

MISKA AND THE FIRST AIRPLANE

An Iditarod Area School District Production

Scene 1: On the Trail

CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

- Traditional Dancers
- Narrator
- Annana, Miska's friend
- Miska, hunter trapper from Nikolai
- Line Dance Performers

OPENING

The set is an outdoor wilderness scene and is in view as audience take their seats. A soft drum beats as the narrator walks out in front stage left. As narrator nears the end of her monologue, dancers file on stage, drum beats steadily, getting louder. With narrator silent and still, the traditional dancers perform on musical cue and end with one loud drum beat.

NARRATOR. You'll be someplace where there's nobody or no animals and suddenly you have that funny feeling that someone's watching you, something's watching you. That eye penetrating you, sensing you. You may see it or not... You hear it from lots of people along the way. 'I feel like somebody's watching me': that expression's been used among friends for some time.

(The dancers walk off stage right and narrator remains in place. Several students sneak on stage with half masks and hide behind props. The audience can see them but the actors are oblivious. Miska and Annana enter from stage left. They walk on what looks like a trail.)

ANNANA. Miska, what's wrong?

MISKA. *(Turning towards her)* No luck today *(shakes his head)*.

ANNANA. Where do you think they have gone? **Sound of Airplane flying.**
(Miska kneels down searching for tracks and hears something. Suddenly he stands up trying to locate the object with his eyes.)

MISKA. You hear that?

ANNANA. Yeah *(shrugging her shoulders)*. What is it? Where is it coming from?

(Both look up at the sky, trying to find where the noise is coming from. The noise gets louder starts to get louder and stronger. Miska and Annana are both covering their ears now. Miska spots the object in the sky and starts to follow it with his finger. Annana turns to Miska and sees him pointing up to the sky. Then Annana looks up into the sky and also sees the object slowly start descending, and it disappears below the tree line.)

ANNANA. Ja' see that?

MISKA. Yeah. Of course I did- it was huge!

ANNANA. What is it?

MISKA. It's too big to be a raven, too big to be an eagle and it shines...

ANNANA. And it kinda sounds like a really big mosquito.

MISKA. I think it fell back in the woods somewhere. *(Miska looks back toward the woods.)*

ANNANA. Ya. Me too.

MISKA. Do you want to go see what it is?

ANNANA. I don't think it's a good idea. It looked really big. I don't think my arrows would be able to kill it.

MISKA. Ya, you're probably right.

(Annana nods her head. While Miska and Annana go through the belongings in their bags, they mime a conversation. Every once in awhile they look up as if something is there. Extras emerge from behind rocks, trees and props, gathering with all performers to sing The Sound of Change, then they EXIT.)

MISKA. Well we should start walkin' back to Nikolai, before it starts to get dark.

ANNANA. Without any meat?

(Miska shrugs his shoulders.)

ANNANA. Ya we should, but what are we gonna do about that thing?

MISKA. I'm gonna go ask the elders, and seek advice from them.
(Miska and Annana exit.)

Scene 2: Graveyard in Old Nikolai

CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

- Narrator
- Miska, *a few months after he saw the first airplane*
- Katherine, *Miska's wife, died from influenza*
- Suji, *Elder of Nikolai, died from old age*
- Tekone, *Miska's brother, died during a raid*
- Shisr, *An elder, died from natural causes*
- Nune, *A young boy, died from starvation*

OPENING

The Narrator is in front of closed curtain to the left. Miska is standing center stage in front of Katherine's grave. Next to trees in shadows are: Katherine, Suji, Tekone, Shisr, and Nune. On the back wall of the stage, there is a mural of a Russian Orthodox church and graveyard. There are spruce and birch trees on the left/right. The sun is shining. Birds are chirping (Play Scene.2 nature CD and fade).

NARRATOR. Long ago, Old Nikolai had many people in it. A very bad sickness came to the village. Maybe it was whooping cough. It might have been the flu. Many people died... It was a year of great sadness.

At the time of our story, more airplanes are arriving in McGrath. Changes are beginning to take place. Miska has talked to the elders in his village. He walks out to Old Nikolai to visit the grave of his wife, Katherine and to be close to the elders of the past.

(Miska enters. Remains still and thoughtful.)

MISKA. Katherine, I walked out here to ask you a question. Planes have arrived in McGrath and I don't know what to think. I wish you could talk to me and tell me whether you think the plane is a good sign or terrible sign?

(On musical cue, Katherine walks out of shadows and appears before Miska.)

KATHERINE. How I miss you Miska! How exciting for you to be alive during this time. I think planes will be an excellent change. Just think, I would be alive right now if there had been planes when I was sick. They would have brought medicine that could have cured me. Remember when the influenza epidemic swept through Nikolai? About half of our people died

from the disease, including me. After the people died, the families suffered from all of the tragic losses. The few men that were left had to hunt for their families, the orphans and widows. Many starved. The men spent much time making caskets. If planes were here when everyone was getting sick, we might be alive right now. I would have been glad if airplanes were there to save all of those people from the killer disease. Influenza was the most horrible disease among our people. A plane in Nikolai could have given us medicine or aid to save of those who died. Now, planes can help you and prevent tragic deaths.

(On musical cue, Suji comes forward to join Katherine and Miska.)

SUJI. My name is Suji. I disagree with Katherine. She is wrong about the plane. Forget about it because the plane could cause problems for the native village. It could make our tribe stop speaking the Athabascan language. The white people will make laws that tell Native people to speak English and not their native language. Our Athabascan language could die. The white people will bring diseases or sickness with them and kill our people. The white people could make many kinds of problems that harm the tribal people in the village. The plane could be hazardous to our culture.

(On musical cue, Tekone, joins the others.)

TEKONE. Miska, I agree with Katherine. The planes will be good because they can bring an order to our land. I remember when my sister, Ezio, was seized by the Yukon side in a raid. While captured, she went with the Yukon women to pick berries. While berry picking, my sister made a plan to escape. When she stored enough food, she ran off.

Ezio waited for the search parties to stop looking for her. She went on to Nikolai and made it back home to us. Ezio told me what happened. So, I went with the men from our village to the Yukon to assassinate the one who kidnapped my sister.

Miska, from this experience, I know that the plane is a superior idea. The plane will bring law to our land. It will prevent violent raids and kidnappings from happening.

(On musical cue, Shisr appears.)

SHISR. I disagree. I don't like the airplane because my people are clever and resourceful. They don't need outside resources like the plane to rescue them.

When I was young, my parents died in a raid. The people that killed my parents were from the Yukon. I was alone after the raid until an older couple found me and took me in. The couple fed me warm soup. I was only two months old. They made a bottle from a sucker fish's air bladder which they filled with the soup broth. That is how I survived.

My people are resourceful. They don't need all the things that planes will bring in. They will only bring evil like alcohol and diseases.

(On musical cue, Nune appears with the group.)

NUNE. I agree with Katherine that the planes will be a good thing. I died from starvation. I remember when raiders came and killed my parents. The raiders lit flammable material and dropped it down the chimney. My parents tried to get out quickly. The raiders killed them when they came out the door. I was not there at the time. I was getting clean water. Nobody ever found me. I tried living on my own, but I could never find food. I was only eight years old. I think the plane is good because it will bring food to the village when the supply is low.

(All but Katherine and Miska slowly step back into the shadows.)

MISKA. I still don't know if the planes are good or bad. Some say the changes are needed and other say the changes will make our way of life disappear.

(Katherine begins to step back to shadows.)

KATHERINE: *(with an encouraging smile)* Miska, what an exciting time for you to be alive! Sometimes change cannot be stopped. Maybe you can take the best of it...

MISKA: *(gratefully)* Thank you Katherine.

*(All gather on stage and sing **Change Will Come**. All exit. End.)*

Scene 3: The Lonestar Roadhouse

CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

- Narrator
- Line Dance Performers
- Patron 1
- Rick, bartender/waiter
- Patron 2
- Kaylee, a town's lady, mid-twenties, waiting for a letter
- Missie, a town's lady that sorts the mail and makes the famous Lone Star pies
- Miska
- Patron 4

OPENING

The narrator walks on stage and into position.

NARRATOR. Miska Deaphon carried the mail. This was in 1930 and 1931. Miska had a team of twenty-one dogs. They pulled his sled. The sled carried 800 pounds of mail. Miska's mail route was ninety miles long. He went from The Lonestar Road House to Big River.

(All enter onto stage and get into position for line dance. Country western music plays and performers do a line dance, center stage. As dance, ends, music fades to background. Patrons 1 and 2 move to position, Rick goes to bar. Kaylee and Missy get into position on stage. Everyone else exits.)

PATRON 1. *(Looking out window, he excitedly rings the 'Musher's In' bell.)* Hey everyone, look it's Miska! *(People move in a comical wave to peer out window.)*

RICK. *(Glancing up to Patron 1 who is walking out to help Miska)* I'll finish up here and be right out.

PATRON 2. No need- a couple of us can help Miska.

(PATRON 1 and PATRON 2 exit. Rick finishes serving a drink but notices Kaylee is anxious.)

KAYLEE. *(turning to Rick, twisting her hands)* How much longer do you think 'til Miska brings the mail inside?

RICK. I don't know. After the hard run, they will feed and water the dogs and look them over real good.

KAYLEE. *(sighing)* I wish he'd hurry.

RICK. *(raising eyebrows)* You expecting something?

KAYLEE. Yeah, my aunt might move up here from California. She's letting me know in a letter that Miska may have now.

RICK. He'll be in soon, 'kay?

KAYLEE. Ok, thanks Rick. Can I get a cherry soda?

RICK. *(smiling sympathetically and handing her a glass of soda)* Yep, no problem. It's on the house!

KAYLEE: Thank you.

(All but Miska come on stage to sing, The Lonestar Roadhouse. Scene 3 cast members remain on stage after song and all other leave. Line Dance music for Scene.2 plays softly until end of cd.)

RICK. *(calling out excitedly)* Hey everyone they're comin' in with the mail!

(In walk Patron 1 and Patron 2. With exaggerated strain, they put 3 large bags of mail in front of Missy who was just getting up to dance. Missy sighs and begins to go through it.)

PATRON 1. We will be back with Miska in a few minutes- he is still checking the dogs.

KAYLEE. *(Tapping her foot and addressing Missy)* Can you hurry up? Is there anything for me in those bags?

MISSY. *(Frowning and looking at Kaylee)* Does it look like I found something yet? Look at all this mail I have to go through!

KAYLEE. *(irritated)* Well, you can hurry up!

MISSY. *(snapping)* If you don't knock it off, I won't look for your stinking letter!

KAYLEE. *(Rolling her eyes)* Fine, fine. *(She walks over to the bar.)*

RICK. *(Raising eyebrows he asks softly)* Is everything ok? Did you get your letter?

KAYLEE. No, not yet, Missy threatened not to look for it if I didn't stop bugging her.

RICK. Well, it's in there. Just have a little patience. She baked her pies all day and was just about to dance when they brought in the mail.
(After a little bit, Missy walks over to Kaylee.)

MISSY. Here's your letter!

(Missy drops the letter on Kaylee's lap and walks away. Kaylee excitedly tears open the letter and starts to read it. Slowly, she begins to frown.)

RICK. Is everything ok?

KAYLEE. *(sadly)* No. My aunt isn't coming. Her best friend is dying.

RICK. Oh, that's too bad. I'm so sorry.

KAYLEE. *(sighs)* It's ok. I'm just a little disappointed.

RICK. *(grabbing Kaylee's hand)* If there's anything I can do, I'm here.

KAYLEE. *(tearing up)* Thank you.

(Kaylee exits. Miska enters.)

MISSY. Hey Miska, how are you doing?

MISKA. *(sighs)* I'm fine, just tired. You sure get a lot of mail at the Lonestar! I could go for a good drink and a fine meal.

RICK. How's the ride?

MISKA. It was long, but the trail's real good. So what's new here?

RICK. Not much happens anymore. The traffic through here has slowed down a lot in the past year... What about you, do you have any news?

MISKA. Not much, but I have seen some strange things recently.

MISSY. *(Concerned)* Like what?

MISKA. Well, I seen that they're working on building a bigger landing strip in McGrath- a place to land the planes. Seems the planes are gonna change things along the river.

MISSY. What do you mean?

MISKA. I am not sure exactly but it seems planes will need to land up and down the river. Maybe they will chase things away.

RICK. Yeah, I know what you're talking about. I've seen one too. I was taking out my traps awhile back on the river trail. I heard that noise and looked in time to see a plane buzz overhead. I dropped the beaver trap I'd just pulled when I saw how close he was. It's like he was checking on what I was doing!

MISKA. Yeah. The planes are fast and loud. The pilot, Ben Eielson is nice enough. He's probably just curious. I tell you what. I'd like to have seen you drop that beaver trap back in the river! *(Everyone laughs)*

(Patron 4 enters. They make some noise talking adlib about news and the mail when they see Miska. Rick gets up to get food to serve)

PATRON 4. Hey, Miska how have you been? Has a year gone by already?

MISKA. Hehe- yeah I know right? This year just whizzed by, seems like I was here just last week.

(Rick brings food out to Miska, and others.)

MISSY. Hey, Rick bring out some of my pie for these guys!

PATRON 2. Hey, could we get some of Missy's famous pie over here please?

RICK. Sure thing, just a minute. *(He returns with the pie and they start eating.)*

RICK. So about these planes. Who makes them? How do they work?

MISKA. *(Finishing his bite)* Well, like I said, Ben Eielson is the pilot. As far as who builds them and how they work, I don't know.

RICK. So, you have some experience with these things?

MISKA. Not really. I've talked to Ben Eielson some. He told me that soon enough the planes are going to take over the mail delivery. I guess I'll be out of a job.

RICK. Really. That's tough.

MISKA. *(shrugs)* Eh, I'll get by. *(Miska starts to get up.)*

RICK. Miska, we have rooms upstairs. Do you want one?

MISKA. No, I gotta get going.

RICK. Oh ok, I'll get you another meal to go.

MISKA. Thanks and *(smiling towards Missy)* put some of Missy's pie in there.
(Missy smiles back. Rick exits and returns with a plate to go).

MISKA: *(finishing meal)* Thank you, now I gotta get back on the trail.

RICK: We will see you next year!
(People gather round Miska, miming conversation.)

MISKA. See you next year- *(hesitating)* on one last mail run.*(Exits)*

(Actors exit.)

Scene 4: Miska Arrives at Big River

CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

- Narrator
- Miska
- Bobby
- Emucks
- Sori
- Guga
- Ben Eielson, *pilot*
- *Line Dancers* (end)
- *Traditional Dancers* (end)

OPENING

Narrator is in position. Curtain closed.

NARRATOR. Long ago, Bobby Esai was born near McGrath. He lived there with his parents. When Bobby was about nine, his parents died. Bobby went to live in Big River. There were two native families there. There was a store and a roadhouse. Big River was on the Iditarod Trail. Travelers came through there in winter. Some came from Anchorage, some came from Nenana. The mail came by sled and dog team...Some travelers came on foot. Big River was between Nikolai and McGrath. It isn't there any more.

At the time of this story, Miska is on his last mail delivery before the planes take over the responsibility. He travels by canoe from Nikolai to Big River with mail for the village. The people are preparing for Fish Camp.

(Setting is an outdoor scene by the river, the nose of a plane visible from under a blue tarp is left stage. Villagers are doing Fish Camp prep activities. Bobby, Emucks, Guga and Sori are on stage with extras.)

MISKA. Hey everybody. I come with mail!

BOBBY. Oh! Glad you could come!

EMUCKS. What took you so long?

MISKA. Had to delay leaving Nikolai because of weather. I ran into some strong winds and rain that made the water high and choppy. It was hard to keep the canoe upright.

EMUCKS. Yea we had the same weather come through here. It made it hard to get poles for Fish Camp.

MISKA. We are getting ready for Fish Camp up river too.

SORI. Are you hungry? Come rest and eat some of my fish soup I made just a little while ago. I threw in a few fish heads, hearts, tails, eggs and pieces. It's still steamy warm. There's some blueberries and pine tea too!

MISKA. Yeah, sounds delicious! I'll be there. First I have to give you your mail. Guga- give me a hand, won't you?

(Miska goes to his canoe with Guga. They get the 2 bags and bring them back to the group. Guga sorts through and distributes mail. Sori give him a bowl of soup which he drinks down with a smile.)

BOBBY. How were your travels, Miska? What news do you bring for us from up river?

MISKA. Well, there was a bit of trouble. The river was rough and I almost tipped the canoe! The water was high and it was raining! It was even hard to land anywhere to camp. Also I had some trouble with foxes. *(chuckling)* They tried to steal one of the mailbags that sat near my food.

GUGA. Did you lose any mail?

MISKA. No, thank goodness.

GUGA. *(chuckling)* Well at least you survived!

MISKA. Yeah *(laughing)* but they came after me. Those foxes just wouldn't give up my mailbag! But, I am fine.

BOBBY. That's good to hear. See any other animals?

MISKA. There were bears that were walking into my campsite and eating my fish scraps.

EMUCKS. Why didn't you throw your fish scraps far away? You always have to remember to do that!!!

MISKA: *(with a smile)* OK! OK! Next time I will remember to throw away my fish scraps.

BOBBY. She's right, it can be dangerous with them bears around.

MISKA. (*changing his tone of voice to change the subject*) This morning before I left I had to wait until a cow and her calf moved on. I stayed quiet and I just watched them munching on willows. No trouble there.

BOBBY. That's good to hear.

MISKA. (*looking around*) So, what does your family do for fish camp?

SORI. (*laughing*) Same thing as yours, probably!

MISKA. I was wondering because some families have different ways of doing fish camp.

SORI. You are right- ways of doing things can change as you go down river. In my family, my dad and my brother always go out and set the net while the rest of my family and I get ready for them to bring the fish. My whole family prepares smoke wood, which comes from old willow, so we can cut and smoke the fish. Then, we get out the cutting table and ulus, and we put on aprons to keep our clothes clean!

MISKA. Yup- that's just about how my family does it. We make salt fish, too.

SORI. How do you make your salt fish?

MISKA. The salt fish is cooked in a bucket. Then you bottle the fish in vinegar and pickle juice. I think I have enough in my canoe for everyone (all characters but Bobby and Miska exit off stage smiling and laughing). Hey- it is in the smaller bag!

(*Miska and Bobby walk towards center stage*)

BOBBY. (concerned) Miska, I'm sorry to hear about you losing your job. Are you going to be okay?

MISKA. Yeah, I'll be fine. I've been offered a few jobs here and there.

BOBBY. That's good to hear. You know, (sympathetically) if you ever need a place to stay or a job, I can help you.

MISKA. (*Smiling shyly*) Thank you sir.

BOBBY. So, do you know anything about the plane that's taking over the mail on our side of the river?

MISKA: *(scratches his head)* No- not really. I met a pilot and he talked about how fast and easy it would be to deliver the mail.

BOBBY. Have you ever seen a plane up close?

MISKA. No, *(confused)* No, why?

BOBBY. Here, come with me. *(Smiles and starts walking across stage. MISKA follows him across stage. Bobby points to nose of plane poking out from a blue tarp.)*

MISKA. *(excited)* Whoa, you already have one here in Big River?

BOBBY. Yea, you know that pilot, Ben Eielson right?

MISKA. Yeah. I've talked to him here and there.

BOBBY. Well, he's moving to McGrath and is clearing a landing strip here at Big River.

MISKA. *(with surprise)* Really!

BOBBY. He wants to talk to you.

MISKA. About what?

BOBBY. We can find out- here he comes.

(Ben Eielson enters from right stage)

BEN EIELSON. Hi Bobby! Hello Miska. Nice to see you again. *(They shake hands)*

MISKA. Hello, How are you?

BEN EIELSON. I'm good, thanks. *(sympathetically)* I'm sorry my plane seems to be taking over your job but I want to make it up to you.

MISKA. It's fine, but how so?

BEN EIELSON. *(Scratching his head)* I've been thinking. This job is a little hard to do by myself you know? I was hoping you might want to help me.

MISKA. Really, *(Curiously)* What would I do?

BEN EIELSON. Well, my back's been acting up so I need help with all the loading and unloading of my plane. Then, we'll be flying all over Alaska and I need your company! You can get paid about twice as much delivering mail with me as you do on your dog sled and canoe!

MISKA. (*Excited, can't stop smiling*) That is a change that I didn't expect. Sure sounds good!

BEN EIELSON. Please consider it. You've had experience and you're a hard worker I hear.

MISKA. Yes sir, I'd love to help you.

BEN EIELSON. Great, we start next month. Can you be ready by then?

MISKA. (*smiling*) Yes sir.

(*Ben exits*)

MISKA. (*excitedly*) You hear that, I get to work in that plane!!

BOBBY. Yeah, you're mighty lucky you know.

MISKA. Yeah! It's an exciting time to be alive.

(*Everyone on stage to sing: The Sound of Change Reprise.*)

Ending to be practiced and defined in Holy Cross:

1. **Ending.1:** All bow...then get into position for Line Dance-invite others to join? *Over The Mountain Dance?*
2. **Ending.2:** All bow and invite everyone to sing *The Lonestar Roadhouse* (Insert words in program/playbill.)
3. **Ending.3:**