

A DROP IN THE BUCKET;

the play wiped from your brow
by ireon roach

SYNOPSIS: *A play in not e'en ha'f a act in which Sumwea, Sumha, sum Browk comes together by the sweat of your brow. A dive into the psyche of sacred sweat, a baby searches for healing in Grandfather's breath.*

CHARACTERS:

Browk: 20s, hesitant on the road to recovery, keeper of the water [broke, if u must] Sumwea: tweedle-dee, thing 1, keeper of the earth [somewhere, if u must] Sumha:[tweedle-dum, thing 2, keeper of the flame [somehow, if u must] Grandfather: ancestral conglomerate, culmination of the 4 ethers, breath, unvoiced/bodied

SETTING:

Within and without the walls of a traditional sweat lodge

NOTES:

After its assembly, the players must kiss the [blankets on the] ground as they enter/exit the lodge. No shoes inside the lodge. No standing in the lodge.* [] = implied language () = sotto voce !=lines overlap ... = expression/reaction with no words

WHAT THEY TELL US:

"We come from a place of peace and we are given a duty to perform and we descend from the heavens and we are born to our mothers and fathers and the journey begins on the Earth and things begin to happen to us as human beings. Pain becomes a part of our lives and it sings, too. The journey continues because we must reestablish our original relationship with the Creator and in that development of the relationship we learn about where we come from and who was before. And it's the ancestors who stand with us and hold our hands and teach us about the things we need to return to. Because they know what it is to carry the burdens of the heart and mind. [And] healing really is to give away that pain. And when that pain is released to the One Who Made Us, we no longer have to carry it. We are no longer defined by it. And the Creator can truly dress us in the image that He always intended. And it's born from a cry from the heart. And ancestors tell us that if there is no love, there is no healing. So life really is about embracing the Great Medicine from the Creator: love. And if you cannot love, the world will never change. And so we must pass that on to those that are coming behind us so that we may be restored of the perfection the Creator had always intended us to be."

-Kawennanoron Cynthia White, Traditional Healer with Aboriginal Services at Center for Addiction and Mental Health in what is now known as Toronto

scene 1: the ritual - air/east

*lights up on a yellow vinyl tarp, tented yet empty. this is a traditional sweat lodge.
sumwea and sumha enter and re-enter the space with even and processional pace.
each time with new materials until the lodge is set for proper sweat. they are in song
until they are done.*

browk shuffles about – just all inna way.

sumwea & sumha

oh would I were a thunderbird
that flies to the halcyon
along the breaking waves with a fearless heart
that noble bird
that lonely bird
your deep blue
of an ocean

as this goes on...

- 1. the space is smudged with white sage/dragon's blood sage/lemon grass/tobacco/
any of the aforementioned available.*
- 2. those medicines are then placed in a circle near the tarp.*
- 3. small plates of simple fruits and foods are brought out. each figure takes at least
one bite of at least one food before replacing it.*
- 4. those medicines are then placed in the same circle near the tarp.*
- 5. black and white cloth offerings are placed in the center of the circle. this is life
proof for the ancestors.*
- 6. red cloth offerings/tinder are placed in the center of the circle. this is life force for
the fire.*
- 7. a line of cedar [or other greenery] is placed to connect the fire pit to the door of
the lodge. this is the umbilical cord.*
- 8. the cedar is then sprinkled on the ground of the lodge and covered with more
tarp/blankets.*
- 9. through all of this, a bucket of water is prayed over [not by a man]. they anoint
each player with the water as they complete their own tasks.*
- 10. a pipe is filled with tobacco and passed around between the players along with a
bottle of rum. they take a puff** and swig. these too are then placed in the fire pit.*

they look around. almost ready.

except...

sumwea

where is your stone?

browk

...

it's too heavy.

sumwea

...

sumha

...

*sumwea and sumha exit once more and reenter with a huge stone.
maybe it is carved.
they struggle a bit, but they got it.
they place it in the fire pit and look on fondly.*

sumwea

hello grandfather.

sumha

thank you. already.

thank you.

they look to browk

browk

...

sumwea

...

sumha

...

browk

hell-

...

hello

*browk tries and tries to greet his stone.
the words refuse to be released without something he wishes to hold
onto. browk breaks and begins to
weep.*

sumha *comforts him*

3

shhh. shhh.

in the northern lights are the lead spirits.

this is the travel of the ancestors.

they love you in stone and lead you on the wings of the thunderbird, bringing ice and snow

but only in winter, my boy. a restoration of balance.

fly with me to the halcyon, where we ride the northern lights.

they take us past, future,

present presents open omens and answers you're crying for
say O!

sumwea *echoes*

O!

sumha *cries*

O!

sumwea

O, bearers of the heavy names,

names on the dotted lines,

lines at the calling window,

close this and open his mouth.

count his teeth and name each bone,

break them if you must for marrow dust

to mend legs cut from under us. O,

bearers of the heavy names. O!\

browk *breaks*

O!

blackout. strained breathing.

they are the gasps we've all heard on some video, usually followed by--

browk

i can't brea

sumha

yes you can.

PLOP! a drop in the bucket.

browk drops to the floor.

scene 2: sumwea browk sum – fire/south
*sumwea and sumha usher browk through a night terror,
smudging his body as they speak.*

sumha

see that boy?

sumwea

that man?

sumha

that boy.

sumwea

boy.

/look at him.

sumha

/look at him.

I know this boy that can run--

sumwea

like the wind through a bough, boy run
like away from somethin'.

sumha

like he know what he runnin' from.
tuh.

sumwea

his ma.

sumha

oh, his ma.

sumwea

wherever she is.

sumha

sumwea.

sumwea

yes?

sumha

and his daddy,

5

(bless his soul,
pray he alright.

sumwea
sumha.

sumha
yes?

sumwea
that boy.

sumha
he mine.
he—

sumwea
got so many questions.
keep digging like—

sumha
he don't know who he belong to.
he mine.

sumwea
skin tinted from all the dirt.
come home burnin' like---

sumha
sweatin' like the second source of sun

browk stirs

browk
...

sumwea
...

sumha
...

then wakes

browk

I'm still here?

6

sumwea
been here.

sumha
everything been here.

sumwea
yeah, nothin' new under the sun.

browk
I can make new.
that's easy enough.

sumha
(aint nobody said nothin' about enough)

browk
that's why I'm here.

sumha
talkin' like you know sum!

sumwea
but sumwea you browk sum.
sumwea.

sumha
sumha.

browk
...

sumwea
(how long until his folks come?)

sumha
(sumwea, the boy broke sum!)

sumwea
[I'm] sumwea.

sumha
[I'm] sumha.

this is a greeting

sumha

7

I tried to love my babies.
I tried to lay a dream.

sumwea

I tried to ice the winter,
whip it 'til it was cream.

sumha

and you tried to do it all, huh?
you thought you wouldn't cry?

sumwea

but it all catch up and come down to us.

browk

who are you?

sumwea

sumwea.

sumha

sumha.

sumwea

they all be looking at ya?
feel like aint that much to see?

sumha

t-t-try your damndest,
c-c-can't damn speak?

sumwea

another drop in the bucket
be the sound in your sleep?

sumha

sumwea?

sumwea

sumha?

browk

for someone like me...

sumwea & sumha

sum browk

8

sumha

see sumwea,
where they go?
in that next place we'll meet.
not quite the other side. still here,
you'll see.
maybe in the mailbox,
when that settlement come,
for the way they took the 'how' away from /some

sumwea

/sumha, she's the hope.
sumha hold it down.
wonda how sumwea gonna get anywhere
when sumha ain't around.

*a glassy crash.
like a television out of a three story window.
or a heavy stone dropped on top of it.
the fire pit.*

sumwea & sumha

sum browk.

*they flock to the browken thing
and attempt to fix it.
as they do, some water might fall upon the (now hot) stone.
it steams just a bit.*

browk

...

what are you making?

sumwea

amends.

sumha

would you like to join us?

browk

...

browk begins to cough from the smoke.

scene 3: cacophony – water/west

sumwea

cough cough phony
spit it out spit it out
cough cough phony
spit it out

browk

cut it out

sumha

cough cough phony
spit it out spit it out
cough cough phony
spit it out

*they go on in joyous childhood sidewalk song
call & response.*

sumwea

take off ya shirt and take out the staples!

sumha

take off ya shirt and take out the staples!

sumwea

pull down ya pants or pull up ya ankles

sumha

pull down ya pants or pull up ya ankles

sumwea

cough cough phony
laughing in the darkness
sumwea browk sum
sumha a carcass

sumha

cough cough phony
laughing in the darkness
sumwea browk sum
sumha a carcass

sumwea
extra! extra!

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johnny's in the paper!

sumha
smelled so bad got rid of his neighbors!

sumwea
take off ya shirt and take out the staples,
pull down ya pants or pull up ya ankles!

sumha
johnny johnny johnny
why ya mama so browk?

sumwea
johnny johnny johnny
heard ya daddy got poked,
either evil little needle that was hot and rough

sumha
or a white man in blue
with a billy club!

sumwea
what if johnny johnny johnny
go to school school school
nobody ever tell him what to do do do

browk
I was smart as a kid

sumwea
well so was we

sumha
and only way we knew the sun
was the top of that tree

sumwea
the very same one johnny brothas like to hug
when they scratch that little itch
and finish slobbin' on the rug

sumha

if johnny go to school
he gon' try to forget
but it's all in the papers

11

that his mama lost her leg

sumwea

but johnny love home,
he'll be back!
he can't wait!

sumha

johnny come home and jump
in the lake lake lake!

browk

for a swim!

sumwea

(he gon' drown.)

browk

y'all are wrong!

sumha

(quiet down)

sumwea

johnny go and come back
he gon' break. break. break.

*browk resorts to the bottle of rum and peace pipe,
he partakes. relaxes into his own high.
sumwea and sumha look on...*

sumwea & sumha

hey johnny could we have a little taste?

sumwea

taste?

sumha

taste.

they join. PLOP! a drop in the bucket.

scene 4: the docta – earth/north*sumha hits the peace pipe, recounts a tale.**browk lurks in the background,**fighting new gravities in the recesses of such a dream.***sumha**

yeah so all day yestaday, something' was bitin' my leg up!

I say "soon I won't have much to stand on!"

first I went to the docta.

(I knew the po'lice should be the last thing I do. not bcuz they kill us—)

sumwea

[she] forgot that part just like me—

sumha

yeah, naw, just cuz I was hurtin'! so I went to the docta,

[to] see if I was infected.

browk

was you?

sumwea, was she?

sumha

yeah, am I?!

I'm screamin' at the docta:

"what is it?

am I'm infected??"

he wouldn't say.

don't know if he just couldn't tell or didn't wanna but

there was anotha young docta there and the first docta say to

him... ...

...

...

browk

c'mon now!

sumha

the first docta say to him...

sumwea as docta

"sum browk"

sumha

just like that.

13

sstraight like dat.

and just sstraight like dat there was a white something wrapped around my leg, takin' all da blood 'fore I know it.

'fore I know it I was looking at my leg and it was gone while I was lookin' at it! I said: "well these suckas is hungrier than whateva make me come here!" docta start listin' off meds I needed, it was:

sumwea as docta

"crapotocin,
typicaliadone,
generichromic pills,
dissolving dissociatric tablets,
marijuana and ..."
(well ...
I cant think of no mo.)

browk

that aint enough?

sumha

that aint *all*.

aint nobody said nothing about enough,

[I] been had enough.

so the docta listin' em off and the muthafucka aint gave me not one of em! unless it was one of the ones he knew I would want more than one of whether I needed one or not.

sumwea

uhn uhn!

sumha

now doc say:

sumwea as docta

"go up the street and look for the blue lights and my brotha help you find out why you lost yo leg.

prolly kill the muthafucka that did it if you suck his dick, but not if its gon' fall off afta.

we seen ya in the papers.

how many teefs you got left, say ahh."

sumha

ahhhhh don't know what the hell he talkin 'bout

but I say

"ok."

now im walkin' over there and realize

I can't!

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say to myself:

“hollon, na!”

say:

“if I can't walk,

I can't run!

best not to go see the po'lice!”

they erupt in laughter

sumwea

hell naw!

browk

on what?

sumwea

people's souls

sumha

people's legs!

they laugh, it is painful. they cry, it is painful. they sob.

PLOP! a drop in the bucket.

sumha wraps a piece of a cloth offering around their eyes.

*they make a show of feeling their way around the space,
to the cryinglaughing.*

sumwea as aunt abel toussouis

my babies?!

is them my babies?! na, I know I aint crazy I know—

she takes a swig of the rum

sumha

aw, here she go...

good morning aunt abel toussouis

(c'mon say it)

they invite browk to say

[say] “good morning—”

browk in sobering recognition

aunt abel toussouis?

swig

sumwea as aunt abel toussouis

yes I can, na!

sumha

(not since hell gnawed on her eyes, too.)

15

browk

im sorry to hear about your eyes.

sumha

ya legs.

browk

ya teefs.

sumha

ya un-settlement.

browk

ya boys.

I'm sorry to hear about ya boys.

we all heard.

we all heard 'em cryin'.

sumwea as *aunt abel toussouis*

heard 'em?

swig

you don't hear em now?

they all listen.

PLOP! a drop in the bucket.

see! na I aint crazy!

I'll be damned

see,

I'm not sure exactly where I am--

but I know there is a window!

swig

last week a tv fell out of it...

yesterday a baby...

or it felt like yesterday.

swig

see,

I have three! or I wish I still did I

I hope I do. this

this aint a room is it?

it feel like a rock.

like a drunk rock.

sumha

now aunt abel toussouis,
you aint in no room and

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you're sure on a rock but--

browk

you the only one dru--

sumwea as aunt abel toussouis

I'm not drunk!
rest'a the world is! spinnin' and spinnin'!
prolly from them tears, prolly drunk off them!
just drinkin' the pain away,
drinkin' drinkin' all that blood
all them tears
and can't neva sweat.

swig

PLOP! a drop in the bucket.

I'm not sure that these are tears at all.
oh, I aint so sure your stone got eyes,
see?

browk

aunt abel—

sumwea as aunt abel toussouis

aht! I aint crazy!

swig

I know a boy--

sumha

look at that boy.

sumwea as aunt abel toussouis

I'm—

browk

aunt abel—

sumwea as aunt abel toussouis

I *know* a boy,
stand outside cause that's where he was spat at!

browk

on the same rock...

sumwea as aunt abel toussouis
listening at the same window all his life
musta thought he heard sum callin' his name out there.

17

maybe the hungry sweat of the sky?

browk
more like the /salt of the earth?

sumha
salt of the sweat of the /sky

sumwea as aunt abel toussouis
salt of the sweat of that hungry sky
it call out to him from that window

sumha as ma
c;mon eat lil boy!
dinna almost done!

*sumha hums her song softly
as she prepares dinna.*

sumha calls, sotto voce
(oh would I were a thunderbird
that flies to the halcyon
along the breaking waves with a fearless heart
that noble bird
that lonely bird
your deep blue
of an ocean)

sumwea as aunt abel toussouis
O! you can't tell me aint no window when I done watched
both my boys fall out of it
wit my own eyes
rushin' to the mouth of that hungry ass sky

swig

sumha as ma
dinna nigga!

browk starts his journey to the dinna table.

sumwea as aunt abel toussouis
shh na! im tryna listen for something else to hit the ground
(lord please let it be a tv this time)

sumwea as aunt abel toussouis
and I listen for something to hit the ground
and satisfy that hunger of the sky.

PLOP! a drop in the buck-

18

*a glassy crash! like a tv out of a window or a stone on top.
browk is on the ground. silence. like when a baby falls.
sumha laughs. sumwea joins.*

sumha as ma
oooo lawd
there was this one time...!

sumwea rips off the eye covering and passes the pipe/bottle
oh, I like this one here!

sumha as ma
he was a boy. used'ta run right down dem steps [when] I call to
eat and I would just laaaaugh!

browk salty
(and I would ask why)

sumha as a jovial ma
you. boy.
splayed over the third and fourth step
when you supposed to be at the dinna table!
and we could all hear it
and it was funnyyy.

browk
(but when she say that I think she really mean)

sumha as an admonishing ma
you, boy!
ova on the ground when you supposed to be one point further in
time, and got the nerve to be loud about it, too!
gravity—

sumwea
that hoe--

sumha as an admonishing ma

wrapped her arms around you like I knew she would and you just
kissed yo ass goodbye goodbye.
like there was no choice but for you to fall—

browk

that aint true at all!

sumha *as an admonishing ma*

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so you fall.
you gon' fall, huh?

sumha *as jovial ma*

so I lauuuuugh...
louder than the sound of yo ass hittin' the ground.
[I mean] the fuck else I'm supposed to do?

browk

(I wanna say:)
help me!
you supposed to help me or—

sumha *as ma*

(here he go with what I'm supposed to do)

browk

that's what I'm waitin' on! that's why I'm stuck
on the third and fourth step out of the twelve.

PLOP! a drop in the bucket.

yeah, gravity got my ass!
wrapped her arms around me, but you don't know
I fell because I fought her off!
didn't I go down with a—?

PLOP! a drop in the bucket.

you never heard me fall,
you heard me trying to stand up—to stay standin',
to stay movin' through time.
heard me tryna make it to your dinna table
when I wasn't hungry for nothin but
a window that didn't wanna swallow me
any opportunity
anything that wanted to see me alive on the other side!

magnum opus. they take him in. they spit him out.

sumha

hell naw!

sumwea
on what?

sumha
people's souls!

sumwea
people's legs!!

20

sumha
people's eyes!!!

sumwea
people's boys!!!!

they laugh.
PLOP! a drop in the bucket.

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scene 5: me: aether
browk is taken over

browk as ALL
what the fuck is so funny out here?
the fuck is so funny?!
c'mon I wanna know? what's wrong.

browk switches on a dime

baby, what's wrong?
you can tell me—

dime

and you betta tell me when you come from over there
if anybody touched you!
what's the lil boy name?
he got brothers?
they got a daddy?
he be over there?
he got friends?
they be over there?

sumwea
...
shit.
sum browk.

browk as ALL

where? there? ok, I'll kiss it.
now go on and get some sleep.

dime

you aint got nowhere to sleep?!
mhm and you sure you done with that fast tail lil girl, boy?
cause she aint finna run her lil fresh ass
up on my porch
cause you know I still got your granddaddy shotgun and I will—
aight boy well get yo ass in here.

browk sniffs.

dinna almost ready. you smell that?

dime.

browk sniffs again.

[what] you smell like that, for?
you been smokin'?

dime

[last time you] spoken to the lord?
alright, now!
the blood still work! ha hA! you gon' head on!

22

you betta watch yo--

dime

mouf.
my mama aint been alive to tell me what to do in a long time
and I pray every day I could say I love you so go'n head keep talking out ya neck
to me lil boy you gon' cry hardest
at my wake--

dime

up, suga!
in the trees is a breeze like grandfather's breath.
like a tornado.
you know I sat on my porch when I wasn't but ten and
watched one swirl right down this street here.
alarm goin' off on the tv fallin' out the window and
we jus' cover our ears cause it was annoyin'--

dime

ointment?
which kind?
ok go up and check my drawer chest inna room to the left first chamber—pay mind,
now.
cause its 16 of 'em up there. and oil too! castor!

dime

pastor?!

pastor is that you?
well aint it good to see ya!
whatcha doin' around here?!
matter of fact—aw naw—*why* you doin' around here?
(can't be too good.)
whose boy is gone now?

...
aw he aint gone gone is he?

...
well where he go?

sumha
sumwea

sumwea
hm?

browk as ALL
right, sumwea right here.
where did the boy go?

sumwea

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sumha

browk as ALL
right, sumha he'll be back, right?

sumha

...
oh would I were a thunderbird
that flies to the halcyon/
along the breaking waves with a fearless heart/
that noble bird
that lonely bird

browk
/ where did the boy go?
/ don't start the mourning songs! don't you have any respect
for the boy?

sumwea
what's the boy's name?

browk

...

sumha

you gonna stop me from singing over a name you don't know?

PLOP! a drop in the bucket.

browk as ALL

I know his name!

...

I know my name!

sumwea

where's your name?

browk

it's too heavy.

and I can't /breathe—

sumha

/yes you can.

as long as you take grandfather's breath.

the stone.

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browk considers them, and through this himself.

sumha

what will you be now, love?

sumwea

what will you be now?

love?

browk

...

...

...

browk picks up the bucket and douses his stone with its waters.

it sizzles and steams and

sumwea and sumha retreat once again to the recesses of his mind,

all of our minds.

he breathes a moment within grandfather's breath.

maybe he breaks.

maybe he's mended.

whatever love does that day.

aśe.

end of play.