

Unikkausik

Written and Performed by

The Nalujuk Players

Scene 1

The play opens with TWO SNOWMOBILES at the center of the stage, with one in the lead of another. SOPHIE enters STAGE RIGHT, struggling to carry an armful of gear to the back of the closest machine.

Sophie (talking to herself as she packs each object): Okay, let's see. I've got the spot, the ulu, the ax, the gun. Oh! And the bullets! (Shakes the box of ammunition to make sure it's full and then puts it in the very full basket) So, that just leaves...that just leaves...(she starts to get panicked, looking around herself and patting her pockets) Oh no. Wait! Where is it?!

Gus (enters STAGE RIGHT and lays gas cans on the ground next to his machine): Wha you lookin' fer now, Soph?

Sophie: What'd Ya mean, wha I'm looking for? I'm looking for my camera! (She turns to him with her hand on her hips). Where'd you put it to now, Gus?

Gus: Wha, me? I never did anything with your camera.

Sophie: Don't give me that! I know it was you! You're always playing mean ol' tricks wit' me. You never take anything serious! Well, this isn't funny! Now tell me where you put my camera.

Gus (starts laughing): Maybe if you looked down you'd find it.

Sophie (getting very frustrated): Wha you mean, look down? (She looks at her boots and then under the snowmobile) I swear, if this is another one your tricks...

Gus (patiently): Maybe look a little higher, babe.

SOPHIE finally notices the camera hung around her neck and grips it tight with both hands like she's afraid of losing it again. Slowly, she looks at GUS and they both break out into laughter.

Sophie: Oh my. It's too early for this, Gus. I don't think I'm even awake yet.

Gus (looks at his watch and then out at the town): I don't think anyone is awake this early. But you must be excited though - been a long oh time since last you were up Hebron.

Sophie: Three years now. So long ago.

Gus: That's right! Last time you went up, you shot your first caribou, eh?

Sophie: Yesss! And my aunt made these kamiks out of the fur. (Motions to her feet).

Gus: I remember the feed we had down at Maria's shed. You were rye proud, tellin' us all about it. Just had the biggest smile on your face. You lit up the place, Soph.

Sophie (laughing): I don't remember any of that, but I remember that was the night you told me you loved me. That I remember like it was yesterday. Oh, Gus. I can't believe we're actually going back.

Gus: I know. But it's time, Sophie. Three years of talking about it. It's time to just do it.

Brittney and ADAM walk onto STAGE LEFT, their arms hooked together. ADAM lays a box down on the ground.

Adam: (wiping his arm across his forehead): Whoo. I'm ray beat out after all that work..

Brittney: (laughing): Wha work? Giving your cousin a tour of the town? Sure it's not that big and it hasn't changed all that much.

Gus: Hey Adam, what's with the box?

Adam: It's bait, in case we wanna go fishing.

Gus: Of course we're going fishing! (Waving at Brittney) So you're finally back home, Brittney. I s'pose it must be some adjustment between here and St. John's, eh?

Brittney: It's been so long. I'm just glad to start with going out on the land. Hunting and fishing and all that. There isn't much hunting in the city.

Adam (puts the box in the sled and taps the lid thoughtfully, he winks at Sophie): I dunno if some ol' city girl really wants to go out on the land, though. Could be dangerous, you know. You remember the stories of the Kallupiluit?

Brittney: No. What're you talking about?

Sophie (bending her head and wiggling her fingers): It's this big creature from the ol' stories. A sea monster hiding under the ice. (Adam sneaks up behind Brittney). And when the children are bad, it reaches out and grabs them...just...like...this!

Adam grabs Brittney

Brittney (squealing): Ahh! Adam! Give it up!

Adam: I'm just saying, we gotta be careful out on that ice. Never know what we might catch.

Brittney: You'll catch my fist, you don't give it up.

Gus: Don't mind ol' Sophie. I think I just woke her up too early. Late oh sleeper. You must be some excited, eh? To be going up Hebron?

Brittney (sighing): You remember my grandmother? (They all nod). Well, I don't. Not really. I left when I was just a little girl and, so, when I think about her only two things still come to mind - her baking and the trips to Hebron she'd take me on every Christmas. I remember being up there together, living off the land and walking where our people used to walk. She said it brought us closer together. Not just as a family. But as a people. I think...I think after so long away, I'd like to try and get that close again.

Gus: Well, maybe we'll make it our new tradition. All four of us.

Sophie: Maybe we will. But first we gotta get there. We should probably get going now before it gets too late.

Gus: You're right. It's gonna be a long seven hours to get up there. Make sure you got all your warm gear packed up so you don't get cold.

Sophie: Seven? More like four, the way youse drives.

Adam: Bet I could beat Gus up Hebron without even breaking a sweat!

Brittney: Not with me on the skidoo!

Gus: (shaking his head) You couldn't even beat me in the owl hop!

Adam: Oh yeah? That was last year. Let's try again.

Gus: Right now?

Adam: (shrugging) Why not?

GUS and ADAM start doing the owl hop. BRITTNEY and SOPHIE shake their heads at the boys.

Brittney: Gosh, looks like they haven't grown up yet, eh?

Sophie: You got that right. Hey, children, if you're done, we've gotta get goin'! I didn't wake up this early just watch you all goof around.

They get on their skidoos and leave for Hebron. The LIGHTS DIM as music plays.

Scene changes to Hebron, where they are all sitting around a fishing hole.

Gus: Well, the ride up didn't take as long as I expected. Musta been only about five and half hours, wouldn't you say?

Sophie: I told you! You drives like you stole the skidoo. I think you and Adam should go Cain's Quest next time. Youse would have a good shot at winning.

Adam: Yeah we should, maybe if we start fundraising soon we could be ready by the next race

Brittney Go team dumb and dumber! Whooo (girls laugh)

Gus: Keep screaming like that you'll scare your supper away (hands Brittney a stick) here Soph (tries to hand her stick)

Sophie (refusing the fishing pole): No thanks. With my luck, I'd just scare all the oh fish away.

Gus (laughing): I still can't believe you're afraid of a little fish.

Sophie: I'm not afraid. (Hits him playfully on the arm). I'm just terrible at it, and I'd like to have supper tonight.

Brittney: Look! I got one! (hauls up small fish) So cute! What's that called in Inuktitut, Adam? Did you learn that one yet?

Adam: Char.. char... Wait, I know that one uhhh.. iKaluk!

Sophie: Cute Britt. Sure, you're getting right into it. When's the last time you caught a fish?

Brittney: Maybe when I was 7? I don't remember the last time I went fishing.

Gus: I feel one tugging! (He looks down hole) Look, I see him! Hurry! Move! I got him!

Brittney: Let me see! (She moves to look in and Adam pretends to push her in) Ah! Stop it, Adam! You and your dummy oh jokes!

(After a struggle, GUS manages to haul up a huge fish. He holds it up and SOPHIE takes a bunch of pictures).

Adam: Fish this big, I'd say we got our Christmas dinner too!

Sophie: Wow, that was so easy!

Gus (taking the fish off the hook): I told you! You should really try!

Brittney: Yeah, if I can do it, I'm sure anyone can!

Sophie: Alright, then. Make me a hole.

(GUS goes to the skidoo to get the stuff to make a hole and pauses, looking out at the sky.)

Gus: Actually, I think we should get to the camp. It's starting to get dark and stormy out there. We might be having a night in.

(Wind picks up SOPHIE and BRITTNEY jump)

Sophie: Yup! Let's go now.

Brittney: Yeah lets go before it gets any worse
(They pack everything up and exit stage RIGHT)

Scene 2

(Opens with everyone in the cabin. Several days have passed. BRITTNEY and SOPHIE are sat at the table playing cards. ADAM and GUS are pulling on their winter gear)

Brittney: God, I'm right hungry! It's been like four whole days. I thought I was sick of fish, but now I'd give anything for a bite of char. (She looks toward the window and sighs). I'm right sick of it being so white out there.

Adam (putting on his boots): S'alright, Brittney. Me and Gus goin' out now. We'll get us something for the table da once.

Brittney: You boys gonna get lost out there! Can't see an inch in front of your face!

Sophie (resting her hand on Brittney's arm): Don't have to worry about ol' Gus and Adam. They've been out on the land in worse than this.

Gus (picking up the gun): She's right. And we needs food anyway. If we don't go, we're gonna starve.

Brittney: Sure it's you guys gonna be eat! What if a ol' polar bear comes?!

Gus: Eee, I hope it does. We'll shoot it, eh? (Nudges Adam). Big ol' feast, there - we'll have food until next week with that.

Brittney (panicked): Do you really think we'll be here this long?!

Adam: Ahh, it's fine. Not gonna be here *that* long. We just need food, isall. Just in case. I'm sure the storm'll break any time at all now.

Adam and Gus leave.

Scene change to the forest. Adam and Gus trudging in the deep snow.

Gus: Ah. Ugly ol' weather. Haven't had a storm like this in must be fifteen years.

Adam: Too bad it wasn't nicer out. Haven't been hunting with you for a while now. Last time must've been, what, three or four years ago?

Gus: Well, should come up with me more! Not my fault you're so busy all the time.

Adam: I know, Gus. Ever since I got my position with NG I hardly finds time for much else. It's a full time job, you know, researching our history, finding ways to make it come alive for a new generation.

Gus: This is our history, boy. Out here.

Adam (suddenly stops and points): Shh. Look ol' caribou over there!

Gus: Here let me take a look. (Gets down on a knee and looks through scope). You're right. Big ol caribou. That'll keep us going for however long this storm keeps on us. If only I could see it proper in this snow.

Adam: Should be no problem for you, sure! Remember that time you shot that coca-cola can off dat tree up by the cabin? You were practically all the way out of the cove and still managed to hit it!

Gus (fires shot): Ahhhh. Just crippled it, des all. It's only runnin' away now!

Adam: Alright. Well, let's go get after it then.

Gus: Gonna have to go quick 'fore we lose it in the blizzard.

GUS and ADAM trudge off stage.

Scene change to cabin set.

Brittney (gets a blanket and wraps up): It's getting kinda cold in here now, Soph.

Sophie: S'alright. I'll go get the last bit of wood from outside, you just sit tight. (Sophie goes outside, grabs some wood and trips up over the threshold coming back in).

Brittney (jumps up): Oh no! You alright, Soph?!

Sophie: Noooo! I kattacked, b'y! I think I sprained my ankle!

Brittney helps her up onto the chair.

Brittney: You just sit right there, Soph. I'll get you a cup a' tea. You just rest that foot.

Sophie: You know, being up here always reminds me of coming up with my atatsiak. I think he was probably the reason I love telling stories so much.

Brittney: Oh yeah? Why don't you tell me one of those stories now? Might take your mind off that ankle and it'll pass the time while we wait for the boys.

Sophie (nods) Well, my favorites were always stories about Nanuk the bear.

Brittney: Well, tell me one?

Sophie: One winter day, long ago, a great hunter and his dogs spotted oh Nanuk from a distance.

The HUNTER appears on the screen and pantomimes seeing the BEAR.

Sophie: The hunter sent his dogs to chase down the bear.

The DOGS chase the BEAR around in the shadows.

Sophie: Poor Nanuk ran faster and faster. But the dogs were hungry and mad with the chase. They didn't give up.

The shadows show the BEAR leaving the DOGS behind.

Sophie: And everytime Nanuk thought he was finally safe, the DOGS would appear again!

DOGS appear from behind the BEAR and surround him.

Sophie: And so, he had no choice and nowhere left to go. That's when Nanuk leapt off the edge of the earth. And the dogs, who cared about nothing but catching the bear, jumped off with him.

The BEAR jumps off the edge of the earth and tumbles through the sky. The DOGS tumble behind him.

Sophie: And all of them became the stars in the sky.

The screen lights up with STARS.

Lights come up

Brittney (passing Sophie her tea): Oh, I liked that one. (She pauses and looks out the window). Getting dark out there. I wish the stars were out now to guide them home.

Scene III

Opens with BRITTNEY and SOPHIE still in the cabin. It's obviously getting cold. They are trying to keep themselves warm. Huddled together, breathing in their hands.

Sophie: Holy mack, Brit! Go get me a blanket, I'm freezing! That fire still goin' or wha?

Brittney (looking at the fire): Nah. It died like an hour ago. Nothing but coals and ash in there now. Sophie, I'm scared. I hope the boys came back soon.

Sophie: Brittney, it's been hours. I don't think we can wait on the boys. We need wood now. If we don't get it, we're likely to freeze to death in here.

She stands up and tries to go for the ax. The pain in her foot is unbelievable. She cries out as Brittney jumps up to her side.

Brittney: You're in no shape to get wood.

Sophie: Then what are we going to do?

Brittney: I guess I'm going to have to get some. Give me the ax.

Sophie: Brit! It looks like the storm has gotten the best of the boys and they actually know what they are doing! What chance you think you've got?

Brittney (holding the ax incorrectly): Don't worry; I think I got this.

Sophie: Do you even know how to hold an ax?

Brittney: Uh. (Holds the ax kind've correctly). Like this?

Sophie: Close enough, I s'pose.

Brittney (less sure than before): Well. Off I go.

Sophie watches her stumble out the door. She shakes her head.

Brittney tromping through the forest. The snow is deep. The wind is high. Can't see an inch in front of her face. This is not the city. Brittney is getting a little creeped out. Finally comes upon three nice looking trees. Unknown to her, the third and farthest tree is a Talking Tree.

Brittney (talking to herself): Okay. I think these might be good. (Gets in an exaggerated chopping pose in front of first tree). One...two...three! (chops tree with a girlish squeal).

Talking Tree: AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

Brittney (jumps and hides behind second tree. Poking her head out): Hello?! Someone there?! (Waits and hears nothing else). Brittney. Calm down, it's just the wind. (Gets in chopping pose next to second tree) One....two...three! (chops).

Talking Tree (Even louder than before): NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Brittney (whips around, ax held like a weapon): Adam?! Is that you?! This better not be one of your dumb jokes! 'Cause I'm getting right sick of it! I swear, I'll chop you in half if you don't give it up! (She waits and hears nothing). Okay, Brittney. Don't freak out. It's probably just a coyote or something. You've got an ax. If you can chop a tree, you can chop a coyote. (She takes the chopping stance in front of the third and final tree) One...two...three!

Talking Tree: DON'T YOU DARE CHOP ME DOWN!

Brittney (falling backwards and scrabbling away from the tree): AHHH! What's happening?! What are you?! Am I losing my mind?! Trees can't talk!

Talking Tree: Calm down, child. I'm not just any o' talking tree. I'm your anansiak!

Brittney: My grandmother?! That's impossible! (She jumps up and rushes at the tree with the ax, placing the blade against its bark threateningly). You're not just a talking tree! You're a lying tree!

Talking Tree: No, it's true! When I died, I just couldn't bear to leave this place behind. It's where I was born. It's where your mother was born. It should've been where you were born.

Brittney: You think any of that proves anything? If you're my anna saik - prove it.

Talking Tree (revealing face): Is that proof enough for ya?!

Brittney screams again. Tree starts laughing like your typical delighted and mischievous grandmother.

Brittney: Oh, anna siak! It's been so long! You've missed so much! I moved to St. John's just after you passed and...well, I've been gone for thirty years!

Talking Tree: Thirty years! How was it, Ingutak?!

Brittney: What'd you just call me?

Talking Tree (long sigh): Oh my, Brit. It means grandchild..

Brittney: Oh anna saik I barely knows my language. I barely knows anything.

Talking Tree: I could tell as much, the way you speak it. It's pronounced anansiak, not anna saik.

Brittney: Well, it's hardly a surprise I can't speak it. Growing up in St. John's was like growing up on a different planet. It's so big, loud, and crowded. Even at night there was nothing but noise and light! It was so scary going to that school with all those new people. (She gets quiet and reserved) I...I was made fun of and treated so badly. I had to fight for everything. And throughout it all, I felt so out of place and alone, so far from this land. This sky. These trees.

Talking Tree: It hurts my heart to hear you had to go through all that, Ingutak. It's a poor thing to be away from this place. That's why I never left, not even in death. See, when I was a little girl, there used to be a tree in this exact place.

Shadow tree appears.

Talking Tree: Every fall, I'd come out here with my anansiak and atatsiak to gather the red berries that grew here.

Shadow family walk onto the screen. The grandparents bend to pick the berries.

Talking Tree: But every time, I'd get bored and wander over to the tree.

Shadow child walks to tree.

Talking Tree: Oh, I used to love climbing that tree.

Shadow child climbs the tree.

Talking Tree: But the tree was old. And one day, a branch broke and I come flying out of the tree! It knocked the wind right out of me. (She laughs as she remembers).

Shadow child falls.

Talking Tree: My anansiak and atatsiak came running to me to check if I was hurt. They stroked my hair and told me everything was going to be okay.

This happens on the screen.

Talking Tree: This is why I came back here, Brittney. To be with this land and close to their memories. Child, you should've experienced the same thing. Should've walked the paths of your ancestors and left paths for your children. To be seperated from this land is to be seperated from us all.

Brittney considers this. It's a lot. She leans against the tree.

Brittney: I'm back home now, anansiak. And I can't wait to make memories of my own in these hills and forests. I will get to know the land of my ancestors as well as you. I promise..

Talking Tree hugs Brittney.

Scene 4

GUS and ADAM still chasing caribou. The storm is getting much worse. Wind higher. Can see nothing. They take a break to share a thermos of tea.

Gus: I can't believe it's getting worse. I've never seen anything like this.

Adam: So bad, our tea's gone cold!

Gus: Can't feel my hands!

Adam: Your hands?! I can't feel my feet!

Gus: Where's that caribou gone off to, anyway? We should've found it by now.

Adam: Wouldn't see it anyway. My eyes froze shut.

They take a moment to try and warm up. Patting their arms and stomping in place. It is so cold and windy.

Gus: You haven't been getting out enough, des all. That's why you're so cold. Why do you never go out? Sure we all have jobs. Don't stop us.

Adam: It's not just a job. I'm trying to get our language back.

Gus: Why's that so important to you, anyway?

Adam: I'm keeping a promise.

Gus: A promise? To who?

Adam: My dad.

Lights go down. A child shadow appears in the center.

Adam: When he was a child, he was sent to one of the residential schools.

Child is taken away.

Adam: At that school there were many strange rules. One of them was about his language. Every time he spoke it, he would be punished.

Shadow child tries to speak and then is threatened by a meter stick. Child cowers.

Gus: Those schools were horrible places, Adam. My father never even talked about it.

Adam: Well my dad did. He told me how horrible it was. He told me that to survive, he had to do a lot of things he didn't feel proud of. One of them was to stop speaking his language at all. So that whenever he came home, he felt more and more like a stranger.

Shadow child speaks in English. Parents speak in Inuktitut. They cannot understand each other.

Adam: And over the years, he became more and more divided from our culture. By the time he was an old man, he could barely even speak the language of his parents anymore.

Gus: It was a tragedy, Adam. There's no doubt.

Adam: So I promised him that I'd take back our language. That I'd make sure that my kids could use it. Make their way back to their ancestors through it.

Gus: Wait, Adam! I hear that ol' caribou screaming.

Adam: Nah, that's just the wind.

Gus runs off towards the noise. Adam stays behind for a moment and realizes he is now alone.

Adam: Gus?! GUS! WHERE'D YOU GO?!

Wanders off in the opposite direction.

Scene 5

Gus is lost in the storm. He keeps crouching and looking for signs of the caribou. It is truly nuts outside. The wind is wailing. The snow is swirling. From somewhere comes the sound of drums.

Gus: Where're you?! Come out you stupid caribou! You should be down by now! How're you even still going?

The wind and drums get louder. The lights start dimming.

Gus (shouting): I'm not going to die out here!

The wind and drums get even louder!

Gus (shouting even louder): I said come out!

Three Kallupiluit appear on the shadow screen. They stand weird and creepy. Obviously not human. There is a mound in front of them, between them and Gus.

Gus (shouting): Get away! That's my caribou!

The Kallupiluit don't move.

Gus (shouting): Did you hear me?! THAT'S MINE!

The Kallupiluit emerge from behind the screen. They are very clearly not human. They approach him slowly. They are very intimidating.

Gus: What's you?! Kallupiluit?! Sure I thought you were just some ol' story the elders used to tell!

They stand across from him. The caribou between Gus and them. They are looking at him with very creepy expressions.

Gus(shouting over the storm): Look, I don't care if you're some ol' monster. That's still my food. I've got hungry people waiting on me. So, I need it. Now, I've got no fight with you. But I'm coming over there and I'm taking it.

The Kallupiluit do not move. Gus makes a move toward them. The Kallupiluit stand their ground. Gus moves another step. They back up a step. He takes one more. They back up behind the screen and sink into the sea.

The wind and drums fade with them.

Gus (quietly, almost dazed): Kallupiluit. Up in Hebron. Ol' Sophie's never gonna believe it.

Gus walks over to the caribou, wavers in place for a moment, and then drops to his knees in relief.

Slowly the exit music starts playing. Curtains close.

Curtain call.

