

# Imieauraq's Ceremony of the Dead

Imieauraq, the prowler shaman  
is encrusted  
with thick stone ochre powder  
he paints protection  
he sets his willow stick  
with a snare  
his protruding abdomen  
deforms his back  
now hunched  
and bowlegged  
he walks  
his bones knock  
the red dust settles.

*(Imieauraq sees his older brother  
storykeeper of the hunt in his dreams)*

He traps a squirrel *siksrik*  
for roasting a dinner  
for the dead  
over the fire  
on every flint head  
he ties notches a piece of lashing  
which drags and drapes  
across *siksrik's/squirrel's* neck.

Imieauraq removes  
the meat from bone  
intuitively  
carefully skillfully

not to snag a vein (if it bleeds he'll need to use yo-yo's  
as protection

for his bear clan, for his sister's death wish)

he marks a bear skull in white paint: earth=mother=adopted=blood=raven=midnight sun

In his small plywood cabin

on the north shore

he runs in place a slow runner

the cold settles in his bulb knees

(he remembers: ice forming on the lagoon

when his sister fell in the ice water dead)

he scrapes the squirrel's

tiny body

closes the eyes combs

each frozen

blue gray hair

until it is thawed.

He sponges

with a piece of moss

across the flesh.

Wiping

dead

he remembers: digging older strata

dead

descending probing eroding flesh beaches.

He finds: in a burial site up heaving digging removing a way out

the eldest inuk farther inland in a house pit

then on every ridge

yellowed bodies bones

bodies

bones

rising.

He heard this is what happens: when the water thaws

leavening

uprising.

On Kotzebue Sound

he places his sister's kamik legs and marmot arms

head and feet

upon a stilted

driftwood altar

her crown of fireweed

(he sees her ghost rise)

Imieauraq lays wolverine furs over  
the appendages flanks  
slips on her feet  
new kamik boots (*his captain, his Umiliak,*  
new soles for the journey *bear clan leader*)

around the cosmos she will spin.  
On his sister's hands he places  
a pair of caribou mittens

fur-side in

not to offend the spirits. Below he drops  
gooseberries bearberries snowberries  
in a seal poke mixing it with reindeer marrow  
moose meat  
for the burial meal.

At last the ceremony ends he sets off  
to his *ugruk* breathing hole net

on her day he will catch a young seal  
ending

the ceremony he tends his muskrat barrel  
sharpens his black

jade whetstones collects water

in his seal flippers (*waits for raven to bring the light*)

used as blood bottles for dipping (*he waits for the earth to turn*)  
in a shrinking pool.