

# The Pact with Samna

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The ice chisel sculpted her Mother's Day.  
Ash mother sent another caribou calf during  
the first year, through the sprawling white marsh, scrambling  
with pack and paddle, on hooves of driftwood.

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She put on a carved mask with snowy owl feathers,  
then, danced a long, limp, *mukluk* shuffle.  
A clock struck the twenty-fourth hour, her life-line  
was thirty-six years; she knew *Samna* would betray her.

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The jawbone of *Birnirk* was the place to give her up,  
clad in calico flora and braids down her shoulders, she went.  
She went as a mother of children's children.  
She went to seek refuge in the mammoth's arms.

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One day, the pact would be known to the need-be kinfolk.  
One day, the dirty dip net will overflow with frost-bitten whitefish.  
One day, the polar bear will come to the child and give her seal eyes  
for making medicine of twigs and ivory, belting chants of skeleton Inuit.

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A driftwood mask let her be inside out.  
The still poison of fish guts come up, gnarled  
in layers of rabid willow ptarmigan,  
inroads of dirt and dust makeshift the tides.

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To repay *Samna* will be a lifetime of parkas.  
Give the skins to the river's narrow nest lined with plumes  
and dragonflies, humming to *igutchaq* bumblebee.  
Inuit giants will laugh and the salmon will roast.

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Then, she will take the shell lenses off,  
let her goggles lie next to the granite rock,  
pull her braided hair down in truffles of seaweed, and wear the parka.  
This day is made of horned puffins and Eskimo soothsayers.

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