

Moon Waxing

By Ardis Coffman

ACT I, Scene 1

(The scene is the large, country kitchen of a Baptist parsonage in a small Iowa town. The building might originally have been a farm house with a kitchen big enough to feed a threshing crew. In addition to the usual kitchen appliances and furniture, a walk in fireplace hung with antique cook pots, and a cauldron dominates one wall. A rack of herbs dries in front of the fire.

Also standing near the fireplace is a floor to ceiling decorated Christmas tree with its roots wrapped in a ball underneath. The roots are not visible because they are covered by a cloth, but it causes the tree to be raised about a foot off the floor. Nearby a sprig of mistletoe hangs from the ceiling.

In one corner is a computer with appropriate furniture. A screen above it shows the audience what is on the monitor.

A back door opens to the outside. As the play begins, the only light on the stage is from the Christmas tree.

Sound of people arriving outside, door unlocked, stomp of boots in entryway. Lights up. Faye Paulson enters carrying two cardboard boxes. Her husband, Robert, carries two more, along with shepards' costumes thrown over his shoulder.)

ROBERT

That's done for another year. *(They dump materials on the table)*

FAYE

It went well.

ROBERT

Some of the props in the manger scene got a bit out of control.

FAYE

Did you tell the Halverson twins they could bring their miniature horse?

ROBERT

I thought it would add a little life.

FAYE

I don't think people heard a word of your homily. The laughter at the horse relieving himself on the sanctuary floor drowned you out.

ROBERT

It amused the children. Anyway, horseshit's appropriate for a stable.

FAYE

Who would have guessed it's so easy to entertain this crowd. We should have thought of it before.

(She hangs up their coats, begins refolding the costumes and generally tidying up.)

FAYE

Mary Ellen Finney told me she was very disappointed her granddaughter wasn't chosen to play Mary.

ROBERT

Why?

FAYE

I guess the girl wanted a bigger part.

ROBERT

So the president of the board of trustees and his wife are torqued we snubbed their grandchild.

FAYE

The parents almost never come to church. I thought the children who attend every Sunday should be in the pageant.

ROBERT

I figured the day John Finney got elected chair of the trustees, he meant trouble for me sooner or later. Guy's got a corn cob up his butt.

FAYE

That's not very charitable. *(She continues to put away costumes)*
Before I forget. I need to put a note out on the email list for prayers for Harry Klein. Helen told me tonight he's having gall bladder surgery in the morning.

(She walks over to computer and flips switch to on. Opening for Windows comes up on overhead screen.)

ROBERT

I thought maybe Caitlin and Kevin would show up tonight.

FAYE

I think Caitlin had enough of Christmas pageants growing up a Preacher's Kid.

ROBERT

It would look better if they'd participate more in the life of the church.

(Robert rummages in boxes)

ROBERT

Where did you put my digital camera? I want a shot of this Christmas tree. Have you noticed how green it is?

FAYE

There's a string of lights out.

ROBERT

It's more alive since we brought it inside. Weird.

FAYE

Not really. It's a living thing. It wasn't cut; it was dug up. The roots are still attached.

ROBERT

Stand over there by the tree.

FAYE

Robert, I need to get this email out.

ROBERT

It will just take a minute. I love this camera. Imagine being able to post pictures on the internet as soon as we get home. No going to the drugstore. No waiting.

(Faye reluctantly goes to the tree. Robert snaps picture. Faye returns to the computer.)

ROBERT

You're planting this tree in the yard after Christmas? Are you going to keep this up every year? We'll need a machete to get the garbage to the alley.

FAYE

I never liked bringing in a tree and watching it die for Christmas.

(She makes her way through a Window's menu. The screen appears above her where it is visible to the audience. She types: "In your morning prayers, please remember Harry Klein, who is having gall bladder surgery at 10 a.m. I'll post a report about his condition later in the day when Helen calls me. Faye Paulson." Faye gets up from computer. Robert sits down and begins processing his digital pictures.)

ROBERT

I will *not* miss Christmas pageants when I retire. All that youthful energy is exhausting.
(Pictures of pageant come up on screen.)

ROBERT

These shepherd's robes look ratty. I think the kids who wore them the first time have grandchildren. Make a note to get some new ones next year, will you? ... Now this is cute. The parents should love these... Here's our tree. *(Pause)* Faye, come here and look at this.

FAYE

(Moves behind him.) What?

ROBERT

What's that green shadow next to you? It almost looks like a human figure.

FAYE

Is it a double exposure?

ROBERT

I don't think you can do that with a digital camera.

FAYE

Maybe it's a ghost. Are we harboring a ghost here?

ROBERT

I don't believe in ghosts. Neither do you.

FAYE

How do you know what I believe in?

ROBERT

It must be a reflection. Christmas tree lights or something. I don't think I'll put this one up. Don't want to spook the parish, do we?

FAYE

Lots of ministers and their wives over the years in this parsonage. Maybe it's one of their ghosts. Do you think we'll come back to haunt this place? *(She looks around the room)* I'm going to miss it. Sometimes I forget it belongs to the church, not to us.

ROBERT

Some good memories under this old roof. I often look at the picture of Cait in that little pink playsuit she wore the day we moved in. She was so excited by this big house after our cramped apartment.

FAYE

To a five year old, it seemed huge. At least we'll have pictures to take with us. Lots of pictures.

ROBERT

Sometimes I think I missed my calling. I should have been a commercial photographer.

FAYE

You'd have been good at it.

ROBERT

When I retire, I'm going to get serious. Amazing new technology in the field. I've barely scratched the surface. Maybe I could free lance for a travel magazine, and we could take trips all over the world for free.

(Robert finishes sending pictures over the internet while Faye stores away costumes.)

ROBERT

I'm for bed. Are you coming up?

FAYE

I'll be up soon. I want to put the costumes away before I turn in. My women's group meets here in the morning.

ROBERT

Them again? What is it you do with this group?

FAYE

It won't take me long. You'll probably read for a while anyway.

(As soon as Robert exits, Faye sits down and begins typing. The screen changes to a website for Millennium Witchcraft. She selects and loads a Goddess chant and sings with the voices.)

The earth is our mother.
We will take care of her.

The sky is our father.
 We will take care of him.
 The sea is our sister.
 We will take care of her.
 The forest is our brother.
 We will take care of him.

(Someone taps at the glass on the back door. Faye goes to door and admits Caitlin. She is 35, fashionably dressed and rather high strung.)

FAYE

Caitlin, what are doing here at this hour? Is something wrong?

CAITLIN

I saw the light so I figured you were still up? Where's Dad?

FAYE

He just went up to bed.

CAITLIN

How was the pageant?

FAYE

The Halverson twins brought their miniature horse. Cute little thing about the size of a large dog. It made quite a hit. Your Dad was disappointed you didn't come.

CAITLIN

Oh, come on, Mom. Surely he doesn't think we're going to be there every time the doors open.

FAYE

Once in a while wouldn't hurt.

CAITLIN

We usually come to church Sundays, although Kevin's been threatening lately to go the Episcopalians. More money there. He might scare up a little business.

FAYE

That's a fine reason to pick a church.

CAITLIN

It's hard to start a new practice. Even though we both grew up here, after 15 years away, we have to get acquainted all over again. Kevin joined the Volunteer Fireman and the Elks Club. I'm trying to figure out what to join.

FAYE

What interests you?

CAITLIN

That's hardly the point. What group of people is likely to hire a lawyer?

FAYE

The Salvation Army makes jail visits.

(Caitlin gives her mother a dirty look)

CAITLIN

Well, I guess things just don't always happen when you want them to.

FAYE

That's true.

CAITLIN

Sometimes you just try and try and you still fail.

FAYE

You know what your father says. God answers all our prayers, and sometimes he says "no."

CAITLIN

Well, God or someone is telling me "no" in a loud, clear voice.

FAYE

Why do I get the feeling we aren't talking about the law practice?

CAITLIN

Am I being punished because I want a career? I'm a good attorney, Mom. I don't want to give that up.

FAYE

Who says you have to give it up?

CAITLIN

My friends have children and jobs, so what's wrong with me?

FAYE

Spit it out, Cait. What's happened?

CAITLIN

It's so damned unfair. The world is full of women getting pregnant with babies they don't want.

FAYE

Who told you the world was fair? Not me.

CAITLIN

Mom, I'm so disappointed I just can't stand it.

FAYE

Why?

CAITLIN

I thought I was pregnant. I was so excited, but I saw Doctor Baker today, and he says I'm not. I'm just run down and need more rest.

FAYE

You and Kevin work awfully long hours.

CAITLIN

It's hard to get a new law practice going. We're just beginning to have enough clients to support us. How am I going to find time to rest and relax?

FAYE

How are you going to find time to take care of a baby?

CAITLIN

I was rather depending on you for that.

FAYE

Excuse me?

CAITLIN

You know what I mean. We'll have a nanny or do daycare, but it's nice knowing you're here for emergencies..

FAYE

Oh, Caitlin, I don't...

CAITLIN

You're so good with children. All the kids in Sunday School adore you. They flock to you like pigeons when you walk in.

FAYE

I raised my child. This is your time.

CAITLIN

Oh, come on, Mom. You know Kevin and I moved back here, so we could have help with a family.

FAYE

No, I didn't know that. I thought Kevin liked small town life, being a farm boy and all. I might have ...

CAITLIN

Mom, you would love having a baby around.

FAYE

I did love having my baby around, but now she's grown up. It's time for other things.

CAITLIN

I looked around at other woman attorneys in Chicago, and I realized the only ones who really managed to have a career, children and their sanity were the ones who could depend on their families. I mean what do you do when you're due in court in an hour and the sitter calls and says she's not coming?

FAYE

You call Mom.

CAITLIN

Exactly.

FAYE

What if Mom has plans?

CAITLIN

It wouldn't happen very often.

FAYE

I can't promise you...

CAITLIN

This is silly. I'm trying to get you to baby-sit for a baby that may never happen. A little motherly sympathy would not be out of place here. I felt on top of the world this morning, and now... We've spent a fortune on fertility monitoring kits and all the other paraphernalia.

FAYE

What are you doing here?

CAITLIN

I'm disappointed, Mom. I wanted a little tea and sympathy.

FAYE

No, I mean why aren't you home with your husband. I did tell you where babies come from?

CAITLIN

Kevin's still at the office going over some affidavits for an insurance case.

FAYE

Maybe spending a little more time together outside the office might be a better investment than five kinds of fertility monitors.

(Caitlin wanders nervously around the kitchen. She looks at the computer screen.)

CAITLIN

What's this? Millennium witchcraft?

FAYE

(Goes to computer and closes the website.)

I was just sending a message out on the email prayer list. One of the parishioners is having surgery in the morning.

CAITLIN

Who were you sending it to? Hell's hotline?

FAYE

That's nothing. Just something I was looking at. *(She turns to her rack of herbs directing Caitlin's attention away from the screen.)* Did Dr. Baker recommend vitamins? I've got some elecampane I could give you. Coriander seeds enhance lovemaking. Brew them into a tea. They taste great too.

CAITLIN

No thanks. I'll leave the weed eating to you and dad.

FAYE

Chamomile is good for calming down. I think you could use that. You're pacing the floor.

CAITLIN

I'm perfectly calm, Mother.

FAYE

(Picking up one of the drying herbs) Now I know this black haw is good for preventing miscarriages and stopping menstrual cramps. I don't think it helps with fertility though. My women's group is meeting here in the morning. Someone will know.

CAITLIN

Mother, don't you dare. I know this town. This is nobody's business but Kevin's and mine.

FAYE

Nobody needs to know I'm asking for you.

CAITLIN

They'll know. When did you get into this herbal healing nonsense anyway? And what is this women's group?

FAYE

Just friends. We drink herb tea and talk. Sometimes we ch ---sing.

CAITLIN

You're much too sensible to get caught up in this herb hunting, plant picking fad. It has no credibility what-so-ever.

FAYE

Says you. It's been around since the dawn of civilization. Before civilization actually.

CAITLIN

So has killing dinner on the hoof, but most people don't do it anymore.

FAYE

Modern medicine only got here last Thursday by comparison.

CAITLIN

And since last Thursday people have been living an average of 75 years instead of 33.

FAYE

I often wonder what we're supposed to do with all those extra years. In my great grandmother's day, people lived to raise their children, then most of them died. What are we supposed to do with all that time?

CAITLIN

Help your busy, career woman daughter raise her children. Ha! Gotcha!

FAYE

It's almost Midnight. Why don't you go home and see if your hard working husband is up to baby making tonight?

CAITLIN

Wrong time of my fertility cycle.

FAYE

Some people do these things just for fun.

CAITLIN

(Kisses her mother) E-gad, my own mother is encouraging me to engage in non-productive, recreational fornicating. Isn't that a sin?

FAYE

Only since the Christians came on the scene, my love. The pagans considered it a sacred rite and a way to honor the Goddess.

CAITLIN

(Gives her mother a curious look) I better go home. This conversation is going down a road I don't care to take. *(She hugs her mother, then pulls back and looks at her closely)* Something's going on with you, Mom. You're different.

FAYE

It's late, dear. I'll talk to you tomorrow.

CAITLIN

(Crosses to door, stops, appears to be planning to say something and decides against it) Tomorrow... *(Goes out door, closing it quietly.)*

(Faye seats herself at computer and begins typing. Another pagan website comes up on screen. Faye selects a chat room and posts a question? Is Black Haw good for infertility? Does anyone know something better? As she waits for a reply, she begins chanting)

Maiden, mother, crone
 Make my hearth your home.
 Mother, hear my plea,
 Blessed deity.
 Oh, Goddess, come to me.

(Spoken) I call you by your names:
 Adya Shakti, Pele'

Isis, Istar, Kali Ma,
Goddess, come
Hecate, Athena, Diana, Lilith.

(Unnoticed by Faye, the Christmas tree begins to glow as the curtain falls.)

End Scene 1

ACT I, Scene 2

(Faye stands in the open door bidding farewell to her women's group. Tea mugs and empty snack plates litter the kitchen table. A fire burns in the fireplace.)

FAYE

Blessed be. My thoughts are with you tonight. Blessed be. Blessed be.

(She closes the door, picks up plates and cups and places them in the sink while singing:

The earth is our mother.
We will take care of her.
The sky is our father
We will take care of him.

(Faye goes to sit by the fire place and begins absently throwing in small amounts of herbs from the rack.)

FAYE

(Facing audience) It's solstice tonight, longest night of the year. Now the earth tilts again in its orbit, and the days grow longer. It's a waxing moon tonight. The coming year will be a time of growth and change. I should be in the forest with my sisters.

(As Faye speaks, she does not see a wood nymph crawl out from the Christmas tree. The nymph should be a dancer able to express ideas in pantomime. She does not speak. Green makeup would be appropriate for this spirit of the forest. The sprite is curious as a cat. She looks into every cranny and corner.)

FAYE

(To herself) I love the solstice ritual where we write on a piece of parchment all the things we want to be rid of in the coming year. Each woman comes forward and hurls her paper into a bonfire as the group chants. It works. One of our coven wrote "kidney stones", and the next time she went back to the doctor they were gone. I'd ask to stop judging others and rid myself of resentment. Resentment is a problem for me. I resent that I'm here making Christmas angels out of detergent bottles tonight while the others are in the forest.

(Sprite moves into Faye's view and begins exploring the kitchen. At first Faye freezes in disbelief, but she springs into action when the Sprite turns on all the burners on the stove and switches on the blender.)

FAYE

Stop that. You'll start a fire. How did you get in here?

(Sprite ignores her and tries to crawl into the dishwasher to see what's inside. Faye holds her back.)

FAYE

You must stop this. You'll get hurt. You'll burn the house down.

(Sprite continues to dance from one place to another oblivious to Faye running after her.)

FAYE

Great Goddess, what is this thing? Did I do this? Did I summon it? That's not possible. *(To Sprite)* What are you?

(Sprite stops by Christmas tree and studies it. She makes chopping motions asking if the tree was cut.)

FAYE

You want to know if the tree was chopped down. Did I chop the tree down? No it still has its roots.

(Faye shows her the root ball under the cloth. Sprite dances thank you.)

FAYE

Is that your home? Are you a tree sprite? No, of course not. There is no such thing.

(Sprite continues to explore with Faye right behind her.)

FAYE

This just won't do. You have to go away.

(Sprite ignores her.)

I don't believe this. It is *not* happening. I'm going to sit down here, cover my eyes and you will go away. *(She sits and closes her eyes.)* I am very calm. I am breathing in and out. *(Pause)* When I open my eyes this thing will be gone.

(Sprite hides behind sofa. After a moment Faye opens her eyes and looks around. She sees no Sprite)

FAYE

I knew I imagined it. Thank you, God. Thank you, Goddess.

(Sprite springs from behind furniture. If she could speak, she would say "surprise!")

FAYE

(Exasperated.) Please go away. You can't be here.

(Sprite dances around the room, finally stopping at the computer. She begins to push buttons. Looks questioningly at Faye)

FAYE

It's a computer. You use it to... Oh, never mind. I'm explaining something to someone who doesn't exist. I'm insane. Of course, that's it. One Christmas pageant too many. Or was it the detergent bottle angels?

(Sprite pushes "on" button and jumps back when computer comes to life. The Sprite is now fascinated. She reaches out tentatively and touches a key, then snatches her hand back. Bolder now, she pounds keys like a pianist.)

FAYE

Fine. Play with the computer. Just leave the stove alone, okay? That goes double for the blender. *(Thinking)* I could look in the encyclopedia. Maybe I could learn something useful about Wood Sprites, if that's what you are.

(Faye moves Sprite aside and sits at computer, brings up webpage for Encyclopedia, then types in Wood Sprite. A character looking much like the Sprite appears on screen. Sprite tries to touch it.)

FAYE

You can't touch it. It's not really there.

(Sprite looks confused.)

FAYE

It's like magic. See. Magic? *(Looking at image on screen.)* It looks like you. Mmm. It's a character in "Midsummer Night's Dream." Those were woodland creatures, weren't they? I wonder if Shakespeare knew your kind?

FAYE *(reading)*

In folklore, a diminutive supernatural creature, generally in human form dwelling in forest, sea or rock, an incubus, male or succubus female. *(Faye studies Sprite)* Definitely female. *(Returns to reading.)* The early Assyrian lili was a sexually insatiable female demon who roamed the night looking for a mortal man to lie with, and she became the Hebrew Lilith, who was queen and mother of incubi. Wow! The Graeco-Roman world had its equally rapacious wood nymphs, associated with the pre-Christian God, Pan. Arab... Well that's enough. You have a long history from everywhere in the ancient world.

(Sprite dances back, back and back)

FAYE

Somehow I don't see you as seductive.

(Sprite strikes a seductive pose making Faye laugh)

FAYE

I have to admit though, you are a rather charming little creature.

(Sprite indicates "I like you too.")

FAYE

Now how do we get you back home? A succubus in the parsonage definitely won't do. People drop in here anytime.

(Door opens. Robert enters, takes off coat and hat and hangs them in the closet.)

Lunch ready? ROBERT

Lunch? FAYE

(Sprite jumps up on mantle piece watching. Faye watches him look right at Sprite without appearing to see her)

That meal we eat at noon. ROBERT

Do you notice anything odd in this room? FAYE

Tree's still really green. ROBERT *(looking around)*

That's all? FAYE

What's going on, Faye? You look like you're in shock. ROBERT

I forgot you were coming home for lunch today. I'll make you a sandwich. *(She opens refrigerator and begins taking out food. Sprite jumps down from mantle and sits at table with Robert studying him. When Faye sets plate on table, she starts to pull it away)* FAYE

Leave it alone. FAYE

What? ROBERT

Nothing. FAYE

(Sprite holds onto plate)

Let go. FAYE

What? ROBERT

FAYE

Nothing.

ROBERT

I had a strange call this morning from a reporter. She's doing a story on witchcraft. I guess it's witchcraft. She said something about a pagan cult here in town, and wanted to know what I thought about it.

FAYE

Why did she call you?

ROBERT

She seemed to think some of them were members of my church. *(Faye stops dead in her tracks)* Isn't that ridiculous?

FAYE

I guess lots of people practice Wicca these days. It's an environmental thing, worship the land and nature. All that stuff.

ROBERT

Sounds like devil worship to me.

FAYE

I don't think it's about the devil. Unless you want to think of the devil as being a beast and beasts are part of nature. Like that.

ROBERT

What a stupid idea! Baptist pagans. I told her she'd been misled. I hope she drops the story.

(Sprite touches Robert's face and runs her hands through his hair behaving in a seductive manner. Faye picks up napkin and flips it at her.)

FAYE

Stop it. Leave him alone.

ROBERT

What in the world are you doing?

FAYE

Fly.

ROBERT

In December?

FAYE

It's a winter fly. *(Waving napkin)* Knock it off.

(Sprite goes to sit on mantel piece pouting. She continues to react to what happens in the room.)

ROBERT

Where?

FAYE

Never mind. It's gone now.

ROBERT

Have you heard anything about witchcraft here?

FAYE

Wouldn't surprise me. It's got a certain appeal.

ROBERT

I don't get it.

FAYE

Everybody needs a chance to shine. Christian churches don't let women preach, or serve as leaders. Is it any surprise some women look for a religion where they're valued?

ROBERT

We value the women in our church. It wouldn't run without them. They operate the Sunday school. They do church dinners. They run bazaars and bake sales.

FAYE

How many women are on the board of trustees?

ROBERT

Jesus didn't have women disciples.

FAYE

Maybe he should have. Maybe things would have been different.

ROBERT

Faye, you may not agree with God's law, but it is still God's law. We may not always understand...

FAYE

Don't preach at me, Robert. I'm just trying to explain to you why women might be attracted to Wicca.

ROBERT

There are so many new opportunities for women. It's a new day. Look at our daughter. A lawyer. How many women lawyers did you know when you were growing up?

FAYE

And still the churches lag behind. It's as if women are told they can be equal in the secular world, but they're still inferior in the eyes of God. Is it any surprise they try to create a new religion?

ROBERT

They're returning to an old one. Christianity pulled humans out the mire of idle worship, superstition, human sacrifice. Do you think people want to go back to that?

FAYE

Some people think it might be a good idea to go back to a world that respects nature.

ROBERT

It's blasphemous. I'm appalled, and I refuse to believe any of my church members are part of it. I'd take some more of that potato salad if there is any.

(Voices outside. Door opens. Caitlin and Kevin enter)

KEVIN

Hi, Mom. We're home.

ROBERT

Welcome, strangers. Familiar faces, can't quite bring in the names.

KEVIN

Just thought we'd stop by with some news.

FAYE

Can I fix you a sandwich? There's potato salad.

CAITLIN

No, thanks. We're having lunch with a client. The C.E.O of Arlington Lumber, no less. Where should we take him?

ROBERT:

That new German place out near the Freeway is good..

(Sprite jumps down from mantle and begins circling Kevin with keen interest. She signals to Faye that she like him. Faye makes backoff motions with her hands.)

FAYE

Arlington Lumber. What are you doing with that crook?

KEVIN

Faye, please. You're referring to a potential client of Hansen & Paulson.

ROBERT

That's the company that cut a mile swath of timber through a state park, isn't it?

KEVIN

They had permission to build a road to get their lumber out.

ROBERT

They built the road a mile wide.

KEVIN

The contract didn't say how wide the road should be. The state should really get some better attorneys.

(Faye places herself between Kevin and the Sprite, shooing her away.)

ROBERT

Not the fly again. Your mother insists there's a fly in here, but I don't see it.

FAYE

They took out thousands of old growth Cedars and Spruce.

CAITLIN

And made their company about a billion in the process.

ROBERT

What are you doing with these people?

CAITLIN

We may represent them in a suit against the Environmental Protection Agency.

KEVIN

They want to build a lumber mill on the Cedar.

FAYE

You're not going to do it?

KEVIN *(together)*
Of course

CAITLIN
We're not sure.

CAITLIN

We haven't decided.

KEVIN

If they're serious about the absurd amount of money they offered us, the answer is yes.

CAITLIN

Kevin...

KEVIN

We can't turn down an offer like that. They deserve good representation just like anybody else.

CAITLIN

We haven't decided. That's why we're having lunch with him.

ROBERT

Why do you think they want to hire a small two person law office when they could pay any firm in the state?

KEVIN

I don't care why, as long as the check 's good.

ROBERT

How long has your family owned a farm here?

CAITLIN

Since 1832. What's your point, Dad.?

ROBERT

Maybe they're buying you, so they don't seem like the big outside polluters come to destroy the heartland.

KEVIN

Damned smart.

FAYE

Kevin, you must feel some responsibility for this land. It's supported your family for generations.

CAITLIN

Hey, guys. Quit ganging up on Kevin. This is business, okay? We just stopped in to share some news. Your approval isn't needed.

KEVIN

I do feel for the farmers in this county. You can't make a living on the family farm anymore. A mill would bring in hundreds of jobs.

ROBERT

And destroy the Cedar. You both grew up swimming in the Cedar. I have pictures of you when you were just little tads. Don't you want your children to have that chance? The river will be so full of chemicals no one can come near it.

KEVIN

That's why we have courts. To settle these things. I understand where you're coming from, Robert, and I do respect your position, but we aren't solving this today in the kitchen. Arlington Lumber has a perfect right to their day in court. They've also got a right to the best attorneys they can afford. That's how it works.

CAITLIN

Anyway, the way things are going I'm not sure there are going to be any children to swim in the damn river.

KEVIN

Honey, don't talk like that.

FAYE *(Annoyed)*

I could find the old crying towel. It's still in the cupboard somewhere.

CATLIN

If I want to whine, I'll whine.

FAYE

Could you do it somewhere else please?

ROBERT

Did I miss something? What are you talking about?

CAITLIN

I'm talking about being 35 and childless. My biological clock isn't just ticking, it's striking Midnight.

(Sprite jumps down from mantle. She pantomimes large stomach, then rocking a baby.)

FAYE

(To Sprite) She has no baby.

CAITLIN

We all know that, mother.

(Sprite pantomimes, "I can do this.")

FAYE

No, please, don't do anything. We don't need your help.

(Sprite grins gleefully, dancing and rocking her pretend baby as trio stares in silence at Faye.)

CAITLIN

Who are you talking to, Mother?

ROBERT

And please don't say it's the fly again.

FAYE

I was just thinking out loud.

CAITLIN

The hell you were. You're talking to someone. I'm starting to worry about you.

FAYE

Save your worry for yourself, Cait. If you're seriously considering taking this client, you need to worry.

KEVIN

I think it's time to go now.

FAYE

I'm talking to her instead of you, Kevin. You're your parent's problem. She's mine.

CAITLIN

I am not your problem. I'm an adult and I'll make my own decisions, thank you.

KEVIN

Caitlin, come on. We're going to be late.

FAYE

I intend to tell you what I think of your decision.

CAITLIN

Well, that's nothing new, is it?

KEVIN *(Pulling her toward door)*

Come on, Cate.

ROBERT

Enjoy your lunch.

(Exit Caitlin and Kevin. Sprite jumps up and down in glee, enjoying the display of temper. Faye gives her a black look)

ROBERT

I read the other day that family fights double in number during the holiday season. I wonder why that is.

(Sprite dances.)

END ACT I.

ACT II, Scene 1

Solstice Eve

(Robert sits by the fire reviewing the church budget. Detergent bottles with vaguely human shapes, glitter, glue, scraps of material litter the kitchen table. As the door opens, snow falls outside in the dark. Caitlin enters with several pairs of pants over her arm. She shakes her parka and slips out of it, hanging it over the back of a chair.)

CAITLIN

Hi, Dad. Mom here?

ROBERT

At the drugstore.

CAITLIN

I wanted to ask her to hem these pants for me. I bought them months ago. Can't seem to get to them.

ROBERT

Leave them on the chair. I'll tell her. How was lunch?

CAITLIN

Okay, I guess. Food's pretty good. Glad you suggested that place. Mr. Hackett liked it, I think.

ROBERT

So how did it go?

CAITLIN

I ordered fish and a salad. I wanted a glass of wine, but my doctor says not when I'm trying to get pregnant.

ROBERT

I meant how did it go with Arlington's law suit?

CAITLIN

Where did you say Mom went?

ROBERT

I'm sorry about earlier, Cait. Your mother and I have no right to tell you what clients to represent.

CAITLIN

Kevin loves to argue. You know that. I think he suggested coming over here to tell you about that lumber mill suit, because he knew you'd get riled.

ROBERT

Worked didn't it?

CAITLIN

That's fun for him. He doesn't play tennis any more, but he loves to bat those words around.

ROBERT

He does it very well. So are you going to represent Arlington Lumber?

CAITLIN

That's my impression.

ROBERT

How do you feel about that?

CAITLIN

He's my husband. What can I say? *(Changing subject)* Where's Mom again?

ROBERT

She ran over to Walgreens to get more glue. For the angels.

CAITLIN

Ah, yes, the Christmas bazaar.

(Caitlin picks up angels examining them.)

ROBERT

Your mother's angels sell very well. *(Pause)* You know it's funny. She said she had to wait for me to get home before she could get the glue. She said somebody had to be in the house for safety.

CAITLIN

She acts really peculiar lately. All this herb stuff and now she talks to herself. Is she okay?

ROBERT

Your mother's always been a bit eccentric.

(Sprite comes from under tree and circles Caitlin studying her.)

CAITLIN

The last time I saw Grandma Haggerty, she told me some things about Mom when she was a kid. I guess she figures I'm old enough to know.

ROBERT

That bad?

CAITLIN

Just that they sent her off to a Baptist Boarding School, because she skipped school and slipped out of the house at night. Grandma called her a wild child.

ROBERT

I'm glad you didn't take after her.

CAITLIN

What did she do that was so awful?

ROBERT

Ask her sometime.

(Sprite checks Caitlin's aura, outlining her body, but keeping her hands about a foot away from her. Then she prepares a concoction. She takes some of Faye's herbs, crushes two mistletoe berries from a sprig hanging from the ceiling. She reaches into the chimney and removes soot with a piece she breaks from the Christmas tree.)

Your mother moved directly from boarding school into seminary. The first time I met her, we handed out flyers on a street corner. I think an evangelist spoke, something like that. If passersby wouldn't take Faye's paper, she'd chase them down the street and talk to them about Jesus. So much passion. She overwhelmed me.

CAITLIN

I wish I could have known you both then.

ROBERT

You'd have found me boring. Dedicated to the church, but boring. Your mother had all the fire. She preached a sermon about Ruth once. The whole class cried, even the guys.

CAITLIN

Mom? Preaching?

ROBERT

Sure. In school. When we attended Seminary together. The women in the class all married future ministers. It's an odd kind of dating service. Turns out some good partnerships though.

CAITLIN

Not so different from Kev and me, I guess. Except I have a title.

(Sprite now turns to Robert. Pantomimes pushing thought into his head)

ROBERT

How about if I make us a cup of tea, Cait? *(He looks toward door)* It's still snowing out there.

CAITLIN

Okay, but I'll fix it, Dad. You might mix up all that paper. *(She goes to microwave and prepares tea.)*

ROBERT

Next year's church budget. There's never enough money to cover everything.

CAITLIN

You need some rich people in the parish.

ROBERT

How about your Mr. Hackett from Arlington Lumber? Does he need a church?

CAITLIN

I'd say he seriously needs one, but he lives in Chicago. That's a long drive Sunday morning.

ROBERT

Too bad. *(Studying papers)* I don't know where we'll get the money for the roof. Maybe we need a spring bazaar. Mother could make Easter bunnies out of milk jugs or something.

(Sprite has concoction prepared. She anxiously waits behind Caitlin. Microwave buzzes and Caitlin removes mugs. As she sets them down, Sprite drops mixture into cups. Glitter rises.)

CAITLIN

You want honey in this? You always used to drink honey in your tea.

ROBERT

In the cupboard.

CAITLIN

I know where it is.

(She brings tea to her father and sits across from him. Robert sips)

ROBERT

This tastes really good. Something new?

CAITLIN

I think mother makes it from dried peppermint plants. *(Sips)* That does taste good.

ROBERT

Snowy night like this seems to call for herb tea.

CAITLIN

Or some nice mulled wine.

ROBERT

I like a little eggnog with rum. I look forward to snowy nights in the future when I can sit by the fire and drink whatever I please. But not yet. You never know when a parishioner might drop by and see the minister imbibing.

CAITLIN

Don't you ever get tired of it?

ROBERT

You have no idea.

CAITLIN

I know I resented being a preacher's kid. I'd let a swear word slip and everybody gasped. Some other kid would say the same thing and nobody noticed.

ROBERT

People expect P.K.s to be brats, and they're usually right. Present company excepted, of course.

CAITLIN

I didn't tell you everything.

ROBERT

Nobody tells their parent's everything. Where's Kevin tonight?

CAITLIN

Working. Like always. I'd be there too, but the doctor says I need to relax and get more rest.

(Sprite leans against mantle watching intently.)

CAITLIN

I'm feeling odd. Kind of flushed. Is it hot in here?

ROBERT

Must be the fire. Too many logs, I guess.

CAITLIN

Do you think Mom would be really upset if we take Arlington's case?

ROBERT

That's not Mom's place. Nor mine.

CAITLIN

It's just that she obsesses about the environment.

ROBERT

You're too old to worry about pleasing your mother.

CAITLIN

They offered us a pile of money. We could buy that old farmhouse we looked at.

(Lights change to a softer hue.)

ROBERT

Are you sure you fixed peppermint tea? I'm suddenly so sleepy.

CAITLIN

The tree looks so, I don't know... Green.

ROBERT

The whole room looks strange.

(Faint chanting comes from somewhere in the distance.)

CAITLIN

Snowy night like this, I want to be cuddled up on the couch with Kevin. And where's Kevin? At the office, of course. Where was he last night? At the office, of course. Where will he be tomorrow night?

(Sprite dances near Caitlin, urging her to go home.)

ROBERT

He's working hard, Caitlin, trying to build a practice.

CAITLIN

What about building a marriage? That needs work too.

(Sprite leans over Robert's chair. She ruffles his hair and kisses his ear. Robert seems aware of her at some level. He turns and looks behind him, but sees nothing.)

ROBERT

On my way to make a parish call today, I saw a young couple leaning against a tree trunk with their bodies locked together. I can't get it out of my head. I know what it is to feel desire like that. When the world slips away and it is just the two of you, and nothing else exists, not even death. I thought I want to feel like that again.

CAITLIN

Do you know what sex is like when you're trying to conceive? It's like reconciling your check book or unloading the dishwasher. It's a job to be finished. There's no joy in it.

ROBERT

Intensity. That's what I saw in them.

CAITLIN

It didn't used to be like that. Not like paying the bills.

(Sprite says to Caitlin, go. Caitlin stands. In an altered state, she picks up the telephone and dials.)

CAITLIN

Kev, it's me. ... At Dad's. I'm going home. I want you with me. ...No, right now. Finish it in the morning. It's snowing. It's a long, cold winter's night and I want my husband. I'm throwing the fucking monitor out the window. *(She laughs)* I thought you'd understand. How soon can you get there? That soon? I'll be waiting.

(She pulls on her parka)

CAITLIN

Night, Dad.

ROBERT

(Half asleep) Night, dear.

(Exit Caitlin. Robert picks up papers, begins reading, but his head soon drops on his chest. Sprite now behaves in a very seductive matter, climbing into his lap, kissing him)

ROBERT

(Waking) What's going on here? Faye? Am I dreaming?

(Sprite pulls him to his feet and beckons toward upstairs.)

ROBERT

A lovely dream. *(He looks at her closely)* You're green. *(Pause.)* Green, but comely.

(Sprite leads Robert off stage. A moment later Faye enters carrying sack from Walgreens)

FAYE

Hi, I'm back. Robert?

(She picks up papers he was reading.)

FAYE

Must really interest him. He went to bed right in the middle. *(She looks at angels)*
There you sit, you little dears. No one came to steal you away. Too bad. *(Looks at watch)*
Ten o'clock. I could still make the midnight ceremony. Snow falling through the bare trees, hissing as it meets the bonfire. My sisters with hoods pulled forward in the cold, chanting into the silence of the wood. Robert's asleep. He won't even know I'm gone. *(To Angels)* I'll get to you ladies later.

End Scene 1

ACT II, Scene 2

The next day, Solstice.

(Faye sits at computer looking at Wiccan Website. Sprite perches on the mantle watching.)

FAYE

I'm about to give up. Nobody can tell me how to get you home. As far as I can tell, this hasn't happened in 2000 years. Maybe longer.

(Sprite jumps down. Acts out "I'm such a rare and special creation.")

FAYE

Oh, you're a rare bird all right, but it's high time you migrated.

(Sprite pantomimes she likes it here)

FAYE

You're smug this morning. I hope you didn't cause trouble last night.

(Sprite feigns innocence.)

What a gorgeous Solstice Eve. Waxing moon reflecting off new snow. Night like that you feel anything could happen. Ardelle talked about how reality thins in the Midwest, because of the distance from the oceans. You know they used to believe witches couldn't cross water? Water represents the real world and witches come from another world. Last night I could believe that. Reality seemed flimsy as a gauze curtain. I stayed too late. Overslept this morning. Robert left by the time I woke up. Don't think he missed me though.

(Sprite nods in agreement)

How do you know? Did something happen last night? You didn't DO anything?

(Sprite looks hurt that Faye would consider such an idea.)

I found the sewing. I guess Caitlin came by. . You didn't do...something to Caitlin?

(Sprite feigns injured feelings)

Why don't I trust you? Stupid question. I know why I don't trust you. Maybe if I took your tree out...

(Sprite runs to tree as if to protect it, obviously distressed.)

FAYE

What got you so twitchy? Taking the tree out? *(Triumphantly)* That's it, isn't it? If the tree goes, you have to go.

(Sprite shakes head, no)

FAYE

Of, course. I should have thought of that. Well, thank you very much. I think my solution just appeared.

(Faye goes to closet, takes out storage box and removes decorations from the tree. The Sprite tries to stop her, then gives up and retreats into tree. Faye takes off only a few ornaments when Robert comes through the door. He holds several 8 by 10 glossies, of the type newspapers use, in his hand. He is visibly upset, so much so, that he does not ask his wife why she is taking the Christmas tree down three days before Christmas.)

ROBERT *(calling)*

Faye!

FAYE

I'm right here.

ROBERT

Where did you go last night?

FAYE

That sounds like an accusation.

ROBERT

Never mind. I know where you went.

(He spreads glossies out on the table.)

ROBERT

Do you recognize the woods above the Pennbrook farm? You should. Here's Ida Pennbrook, our neighbor Ardelle, Karen Carson from church and you.

FAYE

Looks like us.

ROBERT

You wear long black robes and stand around a bonfire in the middle of the night. Why?

FAYE

Where did you get these?

ROBERT

The newspaper reporter I told you about came by with them this morning. Her photographer took them with infrared film last night. She gave me a chance to make a statement before the article goes to press.

FAYE

I don't understand this story. What? Pagans in the heartland? I don't see that as news worthy. What kind of statement did you give her?

ROBERT

What could I tell her? I don't know anything. Would you like to explain it to me?

FAYE

Very clear pictures. Now I suppose you'll want an infrared camera.

ROBERT (*loudly*)

What were you doing out there?

FAYE

I don't know what to tell you.

ROBERT

Try the truth.

FAYE

The photographer trespassed on private property.

ROBERT

The article says my wife practices witchcraft, and they claim they've got the proof right here.

FAYE

(*Looking at pictures*) I don't see any criminal activity in these pictures. What's the big deal?

ROBERT (*shouting*)

You know damned well what's the big deal.

FAYE

You're shouting. You never shout at me.

ROBERT

I never had a good reason 'til now.

(They stare at each other for a moment in silence. Faye turns away)

FAYE

I should have told you a long time ago. I should have known I couldn't keep it secret.

ROBERT

Apparently you're much better at secrets than I suspected.

FAYE

I meant to tell you, but the longer it went on, the harder it got.

ROBERT

The longer what went on?

FAYE

It started at Solstice last year. I sat here at this table making angels like always. I looked up and saw flames across the street behind Ardelle's house. It looked like fire leaping from the top of the garage roof, so I went over to help. When I got there, I found a bunch of robed women singing and laughing in front of a bonfire. I'm embarrassed to say I hid behind some trash cans and watched, but Ardelle's cat scared me, and when I tried to run I sprained my ankle. They treated me with great kindness considering that I spied on them. They put hot and cold herb compresses on my leg and performed a healing ritual. The swelling disappeared immediately. I thought: I want to learn to do that. I joined them a few weeks later.

ROBERT

Joined what? Some kind of alternative medicine study group? What?

FAYE

One of their members moved away. They needed a twelfth.

ROBERT *(Losing patience)*

A twelfth what?

FAYE

Member of the coven.

(For a moment Robert is speechless)

ROBERT

You've forsaken God. How could you?

FAYE

Oh, Robert, no. I'm closer to God than ever. It's just that God to me now includes Goddess.

ROBERT

That's blasphemous.

FAYE

At first it shocked me too. Then I realized how right it felt. Wicca honors the natural world. God made all living things male and female. How arrogant of men to think they could eliminate women from the life of the spirit.

ROBERT

Women make up more than half our church membership.

FAYE

The half with no power.

ROBERT

Now, I get it. You got caught up in some whacko feminist thing. Really, Faye, I thought you had better sense.

FAYE

My croning took place at fall equinox. I wanted so much to share it with you.

ROBERT

You're crowning?

FAYE

Croning. My croning named me as a wise, old woman. In a world that pushes old women aside and deems them useless, you can't believe how affirming it felt to celebrate my coming of old age with people who loved me for it.

ROBERT

Crone. Sounds like the wicked witch in "Wizard of Oz." I wonder you didn't melt down out there in that snowstorm last night.

FAYE

I'm proud to be a crone. Now I share the wisdom I've gained with younger women. Men too.

ROBERT

In our church we don't push old women aside. I've never done that.

FAYE

I almost told you, because I wanted you there to celebrate with me. I just couldn't find the right words. It's hard to explain what a happy time...

ROBERT

I thought you called our wedding day the happiest of your life.

FAYE

That day celebrated us. My croning celebrated me, my life, my maturing to a wise woman.

ROBERT

Will you listen to yourself? You stand here in our kitchen talking about a Satanic rite like its an afternoon garden party.

FAYE

It's not like we ride around on broomsticks and steal babies from their beds.

ROBERT

Tell that to the members of our church. Because when this story is printed that's exactly what they'll think.

FAYE

I suppose they will.

ROBERT

I'll be forced to give up my pulpit.

FAYE

You haven't done anything.

ROBERT

Our marriage makes us one.

FAYE

Ah, yes. I've seen that book in your office at the church. "*When Two Become One.*" You give it to engaged couples? I've wondered about it. It seems to me when two become one, you lose somebody. I think we lost me.

ROBERT

Faye, what are you talking about?

FAYE

I lost me somewhere, Robert. I lost that wild child, the one who snuck out at night to run barefoot along the creek under the moon. The one who wanted to live in a tree.

ROBERT

She grew up. People do.

FAYE

She got crushed beneath 30 years of church bazaars and rummage sales and trying to please every single person in the parish. In Wicca I found her again.

ROBERT

You think you're the only one who got lost? Do you know how many times I've sat at Board of Trustees meetings, while members aimed pointed remarks blaming me for every problem in the church? A better preacher would fill the pews, they hint. Then we wouldn't have to worry about paying for the roof. (*Imitating*) Missed the point of Sunday's sermon, Reverend, but then I usually do. I can't tell you how often I thought about leaving. Just get in the car and go. But I stayed, because I made a promise to you, and to God and the people of this church community.

FAYE

I didn't know.

ROBERT

The board tried to force me to resign three years ago. They failed. My preaching may lack brilliance, but my parishioners respect me. I set a good example of Christian behavior, and in the long run, that always matters more than what you say or how well you say it.

FAYE

You should have told me. We pledged our lives in Christian partnership. How could you keep such a secret from me?

ROBERT

Oh, you're a fine one to talk about secrets.

FAYE

Maybe I could have helped.

ROBERT

How? Preach my sermons for me? Not that you wouldn't do it well. And that's another thorn in my brow. My wife can do my job better than I can, and lots of people know it.

FAYE

That's crazy. A church budget makes my head hurt. I could never read it, let alone follow it.

ROBERT

That's a small thing.

FAYE

You're so good at counseling the depressed divorcees and the farmers losing their family farm? You know what I'd say? Get off your butt, and quit whining. That would sure build church membership.

ROBERT

There you go. Direct, dramatic statements. Your strong point.

FAYE

I try to stay out of the spotlight.

ROBERT

It found you. People warm to you, Faye. You walk in a room and conversation stops. I'm proud of you, but sometimes. *(Pause)* I had this plan when we moved here. A few years in this church, then on to a bigger church, more influence in the denomination. I thought I could change the world through my ministry. But the call never came.

FAYE

You serve in a place where people need you. The small farmer can't make a living now, and most of them know nothing else. You help people find a future.

ROBERT

I wanted to do more.

FAYE

I know. We dreamed big dreams. Comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable.

ROBERT

Rather naïve. But you know, Faye, Jesus lived in our hearts. We loved God and we loved each other.

FAYE

How did we lose it?

ROBERT

I dreamed last night about us as we used to be, silly, playful. We made love, and it felt so real. *(Pauses, thinking)* Except for one thing... I think you were green.

(Faye turns and glares at tree.)

FAYE

I knew it. I walk out of this house and you... you glorified piece of pond scum...you molding mass of stinking tree decay.

ROBERT

Faye, stop it. Stop talking like that. What's the matter with you?

(Faye tears ornaments from the tree with a vengeance. She throws them into the box , dropping and breaking a few as she works.)

ROBERT

What are you doing? Christmas is three days away.

FAYE

We have to get this tree out.

ROBERT

We face a serious problem here. I don't think the tree...

FAYE

Take my word for it, this tree has to go. The sooner the better.

ROBERT

(Thinking) We need a plan. We'll say a friend invited you to come along last night. You never guessed it was a pagan rite. No way for you to leave, since you didn't drive.

FAYE

I belonged to the coven for a year.

ROBERT

Cut off contact with those women starting right now. Take up your church duties. Perform them better than ever. You've neglected the Sunday School lately. Get it operating as smoothly as it used to. We'll just keep repeating the newspaper got it wrong.

FAYE

I can't imagine my life without the sisterhood.

ROBERT

Politicians do it all the time. "I was misquoted." We'll just call it a mistake, and we'll keep repeating it. Say it often enough and people start to believe it.

FAYE

No.

ROBERT

I might talk about the newspaper story in church next Sunday before it comes out. That works. Get my side out first. Let people know what's coming.

FAYE

No, I won't.

ROBERT

Won't what?

FAYE

I won't give it up. I can't. For the first time in a life devoted to serving God, I feel I really know God. At night in the forest, with the stars above me, and a breeze moving leaves at my feet, I hear God breathe.

ROBERT

Then we're done for. I lose my pulpit, my retirement, my self respect.

FAYE

I'll leave.

ROBERT

Leave? Where would you go?

FAYE

I know some women in Boston.

ROBERT

But, how would you live?

FAYE

My parents left me a little money.

ROBERT

Ten thousands dollars isn't going to last very long...

FAYE

I'll get a job.

ROBERT

Doing what? You've never worked.

FAYE

I've never worked? Who do you think acts as your assistant and runs the household and the Sunday School and church suppers...

ROBERT

That's different.

FAYE

I don't get paid for it. That's how it's different.

ROBERT

Faye, we've never been separated for more than a few days? How would I get along here without you?

FAYE

It will be hard for us both.

ROBERT

I can't imagine my life without you.

FAYE

I don't see any other way.

ROBERT

Then, I'll go with you.

FAYE

And lose everything you've worked for? Abandon people who trust you and count on you? Not the Robert Paulson I know.

ROBERT

It's just a year and a half.

FAYE *(Suddenly understanding)*

That's why they build altars.

ROBERT

We can see this through. If you just don't give anyone a reason to talk...

FAYE

Every religion I know of uses altars. I never thought of it before. In order to connect to the infinite, a person must sacrifice. Humans have always known since the dawn of time. Altars for sacrifices, because we must make sacrifices.

ROBERT

People have short memories. Everyone likes you. They'll want to forgive and forget.

FAYE

I thought I could have it all. My old life, my new life, my husband, my coven. I should have known I had to sacrifice.

ROBERT

I don't want you to go. I'll wander this house alone like a ghost. A parsonage needs a woman in it.

FAYE

This congregation will never understand. Every time they look at me, they'll see a woman in a pointed hat about to hex them with an evil eye. Or worse, they'll think I worship the devil. Once I'm gone, the talk will fade. Your wife went a little crazy, but she left town, thank goodness. Newer and better gossip will come along.

ROBERT

There's got to be another way.

FAYE

There's no other way. Both of our lives have been about your ministry. I need something that's my own.

ROBERT

I'm not going to change your mind, am I?

FAYE

Help me get this tree down. It has to go out tonight. Don't plant it in the yard. Don't burn it or cut it up. It has to be taken outside of town and planted somewhere.

ROBERT

And then what?

FAYE

Then, as soon as I can make arrangements, I'll be on my way.

ROBERT

You could at least stay through Christmas.

FAYE

I hate good-byes. We'd say them all week. I'd think: this is the last time I cook in this kitchen; I'll never prepare a fire in this fireplace again. I don't think I could stand that. Help me by letting me go now.

(They embrace)

END ACT II, Scene 2

ACT II, Scene 3

Dec. 21, Solstice, One Year Later.

(Caitlin, no longer fashionably dressed, sits by the fire next to an old fashioned cradle, which she rocks from time to time. She seems serene and relaxed. There is an empty spot where the tree stood last year. Robert types at the computer looking at email. Kevin enters carrying a large armload of logs. He drops them on top of a pile near the fire.)

KEVIN

Longest night of the year, and the temperature's dropping like a stone in the pond. But we're ready now.

CAITLIN

I should hope so. Looks like enough firewood to last 'til March.

KEVIN

Don't get her too close to the fire.

CAITLIN

I'm watching the heat. She's fine.

ROBERT

Faye just sent me email.

CAITLIN

What does she say?

ROBERT

She's shouting from the rooftops. Well, at least from her computer chair. A supporter donated land for the School of Pagan Studies, so now they can start building. *(He laughs)* Two and a half acres in Salem, Massachusetts. How ironic. *(Pauses as he reads)* She gets 500 hits a day on her Wiccan website, and a London pagan group invited her to speak there in May. She seems to be on her way to fame, if not fortune.

CAITLIN

The next Sybil Leek.

KEVIN

Whoever that is.

CAITLIN

Famous witch.

ROBERT

Glad you came over tonight. The house feels so empty with your mother gone, especially now at Christmas time. And, Caitlin, thanks for that terrific dinner. Who would have guessed you'd become a gourmet cook?

CAITLIN

Thanks, Dad, but I think gourmet might stretch the truth a bit. I like using Mom's kitchen. Everything I can imagine needing is here somewhere.

ROBERT

A lifetime of collecting will do that.

CAITLIN

They say every woman reaches a point in her life when she suddenly realizes she's her mother. Do you think that's true?

ROBERT

You could do worse.

CAITLIN

I'm beginning to feel I understand her. I met some of her friends from the women's group. They're not as crazy as I used to think they were. In fact I like them.

KEVIN

For my money, they're crazy.

CAITLIN

Feels funny in here without the big tree where it always sits.

ROBERT

Faye insisted we remain treeless this year. She sent me at least three emails and one phone call reminding me.

KEVIN

I wonder why.

ROBERT

With Faye you never know. Something about spirits. Don't bring in a wood spirit? Makes no sense to me. I don't care. I didn't have much enthusiasm for putting up the tree just for myself anyway.

CAITLIN

(Mysterious) Maybe Mom knows something we don't.

ROBERT

The night before she left, she dragged the Christmas tree out of here. She almost seemed angry at it.

CAITLIN

That's my Mom.

ROBERT

She told me to take it out in the forest and plant it. I never did get to it. Used a few pieces when I rebuilt that old cradle though. They fit into place like they were grown specially for the job. I didn't even lathe them.

CAITLIN

(Rocks cradle) You must have put hours of work into refinishing this piece. All those little surfaces.

ROBERT

I enjoyed the sanding and varnishing. I found the old cradle up in the attic. I guess it stayed behind when another minister's family left. Couldn't wait for Christmas to give it to you. I know that's childish of me, but ...

CAITLIN

Elizabeth loves it. She's smiling.

KEVIN

(Looking into cradle) Hi, pretty, girl. You look snug in there.

CAITLIN

I'll tell Mom you gave us a solstice present. She'll flip.

ROBERT

I better start learning her ways. I join her in a few months.

CAITLIN

You'll die of boredom in Massachusetts. Stay here with us.

ROBERT

I own \$30,000 worth of photographic equipment, barely used. First thing, I intend to do is put better graphics up on her website. Content's good, but the look ... Definitely 20th

Century. I've got some ideas. Speaking of bored. How about you? Do you miss the law office?

CAITLIN

Sometimes, but at least I don't worry about the care my baby gets. Besides Kevin and I disagree about the Arlington suit.

KEVIN

We don't need to go into that, Cait.

CAITLIN

If they have their way, they'll destroy the Cedar River. Kevin seems able to blow that off, but I can't.

KEVIN

I'm more concerned about the displaced farmers here who need jobs. A new lumber mill would provide 200 of them. So we settled the dispute. I handle the suit and she handles the baby. A reasonable solution all around.

CAITLIN

(Caitlin seems uncertain) Except I seem to really enjoying the money it brings in. I guess that makes me a hypocrite. Did Kevin tell you Arlington wants him to run for State Assembly? The company offered to fund his campaign.

ROBERT

You're not going to?

KEVIN

(Kevin bristles ready for battle) I might. I have to think about it.

ROBERT

You couldn't vote your own conscience. Who would you represent? The people of this county or Arlington Lumber?

KEVIN

Just because they pay...

ROBERT

I certainly hope you turn them down.

KEVIN

I see no reason why I should.

CAITLIN

Okay, okay. Could we discuss this some other time? I thought I heard something about a football game?

KEVIN

Oh, my God, the Vikings. What time is it?

ROBERT

Kick off in five minutes. We'll use the set in my study. Coming Cait?

CAITLIN

Maybe in a little while. Elizabeth and I enjoy the fire. Don't we?

(Robert and Kevin exit. Caitlin rocks cradle.)

CAITLIN

There go the boys, off to watch other boys kick a ball around. What do you think we should do? Good idea. How about a little lullaby? The kind of lullaby mothers and daughters sing when the men are out.

(The chant begins slowly, then becomes louder and faster. The "return" refrain should sound like an echo repeating and finally dying.)

Earth, water, wind and fire.
Return, return, return, return.
Earth, water, wind and fire.
Return, return, return, return.
Earth, water, wind and fire
Return, return, return, return

(Light goes up on Faye dressed in full priestess robe. A dagger rests on her hip, held in place by a crisscrossed length of leather. A silver pentagram dangles from her neck. Sounds of a large crowd accompany her appearance. She joins Caitlin in the chant though they are unaware of each other.)

Earth, water, wind and fire.
Return, return, return, return.
Earth, water, wind and fire
Return, return, return, return.

(Faye raises her arms over her head. Crowd cheers.)

CAITLIN

Goddess, hear this mother's call:
Adya Shakti, Pele'
Isis, Istar, Kali Ma,
Goddess, come.

Hecate, Athena, Diana, Lilith.

(Wood Sprite materializes from wood pile. Caitlin show no surprised. Faye still faces audience with arms above her head)

CAITLIN

Welcome. I hoped you'd come tonight.

(Wood Sprite dances over to cradle. Both admire baby as lights dim on Caitlin, Sprite and then a few seconds later, on Faye.

END