak to. And you would do well not to speak to that one, too. Anyway, We'wha is now the helper of Pu'tsinne Kapa.

Cushing [*repeats to himself as he writes it down*]: Pu'tsinne Kapa. Oh, that's very mean. I like that. But, brother, let me give *you* warning — do not call her Wide Ass to her face or you will feel more than smarting words.

Heluta takes the stew bowl away.

Cushing: Older brother, tell me how you became governor.

Heluta: I was chosen by the priests. I tried to go away, so they wouldn't find me. But the snows came and I could not leave. They brought me the cane. So I am governor. Now all the Zunis come to me — to complain and criticize and cry. My ears are filled with their words all day long.

Cushing: And how many priests are there?

Heluta: Six priests, one for each direction.

Cushing: Six directions?

Heluta: East, South, West, North, Up, and Down. Six.

Cushing: And there are six societies of masked dancers?

Heluta: Yes, and six kivas. Every boy is initiated into a kiva. When the kiva groups appear, they enter by the order of the directions and dance six times. We also have medicine orders. Twelve in all. Each knows a different magic — for hunting, for warfare, for healing. I belong to two.

Cushing: This complexity is amazing. All these societies and associations. There are barely fifteen hundred people in this village. How do you keep track of it all without pencils and paper for remembering?

Heluta: All this is described in our myths, little brother. The myths tell the beginning of each society and its place among the others and its place in the ceremonies.

Cushing: And what about these old villages around here, the ruins that you see. What do you remember about these?

Heluta: They are the homes of our ancestors.

Cushing: Really? Do they have names?

Heluta: They all have names.

Cushing: Tell me [*gets ready to write*].

Heluta: The telling takes from when the sun sets until it rises. Only I and two other men can say it right. We call it, Words of the First Beginning.

Cushing: Will you tell me, brother? The night is long.

Heluta: Very well. I will tell it. Then you will not have to ask me anymore questions about the Zunis. Roll me a cigarette.

In the beginning the Sun Father was alone in the sky. He was lonely. He wanted people to offer him prayers and sacrifices. So he brought the Zunis, the A:shiwi, up from the four wombs of the earth. In the east the Sun Father was rising, and at first the people could not bare to look at his light. You see, they were still raw beings. They stumbled about and crawled all over each other like snakes and tadpoles. They did not yet know how to eat mortal food, how to offer prayers to their Sun Father. All this they had to learned, to become cooked people. So they started to journey in the direction of the sun father, always seeking the middle place.

Cushing [*writing while Heluta continues and fades out*]: Dear Major Powell: This night a glimpse was revealed to me of a mysterious life by which I had little dreamed that I was surrounded. As Heluta recited the ancient home sites of his people, naming them in precise order, I realized that if I can match the names in the saga with these sites a great mystery will be revealed. I believe the Zunis are the living remnants of a once vast, powerful, and peaceful civilization, overtaken by the warlike Aztecs. To escape the marauders, remnants of this civilization began a long trek northward. They sought, like the ancient Hebrews, their promised land, which they call the Middle Place.

I am using every argument to induce Colonel Stevenson to make arrangements for my continued sojourn here. My anxiety would not be so great were there not a possibility that I am among the last who will ever witness all this in its purity. I can safely say that I

have laid open a field which, without presumption, I can say is the richest ever within the reach or sight of an American investigator.

Scene 7: Stevenson and We'wha

In We'wha's home.

Matilda: We'wha, since you are going to teach me about your ways and customs, I will teach you about some of the ways of the Americans. This is a foaming bar, We'wha, a bar of soap, and with this foam you can make your clothes clean. I want you to be the first Zuni to use this bar. When the other Zunis see your clean clothes and how much the Americans like you, everyone will want one of this bars. And that, believe me, will be a change for the better for the Zunis. Now, watch what I do.

We'wha is silent throughout this. Stevenson attempts to wash clothes but drenches herself and spills the water.

We'wha: You do not understand that which you would teach. You do not understand as much as the wife of the Missa-man. She keeps the water in the tub and does not make a river on the floor. Let me take your place. [*Washes clothes vigorously*].

We'wha scrubs the clothes for a while, with Stevenson watching approvingly. Then suddenly disgusted, We'wha puts down the wash and stands up.

We'wha: This is foolish. You must carry water from the well. You must use your back like corn grinding. But instead of corn meal you can eat, all you get is water on the floor. And this foaming bar smells like . . . like bad beans.

Matilda: But, We'wha, when the Americans see how you can wash your own clothes they will give you dollars to wash *their* clothes.

We'wha: Really? Give me that foaming bar.

We'wha puts the soap away and rinses out the laundry. Mrs. Stevenson finds a crate for to sit on. We'wha sits on the floor and weaves a belt.

Matilda: Your home is very nice, We'wha. So clean and orderly.

We'wha: When we were young our mother always said, "Get up. Wash your face. Sweep the floor. You never know who might come over."

Matilda: That's good advice.

We'wha: It could happen to you, mother. You might be having sweet words with Colonel Teemsy some morning and suddenly the Missa-man comes to your door.

Matilda: The missionary? Heavens' forbid. Reverend Ealy looks like an undertaker.

We'wha: Or perhaps Mouse-face.

Matilda: Mouse-face?

We'wha: The wife of Missa-man.

Stevenson [*laughing*]: Yes, she *is* a mouse . . . always trying to squirrel things away. Yesterday, I found a sack of sugar from the expedition in her kitchen. You should have seen her little eyes darting back and forth, her hands twitching, when I caught her. Just like a mouse.

We'wha [*laughing*]: Yes . . . like this [*does an imitation*].

Stevenson [*suddenly serious*]: If there's anything I can't stand more than a mousey face it's a mousy character. . . . But I thought she was your friend, We'wha. She taught you English.

We'wha [*stops weaving and looks at Stevenson*]: I am like a pancake. I have two faces.

Matilda: What do you mean?

We'wha: Mouse-face was always reading from her book. Big, black book. I cleaned. I worked. She read. And she said, "We'wha, you must be a Christian." All the time.

Matilda: Are you a Christian?

We'wha: Of course, mother. Since I was a child we have left prayersticks in the shadows of the Missa house. And when we die we are buried in the cemetary in front. Therefore, we are Catholic.

Stevenson starts taking notes.

We'wha: They say that no sweet words ever come from your cloth house.

Matilda: What do you mean?

We'wha: Here everyone sleeps in one room. When the mother and father make laughter, as we say, everyone knows. But no one has heard laughter from your cloth house.

Matilda: I really *don't* think we need to be talking about this.

We'wha: It's just that, the Zunis are asking . . . do you have sex?

Matilda: Excuse me!

We'wha: This is how the Zunis talk. They have no sense.

Matilda: I've never been asked me such a question before in my life. . . . Well, I'll tell you. It's quite simple. James and I have an agreement, that's all. Intercourse in the best of circumstances . . . well, you know, it's messy, it's awkward, one must prepare. Out here in

the desert, with these sandstorms, with Zunis *apparently* snooping around outside. We keep to our own cots that's all.

We'wha: I see.

Matilda: I like your honesty. I don't think I've ever had a conversation like this before. And what about you, We'wha — do you have a husband?

We'wha: He's gone.

Matilda: What do you mean?

We'wha: He left.

Matilda: Men can be such scoundrels. I swear they lack a moral faculty in their brains. . . . You say, he lived *here*?

We'wha: Yes, the man lives with the woman. He helps her family.

Matilda: What if he builds the house? Doesn't he want to keep it and send the wife away?

We'wha: If she puts his moccasins on the door, he takes them and goes back to his mother's house. They cry. That is all. . . . This is my mother's house, the one who raised me. Someday it will belong to my older sister.

Matilda: What about your brother?

We'wha: The house belongs to the sisters. Children are born from women, not men, and so they belong to her, not him. How else could it be?

Matilda: Don't children have to have fathers?

We'wha: Fathers? Every child has brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts and grandparents. And many mothers — we call our mothers' sisters, "older mother" and "little mother."

Matilda: Among the Americans, a child without a father would be looked down on. A young woman who had a child without a husband might by locked away and her child taken from her. Everyday in Washington infants are abandoned by women who simply have no way to feed them.

We'wha: I don't understand the Americans. How can a woman and her children not have a house?

Matilda: Among the Americans the fathers take care of the wife and the children. Only the father can provide a house and food.

We'wha: Amazing! Your American men are better than ours. Warriors *and* mothers. . . . But then, what is left for your woman to do?

Scene 8: Cushing and We'wha

Cushing knocks on a door. While he waits he writes in a notebook. The door opens. Cushing looks up to see the much larger We'wha towering above him.

Cushing: Oh, *keshi*. I didn't realize this was where you lived.

We'wha is silent.

Cushing: Wa-sin-ton-a has ordered me to count the Zuni people.

More silence.

Cushing: Wa-sin-ton-a wants to know how many Zunis there are, what they do, and what their condition is.

We'wha: We all know this. The crier announced it from the roof tops.

Cushing: Yes, well, it won't take long.

We'wha [*smiles*]: Come in, sit down, eat!

Cushing steps through the door way and hesitates.

Cushing: I can't stay, really. There are many Zunis I must count today.

We'wha: Sit. The Zunis always feed their guests. It will not be said that the We'wha failed to do what every good Zuni does. [*Places a bowl of stew in front of Cushing.*] And it is said that you eat Zuni food. I want to see that.

Cushing: I am trying to learn all your ways.

We'wha: Have you been eating the stew of Heluta?

Cushing: Heluta's stew is a great delicacy.

We'wha: You think so? I will tell you what I think. If you have been eating the stew of Heluta, you have not had Zuni food. Heluta has the stomach of a baby. He uses no chili. Eat *my* stew. [*Hands Cushing another bowl*.] And here is more chili paste. Now, let me see you eat like a Zuni.

Cushing hesitates.

We'wha: Ah, yes. Of course. He-who-eats-from-one-dish-with-one-spoon.

We'wha finds a spoon. Cleans it with water and a clean cloth. Cushing eats fastidiously, and We'wha scrutinizes him, reacting to his quirky, less-than-masculine mannerisms.

We'wha: Why must Wa-sin-ton-a count the Zunis? What does Wa-sin-ton-a care?

Cushing: Washington cares about the Zuni people. . . . [*to himself*] Actually, Major Powell cares. He thought this up and stuck me with doing it.

We'wha: The Black Robes counted the Zunis in the time of my grandmother. Perhaps, like the black robes, Wa-sin-to-na wants to know who is married to whom, and when a woman sends her husband away, and who owns the house.

Cushing: If the Americans count something it's because it's valuable. Like the Zunis count their sheep. What cannot be counted does not interest them.

We'wha: So we are valuable. Like sheep. So count us.

Cushing: Right. Well, how many people live in this house?

We'wha: There are eight. My aunt, whom I call "mother," her husband, whom I call "father." My older sister and her husband, two children. My younger brother.

Cushing: Occupation. What does your mother do?

We'wha: She is the boss of the house. She makes pots.

Cushing [*writing*]: Housekeeper. Potter. And your father, what does he do?

We'wha: He farms.

Cushing: And your brother.

We'wha: He takes care of our sheep.

Cushing: What about you?

We'wha: I work here. I farm. I make pots. I weave blankets.

Cushing: Isn't farming men's work?

We'wha: That's right.

Cushing [*writing*]: Let's see . . . that's four males and . . . four? females? Or should I write three?

We'wha: Write as you wish.

Cushing: I must write male OR female.

We'wha: Only male or female? Is not every child born of a woman? Are not women then male *and* female, and males being born of women, female, too?

Cushing: I don't understand. Look, I just have to write down something.

We'wha: Has not Heluta told you the Words of the First Beginning?

Cushing: He has. And I have written them down.

We'wha: And he told you of the children of the brother and sister?

Cushing: Yes.

We'wha: They were the nine Sacred Clowns, each misshapen, with heads like pumpkins, ancient ones who are forever boys. Like you, Cushy.

Cushing: And the point is.

We'wha: The firstborn was formless in yet another way. With the features of a woman and the strength of a man. It was the two-fold one-kind. We call that one *lha'ma*, man *and* woman, like an ear of corn with two hearts, neither one kind nor the other, but both. . . . *I* wear the mask of Kolha'ma in the dances. I am two-fold. I farm *and* I make pots. . . . So, child of Wa-sin-ton-a, what will you write?

Scene 9: Collecting clay

We'wha comes on stage followed by James and Matilda.

We'wha: Here I say a prayer so that my strength will not leave me when I carry the clay down from the mesa.

Matilda [*writing in a notebook*]: "On one occasion Mr. Stevenson and the writer accompanied We'wha to Corn Mountain to obtain clay. On passing a stone heap she picked up a small stone in her left hand, and spitting upon it, carried the hand around her head and threw the stone over one shoulder."

We'wha throws a stone and Matilda ducks. The three go a little farther.

We'wha: Colonel Teemsy must stay here now, mother. Men must never come near the clay.

James shrugs. He sits and whittles with a pen knife. Matilda and We'wha go on.

We'wha: Now, mother, we must not speak. Should we speak the pot will crack when I bake it, and I must pray constantly or the clay will not appear to me.

While praying, We'wha starts vigorously digging, carefully examining the clay, rejecting some, putting some in a blanket. Matilda takes notes.

Stevenson [*writing*]: "Nine-tenths of the clay was rejected, every lump being tested between the fingers as to its texture. She gathered about 150 pounds in a blanket and carried it on her back with the ends of the blanket tied around her forehead apparently unconscious of the weight."

James approaches.

James: There you are. I was beginning to think you two had been swallowed up by the clay pits. [*We'wha walks past him.*] Whoa, there's a heavy load.

Matilda: Yes, James, it's an excellent bed of dark gray shale. And something else . . .

James: What's that, Tilly?

Matilda: There's bituminous coal up there. Quite a bit of it.

James: That's a pity.

Matilda: What do you mean? I should think you'd be delighted to find something of economic value out here.

James: These people will never take advantage of such a resource. Look at how they farm. All that praying and dancing. Can you imagine the rigamarole if they went into mining? Offering prayers to the Coal Mother, sprinkling sacred coal dust . . .

Stevenson [*laughing*]: James, you really are wicked.

Scene 10: Expedition leaves

We'wha and Stevenson are sitting together, watching the sun set. We'wha rolls a cigarette, sharing it with Stevenson, who clumsily accepts it.

Matilda: The sunsets here are spectacular. Truly, I have never seen more magnificent sunsets.

We'wha: We call that *tso'ya*. It means anything that is beautiful and has many colors. Our dances are *tso'ya*.

Matilda: *Tso'ya*. . . .

We'wha: See, mother, how the colors are changing.

Matilda: Yes. Lovely. So peaceful. . . . I have to say that I've enjoyed my time here at Zuni . . . very much.

We'wha: And so now you will leave us.

Matilda: Yes.

We'wha: And the Zunis will never see the mother of Wa-sin-ton-a again.

Matilda: No, no. I'll return. My research has only begun. Colonel Stevenson and I will be back.

We'wha: So you say.

Matilda: Why don't you believe me?

We'wha: Other Americans have come, mother. We never see them again.

Matilda: *I* will be back. This is my career, We'wha. This is what I will do for the rest of my life. Just like you will always make pots.

James enters. Matilda puts out the cigarette.

James: Well, the last crate is loaded. We can head out tomorrow morning at dawn.

Matilda: Are there enough drivers?

James: I had to hire an extra one. Cushing is staying behind.

Matilda: Staying? For god's sake, what for?

James: Research, Tilly, research. He claims he's onto something, some big discovery about the origins of the Zunis. He's convinced Powell.

Matilda: Powell is a fool. Cushing is going to undermine everything we've accomplished here. And this business about living with the Indians. . . . [*To We'wha*] We'wha, do you think I should dress like a Zuni woman?

We'wha [*smiling*]: No, mother. But perhaps Cushy thinks Zuni girls will like him better if he looks like a Zuni.

Matilda [*laughs a little*]: That's right! He's a skirt-chaser. [*Suddenly mood changes*]. Disgusting. Do you hear that, James? It's disgusting.

James: The Major . . .

Matilda: What's that?

James: Oh, some supplies for Cushing. I was about to leave them with the governor.

Matilda: Let me take care of it. You have better things to do.

James: Okay . . . see you at supper. [*Exits*.]

Stevenson [*to We'wha*]: How many of these supplies do you think "Cushy" will get if I leave them with Mouse-face instead of Heluta?

We'wha [*laughing*]: Mother, you are very clever.

Scene 11: Cushing on his own

Cushing walks into his Zuni room, sits in his hammock, and buries is face in his hands. When he looks up again Heluta is standing there.

Heluta: Why is my brother sad?

Cushing: Colonel Stevenson is gone and he has left me nothing. The missionary's wife says the supplies he left were meant for her.

Heluta [*after pause*]: Little brother, you may be a man of Wa-sin-ton-a, but it seems you are very poor. Why don't you be a Zuni instead? If you will make up your mind to be a Zuni, you shall be rich, for you shall have fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and the best food in the world. But if you do not, I think you will be very, very, poor, indeed.

Cushing: Why should I not be a Zuni?

Heluta: Why not? Now eat. Fill your stomach and your face will brighten.

While Cushing eats, Heluta removes all his personal belongs, clothes, and the hammock.

Cushing: Where are my things? Where is my hammock?

Heluta: I cut down that bed of strings. Some night you might dream of a Zuni girl — or perhaps Old Nine — and fall out of that rabbit net. And then Washington will say I killed you. You are as raw and unformed as a newborn baby. You must sleep in the cold and on a hard bed — that will harden your meat. And you must never go to the missionary's or the trader's to eat. I want to make a Zuni of you. Youmust east only Zuni food? And you must get rid of that hat. It makes your head look like a rat's butt.

Heluta puts a scarf around Cushing's head.

Heluta: That is much better. Now go out and let the Zunis see you, our new son, the child of Wa-sin-to-na.

Cushing [*fiddling with scarf*]: But, brother, if the American trader or the missionary should see me they will laugh at me.

Heluta: The Americans are asses. Don't you suppose I know what becomes a man?

Cushing: Brother, since I am to become a Zuni, can I now attend the ceremonies in the kivas?

Heluta [*frowning*]: You must have your ears pierced, too. Even babies have their ears pierced. I will give you turquoise to wear.

Cushing: And then?

A messenger arrives.

Messenger: Governor. The Navajos attacked Nutria yesterday. They burned Koyema's corn fields and pushed him into the mud.

Heluta: Damn!

Messenger: A party of bow priests is leaving soon.

Heluta: I come.

Heluta starts to gathers things, including his old rifle.

Cushing: I will come, too. If I can kill a Navajo, then maybe I can become a bow priest.

Heluta: No, little brother.

Cushing: I will come and help you fight our enemies.

Heluta [*angry*]: I said no. . . . [*turning to Cushing*] . . . Little brother, if you wish to help the Zunis then ask your great father to drive these Navajo beasts off our lands.

Cushing: Yes! That's it. Better yet, *you* can ask him. I can take you to Washington.

Heluta: To the land of sunrise?

Cushing: Yes. To the great city of the Americans.

Heluta: Very well. Take me to Wa-sin-ton-a. I will tell him myself.

Heluta starts to leave and Cushing follows.

Cushing: Yes, and we can show the Americans that the Zunis are not savages. . . . And brother, [*takes Heluta by the arm*] when we return, *then* I will enter the kivas.

Heluta: Yes, yes. I will sponsor you myself. My eager little brother . . . so eager to be what he is not. But now we must go and drive these dogs off our land.

Act Two

Scene 1: Cushing and Heluta on tour

Cushing and Heluta are on tour on the East, appear on stage. Cushing lectures with slides of Zuni projected behind him. He wears a colorful headband.

Cushing: . . . and so on that June day in 1539, as the sun set in the west, Father Marcos de Niza, exhausted from his long journey across the desert, became the first European to lay eyes upon the pueblo of Hawikkuh — westernmost of the seven Zuni villages. Bathed in the day's waning light, the good father was convinced that the walls were made of gold. And so the myth of the seven cities of Cibola gained new life.

Today the Zunis live in a single village, and the walls of their pueblo are made of clay not gold. But their way of life is gold of another kind. For the Zunis, with all their quaint customs are typical of a phase of culture through which all desert peoples have passed, including the ancient Hebrews. By studying the Zunis we gain a glimpse of our own distant past.

I now give you the governor of Zuni, member of the Order of the Bow, priest of the Deer society — my adopted brother — Heluta.

Heluta: Twelve generations have passed since the Spaniards first came to our land, but we have not forgotten the stories of how our ancestors fought them, and how our arrows and stone clubs were no good against their guns. But then we found the white men to be our brothers. And now we are all children of one father. And that father is Washington, the great chief of the Land of Daybreak.

My people today are poor among men. If we do not smile on Washington and his children, and he does not smile on them, we will surely pass away or, like dogs, lie hungry at the doors of strangers. So, I call you brothers and sisters. May we smile one upon the other and be happy forever and through all our days. This much I have spoken.

Heluta plays a drum, while Cushing watches on. Lights out.

*

When the lights come up, Cushing is again at a podium, but this time his costume is even more elaborate.

Cushing: If I am at times seemingly too personal in style of statement, let it be remembered that well-nigh all anthropology is personal history. If I would understand the life of past man, I must make his ideas my own and then use those ideas to reproduce his thoughts and actions. I have the same hands and eyes as he, the same mental faculties. And so I can recreate within me his life and reproduce his arts.

Heluta: And I call you brothers and sisters. May we smile one upon the other and be happy forever and through all our days.

Heluta drums. This time, instead of just watching, Cushing starts to dances. Lights out.

*

When the lights come up again, Cushing's costume is even more elaborate.

Cushing: Thus, my researches among these Zunis and my experimental researches upon myself, with my own hands, under strictly primitive conditions, have given me insight and power to interpret their myths and old arts, and it has enlarged my understanding of the earliest conditions of man everywhere.

Heluta: May we smile one upon the other and be happy forever and through all our days.

Heluta drums, this time standing. While Cushing dances even more avidly.

Scene 2: Matilda's plan

Matilda and James Stevenson in their home. James's face is buried in a newspaper. Matilda is reading a part of the paper while pacing back and forth.

Matilda: "In concluding his lecture, Lieutenant Cushing" — where did he get that title?

James: Probably from the same place I got the title "Colonel."

Matilda: Well, at least you served in the army . . . . "Lieutenant Cushing stated that the methods he has developed are certain to be used by all future investigators in the field of anthropology." Since when is dressing up like a cowboy fop a method of anthropology? "Lieutenant Cushing related that on a sidetrip to Salem, Massachusetts, Heluta was very interested to learn that the people there had once put several witches to death. Addressing the residents, Heluta proclaimed: 'Be the witches or wizards your dearest relatives or friends consider not your own hearts but remember your duty and put them to death!'" Can you believe it, James? He's *encouraging* these superstitions. He's making a mockery of everyone. We can't let him get away with it. . . . James?

James [*from behind newspaper*]: What's that, Tilly?

Matilda: We have to get attention for *our* work, James.

James: I'm not dressing up in feathers and a loin cloth.

Matilda: Ha-ha. That's not what I had in mind. I was thinking that Washington has seen many Indian chiefs. But Washington has never seen a civilized Indian priestess who can demonstrate all the peaceful arts of her tribe.

James: We'wha?

Matiilda: Heluta and Cushing's sideshow will be exposed for the sham that it is when Washington meets We'wha — a dignified Indian woman, versed in her tribe's lore, who also happens to speak English. We'wha will be perfect. . . . James, take me to the Western Union office.

James: Tilly, I'd really like to finish reading the paper.

Matilda: Then I'll go myself.

James [*gets up*]: Nonsense, no woman of your class travels in public unchaperoned. This is not the wild West.

Matilda: Then you must take me. And I wish to go now.

Scene 3: We'wha arrives

Matilda introduces the Zuni Priestess We'wha at a reception in her home.

Matilda: . . . and so, without further ado, I give to you We'wha — priestess, artisan, ambassador of the Zuni people of New Mexico.

We'wha bows slightly. The women clap politely.

Mrs. Logan: She's so . . . tall.

Mrs. Atkins: She's so . . . dignified.

Mrs. Carlisle: She doesn't seem savage at all.

Mrs. Atkins: [*tries to speak to We'wha using sign language*]: Hel-lo. Wel-come.

Mrs. Carlisle: Ask her if it's true that Indian women are slaves to the men.

Mrs. Logan: No, no. Ask her if she knows any Indian love songs.

Mrs. Logan: Maybe she will give us Indian names!

Mrs. Atkins: [*using crude sign language*]: Wait, I know . . . How . . . big . . . is . . . your . . . tipi?

Matilda: Ladies, please. Let me introduce you properly. We'wha, this is Mrs. Conrad Atkins, her husband is the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

We'wha starts to do a traditional Zuni handshake. Mrs. Atkin's recoils until Matilda reassures her.

Matilda: She's trying to give you a blessing. By breathing *from* your hand she receives your life spirit and by breathing *on* your hand she imparts her spirit to you.

Mrs. Atkins: Oh, I see. How peculiar. How do you do? [*Clumsily completes the handshake*.]

Matilda: And this is Mrs. John Carlisle. Her husband is Speaker of the House of Representatives.

When We'wha does not take her hands, she takes We'wha's, in order to receive a blessing.

Matilda: This is Mrs. John Logan. Her husband is Senator Logan. The Colonel served under him during the war between the states.

Meanwhile, James is having a conversation with Senator Logan's son-in-law, Major Benjamin Tucker.

James: Tell me, Major Tucker, are the rumors true? Am I about to toast the son-in-law of our future Vice President? Vice President Logan has a nice ring, doesn't it?

Tucker: The old man says the days of his great battles are behind him. But to see the way he struts about, like a rooster who's just discovered a new hen in the coop — I'd say he's been offered a place on the ticket *and* he's accepted it.

James: Tell me, Major. You've been stationed at Fort Wingate for two years now. What's your opinion of the territory?

Tucker: You can take every last speck of dust in that worthless territory and pour it into the Rio Grande and send it back as mud to Mexico as far as I'm concerned. Deserts, superstitious Catholics, wetbacks, Indians. New Mexico can never be assimilated into Anglo-Saxon America. It's a permanent backwater. And they will drag the rest of us down.

James: Ah, but there's some beautiful scenery out there.

Tucker: Beautiful . . . empty . . . worthless. The only good lands are held by the Indians, who do nothing with them. All tied up by Spanish land grants.

James: You could run cattle . . .

Tucker: If you could find water . . .

James: There's coal.

Tucker: Coal? Where?

James: On the Zuni reservation. Matil . . . I spotted it with Matilda.

Tucker [*casts a doubtful eye at We'wha*]: Coal . . . now that's worth something. The railroad is going in and Gallup will be a major stop. Anyone who could deliver coal to Gallup would make a fortune.

A door bell rings and Matilda leaves to answer the door. It is Senator John Logan, who arrives quite drunk.

Matilda: Senator Logan. Please come in. We're so delighted to have you. Such an honor. I know your time is limited.

Logan: Nonsense, nonsense. If I hadn't left the committee meeting, I'd probably be dead drunk by now. Instead, I'm living drunk. And your invitations are hard to resist, Tilly. You know that?

Tilly [*giggles*]: Senator, really. I merely conveyed an informal invitation through your wife.

Logan [*glances at her across the room*]: Yes . . . and she's a hard woman to resist, too.

Tilly: It is a special occasion, Senator. I think you will see why my husband's work in the Bureau is so important.

Logan: Ah, yes, the Bureau of Ethnology. That's under Interior, right?

Matilda: The Smithsonian.

Logan: They're part of that Indian-lover crowd, aren't they?

Matilda: The last Congress appropriated seed funding.

Logan: We spend millions on the Indians.

Matilda: It's a small appropriation really.

Logan: The white working man wants to know why the Indian gets free food, clothing, housing, while he works twelve hours a day to barely get by.

Matilda: We're hoping for a modest increase. To fund another expedition.

Logan: The Indians sit on some of the most valuable lands in the West.

Matilda: My husbands' work will help the government manage the Indians.

Logan: Is that right?

Matilda: We need to understand how primitive people think — in order to teach them.

Logan: I like the way *you* think, Tilly.

Matilda: Senator . . . my husband's work . . .

Logan: You're quite a woman. . . . Something . . . different about you.

Matilda [*giggles*]: I'll take that as a compliment, Senator.

Logan: Take this, too. [*Grabs and kisses her.*] I've always wanted to do that, you know.

Matilda [*adjusts herself*]: It's only a 10% increase.

Meanwhile, the women have been attempting to speak to We'wha with sign language and We'wha has been attempting to respond. Finally he speaks English, to the women's surprise.

We'wha: I am sorry. I do not know this language. Could we speak in English please? I am We'wha. Hello. How are you? How do you do?

Mrs. Logan: Oh my, she speaks English!

Mrs. Carlise: So civilized.

Mrs. Atkins: How do you do?

Matilda and Logan join James and Tucker. While passing in front of We'wha, Matilda giggles in response to a whispered comment of Logan's — We'wha notices them.

James: Senator . . . we're so grateful you could come.

Logan: How could I say no to the best captain who ever served under me? And here's my favorite son-in-law.

Tucker: Your only son-in-law, sir.

Logan: Whatever.

James: Tilly, be a good girl and get the Senator a drink. You know what he likes.

Matilda: Yes, James. [*She starts to leave*.]

James: And bring the cigars.

Matilda: Yes, James. [*Leaves*.]

James: As I was telling the Major, it can be quite handy to have a wife to assist in ethnological research. Often the Indian women will only confide in another woman. And, of course, there's the convenience of having all the wifely comforts, if you know what I mean.

Logan [*chuckling*]: She's quite a woman.

James: Yes, she is. . . . Senator, Major Tucker and I have been having the most interesting conversation about mineral resources in New Mexico. . . .

Matilda returns with the drink and cigars. She pauses to take a sip from one of the drinks.

Frances: Tilly, Mrs. Atkins has had the most marvellous idea. She wants We'wha to appear in this year's hospital extravaganza! They're planning a series of national dances — a French minuet, Tyrolean dancers, Swedes, Japanese — and Mrs. Atkins wants to have an *Indian* dance . . . [*indicating We'wha*] with a real Indian!

Matilda: Frances, I don't know. We'wha is here to work with me. We're doing serious research. I won't have her in some kind of stage show like that boy Cushing is putting on.

Frances: Oh, no, no, no, Tilly. It won't be like that. It will be tasteful. Tableaus, Tilly. Dignified, silent — except the music of course — dramatic poses. The story of America's clash with the savage — his violent, primitive emotions, his passions — and the steady advance of civilization — the white man extending his hand in friendship to the red man. It will be our national dance, the American dance.

Matilda: Well . . .

Frances: The President will be in his box, half of Congress will be there, the best of official society. . . . It'll buy a lot of pills and plasters for the hospital.

Matilda: The President . . .

Frances [*looking at We'wha across the room*]: I never knew an Indian woman could be so . . . dignified.

Scene 4: We'wha in Washington

In this montage scene, Cushing and Stevenson (on opposite sides of the stage) read newspaper accounts of We'wha, while in the center of the stage We'wha appears in tableaus (typical of period) representing the events described. [Cushing is in a hotel room, with Heluta, who does something funny (e.g., sampling strange foods, jumping on the bed). Matilda is with James who is (cleaning a gun? trying to piece together pottery shards?)?]

We'wha in society

We'wha is shaking hands in a reception line. After the first few clumsy handshakes, We'wha gives up and just gives each greeter a little bow.

Matilda: This is wonderful, James. Listen to this: "Society has recently had a notable addition in the shape of an Indian princess of the Zuni tribe. The princess We'wha is the guest of the wife of Col. Stevenson of the Bureau of Ethnology." Did you hear that, James? "She goes about everywhere in her native dress, moving with wonderful dignity and self-possession among the most enlightened society of the metropolis. . . ."

*

Cushing: ". . .One prominent society lady who saw We'wha for the first time was charmed because the princess gave her a sweet smile and a low bow without the formality of an introduction. She said to a friend: 'I always knew that these Indian chieftains were remarkable for their taste.' She was quite disgusted when she found that the 'chieftain' was a member of the other sex." [*Both laugh*.]

We'wha weaving

We'wha is demonstrating weaving. A photographer documents the work. A crowd gathers to watch and admire.

Matilda: This is even better, James: "An Indian woman, crouching before a rude loom, formed the center figure of the picture that met the eyes of a Star reporter when he arrived at the mall in front of the Smithsonian Institution. It was the Zuni maiden, We'wha, a priestess, and a person of importance among her own people. We'wha came there to weave a blanket on the loom and explain the use of the implements."

A flash goes off as We'wha is photographed.

*

Cushing: Listen to this: "Folks who have formed poetic ideals of Indian maidens, after the pattern of Pocahontas or Minnehaha, might be disappointed in We'wha on first sight [*starts chortling*]. Her features, and especially her mouth, are rather large; her figure and carriage rather masculine. . . she speaks a little English, and her . . . manner is very gentle."

Heluta [*frowing*]: Gentle?

Cushing: This is even better: "One day We'wha overheard some women talking in English about a sale on parasols at a certain store, never thinking that the Indian girl would understand them. But the princess disappeared and returned shortly thereafter with a large red satin parasol over her head." Can you see it? Princess We'wha and her umbrella?

At this moment, We'wha stands up from the loom and opens a red parasol and exits.

We'wha on stage

We'wha appears in a tableau of "wild Indians" who rush about and strike various absurd poses. We'wha stands in the center, holding a prayer stick and looking somewhat askance.

Matilda: Listen to this, James. "The Indian Dance was the novel event of the evening. The young people spared neither their good looks nor expense in their enthusiasm to look the part. In the midst of the warlike spectacle, the Zuni priestess We'wha looked statuesque and majestic — the ideal priestess of a barbaric people." Blah, blah, blah, blah . . . oh yes: "President Cleveland was said to have greatly enjoyed the spectacle."

We'wha meets the press

A press conference following the extravaganza. We'wha is still holding a prayer stick.

Reporter 1: Princess We'wha, I understand you were reluctant to appear in the dance at first.

We'wha: At Zuni, dancing is part of our religion. So I was uncertain. I prayed. When it began to rain I knew it would be alright.

Reporter 2: What did you think of the dance?

We'wha: Well . . . the movements of the dance were very curious. . . . I have not seen anything quite like it among my people. . . . But it was very nice.

Reporter 3: Princess, you've seen our great monuments, you've just appeared before an audience of national leaders and official society — what are you going to do next?

We'wha: I'm going to the White House.

We'wha opens his parasol and exits.

We'wha at the White House

Matilda [*writing*]: Eighteen June 1880. Dear Sir: Wéwhá a Zuñi Indian priestess who has been spending the winter with me for the purpose of Ethnological study will in a short time leave for her far away home. She is anxious to meet the President and extend a greeting from her people in the form of a little gift of her own handiwork.

*

Cushing: Well, I see our friend is on the front pages again. "We Wah, the Zuni princess, walked up the broad entrance to the White House . . . and, in company with Mrs. Col. Stevenson, was shown into the Green Room." Now there's a historic moment. "Princess" We'wha, the tallest Zuni, meets Grover Cleveland, America's fattest president. "We'wha's conversation was mainly in monosyllables, but Mrs. Stevenson and the President had quite an interesting talk." No doubt. I can't believe this woman's gall. If the truth got out the scandal would be incredible.

Heluta: Let us hope We'wha does not decide try to find a Wa-sin-to-na husband.

Scene 5: We'wha and Matilda

Stevenson and We'wha arrive out of breath at the top of the Washington Monument.

We'wha: I told you I would climb this Standing White Rock, mother, and I have.

Matilda: Yes, We'wha, you have. You have indeed. And now I'm drenched in perspiration. But look at you, not a bead of sweat — you Zunis seem perfectly adapted to heat.

We'wha: Hush, mother. I must pray. The Sun Father is right above us. He hears every word.

Matilda [*to herself*]: Yes, I suppose so.

We'wha prays. Stevenson takes out a notebook and makes some notes. When We'wha finishes praying, he looks out at the view.

We'wha: Mother, this river . . .

Matilda: The Potomac.

We'wha: You say that in a short distance this river flows into the great waters of the east? [*Matilda nods.*] Truly, this must be the very edge of the world. [*Falls silent.*]

Matilda: What are you thinking, We'wha?

We'wha: What can one think having each and every day of my life prayed for water, believing that in all the world there was not so much water, and now seeing so much water as this? When one has seen such wonders . . . when one stands so near to the Sun Father. To say anything would only show how small my thoughts are.

Matilda: But the ocean is not endless. On the other side is more land.

We'wha: If I could walk across this ocean, how many days would it take to reach the other side?

Matilda: More days than it would take to walk from here to Zuni.

We'wha: But the great sailing chests that move with steam — they are faster, are they not?

Matilda: Yes. You could cross the ocean in eight days and nights.

We'wha: And if a sailing chest traveled south, how long before it would reach the end of these waters?

Matilda: A very long time. Such a ship could travel a month without seeing land.

We'wha: Amazing!

Matilda: Eventually, it would reach a land of ice, where not even Americans have been.

We'wha: Our traditions tell of a land of everlasting summer to the south.

Matilda: Well, there *is* a land of summer about half way to the land of the ice.

We'wha: A place where Americans have never been. Remarkable. Neither heat, nor danger, nor any difficulty can stop the travels of the Americans. Only cold and ice. . . . The gods know the passions of the Americans and so they put up barriers at the ends of the earth to keep them away.

Matilda: Men have tried passing over the southern end of the earth. They have died trying, but they will try again, I suppose, until they succeed.

We'wha: What a strange people. We Zunis live in a poor, dried-up country. We do not welcome you. We treat you rudely. Yet you come into our country and crowd around us. Is it possible for anyone to say what you want? Where is there a country more beautiful that this? Green things grow even on the tops of hills and mountains, and everywhere there is water. Your houses and villages cover the land like forests. But the houses you were born in mean nothing to you. You leave, seeking other places. Why are the Americans so unsatisfied?

Matilda: I don't know. We're still a young nation. Not like the Zunis, living in the same place for untold centuries, believing you are at the middle of the world. We're a nation of immigrants, and no one can agree what an American is. We're trying to find a middle place, I guess. We go west . . . and we find you.

We'wha: It seems to me that above all the Americans are a jealous people.

Matilda: What do you mean?

We'wha: If one American goes one day's journey in the direction of a difficult trail, it seems it is not long before another will go two days' journey in a more difficult direction. One American cannot bear that another shall surpass him. If it were possible, no American would be taller than any other.

Matilda: The Americans are your friends, We'wha. We can help you in many ways.

We'wha: No. Not friends. You are our mother. Wa-sin-ton-a is our father. We must obey you, and you must protect and care for us, like a mother and father. But not friends.

We'wha [*after a pause*]: You, too, have wandered far from the house of your birth.

Matilda: Yes.

We'wha: You are not satisfied.

Matilda: No . . . I'm not.

We'wha: And you have changed.

Matilda: Changed?

We'wha: [*Imitates Matilda's giggling.*] I did not hear this laugh before. And. "Yes, James. Yes, James. Yes, James." These were not words I heard from you at Zuni.

Matilda: Well, things are different here. A Washington woman cannot behave as she can at Zuni. We cannot put our husbands' moccasins on the door. We cannot say what we really think.

We'wha. Yes. I see this.

Matilda: . . . and I *hate* it. We'wha, I hate it. Ever since I got back I've been suffocating. These endless society events. James taking all the credit for our work, treating me like a stupid maid. I can't even attend the meetings of the Anthropological Society because I'm a woman. It's just so . . . [*starts having leg cramps*]. Dammit! Oh god dammit it!

We'wha: What is it, mother?

Matilda: My legs . . . I'm getting cramps. . . . all this climbing. Dammit! What will I do?

We'wha: Come here. Sit. The men get these pains when they run the kick stick races.

We'wha starts to massage Stevenson's calves and feet. Slowly, the pain subsides.

Matilda: Yes . . . that's better. These damn legs. Sometimes the cramps keep me up all night. . . . You do it much better than James. . . . Your hands are so strong, We'wha. Truly, you are the strongest woman I know — in every way.

We'wha: And you . . . you are a woman but you do the work of a man, and you have the head and the heart of a man.

Matilda: Quite honestly . . . I wish I were a man. To have that independence. To say what you really think. I have the head and the heart and the *mouth* of a man, We'wha. That's my problem.

We'wha: No, mother. . . . You have the mouth of a Zuni woman. And American men are not used to a woman who tells them when they are fools. That is your problem.

Matilda: That's much better . . .

We'wha [*stops massaging*]: Do you know about the time the Zunis removed the governor from office?

Matilda: No.

We'wha: He let the Mormons settle at Ramah. Everyone said they gave him dollars. So the priests decided to take back his cane of office. But then none of the men would go to get it. They had a big fight. They argued for hours and hours — who would get the cane. The women sat outside the kiva crying. Finally, they said to each other: "We will get rid of this stupid man." And they did. They went right over to that man's house and right up to his door and said, "Give us the cane!" The *women* did it. And then Heluta became governor.

Matilda: The women did it. Yes . . . there *are* others. Alice Fletcher, Erminie Smith, Zelia Nutall — they've all published. And if I can get these society women to serve on a board of advisors, it'll look quite impressive. "Mrs. Senator Logan" — they'll think twice before the belittle a group with her name attached to it. . . . Yes, We'wha, you've given me a wonderful

idea. The Woman's Anthropological Society. The first organization of women scientists in America!

Scene 6: The plot is hatched

We'wha is in the Stevenson home. She is sweeping the floor. One thing leads to another and she starts to rearrange the furniture, which she has no problem lifting and moving. Meanwhile, the sound of glasses clinking and cigar smoke comes from off stage, where James Stevenson and Major Tucker are talking. We'wha stops to listen in.

James: But can the Senator get the legislation through this Congress?

Tucker: It should be no problem. He'll attach it as a rider to the appropriations for Interior. It'll slide in easier than a nigger's dick into a Mexican whore.

James [*laughing*]: Are those his words?

Tucker: Don't quote him. . . . Anway, once the boundary of the reservation has been moved, the coal deposits will be in the public domain. The same day the legislation is signed into law, I will be at the Land Office, filing a claim for a homestead — my god-given right as an American citizen — and so will every other officer at the Fort. Then we'll discover the coal.

James: Shouldn't the Indians get something for their land?

Tucker: That's where you come in. My father-in-law will endorse a substantial increase in the appropriation for your Bureau. You can collect all the pots and arrowheads you want for six months — and keep things smooth with the Indians.

James: I see. . . . Well, you've worked things out pretty tight.

Tucker: The old man wants to do something for his baby girl . . . and he wants to do something for you and the Mrs.

James: Well, in a way we owe it all to Tilly's keen eye.

In reaction to what he's heard, We'wha drops something.

Tucker: What's that? I thought we were alone.

James: Nothing . . . it's just the Zuni girl.

Scene 7: We'wha confronts Matilda

Matilda: We'wha, what can I do? James is my husband. Our lives, our work depend on men like Senator Logan. My hands are tied.

We'wha: Your hands are tied. I see no rope.

Matilda: You don't understand, We'wha. James never asks for my opinion, and he never tells me what he's planning to do. The husband decides, the woman must follow.

We'wha: Only a fool follows a fool.

Matilda: You've been here six months and you've learned nothing.

We'wha: Here is what I have learned. Colonel Teemsy says, I want to learn about the land of the Zunis. It means he wants to take our land. You say, I want to learn about the ceremonies of the Zunis. It means you want to take our ceremonies. And yet, you don't like our land, you don't believe in our ceremonies. But you burn to have what you don't have, even what you don't like, don't want, don't care about. The Americans are witches. Truly, a nation of witches.

Matilda: Look, maybe it's not such a bad thing. If they start a mining operation, maybe Zunis can get jobs . . . you can build schools, get doctors, make your lives better.

We'wha: Corn Mountain is sacred. The clay I gather there is the *flesh* of the mother. . . [*pause*]. Do you remember what I said?

Matilda: About the Americans not being your friends?

We'wha: No, about me. I have two-spirits, mother. I am a pancake.

Matilda: I don't understand.

We'wha: It's time I return to Zuni.

Scene 8: We'wha and Cushing

Before leaving, We'wha (with his parasol) goes to Cushing, who is in a hotel in Washington.

Cushing: Oh! . . . Come in. . . . Are you alone? How did you get here?

We'wha: I followed the iron bars in the street. It was not hard to find you.

We'wha looks around the room.

Cushing: Come in. Sit. I'm sorry I have only some cheese and bread to offer. It's not easy to follow Zuni customs here.

We'wha: Where is Heluta?

Cushing: Heluta is taking a walk — with what he felicitiously refers to as the "walking ladies" who grace our streets in the twilight hours.

We'wha: I see.

Cushing: Why are you here? Did Putsinne Kapa send you?

We'wha [*gives Cushing a dirty look*]: No!

Cushing: The Colonel?

We'wha [*ignores him*]: What is this?

Cushing: I'm teaching myself how to make Zuni pottery.

We'wha: This is women's work.

Cushing: I want to learn all the arts of the Zunis. Among the Americans, men make these kind of things.

We'wha [*examines pot*]: The coils are not even. The walls will fall in before you finish this shape. Anyway, you did not knead the clay enough. It will crack in the fire. [*Takes Cushing's hands*.] Your hands are so small.

Cushing: Yes. Well, we can't all have your gifts, We'wha.

We'wha: I just want to ask you one thing.

Cushing: Yes?

We'wha: What are you, Cushy?

Cushing: What do you mean?

We'wha: Where is your wife?

Cushing: I'm completely normal . . . if that's what you mean.

We'wha [*indicating his costume*]: Yes. A normal man . . . who dresses in costumes and does women's work.

Cushing: When Heluta and I return to Zuni I will be initiated — like all Zuni men.

We'wha: I have been initiated. But I am more than a man — or a woman. . . . I see your fear. Yet you long to be more than a man, too. More than an American man. And Teems Okya wants to be more than a woman.

Cushing: Only you would compare me to Mrs. Stevenson. I don't know whether to take exception or to laugh.

Cushing nervously taps his pencil.

We'wha: Or to run like a coyote?

We'wha walks over and takes the pencil from Cushing.

We'wha: You know, of all the machines the Americans have invented I think this is the greatest one. Truly, it is greater than your iron horses and your sailing chests. With *this* [*indicates tip of pencil*] you draw the shadows of things, and these are more real to you than what you can see and smell. So you teach children not how to see and know the world but but how to read shadows. And with this [*indicates eraser*] you take away whatever you don't like.

Cushing: You have your gods, We'wha. You can't see them, but you look to them to tell you how to live, you follow the words of your myths. How is that different from writing?

We'wha: You are wrong to say we do not see and feel our gods. When we put on the mask, we see through the eyes of the god. We are holy. And when the priests says the words of the prayers in their hearts, the rains come and everyone is blessed with food and children.

Cushing: I do not make things up. The words I write on this paper are true. I want the world to know about the true Zunis.

We'wha: The true Zunis? Did Heluta ever tell you the story of the serpent god who got angry with the Zunis and caused a great flood?

Cushing: Yes, and the Zuni boy and girl offered themselves to the waters to save their people and became the twin rock spires you see before Corn Mountain today. It's a lovely tale.

We'wha: They didn't jump, Cushy. They were pushed. They chose the most beautiful son and daughter of the priests . . . [*Cushing is silent, tapping his pencil*.] Why don't you use your machine to write this? Perhaps the Americans would not be so eager to see you and Heluta dancing if they knew this? Perhaps Washington will say you should stop our ceremonies, not write about them.

Cushing: I can't believe that the Zuni priests, who pray every day for the welfare of every living thing on earth, would sacrifice their own children.

We'wha: And what about me. Am I on that page?

Cushing: You?

We'wha: Do you tell the Americans about me, about those who have two spirits and the two-spirit kachina? I think not. I think not because the Americans are like the Missa-man and Mouse Face. When they learned about me they sent me away. They told their children to fear me. They said bad things about the Zunis.

Cushing: Is that why you haven't told Mrs. Stevenson?

We'wha: Teems Okya has eyes. She uses them as she wishes.

Cushing: That is certainly true.

We'wha: No one can stop her.

Cushing: Stop her . . . stop her from what?

We'wha: Don't you know?

Cushing: Know what?

We'wha: Aren't you a Washington man? Your Washington friends have made a plan for the Zunis.

Cushing: What plan?

We'wha: It seems our poor, dried-up land is valuable. Colonel Teemsy thinks so — and the old man who smells bad and falls down.

Cushing: Logan? Colonel Stevenson and Senator Logan want to take Zuni land? Why?

We'wha: There is some rock. Some kind of black rock.

Cushing: Coal.

We'wha: You know nothing about this?

Cushing: No. Look, you must know that the Stevensons and I are not exactly *kihe*, friends.

We'wha: Then perhaps you will help the Zunis.

Cushing: Me? Oh, no. I can't do anything. Colonel Stevenson has many powerful friends.

We'wha: It is not Colonel Teemsy who made this plan.

Cushing: Who made the plan?

We'wha: Teems Okya made the plan. I heard it all. Logan will make a piece of paper that says the land belongs to Wa-sin-ton-a, not the Zunis. Then the son of Logan will buy the land from Wa-sin-ton-a. Then they will dig up the black rock and take it away. And everyone will get dollars. And Teems Okya will make many copies of her writings, many more than yours, and she will be famous.

Cushing: That malevolent hag. She's obsessed with destroying me. And it means nothing if she destroys your people in the process. . . . Well, your boundaries are guaranteed by a Spanish land grant. Logan can't get away with this. He's running for vice-president this fall, and he can't afford a controversy.

You don't like writing. Well, this writing is a list of all the journalists I have met on this trip. Each one of these will write that Senator Logan is trying to steal the lands of the poor little tribe of Zunis, who have always been friends of the Americans.

We'wha: The writing on this paper can help the Zunis?

Cushing: Yes. Yes, it can.

We'wha: Then use this paper . . . and use that [*points to pencil*]. Perhaps, Cushy, you truly are a son of the Zunis. [*Opens parasol*.]

Scene 9: The campaign

James and Matilda Stevenson, Cushing, and Logan are on stage in three different spotlights.

James Stevenson [*reading*]: Did you see this, Tilly? "The Democratic Party's newly chosen vice presidential candidate is rumored to have more than a philanthropic interest in a small band of Indians in New Mexico territory. Senator Logan has attached a rider to the Interior Department's appropriations changing the boundary of the Zuni reservation. When contacted, the Senator stated that he wrote the provision at the request of local residents to resolve disputes over old Spanish land grants. . .

*

Cushing: ". . . but sources indicate that it was introduced on behalf of a certain Major Benjamin Tucker, an officer stationed at Fort Wingate and Logan's son-in-law, who has discovered mineral deposits on the lands in question." Yes!

*

James: "According to Lieutenant Cushing, who has made a special study of the tribe, the Zunis have always been allies of the Americans, providing supplies and volunteers during the war against the Navajos."

*

Logan: Dear Editors: May I remind you that the Zuni Reservation comprises some 1,600,000 acres, yet there are barely 1,500 Zunis. If a civilized white man can now get only 160 acres of land as a homestead by paying for it, and an Indian can get over 1,000 acres without paying for it, had not the white man better adopt the Cushing plan and become one of the Zuni Indians?

*

Cushing: "Republican officials are considering hearings into Senator Logan's interests in New Mexico and elsewhere." The *Evening Star* . . . the *Washington Chronicle* . . .

*

James: . . . the *New York Herald* . . . the *Chicago Tribune* . . .

*

Logan: . . . the *Boston Globe* . . . the *Phildelphia Eagle*!

*

James: It's a disaster!

Matilda [*insincerely*]: It's a pity.

James: Damn that Cushing!

*

Logan: Damn that Cushing and damn that jackass son-in-law of mine. And damn the Stevensons and their goddamn Indians.

*

Cushing: "The Senator has announced the withdrawal of his legislation on the Zuni Indians." We won!

*

James: Who would have thought that Cushing was capable of this?

Matilda: I don't believe you asked *me*, James.

James: Well, if I know Logan . . .

James and Logan [*together*]: . . . somebody's going to have to pay for this!

ACT THREE

Scene 1: Robert and Matilda

Matilda: He must have been very pleased with himself. The Blaine-Logan ticket was defeated. One of the most powerful men in America, one of the best friends of the Bureau humiliated. By the time the ink had dried, Cushing was back in New Mexico, basking in the adoration of the Zunis. Now all doors were open to him. He entered the kivas. The old men unbusomed themselves. Cushy could do no wrong. Well, you found out about that. . . .

Something falls from the papers Robert is holding.

Matilda: What's that? [*Picks it up*.]

Robert: Photographs that I found in the archives. Cushing posing as a sacred clown, as a kachina. . . . The Zunis find these extremely upsetting. They think he's making fun of them. There's some writing on the back of this one.

Stevenson [p*uts on her monacle, and reads*]: "Frank Hamilton Cushing in his fantastic dress worn while among the Zuni Indians. This man was the biggest fool and charlatan I ever knew. He even put his hair up in curl papers every night. How could a man walk weighted down with so much toggery?"

Robert: It looks like your handwriting.

Matilda: I had a fine, steady hand in those days. [*Hands it back*]. Now look at this old claw. It hurts so much I can barely dress myself. That's why I take strong drink. And I need a secretary to write for me. Since Clara left I haven't gotten a bit of work done.

Robert: About the photograph . . .

Stevenson: Pansy.

Robert: What?

Matilda: He was a freak, a sideshow. I'm translating what I wrote into the language of your times. Isn't that what anthropologists do?

Robert: Well, that is one view of anthropology. Another view is that anthropology is a dialogue, or rather an artifact of a dialogue between an anthropologist and people of another culture. Personally, I don't think an outsider ever really witnesses the "real" or "true" culture of others — just what people do and say when an outsider is watching them and asking questions.

Matilda: Horse hockey! Anthropology is about looking, seeing, and recording *facts*. What people do, what they say. I can do it and you can do it. Science is the universal language. What you're saying is Cushing-ism.

Robert: Well, "Cushing-ism" pretty much rules. Lévi-Strauss claimed Cushing as the first structuralist. And the postmodernists claim him as someone who did reflexive anthropology — you know, because he wrote about his personal experiences, described his interactions with the Zunis. He's considered the originator of the participant-observer method.

Matilda: The originator of *what*? Cushing became a savage. It was a method for chasing Zuni girls.

Robert: Well, you know, Cushing denied those charges. He married an American woman and lived with her at Zuni just so they would stop pressuring him to marry a Zuni woman.

Matilda: He got married to stop rumors that he was a pansy.

Robert: Well, which is it? Was he chasing girls or boys?

Matilda: Never mind. What about *me*? What about *my* legacy?

Robert: Kroeber praised you as being more reliable than Cushing . . . And the feminists claim you as one of the first professional women scientists in America.

Matilda: Yes!

Robert: But Cushing was the first anthropologist who actually lived with the people he studied. Participant-observation is considered the basic methodology of anthropology.

Stevenson: It's a trick . . . You don't need to dress in drag to study another people. Why shouldn't they help you record their history and culture? The Zuni men who cooperated with me were leaders — Heluta, the priests, and, yes, We'wha. They saw that it was in their best interest to help me. There was no need to trick them into revealing secrets.

Robert: They cooperated with you because they were desperate to maintain good relations with the American government. Zuni lands were been eaten away by squatters. They would have done just about anything to keep Washington happy. Zunis today have a hard time understanding why they told you so much.

Matilda: Well . . . it's good for you they did. Isn't it true that Zunis have copies of my book? That they look at the plates when they restore the old masks?

Robert: Yes . . . but any white person can look, too.

Matilda: You're being paranoid. The Bureau's reports are limited editions, for research libraries. Only experts ever look at them.

Robert: No. Many people look at them. Anthropology is *popular*, Mrs. Stevenson. Today we see our kachinas on t-shirts and coffee mugs and refrigerator magnets. They're our gods.

Matilda: Haven't you ever seen a glow-in-the-dark crucifix?

Robert: That's not the point. Anthropology brought more than bad taste to Zuni. You and Cushing may have had different approaches but you both undermined traditional culture.

Matilda: What are you talking about?

Robert: Mrs. Stevenson . . . what I'm trying to say is . . . you went to Zuni to record and preserve Zuni culture — and that's a very noble goal — but at the same time you helped destroy what you were trying to preserve. Just like big game hunters in Africa killed off the animals so that they could be "preserved" in museum displays back in America and Europe. Don't you see the irony? That's postmodernism.

Matilda: Recording it *caused* it to disappear? Where do you get these ideas? It was disappearing anyway! Are you going to blame me for Columbus, for the American Revolution, for the horse and the rifle? Savagery gives way to civilization. It's natural. It's nobody's fault.

Robert: Civilization? Progress? Mrs. Stevenson, why don't you pour another drink and let me tell you something about the twentieth century. . . .

Scene 2: We'wha's tea party

We'wha is having a Washington style "tea." As the women enter, We'wha gives them an American-style handshake.

We'wha: Hello. How do you do? Come in. Sit down.

Several bags of laundry have been set around a low, improvised table.

Woman 1: What is this?

We'wha: Oh, it's just the clothes of the Americans. I wash their clothes and they give me these.

The women gather around to look at We'wha's coins.

We'wha: Now sit.

The women sit on the laundry bags, shifting around until they're comfortable. We'wha solemnly pours tea into cups with saucers. The women try to figure out what to do.

We'wha : No, no, no. You hold the flat one like *this*, and you hold the little pot like *this* and then you drink like *this*.

Woman 2: Are you sure the Washington ladies drink this way?

We'wha: As surely as you hear my words. They put their fingers like this and their mouths like this — very tiny — and then they suck.

Woman 3: Like this? [*Slurps*.]

We'wha: No, not like a horse. Washington ladies do things very carefully. As if everything was very, very delicate. Like this.

All the ladies start imitating We'wha, then they all break into giggles.

Woman 1: How do the Americans think of these things?

We'wha: Who knows? Truly, the white women are all fakes. I saw them in their dressing rooms, stuffing rags in their chests to make them bigger, putting on fake hair, even taking their teeth out of their heads!

Woman 3: Really?

Woman 1: Their teeth?

We'wha: I saw a woman take her teeth out and put them on the table.

Woman 2: Are they witches?

Woman 1: Perhaps they are gods.

We'wha: They are neither.

Woman 3: Heluta says that the Americans are weak and foolish. They make their houses so hot you must take your clothes off inside, and they sleep in beds so soft you never wake up.

Woman 1: And they only pray one day a week. The rest of the time they never give the slightest thought to their gods.

We'wha: Heluta is the fool if he cannot see the strength of the Americans. If the Americans want something they will never stop until they get it.

Woman 1: Someone is an even greater fool than Heluta.

We'wha: Who is that?

Woman 2: Didn't you hear? Tsalatitse has taken him back . . .

Woman 3: Back? Did she throw him out again?

Woman 1: Thrown out or left. Who knows? That home has no door. Someone is always moving out or moving in.

We'wha: Heluta has left before?

Woman 3: Does the Sun Father leaves his home each morning? It's always the same. But when Heluta leaves he never goes back to his mother's house. No. He always goes to the home of some other woman.

Woman 2: So they say in marriage three is company, but two is very lonely.

Woman 3: A man must have said that.

Woman 1: Didn't you know, We'wha?

We'wha: Know what?

Woman 1: Heluta is Zuni's most loyal husband. All the other Zuni men may be dogs. They all go sniffing around sooner or later. But not Heluta. He has never cheated. He divorces.

Woman 2: Then it's not cheating and he doesn't have to hide it.

Woman 3: Only a man would make up something like that to feel better about what he does with that thing between his legs.

Woman 1: But then he gets tired of his "outside," so he divorces her and goes back to his "inside wife." And Tsalatitse always takes him in.

Woman 2: She doesn't even ask where he has been.

Woman 3: He throws dirt all over himself and says he's been sleeping in the streets.

Woman 1: He cries, and she lets him in.

We'wha: Puppies are cute, but they're still dogs.

Woman 2: Surely you knew this? Were you away so long?

Women start giggling.

We'wha: Our tea is finished. Washington women do not spend all day gossiping. . . .

The women linger. We'wha takes the tea cup out of the hands of one woman and sets it down.

We'wha: Sometimes they do not even finish what is given them before they leave to visit someone else. This is considered polite.

Women start to leave.

We'wha: Wait. [*Hands out coins.*] I give you this.

Each women says "elhakwa" *and breathes from the money then looks at it suspiciously.*

Woman 2 [*to Woman 1*]: They say when Heluta returned from Washington he gave the women rolls of cloth, great rolls of cloth, to make dresses like white women.

We'wha: Take this, too [*gives them the rest of the coins*].

Woman 2: Thank you, older sister. May your days pass happily.

Woman 1: May your prayers be received by the gods.

Woman 3: May your be long.

Scene 3: Cushing visits the Sacred Springs

Cushing enters with crate containing jewelry making tools (including a hammer and anvil). There's an envelope sticking out of his back pocket.

Cushing: Older brother, the tools I promised you are here. Everything you need to become Zuni's first silversmith. Paid for by the subscriptions of the young ladies at Wellesley College.

Heluta [*opens box and takes out contents*]: The American ladies paid for this? Truly, they are generous . . . and rich.

Cushing: You made a great impression on them when we visited there.

Heluta: I will make them necklaces with turquoise and silver. And when the Zunis hear about it, they will all come to me. They will be happy to trade with me instead of the Navajos.

Cushing: And here's a gift from me. A silver dollar. You can use this to make your first piece.

Heluta: *Elhakwa* [*breathes from the gift then looks at Cushing affectionately and puts his arm on his shoulder*]. Little brother, you make my heart warm. When you came to us, you were a sickly boy, barely able to care for yourself. You lived on pig's grease and baked dough. But I threw the light of my favor on you and taught how to be a man, a real Zuni, a cooked person. And you are fine man, indeed. It gives me pleasure just to see your face [*puts his forehead against Cushing's*].

Cushing: You honor me, brother. Now I see with the eyes of an American *and* the eyes of a Zuni. And I know myself. I owe this to you.

Heluta goes over to his anvil and begins pounding on the silver dollar.

Cushing: Oh. I got something, too. A letter from Washington.

Heluta: What does Washington say?

Cushing starts to read the letter then gasps. Slowly he sinks to the floor and buries his head in his hands.

Heluta [*stops pounding*]: What makes you puff up your face with sad thoughts? Did I not open my heart to you and you to me? How could there be any sad thoughts now?

Cushing (reading): "It is thought best that the valuable ethnological material collected by you at the Pueblo of Zuni should be put in shape for publication at as early a day as practicable. . . . As soon, therefore, as you can settle your affairs at Zuni, and make the necessary arrangements, you will proceed to Washington and report to the Director."

Heluta: Is this the doing of Colonel Teemsy?

Cushing: The telegram comes from Powell, but of course Stevenson's behind it, and maybe Logan. . . . And that damn woman. Putsinne Kapa has plopped her wide ass right on top of me and my work and my career. . . . Why am I cursed by this evil woman?

Heluta: I do not know what it means, but it must mean something.

Cushing [*angry*]: You don't understand. What do you think I've been doing all this time? Why do you think I moved in with you, put up with all these hardships, subjected myself to the

ridicule of the Stevensons? For fun? Just to see what your food tastes like? . . . I'm doing research, scientific research. I'm on the verge of proving something that will change our understanding of history.

Heluta: Prove?

Cushing: Show the truth of something. In a way that other people, even people who hate you, like the Stevensons, have to agree. That's the power of truth.

Heluta: To know the truth one must have imagined many falsehoods.

Cushing: Yes. And I know the falsehood of what has been said about the Indian, about you. These falsehoods are used by men like Logan when they want to take your land.

Heluta: The tellings from our ancestors are true. What else do you need?

Cushing: More than words and stories, more than memory. I need something concrete, something I can show, an artifact.

Heluta: What is that?

Cushing: Evidence of a connection. Something that the Zunis make or use today that your ancestors also made or used. That's it! We must go to the home of your ancestors.

Cushing starts to rise and Heluta follows, his expression revealing alarm at what he hears.

Cushing: Brother, you must take me to the Sacred Springs. If I can find something in the shrines there — I can prove my theory. We must leave now. How long will it take?

Heluta: No!

Cushing: What?

Heluta: I said NO! Only the highest priests ever go to Sacred Springs. How could you think of this?

Cushing: Brother, our visit will be short. No one will know. We'll take our sacred cornmeal and prayersticks and make all the offerings.

Heluta: I thought you were a Zuni!

Cushing: What I learn will help the Zunis!

Heluta: I will never betray my ancestors! Not for you, not for Washington, not for anyone!

Cushing: Brother . . . please help me.

Lights out except for a spot on Cushing.

Cushing [*lectures with slides*]: We left the village by cover of darkness, to avoid drawing attention from the ever superstitious Zunis. My Indian guide, although horrified when I proposed the journey, succombed to superior reasoning — and the promise of silver dollars — and conducted me to the site, over 100 miles distant. When we came within view of our destination, he refused to go further. I would have to traverse the remaining distance myself, including a perilous passage down the side of a steep box canyon. Within the canyon walls all was shaded with perpetual twilight. I made my way through the underbrush until finally the narrow ravine was joined by a side canyon. A series of small springs fed a scum-covered lake. This was Zuni Heaven. Beneath the waters, lived the spirits of the ancestors.

When I emerged from the depths, the sun was slipping below the horizon. I found my companion praying and offering cornmeal to appease the gods. We returned that night, and forty-eight hours later the precious artifacts — definitive proof of my theory — were craddled on my lap, as I sped by rail to our nation's capitol, where they are now part of the permanent collection of the National Museum.

Scene 4: We'wha and Heluta

The central plaza at Zuni. Heluta, sporting a new necklace, and We'wha, carrying a bag of laundry on his back with a strap around his foreheard and holding his parasol, meet. They try to pass each other — Heluta gets knocked by the parasol. As their dialogue proceeds other Zunis gather to watch.

Heluta: Keshi.

We'wha: Keshi.

Heluta: You have returned.

We'wha: Yes. You too have returned.

Heluta: You saw many things of the Americans, they say.

We'wha: I saw only the city of Wa-sin-ton-a. They say you saw many cities, some even greater.

Heluta: You saw Wa-sin-ton-a himself.

We'wha: I gave him a greeting from the Zuni people, that is all.

Helutae: The father of the Americans is a great man, is he not?

We'wha: He is a fat man. He is the fattest of all the Americans, I think.

Heluta [*gravely*]: There are many fat Americans.

We'wha: They say you left Tsalatitse again . . .

Heluta: You know her temper.

We'wha: . . . and returned again.

Heluta is silent.

We'wha: The Zunis never seem to know if their governor is married or not.

Heluta: He is married . . . he is much married.

We'wha: Well . . . as long as Tsalatitse knows.

Heluta: That is *her* concern, I think.

We'wha: Yes, it is.

Heluta: It's true, I have left before. But everyone knows that when we are married there is no other woman for me.

We'wha: And what about the walking ladies of Washington?

Heluta: What do you know about that?

We'wha: I know everything about that. Were you married then or not? Or are you lying now? Or do you cheat *and* lie? When you told me your days with Tsalatitse were finished, were you lying or cheating or both? . . . You have many words. Inside a blanket your words are sweet. Perhaps Tsalatitse and I should compare your words. [*Raises his voice for the onlookers*]. Perhaps its time that the Tsalatitse had her eyes opened.

Heluta: The eyes that should be opened belong to those who believe that Colonel Teemsy and Teems Okya are their friends. Perhaps it's time the Zunis know who made the plan to take their lands — how Teems Okya found the black rock on Corn Mountain, who took her there. And why is it you have so many fine things when the rest of the Zunis are so poor . . .

We'wha: You do not suffer for lack of fine things [*indicates Heluta's necklace*]. But the Zunis are not asking questions about Teems Okya. They want to know what happened to the shrine at the Sacred Springs.

Heluta: What do you mean?

We'wha: You took Cushy to Sacred Springs. Everyone knows. They say your American brother took the prayer sticks of our fathers. And that is why so many children are sick and the rains have not come.

Heluta: This is not true. None of this is true. Cushy is our friend. He is the one who saved our land. He is the one who has learned our ways — not Colonel Teemsy, not Teems Okya. Only Cushy. Because I taught him. And now he honors our ancestors.

We'wha: Perhaps. I do not know. . . .

Heluta: You do not know.

We'wha: There seems to be much you do not know, either.

Heluta: I know enough.

We'wha: Then you know how Cushy found out about the plan. You know that someone told him. And if you were not with the walking ladies that night, you would know who came to Cushy, who told him about the plan, who asked him to help the Zuni people.

Heluta: I see. [*To the onlookers*.] Then the Zunis should be grateful to their man-woman. Indeed, we should all say thanks to We'wha. Here, I give you this. [*Gives necklace and prays*.] My clan brother, may your days pass happily and the gods smile on your path.

We'wha: Yes. Our brother is a great man, indeed. He keeps nothing for himself. You must have something, too. Take this. [*Gives him the parasol and prays*.] May your days pass happily, clan brother, and the gods smile on your path, now and each day the Sun Father rises.

Heluta: That is all.

We'wha: My words are finished.

We'wha puts on the necklace, Heluta opens the parasol, and both storm off stage in opposite directions.

Scene 5: Matilda and We'wha

We'wha is grinding corn. Stevenson is dressed in black.

Matilda: We'wha . . . it's Tilly. . . . I've come back, just as I said I would.

We'wha: So I see.

Matilda: You look well. . . . I thought about you often. So many times I wished I could speak to you.

We'wha: I have been busy. I have been doing all the work no one did when I was gone.

Matilda: A lot of things have changed, We'wha. [*Stands in front of We'wha to get his attention*.] I have some bad news.

We'wha [*finally stops grinding and looks up*]: All black. You look like the warrior woman kachina.

Matilda: Colonel Stevenson . . . . James . . . passed away, We'wha. Four months ago. It was mountain fever, brought on by over-exposure to high altitudes.

We'wha: His road was short, and he knew it. So he did those things. . . . [*Starts grinding again*.] The days have been long for you.

Matilda: His death was a shock. He left me nothing. I had to sell the house. I finally convinced Powell to let me finish our report. For the first time in my life I'm going to be paid to do research. I'm a professional scientist. And the Women's Anthropological Society has been a great success.

We'wha: The Zunis have had hard times, too. This year the rain falls everywhere but on our fields. The disease — you call it small . . .

Matilda: Smallpox . . .

We'wha: The children have this disease. Many have died. Some say it's because Cushy stole prayer sticks from Sacred Springs. Some say it's because of witches.

Matilda: Why must you blame everything on witches? Perhaps if I wrote to the Indian Commissioner we could get some vaccines here. . . . I hope we can start work again soon, We'wha. Once I've documented the Sha'lako dances, my research will be complete. I've made lists of questions. I'm much better organized now.

We'wha: I have no time for talking. The gods will be here tomorrow. I must grind corn for my aunt and her people.

Matilda: Of course. I understand. I mean after the gods have danced . . .

We'wha: I will be taboo. No stories can be told then.

Matilda: We'wha . . . our friendship. . . .

We'wha: The gods are coming.

We'wha starts singing.

Scene 6: Stevenson and Heluta

Heluta is at his anvil.

Matilda: Governor, I have sad news. . . . Colonel Stevenson passed away this winter.

Heluta: When Zunis die their spirits travel to the Sacred Springs, and they dance with their relatives and friends who have died before them. Perhaps Colonel Teemsy is dancing, too.

Matilda: You were very helpful to the Colonel. He always spoke well of you. . . . He died before his work was finished, and so Washington has asked me to finish it. He would like you to help me.

Heluta: Washington? He is just a fat man. He does not care about Heluta who lives so far away in a poor little village.

Matilda: What I'm saying is . . . *I* need your help, governor.

Heluta: Is not the man-woman your helper?

Matilda: What?

Heluta: We'wha is your helper and, it seems, Cushy's helper, too.

Matilda: We'wha helps Cushing?

Heluta: So it seems. We'wha told Cushing about the plan to take the Zunis' lands.

Matilda: We'wha told him? I might have guessed. Very sly.

Heluta: Because the plan was yours, Cushy decided to stop it.

Matilda: Mine? Who told you that? I had nothing to do with it. It was one of James's get-rich-quick schemes. I knew nothing about it until We'wha came to me.

Heluta: This was not your plan?

Matilda: What does it matter? It came to naught, and everyone lived to regret it. . . . There will be no more schemes about your lands. *I'm* in charge now.

Heluta: Then why is We'wha not your helper?

Matilda: We'wha . . . We'wha doesn't know the ceremonies they way you do. No one knows more about the ceremonies of the Zunis.

Heluta: Yes.

Matilda: Only you can tell me the chants of the Sha'lako ceremony.

Heluta: Yes. I am valuable. Without me they could not hold these ceremonies. The prayers I know are valuable, too. . . . Cushy gives me these [*holds up a silver dollar*].

Matilda: Is that right? [*To herself*] No wonder he's gotten into the kivas. [*To Heluta*.] Well, I don't have silver dollars to give you, governor. The American men do not let their women have valuable things the way the Zunis do.

Heluta: The American women do not treat their men as badly as the Zuni women do.

Matilda: If you help me, I can help you. . . . Dammit!

Matilda clutches at her leg — she's having a cramp. She takes out a flask and drinks.

Heluta: What is this? [*Takes flask*.]

Matilda: It's medicine. I get terrible pain in my legs.

Heluta [*smells it*]: I know this. This is the burning drink. *This* is valuable.

Matilda: Governor . . . let me give you something else.

Heluta: It seems you are not so different from my younger brother, after all.

Matilda: What do you mean?

Heluta: You are both Washington people, yet you are so poor.

Matilda: Someday society will appreciate the value of scientific knowledge.

Heluta: Give me this. I will tell you what you want to know. . . .

Scene 7: The witch

A stylized depiction shows what happens next. In one part of the stage, Heluta is working on his jewelry; in another, We'wha is washing clothes. We'wha gives a silver dollar to Young man 3. The young man, in turn, gives the dollar to Heluta for whiskey. The young men start drinking. Stevenson watches it all and takes notes.

Matilda: In 1879 whiskey was rarely if ever used by the Zunis; but with the advance of civilization intoxicants are producing demoralizing effects. The peddling of whiskey begins several weeks before the Sha'lako festival.

*

Young man 1: It looks like popcorn water.

Young man 2: It smells like piss.

Young man 3: Give it here. If the Americans drink it, I will drink it. [*Takes a big swallow and starts wheezing*.]

Young man 2: They say it will make you strong and brave!

Young man 3 [*pretends to like it*]: It's . . . it's . . . delicious. Try it, brothers. It's delicious.

Young man 2 [*drinks*]: Uhhhh . . . it hurts!

Young man 1: Let me see. [*Swallows then breathes out in little puffs*.] Oh! It's so hot. It must be a kind of fire medicine.

Young man 3: It's like an arrow shooting from your stomach to the top of your head.

Young man 2: I feel funny.

Young man 1: I feel hot.

Young man 3: I feel sick!

*

Matilda: The biggest peddler of whisky is an Indian educated at the government school for Indians in Carlisle. When discovered by the writer, he declared: "I was trained to be a blacksmith, but when I returned from school and tried to get work in Albuquerque, I received the same answer everywhere I applied: 'White men are good enough for me.' What was I to do?"

*

Young man 1: Heluta says he planted his seed with many American women. They all wanted him.

Young man 2: The American men must be very bad, if their women wanted Heluta.

Young man 3: *I* heard that the American women made Heluta *pay* them to have sex.

Young man 1: Pay?

Young man 3: Yes, with the metal pieces. Just like the one I gave Heluta for the whiskey.

Young man 2: What kind of man has to pay a woman?

Young man 1: There should always be women for men and men for women — and men-women for everybody. And no one should pay.

Young man 2: I think the woman should pay the man! After all we do most of the work.

Young man 3: That's not what they say about *you*, brother. They say your woman does the all work and you lie on the sheep skin and moan.

Young man 1 [*moaning as if having sex*]: Ohhh . . . ohhh . . . ohhh . . .

Young man 2: You are jealous, that is all. . . . Anyway, the Zuni man has to pay. When her parents catch you, and you have to get married, then you pay!

Young man 3: We'wha says that Zuni is not really the middle of the world.

Young man 1: Impossible.

Young man 3: And to the south is not a land of summer but a terrible ice land. Even Americans cannot go there.

Young man 2: We'wha is crazier than Heluta.

Young man 3: We'wha is not crazy.

Young man 2: But if Zuni is not the middle of the world then the stories told by the priests are wrong. They are lying. Even our parents are lying.

Young man 3: It's not lying. They just don't know. They have never left Zuni. So they just guess.

Young man 3: I think they are lying. The priests said that if any human ever went to the Sacred Springs the earth would rip open and we would all die. But Cushy went there and nothing happened. . . .

Young man 2: Heluta is an old coyote. His wife is always throwing him out.

Young man 3: I'm sick of old men telling us what to do.

Young man 2: They beat us when we are initiated and anytime we say anything in the kiva.

Young man 1: It's hard to be a Zuni. I wish I were an American.

Young man 1: The Missa man says we should stop listening to the priests. He says our gods are devils.

Young man 3: Why, I'd like to go right up to those old men and . . .

Young man 2: And?

Young man 3: And spit! Spit in their eye.

*

Matilda: The scene of debauchery is shocking, and as the day wanes it becomes disgusting in the extreme. The mad desire for drink is too great for them to remain sober enough to observe the ceremonial of their gods. Many of these staggering Indians are not over 14 or 15 years of age.

*

Young man 1: See, I can spit farther than you!

Young man 3: It's only because this medicine makes my mouth dry. . . . Anyway, spitting is not important. What's important is sex. Sex is more important, and no one has had more women than me!

Young man 2: So you say.

Young man 3: I have had more women than both of you!

Young man 1: Perhaps. But at least my women are satisfied.

Young man 3: What do you mean?

Young man 2: Uh-oh.

Young man 1: They call you the Rabbit because you do it so fast and then hop away.

Young man 3: Truly?

Young man 1: Indeed!

Young man 3: Well, I'm fast enough to beat you in the kick stick races any day!

Young man 1: I killed a Navajo!

Young man 2: You *think* you killed a Navajo. I say he got away.

Young man 1: Someday maybe a Navajo will kill you!

Young man 3: Kill me? Nobody can kill me!

Young man 2: I feel like . . . like the earth is moving. And you are moving.

Young man 1: Give me your arm.

Young man 3: You think you can kill me? Nobody can kill me. I'm stronger than anybody.

Young man 2: What are you saying?

Young man 3: Go ahead. Hit me. Beat my body. It doesn't hurt me.

Young man 1: Don't talk that way. You're crazy.

Young man 3: Nobody can hurt me. [*Starts hitting himself in the chest.*] I am wise. Did you hear me? I am wise!

Young man 2 [*eyes getting big, pointing*]: You're . . . you're a witch!

Two figures in blankets immediately appear and sweep Young Man 3 away.

Scene 8: The occupation

Back projections of a man hung from the wrists, marching soldiers, etc.

Reporter 1: The *Albuquerque Morning Democrat*: "Tortured and Killed; A Zuni Indian Charged with Witchcraft Mets a Horrible Death." Reports from Fort Wingate suggest that the village of Zuni was recently the scene of an occurrence recalling all the horrors of the days when our God fearing ancestors of New England piously devoted their neighbors and friends to the stake. Apparently, the torture preceding death was of the most revolting character.

Reporter 2: The *Santa Fe Daily New Mexican*: "On a Queer Charge." Major Bejamin Tucker, commanding officer at Fort Wingate, has left for the village of Zuni to arrest Indians responsible for the trial of a young man on the charge of witchcraft. Report of the outrage came from an old Zuni Indian who arrived at the Fort imploring for help to rescue his tortured son.

Two soldiers at We'wha's doorway. They pound on the door and it opens a small crack.

Soldier 1: By order of Major Benjamin Tucker under the authority of General Nelson, Arizona Department, we are seeking the whereabouts of a certain Nick, or Dick, known as Zuni Nick, or Tumaka, or Nick Tumaka, in connection with the illegal sale of alcohol and a charge of assault . . . . We have reason to believe he resides here. . . . You are hereby ordered to turn him over . . . ma'am?

The soldiers start pushing at the door. There is a shoving contest, then the soldiers manage to squeeze in. There is the sound of slugging, and one of the soldiers comes stumbling out, the other following with We'wha tugging on his coattails. The door is slammed and the soldier's tails are caught. Unable to loosen it, he takes out his sword and cuts off his coat tail, picks up the other soldier, and starts to stumble off stage.

Soldier 1: What . . . was that?

Soldier 2: Beats me . . . some kind of freak!

Soldier 1: Let's get out of here.

Tucker is preparing a communique.

Tucker: . . . as my men were withdrawing, the entire population of the village poured out onto the rooftops, shouting and cursing, beating pots and pans, and brandishing weapons. The din was horrible, and had not my men exercised the better part of discretion I have no doubt they would have been murdered on the spot.

These Zuni Indians remained as devoted to their pagan idols today as they were when they massacred the Franciscan missionaries 300 years ago. Their ceremonies are periods of licentious indulgence. Boys and girls mingle freely, out on the sands, till late at night. Married women are at liberty to follow the dictates of their wayward fancies. Bastardy is a frequent occurrence, occasioning no comment. Men are allowed to wear women's costume.

I intend to deploy the entire command of the fort. We will arrest all parties to this witchcraft business, and I will break up the Sha'lako and all ceremonies in their nature or tendency the least vicious. This is a desperate enterprise, but it will mark an epoch in the administration of Indian affairs in this Territory. Benjamin J. Tucker, Commanding Officer, Fort Wingate.

We'wha and Heluta stand on stage with their hands tied behind their backs, flanked by two soldiers. Sound effects of marching, horses, shouts fade in and out.

We'wha: They came the night of Sha'lako. There were so many they filled the whole long valley to Corn Mountain, even as the first ones reached the village. There were many. Two by two in long files, the soldiers came. The Zunis cried. "We shall all die. It serves us right. We have no sense. We drank whiskey. So now it is come we shall all die." The people, even the men, were crying. No one could run away. But the witch man's sisters and his mother and his father were visiting the soldiers at their camp. The Zunis were crying, and the whole village, although they were all taboo, they left their altars and ran away. The soldiers disturbed everything. This is what they did to us.

Heluta: They may imprison me for one month, six months, a year, or forever, but I shall hang the witch who destroys the life of my child.

Soldiers lead We'wha and Heluta off stage.

Reporter: Word comes from Fort Wingate that Major Tucker has returned with several of the tribe's chiefs in custody. The gallant boys were aching for a little skirmish with the redskins, but the Major quickly adjusted the difficulty. They arrived at the fort in time for a Christmas tree entertainment put on by the ladies, who deserve the final credit for the happy termination of the "Zuni war."

Scene 9: We'wha in jail

We'wha sits slumped, facing the audience. Matilda Stevenson enters from behind. When We'wha realizes he's not alone he straightens up.

We'wha: You are here. Why?

Matilda: You're in trouble. I came to help.

We'wha: Are the soldiers still at Zuni?

Matilda: Some have left, but two troops remain. Soldiers have been posted at all the kivas, and they're enforcing school attendence. Of course, with Mouse Face as the teacher . . .

We'wha: My poor people. What of the others?

Matilda: They're in a cell on the other side of the fort. Heluta, the Bow Priests, two of the Rain Priests. They forced them to cut their hair.

We'wha: And what will you do? How can you help now?

Matilda: There was no warrant for your arrest. You are being held illegally. The Americans have broken their own rules. When I confront them they will have to release you.

We'wha: The Americans have rules. But what are rules to those who have guns?

Matilda: You are bitter. You blame everything on the Americans. They are strong and you are weak. They are wrong; you are right. Well you should have been a little weaker when they came for Nick. Why did you hit that soldier?

We'wha: I became angry.

Matilda: You know . . . you and I are a lot a like.

We'wha gives Matilda a quick look then turns away.

We'wha: I was wrong. From the time we are children we are taught never to be angry. All our thoughts must be turned toward the gods and the blessings we seek. One angry or jealous person can ruin a ceremony. . . . What is wrong with me?

Matilda: You couldn't know how the soldiers would react. That's not your fault.

We'wha: Heluta was right. I have spent too much time with the Americans.

Matilda: No. The problem is the superstitious belief of the Zunis in witchcraft. . . . And the whiskey.

We'wha: Whiskey. What do you know about that?

Matilda: Drinking is becoming a serious problem at Zuni.

We'wha: You think so?

Matilda: Of course. If you had seen the drinking. . . . It was shocking.

We'wha: I wonder where the whiskey comes from. Don't you, mother?

Matilda: It's being smuggled into the village by Rio Grande Indians. They put it kegs and hide them in their blankets. I've reported this to the Indian Agent.

We'wha: No! You are lying!

Matilda: Lying! How dare you speak to me that way. After you betrayed me to Cushing.

We'wha: You know.

Matilda: Yes, Heluta told me. He rubbed my face in it. You told Cushing that the plan was mine.

We'wha: I knew he would help if I said that.

Matilda: You lied.

We'wha: Yes. I lied. Didn't I tell you I had two faces?

Matilda is silent.

We'wha: There's one thing I want to know. . . . How did the Zuni boys get whiskey?

Matilda: I told you.

We'wha: You did not tell me. My nephew got the whiskey from Heluta. Where did Heluta get whiskey?

Matilda is silent, looks away.

We'wha: Did you hear me? Is my English good enough?

Matilda: It came from me, and you know it. You don't need to play games.

We'wha: You gave Heluta whiskey.

Matilda: That's right. I gave Heluta whiskey.

We'wha: Why?

Matilda: Because you wouldn't talk to me. So I went to Heluta. But Heluta wouldn't talk to me unless I paid him. Well, I don't have silver dollars. Washington sends Cushing silver dollars every month, but I'm on contract. . . . Anyway, I had no idea Heluta would sell it. I told him it was medicine.

We'wha: See what you have done.

Matilda: And where did Nick get the money to buy the whiskey?

Matilda and We'wha stare at each other.

Matilda: What do you do with the money you earn from your laundry?

We'wha: I buy soap from the trader.

Matilda: And . . .

We'wha: I give it away. If I have more than other Zunis, they will hate me. Perhaps, a witch will try to kill me.

Matilda: What did you think your nephew would do with the silver dollar you gave him?

Silence.

We'wha: What fools we are. Look at us. Look at what we have done. You, always fighting the American men — and now the Zunis are a part of your war. And I thought I was smarter than everyone. I thought I could take what I wanted from the Americans and still be a Zuni.

Matilda: You can, We'wha. You can do that. The Zunis have to do that if they are to survive.

We'wha: Oh, mother, can't you see now that what you've been fighting for, what fills you with so much anger and jealousy that sometimes I fear you — can't you see that it's false?

Matilda: False? What's false?

We'wha: You want to be an American man. But you can't be a man anymore than Cushy can be a Zuni.

Matilda: Nonsense. The only difference between men and women is the way they're treated. You don't need upper body strength to drive a team of horses. Just a strong hand and a loud voice. I've got both. And a mind that's as good as any man's.

We'wha: Do you really want to do what men do?

Matilda: Yes. Who wouldn't?

We'wha: Do you want to steal, mother, like the Senator and the Colonel? Do you want to destroy sacred places? Do you want to point guns at people and say, "Stop praying"? Do you want to treat a woman like your slave?

Matilda: Of course not.

We'wha: You think you can pick and choose. You think you can have the power of a man but not follow the rules that the men have for each other. Are you so wise? They will never let you be a man no matter how strong you are! You may do the work of Colonel Teemsy. But do they treat you like the Colonel? Where are your silver dollars?

Matilda: It won't always be this way. Anthropology is a science. Science is judged not because it comes from a man or a woman, but because it is verifiable, true. Anyone who meets these

standards can join the ranks of science — women and even Zunis. Americans aren't perfect, but our ideals are the best man has yet fashioned.

We'wha: Yes, the Americans have ideals. So you say.

Matilda: I have to believe that, We'wha. I have to believe that my report will win the recognition I deserve.

We'wha: I see. And so you can see why I must forget about Washington now, forget about the Americans, even forget about you. I must be a Zuni again.

Matilda: Can you forget? Can you go back?

We'wha: Can you go forward? Knowing about the American men, about Washington, about what has happened to the Zunis? You have more courage than I do, mother. [*Turns away and takes out corn meal to start praying*.]

Matilda: We'wha . . . This doesn't have to come between us.

We'wha: Mother, there is so much between us.

Scene 10: Robert and Matilda

Robert: You traded liquor for information.

Matilda: Yes. Once.

Robert: Mrs. Stevenson, you requested reimbursement for the cost of the whiskey. I've seen the correspondence in the archives.

Matilda: Powell was a miserable cheapskate. He made me fight for every goddman penny. . . .

Robert: They kept the priests in jail for over a year. It broke their power. They forced the children to attend the mission school. Five of them died the first year because the school building was unheated. Then . . .

Matilda: Look — don't you think I saw all that coming? All of it — the conflicts with Americans, the breakdown of the community. I tried to make the transition easier. I intervened with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs about the drinking, the health conditions. I tried to show We'wha to American society so she could begin teaching other Zunis about it. I pleaded with the officers at Fort Wingate to release the priests — it was all I could do to get them to release We'wha . . .

Robert: Who had to walk home, forty miles to Zuni, in the dead of winter.

Matilda: I didn't know that. . . . I had to go back to Washington. . . . Anyway, what about Cushing? There's plenty to blame him for.

Robert: The Zunis blamed the smallpox epidemic on Cushing because he took prayersticks from Sacred Springs. And, of course, his own death. Choking on a fishbone. You have to admit, it's pretty spooky. The prayersticks were finally repatriated last year.

Matilda: What?

Robert: Returned to the tribe. Museums are returning sacred objects to the tribes they belong to. When the Zunis got the prayersticks, they held the first pilgrimmage to Sacred Springs in twenty years. A whole set of ceremonies have been revived. . . . You know, it's like a row of dominos. Everything happening today goes back to what you and Cushing did. We're still trying to sort it all out.

Matilda: It was inevitable.

Robert: What are you saying?

Matilda: Look, history is like this ball of thread. Here, at the beginning is a single strand — the first men at the dawn of history. There's only one culture, one language. But then they begin to spread out over the face of the earth. There are more and more strands, a knot of cultures

and languages. But at some point the strands started coming together again. Certain societies acquired advantages over others — they progressed. Soon, there will be only one strand again. Everywhere people are adopting the principles of science and reason that have given Europe and America dominion over the world. As it should be. We're all one race, one people, as God meant us. That's what a half a million men of my generation died for in the Civil War. No democratic society can survive with institutionalized social differences. There can be only one kind of citizenship, for black and white, men and women.

Robert: But, Mrs. Stevenson, the ball of thread hasn't sorted itself out. Yes, there are more lines of communication connecting the world. But there seem to be just as many threads of culture as ever. Zuni schools use the Internet to talk to aboriginal students in Australia. And what do they talk about? They share their traditional culture. We upload pictures of pottery. They upload derigderoos.

Matilda: Traditional culture? This is 1914 and Zuni religious life is already a dim reflection of what it was in 1879. What could be left in your time?

Robert: It's true that ceremonies and religious societies have lapsed. Many boys are no longer initiated. But we still have Sha'lako, the kachinas still dance.

Matilda: It's a pipedream. You can't live in two worlds, one based on superstition, one based on rational thought. The scientific worldview is the best; it will always win out because it *works*. You can't truly believe your prayers make the Sun rise every morning after you know about Copernicus, and you can't believe in witches after you've read Freud. The Zunis I knew prayed almost constantly. They spent years learning myths that took six hours to recite. They made offerings to the sun three times a day, fed the kachina masks every night. How are Indian casinos going to help you keep alive a religion based on the sacred act of growing corn? What you're holding onto now are only the *symbols* of your religion.

Robert: Being globally linked doesn't erase differences. It's makes us more aware that ever of differences.

Matilda: On the weekends you can offer all the sacred cornmeal you want, but the rest of the week you live and work in a world based on rational principles.

Robert: Traditions can change without losing their identity. What was traditional for the Zunis you knew, may have been an innovation in their parents' generation.

Matilda: And look at you. You look Indian. But are you Zuni? Are you Lakota? I've never seen a Zuni man wear his hair that way. And I've never heard of a "traditional" Zuni who learned his prayers at UC/Berkeley.

Robert is silent.

Matilda: My damn big mouth. . . . Look . . . why don't you have a drink? Ask me more questions.

Robert: What do you think they said to me everyday when I was a kid at Zuni? “What kind of Indian are you? Are you one of those wild Indians who scalped Custer? Everyday of my life. “Are you a Zuni or are you Lakota? Are you a . . .

Matilda: A what?

Robert: . . . are you a boy or are you a girl?

Matilda: Yes. Well. They called me Wide Ass behind my back. . . . But I’m surprised they bothered you for . . . for that. We’wha was one of the most respected members of the tribe.

Robert: It’s been a long time since anyone filled We’wha’s role. Either they’ve forgotten, or they’ve been brainwashed by missionaries and boarding schools. . . . Mrs. Stevenson, it’s just that all my life I’ve tried to be accepted, to do whatever I was supposed to do, and to get an A doing it. But it never seems to be good enough. It’s like I’m always been tested, but I never graduate. It was the same at Harvard, the same at Berkeley.

Matilda: You pass one test, and they come up with another.

Robert: When you’re a native person in anthropology, everybody assumes you’re there because of some quota. They expect you to be unqualified. My dissertation committee didn’t want to let me study my own tribe because they say I can’t be objective.

Matilda: If that’s true, then men shouldn’t be allowed to study men.

Robert: My advisor is holding up my degree because she says I haven’t had enough “cultural immersion.”

Matilda: What the hell is that?

Robert: Participant-observation in a different culture. The Cushing method.

Matilda: But you grew up at Zuni, you speak the language.

Robert: I speak four languages. I live in two cultures. I’ve traveled around the world. I wanted to tell her that I got all the cultural immersion I needed when I got to Berkeley.

Matilda: You’re smarter than they are. That’s the problem. Not your race. What they can’t stand is that you see through their slippy work and phony politics. But look . . . the best revenge is to beat them on their own terms, pass all their damn tests. In the end, your work will be better for it. . . . [*She sits back in her chair and becomes subdued*.] Work . . . always the work. Isn’t that it?

Robert: What?

Matilda: A Berkeley anthropologist. Can you fit that mold? A life of splitting hairs, backstabbing while pretending to be collegial, all those student papers? [*Spills some of her drink*.] God

dammit! Look — Robert — I denied my true nature for years, tried to be a Washington debutante. Take a good look at me. I've paid the price for all my choices — *that's* postmodernism. . . . Anyway, you have something I didn't.

Robert: What's that?

Matilda: A place to go back to. A middle place. A choice. Maybe even the the best of both worlds. That makes you stronger than I ever was.

Scene 11: Cushing and Heluta

It's several years later. Heluta is visiting Cushing in Washington. He is reciting a story and Cushing is taking notes.

Heluta: And for this reason, one must never forget this young man's experience, and never fall in love with a strange and beautiful woman. For, lo!, in the morning you may find your arms embracing old bones and dust — and you have fallen in love with Death! So it was in the times of our fathers. Thus shortens my story.

Cushing keeps writing.

Heluta: Little brother, in the days I have been here I can see that your face is troubled. You must speak the thoughts in your head.

Cushing [*after a pause*]: The most remarkable thing happened to me a few weeks ago. I hardly know how to describe it.

Heluta: Look into your heart for the words.

Cushing: I had fallen ill with fevers and headaches. I was sitting on the porch taking some fresh air. Emily had wrapped me in blankets. All around me it was red. The trees were red and yellow with the coming of fall, the sun was low and red in a smoky sky. Suddenly I heard a voice, as plainly as I hear your voice now. And this voice said, "You are not what you seem to be. You went were none of your race had gone before. You sought out your true people, and you found them. You are not an American, and when you believe that you will understand the meaning of your life."

Heluta (after pause): You don't understand it, and so you thought I would not understand it. But I understand it perfectly.

Cushing: Perhaps it was a dream.

Heluta: You don't understand it at all. How long has it been since you offered feathers, or properly said the prayers that you were taught?

Cushing: When my prayer meal ran out, I ceased to pray as a Zuni.

Heluta: And have you prayed according to the ways of your own ancestors?

Cushing: I have not done that, either. Not since I was a boy.

Heluta: Even as I would not have you fail to pray according to your ancestors, I would not have you fail to pray according to *my* ancestors. This is why you heard such things. It is fortunate that one of the Holders of our Roads should come to you with such words — before you are cut off while still a young man. . . . Little brother, when you were in Zuni you established an

allegiance to the gods of the Zunis. You became their child. You have not kept this in your thoughts. So you have neglected to offer and to pray to the gods.

Cushing: The religion of my fathers says that your religion is wrong. But as I came to understand your religion, my own began to seem strange and alien to me. I'm afraid I don't know what I believe anymore.

Heluta [*picks up a Bible*]: Are there not some among you — young, foolish ones perhaps — who would say that this sacred writing of yours is but paper, common paper, that anyone might take and roll into cigarettes and smoke away?

Cushing: Yes, there are some who would say that.

Heluta: Since the missionaries came to Zuni, there are some among us who say that our offerings and medicines are nothing but old turkey feathers and eagle plumes, bits of cotton strings, broken beads and shell stuck into lumps of clay. Now I am sure that the wise among you would say, just as the wise among us say, "It is true. These ancient writings are nothing but paper. Yet wrapped up in its heart is something else, something wise and precious." Our elders say, "Look into the heart of things. True, these are only old feathers, shells and beads. But the gods gave these medicines and symbols so that we might use them to pray, to turn our thoughts toward them — the sources of life. *This* is what a few feathers and string can mean."

Cushing: I think I understand.

Heluta: These prayers, the paint, the feathers and sacred costumes — all this is only that we might be brought to the surface and see ourselves in our relations with the fathers, and to acknowledge these relations.

Cushing: But how can one have two religions, belief two things that are different? My mind tells me that only one can be true.

Heluta: Little brother, you must learn to pray from here [*indicates Cushing's heart*], not here [*indicates head*]. If you cannot see the meaning of the rites and prayers, perhaps it is because your eyes are weak — not because there is no meaning. Look harder. Say the prayers — and in time understanding will follow.

Stop deceiving yourself. You are a Zuni. And until you fulfill your responsibilities these dreams will haunt you. Therefore, in the morning you will offer prayer meal to the gods, and at midday while the Sun Father rests above you, and at sunset. And on the day you call Sunday, you will pray to your American god, as well.

Cushing: *Elhakwa*.

Heluta gets up and walks around the room. He notices something on the table.

Heluta: What are these?

Cushing: Don't you recognize them?

Heluta: They look like the ancient prayer sticks of our fathers. Where did you get these? They come from Sacred Springs! What did you do?

Cushing: No, brother. . . . When I got there it was late. I was tired and the sun was setting. I could see the shrine and the ancient offerings, but I couldn't get across the lake. The truth is . . . I can't swim. So I made drawings and from those I made these — and the ones at the National Museum. As you say, I am a Zuni. What I make is Zuni.

Heluate [*laughing*]: The water is no deeper than this [*indicates knee level*]. When the priests go they just pull their pants up [*demonstrates*].

Cushing: Really? Please, brother, let this be our secret.

Heluta: You place our prayersticks in glass boxes, yet your soldiers come to stop us from making them. If your soldiers and teachers and missionaries did not come, we would make our prayersticks and pottery for as long as the sun rises — and you would have no need to put them into glass boxes. . . . The Zunis think that you stole the prayer sticks of their fathers. They blame you for everything that has happened.

Cushing: Would they believe you now if you told them I did not? They will blame someone — better me than you.

Heluta: They blame me. They all blame me. So they came and took the cane, and some other poor fool is governor and has to listen to the Zunis complain.

Cushing: I'm sorry.

Heluta: Soon they will beg me again to be, governor. To punish me more.

Heluta goes to Cushing.

Heluta: Tomorrow I leave.

Cushing: Yes, I know.

Heluta: I have grown to you as one corn stalk grows to another when they are planted together.

Cushing: We shall meet again.

Heluta: I think not.

Cushing: I will visit Zuni.

Heluta: Perhaps. . . . [*Puts an arm on Cushing's shoulder*. May your days pass happily . . . little brother.

Scene 12: A final visit

Matilda [*off stage*]: Goddammit!

Clara [*off stage*]: Tilly, let *me* take the heavy end.

Matilda: Miss True.

Clara: Excuse me — *Mrs.* Stevenson.

Matilda and Clara enter. Together they are carrying a large camera on a tripod.

Matilda: Now, we must find the best place to set this up.

Clara: Right here.

Matilda: The dancers will enter from there. They'll come over here to be blessed by the priests. The dancing will be here.

Clara: Just put it here. We'll be able to photograph anything that goes on in the room.

Matilda: Clara, I've been studying these ceremonies for fifteen years. I know what's going to happen, and I know the best place for the camera.

Clara: And I'm the one who has to peep through the goddamn hole all night long.

Matilda: Clara — dear — if you put it there, it will block the view of the priests, and if the priests can't see I can assure you it won't go well for us. It takes years to win these Indians' trust. We'll place the camera by the hearth. [*She mispronounces it as "herth."*]

Clara: Hearth [*pronounced correctly as "harth."*]

Matilda: What?

Clara: I said "hearth." You said, "herth."

Matilda: Yes . . . well . . . "harth."

Clara: You've been mispronouncing that word since the day I met you.

Matilda: Alright . . . "harth," "harth," "harth" . . . have I got it?

Clara: Yes. Next we can work on "maniacal."

Matilda: What about it?

Clara: The other day you referred to Frank Cushing as "may-nee-AK-al." You see, Tilly, you really don't know everything.

Matilda [*softens*]: Now, Bobo, don't get grouchy on me. I'm counting on you. These photographs will be a coup. Even that *maniacal* Cushing was never allowed to take photographs.

Clara is setting up the camera. Matilda walks up to her from behind and lowers her voice.

Matilda: You'll always be my little Bobo, you know that?

Clara whispers something in Matilda's ear. Matilda laughs. We'wha has stopped grinding corn and watches.

Matilda: That's very sweet. Now be even sweeter and go fetch the negatives.

Clara leaves. Matilda turns to see that We'wha has been watching. We'wha starts grinding corn again. Matilda walks over.

Matilda: Clara is my secretary. . . . Well, more than that, really. She's quite indispensible for my work. She has an excellent mind. Stubborn as an army mule.

We'wha: Bobo?

Matilda: It's just a nickname.

We'wha: Sounds like a name Americans give to their dogs . . . little dogs with funny names that eat from their hands.

Matilda: We make nicknames for close friends. It doesn't mean anything. It's just schoolgirl talk.

We'wha: I am glad you have found someone.

Stevenson: And you, We'wha. Have you found someone?

We'wha: Oh, I have have not been lonely. But I think my love days are over. I have better things to do than flirting at the well or rolling in the sand dunes. I am the dance leader for my kiva. I have prayers and ceremonies all the time. And then there are my pots. And this house. . . . Sometimes I think my heart is breaking. . . .

Matilda: What happened? Did someone hurt you?

We'wha: No. Here. [*Indicates chest*.]

Matilda: Is it hard to breathe?

We'wha: Yes. And my arms hurt so much I can barely grind.

Matilda: It sounds like a weak heart. We'wha, you musn't work so hard.

We'wha: I am only trying to be a good Zuni. That is all.

Matilda: Why did you invite me here?

We'wha: It is Sha'lako, mother. The Zunis invite their friends to come and enjoy our delicacies, see our dances.

Matilda: Did you receive any of the letters I sent you?

We'wha: [*Gets up and takes out a packet of unopened letters*.] I could not read them.

Matilda: Well, I thought maybe the trader would read them for you. . . .

We'wha: Black Mustache? He is too busy counting money.

Matilda: So . . . why did you invite me after all these years?

We'wha: My road is short, but my memories are long. . . . I wanted you to see how I have gone back to Zuni ways.

Matilda: Yes, you have — with a vengance. But now you must slow down. You work harder than any woman or man in the village.

We'wha: Work is the only important thing, is it not?

Matilda: Yes, of course. If our lives have any meaning, it is through work, creating something that lasts beyond us. . . . Others may have children.

We'wha: I have had more than enough children. My sister's children, her children, my brothers' children, their children. Every child in the village calls me mother. But here is my real child. [*Picks up a pottery bowl*.] The children of my brothers and sister will eat stew from this bowl. This is my life. So, don't ask me to stop being a Zuni.

Matilda: I never did, We'wha. I never asked you to do that. But so many changes are coming.

We'wha: And you, mother. Have you stopped trying to be an American man?

Matilda: I haven't stopped trying to be a scientist. That is *my* life. But I have left Washington. I never forgot your words, We'wha. One day I woke up and realized that you were right. It was false, all false. Being an equal to men meant lowering myself to their level, not raising myself to theirs. They claimed their world was rational, fair, based on merit. But it was a lie. I could never fit into that world. And so I sold my house and moved to New Mexico. I bought a ranch house outside of Santa Fe, and that's when I met Clara. We're working on the San Jose Indians now. Whether anyone reads my reports is not my concern. I set my own standards. Someday someone will see the difference. I believe that. . . . Anyway, I'm happier now. Out here I don't have to give a second thought to smoking a cigarette, or riding a horse, or fixing my own goddamn fence. And swearing if I want to.

We'wha: So it seems our lives have changed — but what changes is that we only become more ourselves, not different. Don't you think?

Matilda: Yes. We become more ourselves, but that is a change from the false selves we once were. Haven't you changed?

We'wha: I told you, mother, I have gone back to Zuni ways. This is the first time I have spoken English since I last saw you. And after today, I will never speak it again.

Matilda: Don't you ever think about the time we spent together? Our months in Washington?

We'wha: I remember how Colonel Teemsy made a plan to take the Zunis' land.

Matilda [*after a pause*]: And Mrs. Atkinson and her teeth? Did you forget that?

We'wha starts to smile.

Matilda: As I long as I live I will never forget the look in your eyes when she took those teeth out. You were gasping for air. Like you had seen a ghost.

We'wha [*starts laughing*]: I thought she was a witch. I didn't know whether to pray or run away. I never knew that Americans made teeth out of wood!

Matilda [*laughs, then mood changes*]: We'wha, I don't blame you anymore for going to Cushing. I just wished you hadn't lied about me. . . . You know, conflict with the Americans was inevitable. If it wasn't land, then this business of the witchcraft trials.

We'wha: Now they don't try the witches. Not since the soldiers came. Witches are valuable. So they say. Now, when a witch makes someone sick, when the rain doesn't fall, we can do nothing.

Matilda: Look, we each have plenty of reasons to be bitter. But perhaps we can remember the reasons we became friends in the first place.

We'wha: My anger is for Washington. And Zunis boys who drink. And myself. I was the one that hit the soldier. . . . [*After a pause, We'wha takes Matilda's hands.*] Yes — of course I remember. You hated Mouse-face. That's why I liked you.

Matilda: And you saw through Cushing.

We'wha: Mother, I must grind corn. Why don't you sit with me. I will tell you the meaning of the song.

Stevenson takes out her notebook and sits.

We'wha: The song is for rain. I sing about butterflies, dragonflies, flowers — everything beautiful and pretty. The way the world looks after it rains. . . .

As We'wha talks her breath gets short. She grasps at her chest and slumps over. Lights out except for Matilda, who reads from her notebook.

Matilda: When I arrived at Zuni it was immediately apparent that a great change had come over We'wha. Death was approaching. This strong-minded, generous-hearted creature who had labored so hard to make ready for the reception of her gods was preparing to go to her beloved Sacred Springs. From the moment her family realized that We'wha was in serious condition they remained with her, ever ready to be of assistance. The little children ceased their play and stood in silence close to their mothers, occasionally toddling across the floor to beg We'wha to speak. She smiled and whispered, "I cannot talk." The foster brother, with streaming eyes, prepared prayer sticks. We'wha asked the writer to come close and in a feeble voice she said, in English:

We'wha's voice: Mother, I am going to the other world. I will tell the gods of you and Colonel Teemsy. Tell all my friends in Washington good-by. Tell President Cleveland, my friend, good-by. Mother, love my people; protect them; they are your children; you are their mother.

Matilda: Her face was radiant in the belief that she was going to her gods. She leaned forward with the prayer sticks tightly clasped, and as the setting sun lighted up the western windows, darkness and desolation entered the hearts of the mourners, for We'wha was dead.

Lights up. We'wha's body has been laid out and covered with a blanket. One women enters carrying a Zuni manta or dress, another carries a pair of white cotton trousers, a third carries a bowl of sacred corn meal. While two of the women prepare the body, the third speaks to Matilda.

Woman 3: The women must prepare the body, just as we take care of new born babies. We dress them in their best clothes, so they will be ready to join the dances at Sacred Springs. But first we must bless them with sacred corn meal. Here [*hands Matilda the bowl of corn meal*]. You have learned our ways. You were her friend.

Matilda takes the bowl and steps over to the body. One of the women lifts the blanket. Matilda gasps, steps back, and drops the bowl of corn meal.

Woman 3: What is wrong? Surely you have seen one of those before. Even American men must have them. Or perhaps you thought that this two-spirit was really a woman?

The three women begin to giggle. One of them scoops up the spilled corn meal.

*

Robert: You mean, you didn't know until then?

Matilda is silent, sipping her drink.

Robert: You lived together for six months in Washington. He was six-feet tall.

Matilda: I didn't know. No one in Washington knew. We were all blind to it.

Robert: And yet you wrote about We'wha and his role in your report. You called him your "trusted and devoted friend," "one of the most intelligent of the Zuni tribe." Surely, you knew that once the truth came out it would amount to a scandal.

Matilda: I reported the facts. What I saw, what I observed. It's not about trying to make myself look good — or the Zunis. Many tribes had people like We'wha. Surely, it's been thoroughly studied by your time.

Robert: Well, no actually. All the anthropologists made note of it — the berdache or third gender role — but almost no one wrote more about it than you did. Cushing said nothing.

Matilda: Let me clue you in on something. You won't find this in the text books. The average male is too preoccupied with defending his ego to ever do good anthropological research. The best work in this field will be done by women. . . . Anyway, We'wha *was* my trusted and devoted friend. She took great risks to help me. I stand by my friends. And there's something else. Something We'wha said to me. Even though I was a woman, I had the head and the heart of a man — I had two spirits. I didn't have to be one or the other. I could be both.

*

The burial scene. Stevenson regains her composure, picks up notepad, and starts asking questions.

Matilda: How do you decide which side of the cemetary to bury them on?

Woman 3: The men are buried on the south side, the women on the north.

Matilda: Where will you bury We'wha?

Woman 3: The men's side, of course. Is this not a man?

Matilda [*writes a little, then stops*]: But. . . .

The curtain falls.