

PAINT YOUR FACE ON A DROWNING IN THE RIVER

by Craig Strete

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ACT I SCENE I

The curtain opens and we see Tall Horse standing outside the house. At his feet is a bucket. With a shovel he is digging up something behind the bucket. He's about twenty years old, hair long and black, not braided. Old jeans, cowboy boots, not moccasins. An old rag tied around his head to keep the hair out of his eyes. He is prying on something with the shovel.

His grandmother, an aged woman, gray hair tied on the side in traditional manner, dressed in a long, rather old fashioned dress that reaches to the floor, comes out of the house.

GRANDMOTHER

(Yelling)

What the devil you doing? Are you like dog buried a bone?

TALL HORSE

Digging.....

(Continues digging, doesn't look up at her)

.....just digging.

GRANDMOTHER

What for digging?

TALL HORSE

Just.....just digging.

GRANDMOTHER

(Yelling)

You must think I stupid! Craziness! Next your crooked squirrel mouth'll be telling me you're storing beer cans in your cheeks for the winter time!

TALL HORSE

(Looking at her like she is crazy)

Huh?

GRANDMOTHER

Think I don't know what that hole is for? That digging is for? Digging up that ground to get that money I got put there!

TALL HORSE

(Trying to look innocent)

Money?

(Looking down at the hole at his feet, incredulous)

Me? Digging for money? I never----

GRANDMOTHER

(Interrupting)

You never! You like guilty cat got bird feathers on your breath! Don't be telling me!

(Louder)

Don't be telling me!

(Shouting)

DON'T BE....

TALL HORSE

(Interrupting, raising the shovel and banging it angrily against the ground)

GODDAMNALREADY! So OK you caught me! SO I'M DIGGING FOR MONEY! You hear me!

Dig. Dig! DIIIIIIIG.....

(Shouting)

....for moneeeeeeeey!

(Out of breath)

GRANDMOTHER

(Triumphantly)

See I knowed all the time you was digging for money! Try and fool this old woman! Hah!

TALL HORSE

(Resumes digging at a furious pace, attacking the ground)

You ever think I could be digging a gold mine? Could be digging another pay outhouse for the tourists? You ever think that?

GRANDMOTHER

Just cause I old don't mean I am stupid. You think I like that dumb church preacher, that came out here once and crawled under the stomach cramped horse to see why it wouldn't go...and got brown faced when it went? Ain't that dumb. But you, you know that money ain't yours! Don't it bother you that that money in the ground is MY money?

TALL HORSE

(Flinching)

I was gonna pay it back, first chance I got, I swear. I would have put every penny of it back. Now though, I need it.

GRANDMOTHER

Want to know where I got that money? That money you being so free and easy about walking off and taking?

TALL HORSE

(Uncertain)

Well....figure you inherit it, maybe Uncle Black Wing, when he died, he give it to you. Just know it's been in the ground a long time.

GRANDMOTHER

(Mad)

INHERIT! GIVE...it to me! What you know! I've been saving it forever since way back. Save it from what you ask? I tell you from what....

(Really angry)

....is three thousand, seven hundred and fifty six skipped lunches in that hole

and got notch on every inch of my belly for each missed lunch of it!

TALL HORSE

So what the devil you saving it for?

GRANDMOTHER

(Stopping to think about it and realizing it has been a long time since she has thought about her reason for saving the money)

Well, why I am saving it for is....am saving it for....Oh the Horse!....What was I save it for?

(She shakes her head, genuinely perplexed)

I was....

(Suddenly remembering)

OH! Remembering now. Was gone buy colored type television box...

(She pauses, somewhat uncertain)

...or was I gone buy a two door refrigerator machine?

(Trying to concentrate)

Well, I know was one or the other.

TALL HORSE

(Vehemently)

Craziness! Absolute nut craziness! We don't even got no electricity! ain't gone have it! Not NOW, not EVER!

GRANDMOTHER

(Embarrassed)

That pretty much why I never buy no TV or refrigerator machine. Course, I might want to buy something else any day now!

TALL HORSE

Never happen. You never gone use it and you know it.

GRANDMOTHER

(Bluffing)

How you know I won't go buy me a Cadillac car? How you know?

TALL HORSE

Cause you CAN'T DRIVE is how I know!

GRANDMOTHER

(Vaguely)

Well, I might have used it for raising chickens in the trunk or something. Even so, still ain't your money less I saying so.

TALL HORSE

Not counting absolute nut chicken coop idea, you saying I can have the money? Saying so?

TALL HORSE bends over and picks up a small box out of the hole he has been digging. Brushing dirt off of it, he opens the lid, not yet looking inside.

TALL HORSE

(Persistent)

Saying so?

GRANDMOTHER

(Shaking her head sorrowfully, giving in)

Guess I saying so. If there no dam in your heart stop you take that money and go away, pebble of my wishes not stopping this river in you. Course you know I would let you have the moneys anyway, whether you ask or not.

TALL HORSE

(Trying to explain, but not finding the words easily)

Wasn't stealing this money. Just...just trying to dig my way out of here. Pay every penny of it back.

(Gesturing clumsily with the shovel, exaggerated motion)

Gotta dig my way out of here.

(Guiltily)

I know I haven't been the best.....

GRANDMOTHER

(Interrupting)

I sorrow for you grandson. That hole there ain't no way out of this place, just hole, maybe two feet deep. But you ain't seeing that. Get that money in pocket and your eyes see only out that pocket. That the way the white man see the world.

TALL HORSE

Ain't so.

GRANDMOTHER

Is so.

During her speech, TALL HORSE looks inside the box. Holding the box in such a way that she can not see it, he turns it upside down and shakes it, plainly showing it to be empty.

GRANDMOTHER

But I don't mind. Rather you had the use of it. Better you get it than your old not fit to sleep with dogs grandfather get his hands on it. Least you won't spend it on drinking foolishness like that no good mans. Would hurt my heart to think he steal that too.

(Motioning at the box)

How much in there? Probably three, four hundred dollars I bet?

TALL HORSE

(Pretending to stuff a roll of bills in his shirt pocket)

Easy four hundred dollars there, maybe four hundred and fifty.

GRANDMOTHER

(Relieved)

Well, least that is good money there that won't get drunk away!

And now you got it, you want to eat for you go?

(Changing her mood, suddenly seeming very vulnerable)

Come in the house, I fix you some deer meat. Some stew.

TALL HORSE

(Tossing the shovel aside as an excuse not to look at the hurt becoming evident in her)
Ain't hungry.

GRANDMOTHER

You afraid to look at me or sun maybe on my white old woman hair so bright it's hurting your eyes?

TALL HORSE doesn't answer but he looks at her, a little ashamed.

GRANDMOTHER

(Rubbing her arms like they ache)

Come in the house and I fix for you one time more. Just think Tall Horse, think this, come same time next day you'll be miles gone. Gonna be all them miles away and nobody fix you stews. Nobody fix for you.

TALL HORSE

(Trying to be angry, loudly)

Said I wasn't hungry!

(Softer, with some guilt)

I mean....not very hungry.

GRANDMOTHER

(Pleading, almost ready to cry)

Wouldn't hurt to eat just a little. Come eat. Fill this old woman's heart.

TALL HORSE

Well, I ain't hungry....

(Trying to be firm but knowing the hurt in her, giving in)

but....but maybe could eat just a little bit.

ACT I SCENE II

The interior of a shack. Kitchen, living room, bedroom, all combined in one room. Old wood burning stove, rickety kitchen table. What few items of furniture there are, are ripped, worn out discards. There is an air of oppressive poverty about the place.

A kerosene lantern hangs from a frayed length of rope over the center of the kitchen table.

GRANDMOTHER moves to the stove and TALL HORSE goes and sits at the kitchen table.

GRANDMOTHER

(At the stove, starting in on him again)

You ain't bothered to go leave us? Leave your grandmother and where your father and mother buried, buried right here behind the house and you ain't bothered going? Where you be not having your peoples?

(Waving her finger at him)

This reservation here, maybe you don't care about your peoples no more.

TALL HORSE

I care.....

(Sad but tinged with anger)

but it's more than that and you know it.

GRANDMOTHER

Don't you have pride in..

TALL HORSE

Yes I got pride!

(Rising anger)

Why you think I'm leaving! It's me here at this table, this table that Old Cat got out at the dump, and I try not hearing that sound from under the floor. Try not hear that sound that damn rat under the floor is making. Tell me about pride! I tell you about rat noise under the floor! Tell you about furniture from the city dump! This ain't no way to live!

GRANDMOTHER

Well, you knowing I been after Old Cat shoot that damn rat! You knowing I have. Damn old man! He such a worthless!

TALL HORSE

All same, this place ain't fitting for nobody. This place so bad can't attract but one rat. We is overrun with one rat.

OLD CAT, TALL HORSE'S grandfather, enters the room. His steps seem a little unsteady, as if he were leaning into a stiff wind. He is dressed in faded, much patched Levi's, cowboy boots and a bright colored shirt, ragged shirt tail hanging out and one sleeve ripped. The audience doesn't see it but the back of his shirt and pants have large blotches of drying white paint on them. His hair is gray, braided at the sides. In his hands, he carries a long, feather decorated pipe. He holds it protectively to his chest, as if it were of great value.

He moves to the table abruptly, as if he had been shoved from behind.

GRANDMOTHER, seeing him come in, puts her hands on her hips and glares at him.

GRANDMOTHER

Where the devil you been old man?

OLD CAT

(Starting to sit down)

Well, there was this....

GRANDMOTHER

DRINKING!

Startled, OLD CAT rises up

OLD CAT

....wild horse. See this wild horse, a real beautiful....

(Again starting to sit down)

GRANDMOTHER

(Interrupting again, shouting)

Gambling away the government money!

Again he rises back up.

OLD CAT

Just back of the agency store was where we first saw him.

(Starting to sit down once again)

GRANDMOTHER

(Heavy sarcasm)

Sure! Sure! Horse ran right out the back of the liquor store! I know how it is.

OLD CAT

(Back up again)

A big roan it was, a big rascal, had at least...

(He stops speaking, looks at the chair, looks over at GRANDMOTHER, realizing she isn't believing a word he is saying, quickly changes the subject)

They got a new line of dress material over to the Agency Store.

(With that line, he quickly tries to sit down but she's too fast for him)

GRANDMOTHER

THINK you fooling me, you big old worthless!

(He rises again, poised awkwardly over the chair like a pregnant bird trying to land)

That dress stuff don't be interesting me none, cause I know you spent every last dime of our government money on drink! On cards! On old man foolishness!

OLD CAT

(Glaring at her, grabbing at the back of the chair to steady himself)

Wish you'd shut your mouth old woman! So much hot wind come out of it I'm afraid to sit down for fear you gonna blow the chair over backwards and me in it.

GRANDMOTHER

You STAND there and tell me you ain't drunk away all the money!

OLD CAT

(Once again, lowering himself towards the chair)

I am gonna SIT here and tell you I am biscuit and gravy rich! Full four wheeled and Cadillac car rich! I can hardly carry all my money these days. Maybe have to get a wheelbarrow to carry all my money around.

(Almost in the chair)

GRANDMOTHER

(Shouting)

LYING, BONE NOSE!

OLD CAT pops back up, startled and a little dizzy from the constant up and down.

GRANDMOTHER

So you just show me the color all this money you talking about!

(Waving her fist at him)

So where is the money, lying old man?

OLD CAT

With the man who had three aces and two queens.

(Shrugging philosophically, he looks longingly at the chair beneath him that he has yet to sit in)

TALL HORSE

You mean you won at poker?

OLD CAT

Not with no three sixes I didn't.

(Getting ready to sit down)

GRANDMOTHER

(With an I-told-you-so-expression)

So, you was lying! You was lying after all. You is dead broke, just like I figured. You ain't rich at all.

OLD CAT

FAT lot you know. I am rich in EXPERIENCE. Bet you I never play no cards with Leno Silver Moon again less its with my own deck. Man could get rich in experience just watch that guy's fingers. Musta had 13 or 14 fingers on each hand.

(Actually sits down, rather suddenly)

GRANDMOTHER

GET UP! GET UP!

OLD CAT

(Frightened, jumps out of the chair, dizzy, almost falls)

Are you out of your mind, old woman! What the devil is wrong with you!

GRANDMOTHER

Your ass end!

OLD CAT

What?

(Shakes his head, acts as if he were trying to force water out of his ears)

What?

GRANDMOTHER

Your ass end! Your ass end! Looky what you got on it!

OLD CAT

(Stares at her as if she has gone crazy)

What? What?

TALL HORSE

(Interrupting)

She's trying to tell you that you got stuff on your ass end.

OLD CAT

(Trying to turn around and stare at the back end of himself)

Huh?

(Turns even farther around, straining, and almost falls flat on his face)

GRANDMOTHER

(Coming up to the old man)

Where the devil you been? You got white paint all over your ass end. All over your shirt back.

OLD CAT

(Finally managing to catch a glimpse of the paint splotches)

Oh that damn Brokeshoulder! He went and painted the frigging outhouse again! I ought to wring that damn lamb rammer's neck!

(Turns around and shows his back to the audience and to TALL HORSE and grandmother)

Just look at my clothes! Ruined! That damn Brokeshoulder is all the time painting the outhouse for the tourists! Every goddamn time I see him, he is painting the damn outhouse, paint brush in one hand, and his head down the hole. Maybe he thinks he's gonna meet somebody down there he knows.

GRANDMOTHER

Thems the only clothes you got till the social worker lady comes with the donation truck next Christmas so you just gonna have to wear them.

OLD CAT

(Shaking his fist at the sky)

That dumb Brokeshoulder spends so much time in his outhouse that one of these days that dumb Indian gonna trip in there and fall through the hole and wind up knee deep in white people!

GRANDMOTHER

Ain't his fault! You old worthless! If you wasn't hiding in the outhouse to play poker you wouldn't have ruined your clothes!

TALL HORSE

(Amused)

Why the devil you playing poker in an outhouse anyway?

OLD CAT

(Smirking)

Only place were we can go and not have to worry about white people wanting to get in the game. Smell reminds them too much of home.

TALL HORSE bursts into laughter. GRANDMOTHER however doesn't seem to find it amusing. She leans over and smells the old man's breath. Realizing what she is up to, he tries to turn away but it is too late.

GRANDMOTHER

(Exaggerated actions, holding her nose)

Whew! You been lighting kerosene lamps with your breath! You drunk! Breath smell like dog mistake your face for tree trunk and lift leg at it!

OLD CAT

(Walking away from her, trying to act dignified)

I HAVE been drunk MAYBE a few times in the past. Maybe three or four times before.

GRANDMOTHER

(Rolling her eyes at that)

Hah!

OLD CAT

(Irritated)

OK! OK! Maybe I been drunk more than that, maybe a whole lot more than that but not drunk now.

TALL HORSE

(Laughing)

Well, if you ain't, I bet it isn't cause you haven't been trying.

OLD CAT

(Suddenly very angry, turning on Tall Horse)

One nagging old woman in the family is enough. Enough hot wind around this place as is, without you add to it. Enough to drive a man crazy!

(Pacing)

Man get much more of this and he'd have to commit suicide...

(Points his fingers at his own chest)

...and don't think I wouldn't neither...

(Pause)

...if I could think of a way to do it without killing myself.

GRANDMOTHER

In a bucket with your excusing! While you off drinking your brain away, if you even ever had one, do you know that your grandson is leaving today, leave, maybe never come back? All cause you such an old worthless!

OLD CAT

(To TALL HORSE)

This old noise of a woman saying true? Leaving?

GRANDMOTHER

(Jumping in before TALL HORSE can answer)

Yes he leaving. And why not? Got old man don't work, don't provide nothing to make a boy proud to live here!

OLD CAT

(Hurt, ignoring her)

Was you gone say goodbye to me or just go?

GRANDMOTHER

(Again before TALL HORSE has a chance to answer)

Serving you right he do. Look at yourself. Look at us. Ain't even got electricity. Brokesoulder over the way there. Working in the shoe factory. They got the electricity. They got the tv. They got the radio. They got the...

OLD CAT

(Yelling)

Someday your tongue gone go crazy and beat you to death!

OLD CAT and his wife glare at each other. He turns away, moves to the table and sits back down, effectively turning his back on her.

GRANDMOTHER

(Grumbling)

Getting paint all over the chair.

She moves to the stove and stirs a pot with a long handled spoon.

OLD CAT

(Dismissing her)

Chair could use being painted a little anyway.

(Looking directly at TALL HORSE)

Really leaving?

TALL HORSE

(Staring down at the table)

I...

(Stops, hesitates, trying to find the right words)

I wanted to say goodbye to you. I...I...

OLD CAT

(Nodding, understanding)

Sometimes not saying a goodbye is like not so real the going away.

Surprised that OLD CAT understands, TALL HORSE smiles, relaxes a little.

GRANDMOTHER

(To TALL HORSE)

Don't your belly hurt inside thinking how you going away? What about Nila? What about Nila girl? Don't you hurt in the belly?

TALL HORSE stops smiling, tenses again. Tries to speak but she cuts him off.

GRANDMOTHER

What about that? Ain't you hurting? Don't you feel shamed that you...

OLD CAT

(Interrupting)

Ease off old woman! Give him a chance to speak. Always nagging everybody.

Hardly give 'em time to breathe. You got mind like steel trap.....it's full of mice.

TALL HORSE

(Speaking quickly before they start in on each other again)

Get to the city and get on a wage, maybe I'll send for Nila. Send for you grandmother and for you grandfather. This ain't a fit living place.

OLD CAT

(Shaking his head)

I was here born and here die.

GRANDMOTHER

Hearing him old man? Get wages cause you wouldn't go work for one! Lazy, no good old...

OLD CAT

(Interrupting)

I don't give a damn all the time talking about wage. I may be true poor but ain't factory crazy.

(Uncradling his long pipe from his arms)

This is my land. Don't need no money to be tall on my own land. I don't have to be white man rich to have dreams here. I have my dreams here and no place else. Here I can look at the night and see things. Money ain't gonna give my heart roots.

(Shaking his head sadly)

This is my place in the scheme of things, rich or poor, it is my place.

TALL HORSE

(A little defiant)

Well not me. Not this one. I want to see places.

GRANDMOTHER

What places?

TALL HORSE

(Shrugging)

I don't know. Just places.

OLD CAT

Man who don't know where he is going maybe ought not to go.

GRANDMOTHER

He just like Brokeshoulder's boy, that Leon Brokeshoulder. Off to fight in that damn Vietnams. What for is he doing that? Who am them Vietnams? I ask you what they am. Ain't they brown skin like us and living on land like our fathers and we over there killing them short brown skin peoples. Why for we do that?

TALL HORSE

For America. It was done for America.

OLD CAT

(Preparing his pipe for smoking)

I say that's a lie. I say it's a lie or the white man's funny truth.

GRANDMOTHER

Them Vietnams like us Indians. Never do us any harm. What right that Leon Brokeshoulder got leaving reservation and go over there killing peoples never hurt him?

TALL HORSE

(Impatient)

It's different when you in the army. Brokeshoulder saying you got to do what they tell you. They order you and you have to obey.

OLD CAT

I dog spit! Only time army make good decision is at Little Big Horn. General Custer only American military genius! If only America had more army like him.

(Exaggerated sigh)

GRANDMOTHER

What you saying, you crazy old worthless! Custer and all his men were wiped out altogether!

OLD CAT

(Nodding happily)

Yes....all wiped out.....if only more had followed his good example. Ah!

(Sigh)

You know I was not born yet when it happen so I missed Custer's funeral.....but I did leave word that I approved.

GRANDMOTHER

(Disgusted)

I hope some men come and throw your mouth in jail! Crazy old...

OLD CAT

(Yelling)

Devil take you forked tongue! Bet you only woman in the world can touch both side of cheek with tongue at same time!

TALL HORSE

(Trying to distract them)

Brokesoulder coming in his car soon. Gonna take me to the bus. Be here most any minute.

GRANDMOTHER

(Remembering the food)

But you ain't eat yet.

TALL HORSE

Wasn't really hungry.

GRANDMOTHER brings a bowl of deer stew over to the table and puts it in front of TALL HORSE.

GRANDMOTHER

Where you gonna get food like that? Only word food you gone hear when you leave here is hamburger! Crazy white man and his dead rat taste hamburger! You mind what I say. You eat just this once so you remember what eating good is.

TALL HORSE stirs the stew listlessly with a fork. He really doesn't feel like eating, but he takes a biteful just to please her.

OLD CAT

(Putting tobacco in the bowl of his long pipe, tamping it in with his thumb)

Gone see Nila before you go?

TALL HORSE

(Edgy)

Maybe. Don't know. She's working. Ain't supposed to talk to her when she's working on account her boss gets mad when I do.

GRANDMOTHER

(Guessing)

Bet she don't even know you leaving. Bet you afraid to see her.

Afraid maybe she talk you out of this leaving foolishness?

TALL HORSE

(Loudly)

Ain't true!

(By the uncomfortable look on his face, we see it is true)

I'm going. Nobody stopping me. Nobody. Can't talk me out of it.

GRANDMOTHER

I'm going down that restaurant get her. Bring her back so she seeing you. See what she say when she sees you going.

TALL HORSE

(Quickly and much too loudly)

DON'T!

(Embarrassed)

I mean.....she's working. Ain't right bothering her. Might lose her job doing that.

OLD CAT

(A sly look on his face)

Why don't you just....

(Looks at the old woman)

go cross the way and call her from Brokeshoulder's house. They got a telephone. Nila would get here quicker that way.

GRANDMOTHER

(Jumps, surprised)

You must be sick. You sure you feeling good old man?

(Heading for the door)

First time I ever heard a good idea out your no good mouth.

OLD CAT

(Shouting at her retreating back)

When you were born, a horse lifted up its tail!

There is a silence after she is gone. TALL HORSE fidgets uncomfortably in his chair. OLD CAT puts his pipe to his mouth and strikes a match on the top of the table.

OLD CAT

Now we are alone. Smoke with me.

(He moves the match toward the bowl of the pipe)

Now that the big wind is gone from here, we can have some man talk.

OLD CAT'S eyes are not very good and he misses the bowl with the match. He sucks on the pipe harder and harder but no smoke comes through. He keeps trying until he burns his fingers on the match. He yells in pain and waves his burnt fingers in the air.

OLD CAT

(Eyeing the long pipe with distrust)

Gone have to get either longer match or shorter pipe

(Blowing on his fingers ruefully)

Hurt like sixty!

TALL HORSE stirs restlessly in his chair, waiting for the old man to begin.

OLD CAT

I never did like matches much. I was never one for all these modern improvements.

OLD CAT tries his pipe again with another match. This time he gets it right. He takes several long drags to get it going.

OLD CAT

This is very fine kinni-kinnick. Made the old way by the Mohawks. The Mohawks make good tobacco. They ain't worth a damn at poker but the Mohawks make good tobacco.

(Puffing)

It is hard to get tobacco that has been raised with the right prayers said over it.

TALL HORSE

Why do we not follow the old custom, the ceremonial way in smoking?

OLD CAT

(Sad)

Because if I hand you this pipe and we smoke it in the old way it is as if I am saying to you: "Do what I tell you," and these days I am too old to tell you anything.

(Handing the pipe to TALL HORSE)

Using matches! I dog spit! In the old days it would never have been done. It has been a long time since I smoked the right way.

TALL HORSE

(Coughing violently)

JESUS! GAAAAH!

(Handing the pipe back)

It tastes like tree bark!

OLD CAT

(Nodding)

But very good tree bark!

(Putting the pipe to his lips, exhaling, savoring the smoke)

I miss the old days. There was a time when it was a good thing to be Indian and to be old. One did not have to put up with disrespectful grandsons who thought their tobacco tasted like tree bark! In the old days, a man of my age would be considered wise. He would be important because his medicine had to be very strong to give him protection so long from death.

(Sighs)

It is not the same now. Now to be Indian and old means that some white man may come and put your face on a hair tonic bottle label because you are now what

the white man calls picturesque. All those old Indians and none of them bald!

TALL HORSE

You're lucky to be born with hair that holds onto your head and don't let go.

(Thinking about it)

Although come to think of it, probably wasn't luck. Don't think I ever ran across no bald Indians.

OLD CAT

That is because we never signed no treatys with white men about keeping our hair. Time we ever get treaty rights to protect our hair, whole damn tribe be bald as baby bottoms in a week!

OLD CAT still holds the pipe in front of him. By this time, it has gone out. Aware that it is out, he searches his pockets for matches. Finding none, he glances over at TALL HORSE who also begins searching through his pockets. He too can find no matches.

TALL HORSE

(Rising and heading for the door)

I think I got a box of kitchen matches out in the toolshed. Be right back.

OLD CAT

(Nodding, still searching his pockets for matches, watching TALL HORSE go out the door)

He complains of the taste.

(Sadly)

So it is with my grandson, with the young men. They try a little of the old life and they complain of the taste. Everything must come out of a can these days. It must all taste the same or it is no good.

(Staring at the pipe in his hand, lost in a private reverie)

I remember the day Leon Brokeshoulder and Joseph Little Eagle came to see me.

It was the war on their minds. They came to me with this pipe in their hands.

This very pipe.

(Hugs the pipe to his chest)

I hold this pipe and that day within my spirit. It sits with the secret and sacred things within my spirit. It was a good day!

(His face lights up, becomes animated with the memory)

A good day.

FADE TO BLACK. ACT I SCENE III

OLD CAT is asleep in the sun in front of the shack, hands folded on his chest. An overturned empty gin bottle lies at his feet.

Two young Indians come onto the stage and stand uncertainly before him. They are LEON BROKESHoulder and JOSEPH LITTLE EAGLE. They are dressed in traditional manner but the clothes are very old and tattered. The clothes do not fit them at all and it is evident that they were made for someone else. They are uncomfortable, squirming as if trying to adjust to the clothing.

OLD CAT is dressed in old clothes, faded blue work shirt, faded levi's and boots with holes in them.

They stand silently in front of him. Uncertain. Hesitant about waking

him.

LEON clears his throat loudly.

OLD CAT snores softly.

JOSEPH, more impatient, claps his hands together loudly.

OLD CAT

(Jumps, terrified, feels his chest, thinks he's been shot)

WAAAAAH! THE BLUE COATS ARE AFTER ME! THEY GOT ME!

(Looks around wildly, coming awake)

DON'T SHOOT, I...

(Stops, looks at LEON and JOSEPH, looks around once more, the look of bewilderment fading on his face)

What kind of devilment is this?

(Looks at his hands clutching his chest, realizing he hasn't been shot)

What's meaning you smart noses come around here and scare an old man out of his ears!

They do not say anything. They just look embarrassed and shuffle their feet.

OLD CAT

So it's you big lips, you big time smart mouth talkers! Come here be disrespectful like all the young people these days! Come around and bother me!

JOSEPH

(Taking an old ceremonial pipe out from under his shirt and offering it to the old man)

We bring you a gift and ask that you smoke with us, in the old way?

OLD CAT

(Extremely angry)

GODDAMN ATHEISTS! Have you no shame to mock me, to mock the old ways! You do not believe in the old religion! I will not be mocked!

(Angry gesture)

GO AWAY! You are nothing in my eyes! I tell you to go away! GO!

Neither LEON or JOSEPH make a move. They both stand their ground, heads bent respectfully, taking all his words calmly for what they were, as if they were to be expected and in the old way, not interrupting.

OLD CAT

(For the first time, noticing the clothes they are wearing)

What does this mean?

(Touching LEON'S shirt sleeve)

Why do you wear the clothes of your fathers? What does this mean? Is this some kind of cruel joke? Perhaps it is just the sun and the whiskey and this is what I see instead of purple rattlesnakes wearing boots and silver spurs.

(Uncertain, his voice troubled, more a question than an accusation)

Do you mock my heart and the hearts of your fathers?

OLD CAT stares at them. There is nothing in their demeanor that indicates any disrespect of any kind. Slowly it begins to dawn on him, that there is only respect in their stance before him, that their attitude bespeaks a newborn sincerity.

OLD CAT

My heart rises in me!

JOSEPH LITTLE EAGLE moves the pipe closer to the old man, his arms outstretched.

OLD CAT

(Truly awed)

Do my eyes see you approach me in the remembered ceremonial way? Do these old eyes see a miracle? Is it true that there is no mockery in your speech, in your manner? My eyes! My heart.....afraid to believe!

LEON

(Reaching out and also putting his hand on the pipe)

We offer this gift and ask that you smoke with us.

OLD CAT

(At once moved and ashamed)

My heart flies up. This honor paid me is a great one.

(Eyeing the empty gin bottle guiltily)

I am ashamed I spoke harsh. My bad words shame me. Perhaps the bottle spoke too many words for me today. But now I will act....

(Straightening up, squaring his shoulders)

....as if I do not hear any words the bottle speaks. Let us smoke together.

With trembling hands, he takes the pipe from their outstretched hands. He cradles it in his arms, moved by the gift, near tears.

OLD CAT

It is a great gift. A great gift. It is worth many empty days in the sun to be approached in this way once again.

(His voice breaks with emotion)

For you know I am old, and there is not much I can do. But it has been a long, long time since anybody has asked me to do anything. It is good to be asked. To be asked in the old way.

LEON and JOSEPH come and sit down on each side of him. Leon takes a bag of tobacco out of his shirt and hands it to the old man.

OLD CAT

(Taking the tobacco sack)

Is this the only tobacco you have? This white man's trash, that has not been raised with the right prayers said over it?

LEON

It's all we could find.

OLD CAT

(Shaking his head)

It will have to do.

JOSEPH

(Taking out a lighter and handing it toward the old man)

Here.

OLD CAT

(Refusing it with a violent shake of his head)

Put that fire toy in your back pocket and sit back down on it. If you lucky, maybe it go off down there and cure you of using those dumb white man improvements!

LEON

(A little impatient)

You want us to start a fire so you can light the pipe with coals?

OLD CAT

It is the way it should be done.

LEON and JOSEPH both shift uncomfortably, a move that does not escape the old man's notice.

OLD CAT

But I see by the look of your faces, the time is short for you so I will use the white man's fire this one time. I will use a fire that is not ours but I will not like it.

OLD CAT fills the pipe with pinches of tobacco, careful not to touch the bowl with his fingers. He lights the pipe and offers the pipe held sideways to the Great One Above and once in all the Four Directions.

He puffs four times on the pipe and hands it to LEON on his left, who puffs four times and passes it back to OLD CAT who hands it across to JOSEPH LITTLE EAGLE. He also takes four puffs, but he coughs violently, the smoke going down the wrong way.

LEON claps JOSEPH on the back as he coughs, face green, eyes watering. Obviously, he has never smoked before.

OLD CAT rolls his eyes and shrugs as if to say what can you do with young men these days.

Finally, JOSEPH gets his coughing fit under control and hands the pipe back to OLD CAT.

OLD CAT

Now I ask you, why have you come to me, in the old way? What is it you wish of me?

LEON

It is the war.

OLD CAT

I do not understand.

JOSEPH

Me and Leon are going to fight in the war.

OLD CAT

(Brightening at the prospect)

And you'd like to hear me tell of my warrior days, of how great and ferocious a warrior I...

JOSEPH

Not quite.

(Not sure how to proceed)

It's a white man's war. All out to kill, how many bodies can we pile up, no notion of glory. Gone be lots of "Send the dumb Indian out and see if it's safe." You know that's the way white people are. We think we may get killed. Suppose we get killed?

OLD CAT

I still do not understand.

LEON

In the old days, when you were young, the warriors went to the hills with an elder and fasted and sought visions that would guide them on the warpath.

JOSEPH

We want you to help us do this. We wish visions because we have to go to the white man's war. The draft papers have come for us and we have to go.

OLD CAT

I do not understand this draft business. A government thing no doubt.

(Adopting a fighting pose)

No doubt they shall ask me to go to war also.

(Trying to look wise and fierce)

Probably running short of high up generals and such.

LEON

(Barely able to keep from laughing)

It is for the young men ONLY. The government does not take women or the OLD or the very young or the sick.

OLD CAT

(Slumping a little, disappointed)

Well then, what of my grandson, Tall Horse, does he go into the war? Why does he not seek a vision? Does he not believe in the old ways?

JOSEPH and LEON exchange a meaningful look.

LEON

His heart makes a noise. I do not know what the doctors say it is but it don't harm him. Anyways, cause of that, they don't want him in the war. Us is what they want though. Will you help us seek the visions?

OLD CAT

(Nodding, solemn)

It is not easy. Do not be ashamed if you can not do it. You must be alone for four days and nights without food, without water. It is hard. It is no shame not to finish.

LEON

We don't care how hard it is. We want to do it.

OLD CAT

I do not say you will have good visions. Some men have bad visions. Some do not have any at all, or can not remember them. I tell you it is hard. Hunger and thirst make the wait long for mystery to be revealed. But I will help you.

(Looking at them, almost joyous)

If you knew how glad my heart is, to be asked.....

(Suddenly sad, glancing down at the empty whiskey bottle at his feet)

.....to be asked.....

(With a catch in his throat)

IT SHALL BE DONE!

FADE TO BLACK

ACT I SCENE IV

JOSEPH LITTLE EAGLE lies in the center of the stage. It is night and it is dark all around him. Absolutely still, JOSEPH appears to be asleep. He is alone on the top of a hill.

Suddenly he springs to a sitting position and screams, a terrifying scream. This movement is made with unexpected violence. He clamps his hands over his eyes as if shutting out some horrendous sight and begins weeping, hysterically.

OLD CAT, water bag slung over his shoulder, approaches silently, carrying long feathers in his hands. The stage gets lighter as he approaches and we see that it is nearly dawn. He stops several feet from JOSEPH LITTLE EAGLE, and just quietly watches him, waiting for him to calm down. OLD CAT unslings the water bag, as he moves to stand over JOSEPH, setting it at his feet and makes a pass in the air with the long feathers over JOSEPH's head. He begins a very soft, soothing syllabic chant, the EXACT sounds of which do not carry to the audience. The chant seems to have a calming effect over JOSEPH because slowly his sobs begin to subside. When JOSEPH gets control of himself, OLD CAT brings his arms down and ends the chant.

OLD CAT

Your ordeal is finished. It is ended. I have brought you water.

JOSEPH

(Taking his hand away from his face, haggard, his face haunted)

I...I had a vision.

(His throat is parched and it is obviously very difficult for him to speak)

OLD CAT reaches down and helps JOSEPH LITTLE EAGLE to his feet. His legs are weak and OLD CAT has to help him stand. The old man bends a little, grabs the leather strap of the water bag and picks it up off the ground. He tilts the water bag to JOSEPH's lips and the young man drinks greedily.

OLD CAT

Go easy! Easy.

(Pulls the bag away)

You'll get sick if you drink too fast.

(Brings the bag back to his lips and this time JOSEPH drinks slower)

The water feels good. Take your time with it.

JOSEPH nods, pausing to swallow. Then drinking a little more.

OLD CAT
Enough for now?

Again JOSEPH nods.

OLD CAT
Then while it is new yet in your mind, tell me of your vision.

JOSEPH
(Apprehensive)
I was riding horses, many horses. All around me I saw the faces of people. I did not know if they were enemies. I did not know them at all. I just could see their faces.

(Swallowing with difficulty, beginning again)
In my vision, I could not see if they had any bodies. Just faces, all moving their mouths and making sounds I could not hear.

(Going on)
I was having trouble with the horses. I was falling....falling! I was falling and my leg hit the fence. I did not hear any noise.

He stops, nervously taking another drink.

OLD CAT
(Patiently)
Go on. It may be good medicine.

JOSEPH
(Going on)
I was falling, falling and then I was on the ground. A horse stepped on my legs. Snakes crawled across my face!

(Uneasiness in his voice)
They had heads all over their bodies. My body hurt in many places!

But always, when I had fallen, I got up. Sometimes horses would kick me but I would always get up. There were many horses!

Then I was driving a pickup truck up the side of a mountain. There was thunder and lightning and I was very very tired. I was dizzy.

The truck went up and up and the wheels were floating in the air.

I saw the faces of all those people through the windshield. I heard the horses running behind me. We went over the mountain! I was tied to the truck! I was chained to the truck!

(His voice rises in emotional intensity, reflects a growing terror.)
I couldn't breathe! I was trying to get the door open!

(His words coming faster)
We flew over the mountain and fell down the other side! The truck turned over and over and ever time it hit, a horse was crushed beneath it! There was BLOOD all over the truck!....BLOOD!

(Almost in acute shock)
I didn't have any arms or legs! I tried to scream but my face was gone! I had

no mouth! The horse blood was coming in the windows! Tried to scream! Couldn't get out! We hit the bottom! Couldn't move!.....The blood covered my chest!

(Rolling his eyes, extreme agitation)

IT WENT UP TO MY NECK! IT WENT UP OVER MY HEAD! It covered me up. COVERED ME UP!

I DROWNED IN THE HORSE BLOOD! I DROWNED!

(Hysterical)

I DROWNED IN THE HORSE BLOOD!

OLD CAT

(Taking him by the shoulder and shaking him)

It is over! Do not think about it!

JOSEPH

I DROWNED IN THE

OLD CAT

(Slapping him)

IT IS FINISHED!

The slap seems to bring JOSEPH to his senses. He shakes his head, clearing it. He leans against OLD CAT weakly and looks all around him. His eyes seem to focus for the first time on his surroundings as if he has come awake after a long, long sleep.

JOSEPH

(His voice still unsteady)

I...had a terrible dream...terrible.

OLD CAT

(Holding him gently)

The worst is over. It is finished. You have done the right thing. It shall trouble you no more.

JOSEPH

What does it mean? Is it good medicine?

OLD CAT

(Begins to tremble, his body shaking with discomfort. Seems to hate having to answer, as if what he knows is too painful)

I will not lie to you.

(Shaking his head with sorrow)

It is not good. I do not know exactly what it means but it is not a good omen.

It is not good. Some day, inside yourself, you will know what all these things mean. Some day before it is too late, all meanings will be clear to you.

(Wiping JOSEPH LITTLE EAGLE's forehead of sweat)

You will not live a long life, that I clearly see.

JOSEPH

But the war? What does it say about the war? Does it mean I will die in the war?

OLD CAT

No. You have nothing to fear. You will not die in the war. The enemy in the war can not hurt you, his bullets can not touch you.

(Touches JOSEPH's chest)

The enemy you must fear, is there, inside yourself.

JOSEPH

(Relieved)

Then I've got nothing to worry about. It is good medicine!

OLD CAT

I would not be so sure.

(Looking out toward the horizon)

The hardest enemy to fight is the one you can not truly see. And what man can truly see himself?

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT I SCENE V

Early morning. LEON BROKESHOULDER and OLD CAT sit beside each other on top of a hill. They've obviously been here for some time. OLD CAT holds the water bag upside down, showing it to be empty. He shrugs at LEON.

LEON

That's ok. I had enough anyway.

OLD CAT

And the rest of your vision?

LEON

(Forlorn, filled with some deep and lasting sorrow)

I was on the ground. I was a man made out of the summer grasses of the meadows. A wild horse came up to me with fire in his mane. His hooves crashed against me like thunder!

(Looking off into the distance, a remote quality to his voice)

With my eyes I watched it. Watched the horse as it bit my arm...and tore it from my body. My blood painted the sweet timothy and clover of the field, dark red, dark red.

OLD CAT

(Looking away, unable to meet his eyes)

Do I have to tell you what this vision means?

LEON

(Touching his right arm, staring at it as if it belonged to someone else)

No.... You do not have to tell me.

OLD CAT

Do you worry that it will be hard for you to be brave because you know too much, because what must happen is not good?

LEON

(A trace of bitterness)

Do I have a choice? What I do may not be brave anyway. Perhaps what I do, will

only be foolish.

(Looking abruptly away from his arm, as if it had suddenly become something ugly)
Perhaps it will be only my stupidity that is tested and not my courage.

OLD CAT

Bad medicine.

(Looking up at the sky)

I have brought bad medicine on both of you.

(Lifting his arms heavenward, addressing the Great One Above)

Great Spirit, I am shamed by the bad medicine these old hands bring forth! I hope these young men who wanted to do right are not being punished because I made mistakes in the chanting! They wanted to do right. If I did the chant wrong, I am sorry.

(Trembling)

I may not have got the right words. I may have left out a word. If I did wrong, let it fall on me, for I am old, old and my memory is not so good. They had only good in their hearts!

(Starting to lower his arms, then obviously having a further thought, raises them up again)

Oh yes...also you know I drink too damn much...so if I did not finish a sentence I should have...well...

LEON

It ain't your fault Old Cat. Nobody's blaming you for anything.

OLD CAT

Joseph Little Eagle is waiting for us down at the bottom of the hill. His grandmother fix a feast over to his place. Come with us and get something in your belly.

LEON

(Shaking his head)

No. You go on ahead.

(Trying to make a joke)

I gotta go find a store that sells pairs of left-handed gloves.

(Bitter, with grim determination in his voice)

And I gotta go see Tall Horse, gotta give him something, something important.....

(Almost angry)

something he never earned...

(Rubbing his right arm, staring at it)
but always wanted.

FADE TO BLACK ACT I SCENE VI

Later in the morning of the same day in which LEON finishes his fast. Interior of the shack. TALL HORSE is counting a small stack of paper money on the table. He seems excited, very happy about something. He glances out the door, sees someone coming and grins.

TALL HORSE

LEON!

(Motions him to come in with a fistful of money)

Hey Leon! C'mere!

TALL HORSE suddenly scoops up the money and heads toward the door with it. He's so excited, he isn't looking where he's going. Just as LEON comes in through the door, TALL HORSE tries to go out. They collide with a crash. TALL HORSE bursts on through the door and goes out of sight.

LEON, caught off balance, is spun around, loses his feet and falls backward into the room, landing solidly on his rump. Weakened from his fast, he's stunned. He shakes his head, dizzy.

TALL HORSE

(Sticking his head back through the door)
Hey Leon! What you doing on the floor?

LEON

Avoiding the draft.

(Gets up on his knees)

Some people get out with flat feet, with fallen arches.

(Rubs his hip)

I'm gonna get out with a bad case of fallen lap.

TALL HORSE helps LEON to his feet, waves the money in his face.

TALL HORSE

Look! I got almost a hundred dollars! Playing acey-deucey with a white boy down at the bus depot! We could take this money and leave this place! Me and you take off and follow Joseph Little Eagle round to the rodeos, whatya say? Damn right! You and me and Little Eagle! We'll have us a time! A real whoop-de-doo!

LEON

I'm going away. Leaving in two days.

TALL HORSE

(Laughing)

Sure. You're gonna fly south for the winter.

LEON

Ain't nothing to joke about. Me and Joseph Little Eagle got drafted.

TALL HORSE

You serious?

(Noticing for the first time LEON's physical condition)

Jesus! You look like hell! What you been doing to yourself!

LEON

Fasting in the hills with your grandfather. Seeking visions to guide me in battle.

TALL HORSE

(Finally taking him seriously, stunned)

Drafted! Oh Christ!

LEON

Me and Joseph Little Eagle won't be riding in no rodeos. Guess you'll just have

to go by yourself.

TALL HORSE

Maybe you can get out of it!

(Hopeful)

Maybe you can....

LEON

No way.

TALL HORSE

Look what we could do is....

LEON

No way.

TALL HORSE

But damn couldn't you just...

LEON

(Cutting in)

Gotta be at the induction center in two days. Two days. Ain't no way out of it.

Like everything else, it's just too damn late.

(Moves to the door and looks out)

But it don't matter.

TALL HORSE

Sure it matters.

LEON

(Still looking outside)

Like hell it does! White people own us. They bought us from beginning to end.

Nothing matters. Nothing!

(Takes a cigarette out of his pocket and puts it to his mouth)

You know, when I was little, my grandfather used to live with us. He was an arrow maker. A good one too. You can tell if an arrow is made good cause its got tooth marks on it. The best arrow makers straightened the arrows with their teeth. My grandfathe made the best arrows, everybody said so. Ain't that crazy? An arrow maker!

(Lighting the cigarette)

Want to know something even crazier? When I was little, I wanted to be an arrow maker just like him. Craziess! About like wanting to be an animal act in a circus. Nobody wants arrows anymore. Not good ones any way.

Yeah, I SHOULD have been an arrow maker like my grandfather but white people stole me. They don't draft you when you turn 18, they draft you the day you're born. Oh they stole me good, those white people!

TALL HORSE

What you mean they stole you?

LEON

(As if he had not heard him)

My grandfather used to paint his face every morning at dawn and go outside to

pray to the rising sun. In my memory, I can still hear his voice rising above the sounds of birds as he knelt in the long grass. His chants seemed to be the voice of all we were and all we dreamed ourselves to be. It was a voice that took hold of you and would not let go. It was a voice! The rest of his day was spent, making his arrows, for bows that would never be used. But there was a dignity to the work. But the white people were always coming around and taking pictures of him. Always coming around and laughing at him and having their children look at the 'Funny Old Indian'. I remember the sound of their laughter. That too was a voice!

He never paid the white people much mind. He just made his arrows, because he made them well and that was enough. But I minded! I used to be so ashamed! So embarrassed cause all the white people were laughing at him! I looked at all those over-fed, cruel-faced white people coming round with their big cars and fancy clothes and swore I'd never do anything to make them laugh at me! They stole me!

I never learned how to make arrows. Lost my grandfather...and lost myself. I was drafted at an early age!

TALL HORSE

But damn, just cause you...

LEON

(Angry)

But damn nothing! I tell you it don't matter. Go to the white man's army or stay, it's all the same. Don't you know what they did to us!

TALL HORSE

They did a lot of things to us. They made us invisible. They looked us straight in our eyes and saw only our land.

LEON

(Bitter)

But it wasn't only our land they stole from us! They painted the faces of our old people on a drowning in the river.

My grandfather used to sit in our empty house and hum all the songs he knew because he didn't have anyone to sing them to. When he died, we buried him in the ground like a dead bee in a window box.

TALL HORSE

But Jesus, Leon, ain't there time to still duck it? I mean, you and me, like we planned, go off. Army don't have to know. Hell with them! We'll both of us go whoop and snort and tear up the ground! Can't stop us from riding the rodeos if we really want to. There's gotta be a way.

LEON

You think it's like I don't want to? I WANT TO. Just like I wanted to be an arrow maker once. But I can't. Couldn't then, can't now.

TALL HORSE

(Still insisting, reluctant to give it up)

But you could get out of it! There's ways!

LEON

(Angrily flipping the cigarette out the doorway)
Don't you understand? It's too late. It ain't our world anymore. Other people chose our lives for us. It don't matter any more.....Hell! Who wants to ride the damn rodeos anyway! Christ! We woulda just been a couple Indians falling off horses for white people! If they want that, let them spend their damn money and go see a damn Western movie. Damn Western movies! One shot and five thousand Indians fall on their asses!

There is a pause, each of them standing there silently for a moment.

LEON

What are YOU gonna do?

TALL HORSE

(Shrugging, his shoulders sagging)
Don't know. sure ain't going rodeoing by my lonesome. Maybe stick around here. Do that for a while anyway. Ain't thought that far ahead. Jesus! You really leaving in two days?

LEON

Yeah. That ain't much time. Listen. I want you to do me a favor.

TALL HORSE

Anything. Just ask it.

LEON

(Finding it difficult to speak)
It's about Nila. Her and me was talking about getting married.

TALL HORSE

(Looks away, hurt)
I didn't know that.
(Smiles, obviously an effort)
I'm happy for you. Real happy.

LEON

(Grinning)
Like hell you are! Look at me Tall Horse. You and me, we been friends since the world began. Never been two brothers closer than you and me. Only thing that was ever between us, was Nila. We both want her, always have.

TALL HORSE

(Pointedly)
But you got her.

LEON

So maybe she flipped a coin. It was close either way and you know it.

TALL HORSE

But you still got her all the same.

LEON

Maybe so. But I'm going off to fight the white man's war. Don't even know why or what for. I might not come back. I might get killed. I marry her and get killed, who's gonna take care of her?

(Touching his arm)

Or maybe something'll happen even worse than getting killed.

TALL HORSE

(Backing away, upset)

Oh man! Don't even think it! You gonna come back and ...

LEON

Just shut up and listen to me!

Unknown to them, Nila comes to the door and stands framed in the doorway, listening to them talk.

LEON

If I don't come back, if SOMETHING happens to me, I want you to have Nila! Want you to take her. You always loved her, love her now, you know you do. I want you to have her!

TALL HORSE

But Leon, you'll come back! Everything gone be...

LEON

(Almost violent)

DAMN IT, YOU TAKE HER!

(Grabs his arm)

TELL ME YOU'LL TAKE HER! TELL ME YOU WILL!

TALL HORSE

(Stunned, doesn't quite know what to say, finally gives in)

If it makes it easier for you, gives your heart peace knowing she'll be taken care of, I'll take her. I promise to take good care of her for you. I'll see that she...

NILA

(Storming into the room, in a rage)

LEON! You think I am PROPERTY you can just pass back and forth!

(She takes a swing at LEON, who ducks, runs around the table, and collides with TALL HORSE)

I'm gonna knock your teeth out!

(She grabs a chair and brandishes it over her head, advancing on LEON)

LEON retreats warily before her advance.

NILA

COME HERE YOU!

LEON hides behind TALL HORSE who looks as if he would like to hide behind LEON.

LEON

Now look Nila!

(Protesting)
Be reasonable!

She swings the chair. TALL HORSE and LEON dive for cover, going in opposite directions, as the chair slashes the air where their heads used to be.

NILA
(Recovering from the swing)
STAND STILL COW BRAIN!

LEON
(Under the table)
Aw Nila! I was only thinking of you!

NILA
(Stamping on LEON's hand, he screams)
Come out from under that table you horse kissing coward!

TALL HORSE
(Keeping the table between himself and Nila)
Nila, he didn't mean no harm. Really he was only...

NILA
(Cutting in, noticing TALL HORSE for the first time)
And you, you big taco squeezing jerk! You was ready to take him up on it, wasn't you!

She suddenly runs around the table, swings wildly with the chair at TALL HORSE's head. TALL HORSE yelps, ducks at the last second, and tries to dive under the table with LEON. They both get stuck under the table, not enough room between the table legs for both of them to maneuver.

NILA is recovering from her wild swing at TALL HORSE. She swung the chair so hard she turned completely around almost fell flat on her back.

LEON
NILA, be reasonable! I was only doing it cause I love you!

TALL HORSE
(Echoing)
Cause he loves you.

NILA
(Coming over to the table)
Love is like that? I'm a woman, not no piece of property!
(She kicks them under the table, hard)

TALL HORSE and LEON both yell when they are kicked. Realizing they are far from safe, they scramble frantically to get out from under the table.

NILA You think you can give me away...
(Kicking; they howl each time her foot connects)
Just up and give me away..
(Kicking)

Like some kind of free game..

(Kicking)

You win on pin-ball machine or something!

(Kicking)

I oughta kick your eyes out!

(Really winds up, delivers a hard kick)

TALL HORSE and LEON attempt to get to their feet while still enmeshed under the table. The table tilts, falls over, carrying them with it. Both they and the table collide with NILA, knocking her over backwards. All three of them end up in a heap on the floor beside the overturned table.

OLD COAT, TALL HORSE's grandfather, comes into the room. His hair is grey, braided at the sides. He is dressed in new levi's, shiny cowboy boots and a bright colored shirt. He wears a wood and bone choker around his neck.

He stops just inside the doorway, does a double take as he sees them all sprawled around the overturned table.

OLD CAT

Being an old man...

(Shaking his head)

was pretty damn sure I knowed every sex position there was but this business with the table, looks like something new.

(Hastily, self-consciously, they all struggle to sit up)

Even so, I think it needs work. Think it would be even better if you didn't have no clothes on.

Embarrassed, TALL HORSE stands up.

OLD CAT

But then again, times is changed. Maybe young people like to keep their clothes on these days.

NILA

(Also standing up, straightening her skirt)

Leon and Tall Horse were dividing me up! Trying to decide which one I belong....

TALL HORSE

(Jumping in, quickly interrupting)

See, it's about Leon going into the army, about him getting drafted.

OLD CAT

(Scratching his head)

Never thought of using a table)

TALL HORSE

Grandfather, we was talking about something...personal. Leon's only got two days at home then wham, he's gotta go right into basic training!

OLD CAT

(Going on)

Did it in a broom closet once. Didn't seem all that much different. Never was much on using gimmicks.

Used to know a woman though who said she slept with a bear first to get her started up. She used to smell like she was telling the truth. But I never approved.

I always thought it was a hardship on the bear.

NILA

(Eyes wide)

Is he talking about what I think he's talking about?

TALL HORSE

(Warning him)

You shouldn't talk that way in front of Nila.

OLD CAT

(Going back to the door, making ready to leave)

White people now, they are great ones for gimmicks. They are hot for them gimmicks, they are. You know a white man missionary once told me he got asthma from sinning on a bicycle.

He said God punished him that way. But I don't know about that. I do not believe the man was right in his head. He was a Catholic religion man and he was always running around talking about this thing he called the IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

To hear him tell it, this IMMACULATE CONCEPTION must have been quite an event.

(Pausing as he goes through the door)

I never thought much of it.

(Looking back at them)

After 2000 years, who cares how clean they were when they did it? I myself was born on a clean buffalo robe and you do not find me shouting about it.

OLD CAT exits. LEON, TALL HORSE and NILA look at each other stunned and then suddenly they all burst into laughter. The tension is broken.

TALL HORSE

(First to recover)

Nila we didn't mean to hurt you. We both love you.

LEON

(Speaking softly, almost tenderly)

I'm sorry Nila. I was wrong...Just didn't want you ending up...

(His voice breaking, he looks away)

ending up not having nobody taking care of you is all. Want you to be with somebody I knowed loved you...with Tall Horse...case I didn't make it back.

(Significantly)

Case SOMETHING happened.

NILA

(Going to Leon, putting her arm around him)

Well, I do love you. But I want you to know, I am the one who says which one I'm gonna be with. I got my rights, got my feelings. From now on, both of you BETTER respect that.

NILA reaches out and grabs TALL HORSE by the arm, pulls him next to LEON and her, stands with her arms around both of them.

NILA

I guess I love you BOTH, but in a different way. Don't ask me why! I must be crazy is why!

TALL HORSE and LEON put their arms around her.

NILA

(Hugging them tightly, something sad in this gesture)

I guess we're all birds out of the same nest, only one heart between us.

(Thinking about it, worried)

And it scares me. Maybe some day we're gonna hurt each other. Hurt each other bad.

(Sad)

Maybe some day we're gonna grow too big for one heart to carry us all.

At her words, a barrier seems to fall between them and they pull back ever so slightly. It is as if they have heard a voice forecasting doom and in their expressions, they betray the thought that they have just heard a prediction of a future that will soon be upon them.

FADE TO BLACK

ACT II SCENE I

The lights come up.

OLD CAT sits at the table, head hanging down on his chest, asleep.

TALL HORSE comes in, carrying a box of kitchen matches.

TALL HORSE Got the matches.

OLD CAT

(In his sleep)

...drowned...drowned in horse blood..

TALL HORSE

(Shaking him)

Wake up! I found the matches.

OLD CAT comes awake slowly, rubs his eyes. Looks momentarily lost. His eyes focus on TALL HORSE.

OLD CAT

(Yawning)

What? What?

TALL HORSE

(Impatiently)

The matches for your pipe.

OLD CAT

(Rubbing his eyes, coming fully awake)

Oh yes.

(Taking a couple of matches from TALL HORSE)

Sit down. I'll light up the pipe again.

OLD CAT lights his pipe with another match.

OLD CAT

(Puffing)

I want to tell you some things I have never told your grandmother, never told you.

(Handing the pipe to TALL HORSE)

Now that I know which way the wind blows...

(Looks at him as TALL HORSE draws on the pipe)

..it is time I talked of these untold things.

TALL HORSE

(Handing the pipe back)

I can't be talked out of going. If it's...

OLD CAT

(Cradling the pipe in his arms, looking away at some far distance)

Enough!

(Sharply spoken)

You think I don't know what you think of me? Think I don't know what your eyes see when they look at me? I'm just an old drunk to you.

TALL HORSE

(Trying to protest)

No! It isn't true. You're my...

OLD CAT

(Rising from the table, straightening his back, as if some new strength flowed through him)

It don't matter what you think. You don't have to lie to me. I know what I am.

I know what I BEEN.

(Proud)

You see this, maybe-you-think, weak-minded old drunk, maybe that's all I am...but you listen to me...you listen to me cause no man at the end of a journey is like he was when he began it. I traveled to get here. Maybe you don't want to listen to me, don't think I got anything to say cause I am at the end of things.

TALL HORSE I don't think that. I'm sorry. I just meant..

OLD CAT

(Looking beyond TALL HORSE, as if his eyes see some far horizon)

I still have my memories. Life takes everything else away. But memories are the last to go. A man without his memories is a dark night without the moon.

TALL HORSE

I want to listen to you.

OLD CAT

(Turning to look at him, smiling)

You say that but you are too young to really mean it. Words don't mean as much to the young as they do to the old. Old men, old women...

(Touching his chest)

...old drunks like myself, we spend every waking moment waiting for some word or other that will have some little meaning to us. A kind word, a loving word, maybe a dirty word if it will speed up the blood in the winter of our lives.

TALL HORSE

(Vulnerable)

If it's that I...if you think I don't love..

OLD CAT

(Doing a little dance, turning his head at an odd angle, moving part way around the table so that it's between them)

You don't have to TELL me that you love me.

I can still dance and breathe and KNOW things.

(Waves his arms, flexes his muscles, involuntarily flinches with the stiffness in his joints)

Still can move the bones and muscles from one day to the next. I know you love me. Just like you know I and your big mouth grandmother love you...

(Shaking his head)

You picking up too many bad habits, hanging around them white people. They always running around telling each other how much they love each other. So busy telling each other, they never got the time, to know it inside themselves.

TALL HORSE

Then you know why I'm going away?

(Beginning to realize that perhaps the old man does understand)

You understand?

OLD CAT

Understand? Maybe too well. Yes too well.

OLD CAT sits at the table, again, relights the pipe, puffs on it slowly, letting the silence build between them.

OLD CAT

I took three wives to my bed.

TALL HORSE

(Shocked)

I didn't know that!

OLD CAT

Well, you don't have to be so surprised. It wasn't all three of them at the same time.

(Pausing to think about it)

Not that that wouldn't have been interesting, mind you.

TALL HORSE

I guess all the time I been living with you, all these years, I don't think I ever asked you about your early years.

(Stunned by the thought)
I REALLY don't know much about you at all.

OLD CAT

(Shrugging)
Who's interested in asking drunks anything?
(Puffs on the pipe)
But I have things to remember in my life. I have things to forget. Three times
have I taken a wife.
(A pause, sad and regretful)
The first one...I have not talked of this one, for she was white...

TALL HORSE reacts, twists in his chair, seems stunned.

OLD CAT

(Taking the pipe out of his mouth and staring at it)
That surprises you grandson. Yes. A white woman. Long ago. So very long ago.
The first one. I was blinded by her looks and my hands got the better of me. I
did not know my own heart and not knowing, I let my body decide. It is
something I will always regret.
(Turning the pipe over in his hands, staring at it as if it were not
there)
That summer I was an eagle.
(Voice rising with the strength of the memory)
FREE! Mating in the air. Never touching down. Never looking back. THAT SUMMER!
My hands that touched her were wings. And I flew and the feathers covered the
scars that grew where our bodies touched.
(Sadly)
That first one.

I was of the air and she was of the earth. She muddied my dreams. She had
woman's body but lacked woman's spirit. A star is a stone to the blind. She saw
me through crippled eyes. She possessed. I shared. I was free because I needed.
She was a prisoner because she wanted. There was no life between us.
(Sighing)
That first one.

I saw the stars and counted them one by one into her hand, that gift that all
lovers share. She saw stones. And she turned away...

One day she was gone. Gone. And I folded my wings and the earth came rushing at
me...

And I would fly no more.

There is a pause before anyone speaks.

TALL HORSE

I don't understand. What are you saying to me, that your youth was betrayed by
a white woman? Is that what you wish me to know? To warn me against...

OLD CAT

(Shaking his head)
No! I do not warn you against white women. I warn you against anyone, white,

black or red, against yourself even, who would own a deer. Because I tell you...

I tell you that life is a deer that a boy watches in the forest. The boy sees the deer for what she is. Great and golden and quick in her beauty. This deer that is life, knows the boy thinks her beautiful, for it is the purpose of the deer in this world to be beautiful for a boy to look at.

(Gesturing)

It is the deer, come a little distance towards us. We see her and are moved in our heart for the deer is come because we know how to look at her. But we must not own the beauty of the deer.

(Looking off, as if in his mind's eyes, he himself saw a deer)

The deer has relatives waiting for her, grass waiting for her, seasons being patient on her account. The world is big and she takes her beauty with her, pushes her beauty before her into the world. And we must let her go. We must let her go!

That beauty was ours to share, but he who would possess beauty, he who would own the deer that is life...his life shall be as nothing...for his life will ever be stones in his hands as he reaches for the stars.

There are a few moments of silence between them, as if a storm had passed, taking away the wind of human speech.

TALL HORSE

(Confused)

But a white woman...

OLD CAT

But nothing! Freedom! It is to be found in anyone!

(Cradles the long pipe in his arms, looks intently at TALL HORSE)

Besides...this old drunk ain't so old...and ain't so drunk...that he can't tell by the tone of your voice that you're godawful touchy on subject of white women.

(Piercing stare, speaking abruptly)

So why don't you tell me the name of the one you're leaving us to be with?

TALL HORSE

But..

(Really shocked)

But how did you ...

OLD CAT

That's the trouble with young people. They think they invented the world. Think you can put something over on me? Think you can? I was young once myself, although these old bones ache so much, it seems like something that could never have been so. But there was a time...

(Remembering)

Have I spoken of my second woman? No! I have not. Her father of our people. Her mother white. She grew to her womanhood with her mother's people. Let us call her white too, for I thought her so. It will ease your heart for you to know that. Yes, in her way, she was a white woman too. But her eyes, they sought stars.

(Deeply moved)

She came to me when emptiness and bitterness possessed me. When the feathers of my youth had been torn from my wings. She filled me again with bright pieces of dreams. And for me, in the second beginning of my life, far from that first one, I began again. Flying.

(His face lights up. He seems more alive)

My blood grew warm again with the wind that my newly mended wings rode. Together, this second one and I soared above the forest and saw below us, the deer, and prayed to the deer, in her beauty, to keep her beauty to herself. As we shared the beauty of the deer, so we shared each other.

Old we grew in our bodies but as if young yet, we each had the stars and wore them in our hair and in the night of our life together.

(Suddenly forlorn)

Then death..Yes...Death. Not the sad, frantic death of the white man. The whimpering, clawing death! The vain and silly death! No. Not that. It was only sleep. Sleep! One night the fever took her. Peacefully. Took her while she slept and I neither wept nor followed..

(OLD CAT hugs his long pipe to his chest as if his arms held the memory of her)

.....for she had made me young again and the young do not understand death.

There is a silence. And then suddenly, the old man looks up, and the strength seems to go out of him. His moment of glory passes. He shakes his head and staggers a little. He starts to fall. TALL HORSE quickly jumps up and grabs him.

OLD CAT

(Almost apologetically)

Guess I shoulda ate something today. There is something about a six pack of beer for breakfast that just don't hardly prepare a man for the day.

TALL HORSE

(Arms around him, leading him into a chair by the kitchen table)

Maybe you ought to mix your beer with some corn flakes every morning. That way you'd least get a balanced breakfast.

OLD CAT

(Slumping in the chair, weak)

I already tried it once. Corn flakes still tasted like horse crap, but after fifth bowlful, who gave a damn!

TALL HORSE

(Pushing the bowl of deer stew in front of him)

Eat some of this stew. You gotta get some food in you.

OLD CAT

(Pushing it away)

I can't eat that.

TALL HORSE

(Pushing it back)

You gotta try to get some food in you. Gonna get sick if you don't.

OLD CAT

(Turning up his nose at the stew)

I married your grandmother because I was tired. Looking back, I do not think it is possible that anybody could be that tired....I married her because I wanted a son who was your father. She seemed to understand that part pretty well. She was experienced in delight.

She had slept with policemen.

(Pushing the bowl away again)

As for her cooking, she don't look like it now, but flat on her back, she was one hell of a cook!

TALL HORSE

(Insistent)

You really oughta try to force some of this stew down.

OLD CAT

(Shuddering at the thought)

NO! I'll be alright. Just needed to sit down. I'll save the stew. I may need it later to repair the soles of my boots.

TALL HORSE

(Suddenly angry)

You shouldn't drink like you do! Why you stay here in this nothing? Why you live like this? Why you give up on life?

OLD CAT

(No anger in his voice)

Some people have strength to live their lives from the day they are born to the day they die. Some of us can't. Some of us have to throw our cards in early and quit the game before it is finished.

(Looking down at his hands)

I turned my hand in a long time ago.

TALL HORSE

Why you drink so damn much?

OLD CAT

So I won't remember the reason why I drink so damn much.

TALL HORSE

(Bitter)

You don't want me to stay here and end up like you! End up like you in this nothing! You see why I don't want to live here like a pig rooting for acorns in the dirt?

OLD CAT

(Taunting him)

OINK! OINK!

(Moves his head as if he was rooting in the dirt)

OINK! OINK! OINK!

TALL HORSE

(Furious)

STOP IT! You know what I mean! I want to make something of myself! It don't

make me love you any less, but damn, I know you nothing but an old man who can't even hang onto a dime from one day to the next.

OLD CAT

Never catch me saying I could. Did you ever think it's cause I don't care to?

TALL HORSE

Like to know what so damn bad about having some money, about keeping it? About making something of yourself?

OLD CAT

(Sadly)

In my heart, I find the words that you speak, that I once spoke myself. I know all about money. I had it myself once. Sure I did.

(Sighing, looks wistful)

I remember how all the women used to tongue snap when I came bouncing with money in one hand and fancy suit all slicked up like a crooked dog tied sideways. Now that was a time! I wore fancy boots in them days for all kinds of fancy reasons!

(Shaking his head, pleased at the memory)

Course most of them fancy reasons was lamppost leaning girls with over-sized bumps on their chests and cash registers fastened to their knees. Them were the days! Always the best boots and always the worst intentions!

TALL HORSE

(Trying to strike a note of conciliation)

IF I had money, first thing I'd do is, buy you the best pair of genuine, hand-tooled leather boots!

OLD CAT

Wouldn't want them. No need no more. I am too old to be beautiful from the feet up. Money don't make my blood race no more. Old age moves my blood like gravity pulling down an old sock. Now you, think I don't know how the idea of money makes your tongue wobble? You as hot for it as nine wicked cats in a dark room. And only hot for it like I was hot for it. I used to chase ALL the women.....when I had enough money to slow them down.

TALL HORSE

Don't want money just to chase women!

OLD CAT

(Grabbing his chest, faking a heart attack)

Don't tell me you gonna chase the funny boys too?

TALL HORSE

NO!

(Impatient)

Why can't I make you see that money is more than that! It's a chance to better myself.

OLD CAT

Oh yes. I see that. To better yourself so you are better, you think, than somebody else. You just want to be able to look down on somebody else.

TALL HORSE

(Disgusted)

I can't tell you nothing. You don't know anything about anything.

OLD CAT

(Agreeing)

And it took me years to learn that much!

The screen door bangs as grandmother returns and rushes into the room. She's a little out of breath from rushing.

GRANDMOTHER

I called her and she said she'd come if she could! I spect she'll be here directly.

OLD CAT

Did you tell her to come naked so he can recognize her?

GRANDMOTHER

If I can find heavy enough rock, see if I don't knock your teeth in.

OLD CAT

(Shrugging)

I was only joking.

GRANDMOTHER

I wasn't.

There is a knock on the door.

OLD CAT

(Calling out)

If you don't know me well enough you gotta knock, you ain't welcome!

GRANDMOTHER

(Furious at him, also calling out)

Pay no attention to big mouth pile of horse happenings! Come in!

LEON BROKESHOULDER comes into the room, moving toward them somewhat reluctantly. He is painfully thin. One sleeve of his shirt is empty, a souvenir of the white man's war.

LEON

This a private fight or can anybody join in?

OLD CAT

Howdy Leon. Grab yourself a chair. Sit down...or hit the old cow with it. You're welcome to do both.

GRANDMOTHER

Old man, if you don't shut your flapping mouth, I swear I gonna nail it to the floor!

TALL HORSE

(Ignoring them)
Whatya say Leon?

LEON comes in, takes a chair and stands behind it at the table.

LEON
Got the transmission fixed. Car's ready for the road.

TALL HORSE
Getting it back in shape, huh. Stole a radio for it yet?

LEON
Not yet. Haven't got a back seat put in it yet either.

OLD CAT
That's un-American. Where a young man gonna practice parallel parking if he don't got a back seat?

LEON
(Touching his empty sleeve)
Maybe I don't need a back seat. I don't park as neat as I used to.

GRANDMOTHER
(Embarrassed for them all)
Sit down Leon. Don't pay no attention to the old worthless. He got up on the wrong side of the gutter this morning.

OLD CAT
(Glaring at her)
Old woman, if I woke up in the gutter feeling bad, it ain't my fault. You probably had your cold feet on me in the night.

LEON sits down. He acts uncomfortable in their presence. Obviously, he would rather be elsewhere.

LEON
(Trying to clear the air)
Funny thing about gutters. My uncle used to say evolution didn't evolve fast enough. Least not for us Indians. Said that us Indians needed a groove down one side to fit the gutter curb.

OLD CAT
Was he sober when he said it?

LEON
He used to say he was.....but the police never did.

GRANDMOTHER
How you feeling Leon. You look like death.
(She comes around behind him and feels his ribs through his shirt)
Ain't no meat on your bones! You hungry? I got deer stew.

LEON
Just ate.

Awkwardly, he takes a crumpled pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and puts one to his mouth.

GRANDMOTHER goes to the stove and gets a pot and a bowl. She brings them back to the table and stands beside LEON. She dumps the contents of the pan into the bowl and then puts the bowl down in front of LEON.

GRANDMOTHER

Well, eat again, skeleton, or wind gone think you a tumbleweed and blow you away.

OLD CAT

How things been going with you Leon?

LEON

(Bending over toward the match that OLD CAT has lit for him)

Haven't been doing too much since I got back home. Don't seem to have much energy these days.

OLD CAT

You should have come back here sooner after you got out of that damn Army hospital. You was away too long.

LEON

(Conscious of his empty sleeve)

Not so sure I'm back yet. At least, not all of me.

GRANDMOTHER

You're back now though. That's what counts.

LEON

Is it?

(Flicking the cigarette ash on the floor)

Depends on who you're talking to.

TALL HORSE senses what is coming and stirs uncomfortably in his chair.

LEON

Ain't seen Nila since I got back. Was going to.

(Looks at TALL HORSE significantly)

She's always pretty busy. Been meaning to stop in and see how she's been.

GRANDMOTHER

(Jumping in nervously)

The man who runs the restaurant where she works, he's a slavedriver. Work a body to death. I spect Nila is...

TALL HORSE

(Interrupting the old woman's hasty explanation)

Hell Leon! Ever since you told Nila to keep away from you...when you was still in the Army hospital and wouldn't let her see you no more...guess you told her something...

(Curious look)

...musta really been something to send her away like that...

(Embarrassed)

...Well, you know she's been with me.

LEON pretends to be interested in the cigarette he is smoking.

GRANDMOTHER

(Embarrassed)

Nila is coming here. Gone be here in a little bit.

LEON jumps, looks startled.

LEON

Coming here?

TALL HORSE

Leon, you're the last one on earth whose woman I'd steal, you know that. You musta told her something, made her...I didn't...It wasn't me who...

LEON

(Angrily)

Think I don't know that! That I didn't sit up nights in my bed trying to sleep on the side where my arm used to be, trying to sleep and thinking about her! Thinking about what I did!

(Tugging on his empty sleeve, staring at it)

I let her come see me once at the Army hospital. Just once was all I could stand.

Saw Nila standing there, with that look in her eyes...that kind of look that's too big to hide. She tried to hide it, she tried...but I wouldn't let her. Didn't want nobody feeling sorry for me! Nobody!

OLD CAT

So you did...SOMETHING?

LEON

(Remembering)

Yeah.

(Guiltily)

There was SOMETHING...I did.

OLD CAT

Ever think that maybe you'd given Nila a chance to stop feeling sorry for you, she would have? Ever think that?

GRANDMOTHER

Now old man, who is the one that is prying his whiskey red nose where it don't belong?

LEON

(Going on, glancing uneasily at TALL HORSE)

Back then...I only wanted to hurt her, pay her back for that look in her eyes...I even asked her...if she wanted my arm for a souvenir.

OLD CAT

If that was ALL you did...all you said to her....she would have got over that.
That was then..this is now. Maybe now you feel different...?

GRANDMOTHER

(Waving the empty deerstew pan)
Old man if you don't...

OLD CAT

You still love Nila?

GRANDMOTHER

Shame on you, prying this way! He don't have to talk this in front of
everyone!

LEON

(shrugging, feigning indifference)
Don't make no difference if I do or not. It's too late for that.

OLD CAT

It makes a difference. If you still love her, then you'll have it all your
life. It may not warm your bed, but there will times inside...when it will warm
your heart.

GRANDMOTHER

(Jeering)
Bottle wisdom!

TALL HORSE

(Awkwardly, not sure what he wants to say)
Jesus Leon..I'm sorry...don't know what I can..

LEON

(Bitter)
Don't be sorry! Don't need no one being sorry! You haven't got nothing to be
sorry for. You didn't steal nothing from me.

(Conscious of his empty sleeve)
I'm the one who got stolen. Got an invisible fist at the end of an imaginary
arm.

(His shoulders slump in defeat)
Got an official U.S. Army paper in my back pocket that let me out of the Army
and out of that hopsital. That offical paper gave me a word that's the white
man's death sentence of a good life. That word they gave me is EX-SOLDIER.

(Looking at them all defiantly)
That word don't give no one the right to feel sorry for me!

OLD CAT

Don't give YOU that right either. In my day, a warrior was proud of the scars
of war. They were a sign of his glory. Of the honor won.

LEON

In a white man's war, there is no honor! There is no glory! What does that make
my scars? What are my wounds without reasons to fit them into this world?

(Bitter)
Only an ill wind pushed by the hearts of fools.

For a few moments, they are all silent. Uncomfortable. The old woman nervously breaks the mood.

GRANDMOTHER

LEON! TALL HORSE! You haven't touched one bit of the food I got for you! Probably cold by now! You put some of that good food in your face!

(Pacing nervously behind LEON and TALL HORSE)

You two haven't changed since you was little. Practically had to tie the spoon in your hand to get both of you to eat.

OLD CAT

If you could cook something besides...

(Pointing at the deer stew)

this old whatever it is...

(Doesn't finish the sentence)

GRANDMOTHER

Nothing wrong with my cooking!

LEON

(Studying the contents of the bowl without enthusiasm)

Looks good.

(Stirring it with a spoon, somewhat uneasy at the prospect of actually eating it)

Uh, what is it?

GRANDMOTHER

(Proud of it)

Deer meat stew!

OLD CAT

With the fur still on it.

GRANDMOTHER

(Infuriated)

OLD SMART MOUTH!

(Glaring at OLD CAT)

Why don't you use your smart mouth to talk this boy out of leaving, if your smart mouth is so damn smart!

OLD CAT

(Looking at TALL HORSE)

Cause maybe I don't have the right to talk him out of it. Maybe I don't know how.

GRANDMOTHER

Well, then who has got the right to talk him out of it? Me? Do I got that right? Nila? What about you, Leon? You his friend. Why for you helping this boy run out on us? Why you helping him run away from his people? Don't you want him to stay?

LEON

(Looking away)

If he wants to go...that is, I mean..

(Doesn't know exactly what he means)

Sure I want him to stay.....Sure.

(He stops speaking. Obviously LEON doesn't want him to stay)

GRANDMOTHER

You Leon, you close as a brother to Tall Horse, since you was little, it's been so. Can't there be some way you talk him into staying?

(Desperate)

He'll listen to you! You tell him to stay! YOU make him...

OLD CAT WOMAN!

Stop whipping a dead horse! Ain't Leon's right to try and make him stay! There ever be one moment in your life you could close your mouth out of respect for the way somebody feels, this ought to be that moment. You leave Leon alone. He's got feeling in this, both ways.

GRANDMOTHER

(Defensive)

I got a right to try and keep....

OLD CAT

You got nothing! Nila maybe, she's got the right. Maybe she don't. It's Nila between them. Nila.

GRANDMOTHER

(Looking over at the door)

Nila ought to be here any minute.

TALL HORSE

(Jumps, looks extremely uncomfortable)

We gotta get going.

(Standing up)

Bus'll be here.

(Moves toward the door, in a little too much of a hurry)

Don't want to miss it.

(Avoiding their eyes)

GRANDMOTHER hurries around the table and gets between the door and TALL HORSE. She puts her hand on his chest and pushes him back to the table.

GRANDMOTHER

You sit your rump down and eat! I called the bus station when I called Nila! Next bus don't leave for another two hours! You know it don't take but fifteen minutes to get there. You got plenty of time. You eat something, you hear!

(Arms on her hips, challenging them)

You too, Leon!

But TALL HORSE just shakes his head. He moves around her. LEON gets up from the table and walks toward the door, taking his lead from TALL HORSE.

TALL HORSE

(Restless)

e're gonna go outside for a while.

GRANDMOTHER

(Panic in her voice, speaking rapidly)
What you gonna do? Where you going?

TALL HORSE

(Nervous)
Nothing. Gonna do nothing. Going nowhere. Just going outside for ...a while.
Just a couple minutes.

Abruptly, TALL HORSE and LEON move out the door as if they were escaping from something. The old woman follows them to the door and stands there, looking out after them. She stands there as if a great weight rested on her shoulders.

GRANDMOTHER

When a child is born...there is a harmony with all things that have no end...the sun and moon and the turning of day and night...it is the blood dance of the man and woman of all that exists.

Tall Horse is the last of the life within us.

(Grieving)
He is turning his heart away from us!

OLD CAT

(Gently)
Do not grieve old woman. Hold it in. The sound of it will not comfort you. Try not to think about it.

GRANDMOTHER

(Unheeding)
Like the last eagle in the sky...the last eagle..I am old and have no remaining power.

OLD CAT

Old woman...
(Not able to stand the hurt in her)
Do not take on so.

GRANDMOTHER

(Proud)
I will speak as I feel!
(Fervent)
It is the end of things and I will speak! I am the last old eagle...my eagle song always believed in my children. My eagle song said...the children in us that are gone, will come again in our children. They will see the tears of our old age....and their light boned bodies ...will dance the dances we can not finish...except in them.

All my life I have believed in my children.

ALL MY LIFE!

And when my own children were gone in the wind...dead..when they took their

names out of this world...I was not alone...for I believed in THEIR children.

Tall Horse, the last of them, is my life. All my life I have believed it. I
HAVE BELIEVED IT!

My eagle song said of my children, THEY WILL NOT LET US DIE!

Now the heart of my last child is turned away. Turned away! He murders us. It
is finished. We will be no more. We are alone!

OLD CAT comes over to her, puts his arm around her. He's unable to console
her in her grief. She stares out the door. There is a long silence between
them.

OLD CAT stares out the door. He sees something, reacts, realizing what
TALL HORSE has done.

OLD CAT

What's he think that hole's gonna get him? What's he think that digging's for?

(A little guilty)

Don't he know there's nothing out there? Don't he know I already...

GRANDMOTHER

(Not hearing)

Look at him.

(Her voice is lifeless, as if she were in a a trance)

With his unseeing heart. In the yard with his shovel. Digging that hole
deeper.

(Unconscious parody)

Digging....Just digging.

The old woman gathers herself up, pushes the old man from her, as if
somehow she feels she must stand alone against the universe.

GRANDMOTHER

(Looking up, arms outstretched, pleading)

GREAT SPIRIT! I AM AN OLD EAGLE WOMAN!

IN MY HEART YOU KNOW I AM NOT AFRAID OF DYING!

(Spoken very softly, distinctly)

I am afraid of dying out.

FADE TO BLACK

ACT TWO SCENE II

OLD CAT and his wife both turn and look at TALL HORSE. He is about to say
something when NILA comes through the door.

NILA is dressed in a white waitress uniform. She's young, but looks as
worn out and weary as someone much older. Her hair is partially tucked out of
sight under her waitress cap. She would be pretty if she didn't have so much
make up on. She walks into the room uncertainly, as if somehow she feels she
were not really welcome here.

NILA

I took off work.

LEON, arrested in motion, settles back in his chair, very ill at ease. There is a tension, so palpable it is almost violent. All eyes are on her except TALL HORSE's. He stands with his back to her. He is very tense.

GRANDMOTHER

Come in and sit yourself down girl! You must be tired from that working! Come in and rest yourself. You got here just in time! Tall Horse here was just getting ready to...

NILA

(Breaking in, embarrassed by LEON's presence, quickly changing the subject)
There was an awful wreck down in Pine Canyon this morning.

GRANDMOTHER

But Nila, what about...

NILA

(Going on hurriedly)
That's all my customers talked about all morning was this wreck.

OLD CAT

Anybody we know?

NILA

I think so.

GRANDMOTHER

Well...

NILA

Joseph Little Eagle from over to Schoonerton.

OLD CAT gasps, obviously touched by some memory. His face grows solemn and the life seems to go out of him.

GRANDMOTHER

Joseph Little Eagle? He limped didn't he? That was him, wasn't it? A real bad limp. Too many bad bulls put him against the gates at them rodeos. I seen him round here before. You and Leon knew him, didn't you? Wasn't he a drinking man? Wasn't he all the time stinking, that one?

OLD CAT

We all knew him woman. He was a good man, a brave man.

GRANDMOTHER

He was a drunk, is what he was, like somebody I could name.

NILA

He was pulling a double horse trailer with two geldings behind his pick up truck down along Pine Canyon. Something must a happened, a tire blew or, as some said, he was kinda drunk, and the truck and horse trailer went down the

cliff with him. Pieces of Little Eagle all over Pine Canyon.

OLD CAT

Did he...

(Without much hope)

Was he...

NILA

Killed him. Killed both horses. Guess it was kinda messy. Horse trailer fell down on top of the pick up cab. Pinned him in there. Had to get a wrecker to pull the trailer and them dead horses off of him.

(With a shudder)

They said there was lots of blood. It must have been awful!

TALL HORSE

I didn't know him real well. Only few times I seen him he was drunk. Stinking with it. Specially since coming back from the war. All the time drunk that one.

OLD CAT

Yes. He drank too much, that one. It was an enemy inside himself. Saw him lying in the middle of the road one time and asked him if he was drunk. He said he wasn't drunk cause he could still move a little.

GRANDMOTHER

You a fine one to talk about drinking!

OLD CAT

Who is better qualified?

(Thinking about it)

Fact is, I could use a drink right now.

TALL HORSE

You could always use a drink. You ain't never gone find no answers in a bottle.

OLD CAT

Won't find any questions either. So it all works out in the end.

LEON

(Staring up at NILA)

Haven't seen you in a long time, Nila. How you been?

NILA

(Looking at TALL HORSE)

I've been...busy.

(Guilty)

You...

(Looks at LEON)

made me busy.....I don't have to tell you that.

NILA comes further into the room and stands in front of TALL HORSE.

NILA

You talking to me Tall Horse?

TALL HORSE
Yeah. Why shouldn't I?

NILA
How would I know! Your grandmother says you leaving but you never told me nothing about it.

TALL HORSE
(Edgy)
Meant to.

NILA
That's a lie and you know it. Where you going?

LEON
I'm taking him to the bus station. He's going to...

NILA
Without telling me, just up and leaving.
(Hurt)
That's real damn brave of you.

LEON
He takes that bus, maybe after today you won't be so BUSY. Tall Horse won't...

LEON lets the sentence trail off as he becomes aware that everyone is staring at him. He realizes he has said too much.

TALL HORSE
(Bitter tone)
Tall Horse won't what?

LEON
Nothing. I don't mean nothing. I was just pushing my tongue. I didn't mean nothing at all. My mouth is always messing me up.

OLD CAT
It wants to tell the truth. That would mess up anybody.

TALL HORSE
Leon, you ought to quit walking twice around the house to get to the door. Why don't you just say what you mean and let go at that.

LEON
(Feeling forced into it)
You mean I should say I'm GLAD you're going. That I hope you go away and never come back. You want me to come right out and say it?

TALL HORSE
(Not offended)
Took you long enough but you just said it...and meant it.

GRANDMOTHER

(Shocked)

Leon! How dare you talk that way to...

NILA

Leon ain't got no right to say that! No right being JEALOUS. Not after what he did to me. He hasn't got no right at all. Him and that NURSE of his!

LEON

(Suddenly exploding)

GODDAMN!

They are all stunned by the violence of his outcry. All eyes are on him as he marches angrily to the door.

LEON

(Speaking back at them over his shoulder)

I'll be waiting outside.

LEON slams the door behind him.

GRANDMOTHER

(Bewildered)

What's wrong with him?

TALL HORSE

(Looking at his hands, purposely not looking or speaking directly to anyone)

Ah Leon just never has any luck is all that's wrong. You shoulda seen that NURSE he had when he was in the hospital.

(Looks significantly at NILA)

UGLY! She looked like second place in a two man hatchet fight!

NILA

(Confused)

Ugly?...But he said...

TALL HORSE

(Going on)

You'd have to have a strong stomach to fall in love with an old horse-faced woman like that...Hell! You'd have to have a strong stomach just to be able to PRETEND to fancy a woman like that.

NILA

(Beginning to understand)

Him and her? It was all lies?

TALL HORSE

Everybody guessed it but you.

NILA

If Leon thinks...thinks just cause he lied...that it changes my feelings just like that...that he's got a chance with me if you go.....

(Upset)

How could he do that to me...then expect me back? The stupid...

TALL HORSE

(Interrupting)

Don't say anything you'll regret. I'm going away don't forget...and HE'S staying.

NILA

Don't talk to me about Leon! He threw me away! Didn't give me a chance! It's all his fault that you and I...

TALL HORSE

(Gently)

Is it?

(Shaking his head sadly)

His fault cause he's proud and don't want no pity. His fault cause he tells you some stupid made up lie about loving some damn nurse or other AND YOU BELIEVE IT! He didn't have to lie to you very hard, did he Nila? Didn't take much of a lie to turn you away, did it?

NILA

How could you say such a cruel thing?

(Angry but a little guilty)

You know that's not true!

TALL HORSE

Do I know that?

(Shrugs)

Tell you something I do know. Leon still wants to love you. Me. Maybe I don't have the strength for that.

NILA

(Almost hateful)

You make me sound like a rodeo event!

TALL HORSE

You really don't understand, do you? It isn't you I can't face, it's all the things you stand for, all this place means. I don't have the strength for those things. I can't stay here like Leon can, stay here and hide. Sit on the graves of the old people and guard them so the tourists don't take the bodies home for souvenirs! I can't live like that!

OLD CAT

(To no one in particular)

The only ones who care about the old bones are the ones who are soon to be old bones themselves.

GRANDMOTHER

(Turning to the old man)

Be still!

TALL HORSE

Yeah. Let her shut you up, old man. You may tell the truth...

(Glancing at the old man)

and they'll hate you for it.

GRANDMOTHER

(To TALL HORSE)

You oughta apologise, way you talking, way you acting! Acting like you ain't got no manners!

TALL HORSE

(trying to make a joke of it)

You tried to teach me manners but it didn't work. I grew up just like you.

GRANDMOTHER

(Sensing an ally)

Nila why this pretending he's so hard hearted he has to go leave us? Nila you tell me why this boy has got to go so far away?

NILA tries to smile at TALL HORSE but it doesn't work. She rubs her hands nervously on her dress.

NILA

Where ARE you going, Tall Horse?

TALL HORSE

(Tough act)

Away!

NILA

That don't tell me much.

TALL HORSE

To a city then, maybe Austin, maybe Amarillo.

(Shrugs, trying to act casual about it)

Where ever I can get a good wage working at something.

GRANDMOTHER

(Going on)

Acting like a punk! Acting like you don't care about nothing! Think you fooling anybody?

TALL HORSE

(Stung by the truth in her words, angry)

You want me stay here and end up like Joseph Little Eagle! So stinking with it you don't even know you killed yourself!

NILA

You know what I think?

(Moving toward him)

You ain't just trying to leave this place, you want to leave being Indian. If it was just moneu you wanted, if that was it, there's places around here, jobs and such. I'm working, ain't I? You just want to get away from being Indian!

TALL HORSE

(Forced to defend himself)

What's so goddamn good about being Indian! Just something for the government to

cheat and the tourists to laugh at!

NILA

You saying you don't want to be with your people no more.

TALL HORSE

If me saying that, if me meaning that, is what it takes to escape this place standing on my own feet, then that is what is.

NILA

Trying to escape me too?

TALL HORSE

(Avoiding her eyes)

Didn't say that.

NILA

You don't have to. Your eyes that can't look at me, they speak for you. Tall Horse, I want to hear it from you, from your own heart's words, about us. About you and me.

(Looks over at OLD CAT and his wife both of whom are raptly listening to what she and TALL HORSE are saying)

What about us?

TALL HORSE

(Also looking at his grandparents, uncomfortable)

Look, I can't...

Aware that the old people are hanging on their every word, TALL HORSE grabs her arm and pulls her away. They move away from the old ones at the table, stopping by the door, where they can speak to each other in private.

NILA

You love me?

TALL HORSE

Nila I...I can't...

NILA

(Interrupting)

Did you ever love me?

TALL HORSE does not answer, stirs uncomfortably in front of her.

NILA

You look me in the eyes and tell me you can walk out of here and not think of me.

TALL HORSE has his eyes averted. he simply can not meet her stare or the frank appeal she is making.

NILA

(Hurt)

Did you think I was just someone to sleep with?

TALL HORSE

(Trying to control himself, lying)
Maybe.

NILA

(Recognizing a lie, not believing it)
YOU tell me I was just someone to sleep with!

TALL HORSE

(Steeling himself, trying to act tough, but not a very convincing pose)
You was just someone to sleep with.

NILA

(A note of triumph in her voice)
You don't fool me, talking that toughness stuff. You always did try to sound mean when you were melting inside. You still love me, don't you?

TALL HORSE

No.

NILA

(Almost teasing him with it)
You still love me, don't you?

TALL HORSE

(A little too loudly)
NO!

This word comes out unexpectedly loud, loud enough that the others at the table look up, startled. TALL HORSE stares at them and they all turn away.

NILA

(Not letting up on him, insistent)
You still love me, don't you?
(Angry)
Answer me!

TALL HORSE darts an angry glance at the old ones around the table. He acts and looks somewhat desperate.

TALL HORSE

(Giving in)
Damn it! So what if I still love you! Say I do...let's say I do...I'm still leaving.....
(An effort to get it out)
I...love you.....but I'm still leaving.

NILA

I don't think in your heart you really know what love is. If you did, you wouldn't talk that way.

TALL HORSE

I know what I know. I know I can't stay here.

NILA

Your heart must be a shallow river. You never drank very deep when you loved me.

TALL HORSE

There's bigger things than love.

NILA

(A little shocked)

You're acting like a white man who don't know where the center of the earth is.

(Shaking her head)

There isn't anything in this world bigger than love.

TALL HORSE

(Impatient with her)

I can't talk to you! You're like all the rest...

(Motions toward the old ones at the table)

...none of you can see it. This place, this kind of life! We're all dead. DEAD and we don't know it! We are ghost dancers in the scalp house! We ride tame horses into poverty, our beadwork is strung on diseases and without shame...without shame...we count coup on tourists.

(Gesturing)

Nothing here for me but the wind...the wind...blowing across the tops of too many empty bottles.

(Angry)

I've fallen out of this world. I won't dance here any more.

(Looking at the door)

There's a world bigger than this place, this deserted reservation of the heart...and I want to find it.

NILA

Does money mean that much to you?

(Upset)

Do you love the white man's world that much?

TALL HORSE

I don't have to love the white man's world to live in it.

(Sad)

I don't have any choice BUT to live in it.

NILA

This land here touches my heart and keeps me living, keeps me strong. What makes you think any other place is gonna be better? You got people, you got relatives waiting for you out there? Or is all that's waiting for you out there, is a fast life, full of money bought things and a hole in the ground for you, to hide you away when that kind of living empties you? This is my place in the world. It is the home of my heart.

TALL HORSE

Then stay here.

(Bitter)

But don't blame me if I go.

NILA
BLAME you?

I only pity you. The wind will blow you forever from place to place.
(Sorrowful)

Where are your eyes for the land that is the beauty of your people? Where is your heart for home?

(Anguished)

You know I can't leave here. My heart stops when I lose sight of my land and my people. I can never leave here!

TALL HORSE
And you know...even loving you...I could never stay.

NILA
How can you love me and go away? How can you go away?

TALL HORSE
(Trying to be tough again)
By bus, unless I miss it.

NILA stares at him as if she had never really seen him before. He is nervous, unable to look at her. TALL HORSE moves past her, heading for the table, ending the privacy of their conversation somewhat abruptly. They brush each other as he passes and both jump, startled, as if touching each other was something of which they are both frightened.

TALL HORSE stands with his back to her, close to the table. She turns and watches him walk away from her. Between them there is a sense of things left yet unsaid.

NILA slowly moves up to the table beside him. Reaches to touch his arm. TALL HORSE sees it coming and moves away, circling around the table until it is between them.

There is an uneasy silence.

NILA
What's wrong with me?
(Staring at him)
Am I ugly in your eyes?

TALL HORSE
(Extremely uncomfortable, tense)
Never said that.

NILA
(Beginning to get angry)
Maybe you like the way white girls look better?
(More angry)
You like blonde hair? You like blue eyes? Is that what you like?

GRANDMOTHER gets up and moves to stand beside NILA, to offer her support and to encourage her not to give up.

TALL HORSE

(Reluctantly)

Nila it don't have anything to do with the way you...

GRANDMOTHER

(Interrupting)

I'm ashamed of you, Tall Horse!

(Puts her hand on NILA's shoulder and glares at TALL HORSE)

This girl here, where you gonna find...

(She stops speaking abruptly, looks back at NILA, a double take. She stares at NILA, shocked)

...this girl, where you...

(Unable to continue, too rattled to go on)

The old woman puts both of her hands on NILA's shoulders and turns her around to face her.

GRANDMOTHER

NILA! What you done to your eyes!

(An expression of horror)

What is this eye blackness? What's wrong with color of your face? You sick? You been working too much and come down with something? What's that you got on your face?

NILA

(Without flinching)

Eye stuff is make up. All the white girls at the restaurant wearing it now.

GRANDMOTHER

Shame! You not proud of the face the Great Spirit gave you, paint your face without no meaning, putting that white man's stuff on! Shame!

(Shaking her head)

You think Tall Horse like you better that way?

NILA

(Looking at TALL HORSE to see if he is looking at her)

I never thought of that.

(But she frowns when she sees that TALL HORSE is purposely not looking at her)

How do I know what Tall Horse likes or don't like?

NILA moves away from the old woman, circles around the table and comes up beside TALL HORSE. TALL HORSE turns his head and looks the other way.

NILA

(To TALL HORSE)

You afraid to look at me.

TALL HORSE

(Looking at her)

Course not.

NILA reaches up and pulls the waitress cap off her head. The gesture is somewhat violent and final. She shakes her dark black hair out. It is cut short.

For all of them it is a shocking revelation, evident in their facial expression.

GRANDMOTHER

(Exclaiming loudly)

NILA! WHAT YOU DONE TO YOUR HAIR!

(Hands clasped to her breast in dismay)

WHAT YOU DONE TO YOUR LONG, BEAUTIFUL HAIR!

NILA

(Touching her hair, pretending to be casual and unconcerned)

I just cut it is all, like the white girls at work cut their hair.

(She bites her lip)

Too hot in the restaurant for long hair anyway.

OLD CAT

(Rising from the table with a stricken look on his face)

What you trying to look white for?

NILA

Maybe some people...

(Looks significantly at TALL HORSE)

...like the way white people look.

OLD CAT

(Even he is shocked)

Nila! For a woman to cut her hair! To cut off her womanness!

(Really upset)

It is terrible! Terrible!

TALL HORSE is purposely not looking at her. Even so, he is a little shaken too by her act.

NILA

(Not ashamed)

Tall Horse you look at me. You look at me with your heart. You forget all the lies you been telling yourself and you look at me. Tell me what you see!

TALL HORSE

(Turning and looking)

I...Nila I...

(Overwhelmed)

NILA

(Touching her hair, as if it hurt her)

You like my hair this way?

(Biting her lip)

Is this the way a white girl'd wear her hair for you?

(Lifting her head, standing there before him with pride in her stance)

You like it this way?

TALL HORSE moves toward her, as if he were to put his arms around her.

TALL HORSE

Nila...

(Tries to speak but can not find the right words)

NILA

I cut it for you. I didn't want to cut my hair. I did it for you. It's as far as I can go for you.

(Her voice quavers a little, she trembles, but there is strength in her manner. In no way has this sacrifice belittled her)

Please tell me...tell me that you like it.

TALL HORSE is deeply moved. He reaches out with his hand, reaches to touch her hair, to caress it. Time seems suspended. There is an almost magical quality to this moment. It seems as if TALL HORSE will indeed give in to her, that perhaps he will stay. NILA stands before him, trembling ever so gently as his hands near her hair. Waiting, as if she senses that the moment he touches her hair, he will be hers. That there will be no talk of going away.

TALL HORSE's hand stops, aching close to her hair. He seems willing to surrender, ready to give in to his feelings about her. But it is a delicately balanced thing.

Just as he touches her, just as she leans toward him to embrace him, LEON suddenly bursts into the room. The screen door slams open with a startlingly loud crash. This has the effect of an explosion.

TALL HORSE and NILA jump away from each other. Each realizes the moment is gone. TALL HORSE quickly looks away, his arm still half raised. Suddenly conscious of it, he jerks it back, makes a fist and stares at LEON. NILA turns away, hiding her face with her hands. But she does not cry. She is of the earth and is strong, subdued but unbowed, even though she well knows that in that moment she has lost him.

LEON

(Harshly)

Gotta go now if you wanta make that bus.

TALL HORSE

(Assuming a tough pose again)

I'm ready. Let's go.

LEON is already in motion toward the door. TALL HORSE follows him. He stops and turns, with the door at his back, and faces them.

TALL HORSE

(To NILA)

Wouldn't have worked anyway. I would have ended up like Joseph Little Eagle.

(To them all)

You'll always be in my heart. Long as I live, that's where you'll be. I'll always know where you are.

NILA seems to be in a trance, unmoving.

GRANDMOTHER

(Never giving in, never ceasing to hope)

Nila! Can't you stop this foolishness? Can't you keep him here?

(Desperate)

Can't somebody do something!

OLD CAT

Give it up, old woman. You can't fight the strength of a river.

(Weary, saddened)

Give it up. The river is taking him to the sea.

GRANDMOTHER

(Refusing to accept it)

When you go from here, you are taking our hearts out of our bodies! You are the last of our children. In you, our only hope. You are our only hope! Do not leave us!

(Almost in tears)

Your grandfather and I are old. We have no relatives. The wind of our dance is almost over. Without you we will die inside. We will be like the corn fields in a time of drought. Our dead roots will pull up the ground and shake our empty bones. Without you, we will be childless and nothing!

TALL HORSE

(Torn up inside)

I can't help it. I can't live my life for you. I have to live it for me.

NILA

You'll be a stranger to them if you go. You will not be of their way. You will be some dead man who lives in your body.

(Almost angry)

Maybe you are selfish! Your heart must be hard. Hard! To go away and leave them to grow old alone. You break the life left to them in their old age!

GRANDMOTHER

(Pleading)

Nila loves you! We all love you!

TALL HORSE

(Unnecessarily cruel, trying to stay unmoved by their words)

Love don't come into it.

LEON goes through the door. The screendoor slams behind him. TALL HORSE puts his hand on the door, not yet able to make the final break.

OLD CAT

You throwing away the only thing worth having but you don't have the eyes to see it.

(Sorrowful, speaking gently)

If love don't come into it, what does?

TALL HORSE

(Trying to be funny)

Enough money to buy a car big enough to have its own swimming pool!

(Pretending to laugh at his own joke)

It's any place else but here. Nobody in his right mind would stay here.

OLD CAT

(A gentle smile)

That's the secret you don't know. You don't have to be in your right mind to

stay some place for love.

TALL HORSE

(Bitter)

Then love will kill you! It'll spread pieces of your body all over Pine Canyon!
This place is death to me.

OLD CAT

No one ever dies of love...love dies of people.

TALL HORSE forces himself to move. All their words seem to have no effect on him, or perhaps it is that he can not face the truth in what they say and shuts it out.

He pushes the screen door open, hesitates before walking through the door.

TALL HORSE

I gotta go.

(Much too loudly, as if he were trying to convince himself as well as them)

Maybe I won't be back!

OLD CAT

You don't have to say that. No road is so long that you can't go back in your steps on it to its beginning.

TALL HORSE

(Thinking OLD CAT is not taking him seriously)

I meant it!

GRANDMOTHER

(Anguished)

TALL HORSE, DON'T LEAVE US!

NILA

(Sudden comprehension on her face)

You got a white girl, don't you?

TALL HORSE back stiffens, he half turns, ashamed. From his expression, her accusation has hit home.

NILA

You gonna marry her?

TALL HORSE

(Looking at them for the last time)

Maybe.

Suddenly TALL HORSE is out the door and gone.

NILA goes to the door and looks out after him.

GRANDMOTHER

He couldn't hear our hearts speaking. He has killed us. He couldn't hear our words.

(Grieving)

He already buried all our words in a hole he dug in the ground.

NILA falls back against the door frame and her hands reach up, feeling that place on her head where her long black hair used to be. Almost in slow motion she touches the corners of her eyes and the black make up comes away on her fingers. She stares at it.

NILA

I cut my hair for him.

The old woman comes over to NILA and puts her arm around her shoulders.

OLD CAT

In this life, you have to take the apples out of your own trees. You have to know what you are and live that. Tall Horse don't know what he is and he'll never be happy until he does. Maybe he'll never learn.

NILA

But I cut my hair for him.

GRANDMOTHER stands silently with her arms comfortingly around NILA.

OLD CAT

You haven't stopped being Indian inside and your hair hasn't stopped growing.

GRANDMOTHER

(A catch in her throat)

Crazy old worthless, speaking true this one time so you listen to what he's telling you.

NILA

I loved him.

GRANDMOTHER

(Hugging NILA tightly against her)

And he loved you.

(Trying to smile for NILA's benefit)

Still loves you. He'll be back, you wait and see, back before your hair gets long again.

OLD CAT

(Startled)

What you saying old woman? What do you mean he'll...

GRANDMOTHER

(Cutting him off)

He'll be back, I tell you! A woman knows these things!

NILA leans away from her, in spite of herself a small look of hope on her face.

NILA

You don't really think he'll be back, do you?

GRANDMOTHER

(Acting positive)

That boy don't know his own mind! I tell you, he'll be back!

OLD CAT

(Very angry)

OLD WOMAN! You better watch what you're saying! You better not...

GRANDMOTHER

(Cutting him off again)

Why, Tall Horse is liable not to even take that bus. Why, he might even show up at your place tonight, Nila, who knows. Could be so.

NILA

(Not quite buying it, but down deep, wanting to)

You really think...

GRANDMOTHER

(Bluffing it out)

Absolutely! He may beat you home.

NILA

(Despite all reason, NILA gives in, starts to believe the old woman, suddenly has a million things to do)

I gotta get home and change my clothes. Get out of this stupid waitress dress.

I look a mess. Got a dress at home he likes.

OLD CAT

(Angry and embarrassed by what the old woman has said)

Nila, best not to get your hopes up TOO high.

(Glares at the old woman who flinches as if he had hit her under his stare)

Tall Horse is plenty stubborn. He MIGHT leave for a few days.

GRANDMOTHER

(Seeing a way out of her false prediction)

Yeah. That boy IS stubborn, Nila. Maybe he might be gone a week, maybe two.

Maybe even a whole month!

NILA

(At the door, not really listening to them any more, calls back through the door)

You really think he'll be back?

OLD CAT

No.

(Sees the look on her face and makes a sentence, changing what he meant) ...doubt of it.

NILA exits out the door, by the look on her face only half believing what she has been told, but still willing to hope that it could possibly come true.

There is a silence, lasting a few seconds. Then OLD CAT marches to the door, stands next to his wife. He is obviously not happy.

OLD CAT
CRAZY OLD COW! Why the hell you out and out lie to her for?

GRANDMOTHER
(Close to tears)
You're the expert at lies! You tell me why I told her lies!

OLD CAT
(Thinking about it and then nodding his head sadly)
I guess you told her lies cause sometimes the truth is so ugly you can't survive it.

GRANDMOTHER
(Crying)
We're alone! Alone...On this day...we have no relatives.

OLD CAT puts his arms around her.

GRANDMOTHER
Who's gonna tell US lies?

Who's gonna help US survive it?

OLD CAT shakes his head. He doesn't have an answer to that question. He holds her gently against him and looks out the door.

OLD CAT
That hole out there Tall Horse dug.

A big deep hole. Don't know if it's just a hole or if it's going somewhere.

That hole there.
(Eyes looking into the distance)
Too soon to say...but it looks big enough for both of us.
CURTAIN

A HORSE OF A DIFFERENT TECHNICOLOR

ACT I
SCENE I Interior

Two old men sit side by side in rocking chairs like two tame birds perched on the lid of a coffin.

One is white, the other Indian.

JOHN FORBES is the white one.

He coughs a lot, dresses forty years behind the fashions and chain smokes cigarettes with slot machine motions.

RED HORSE is in the other chair. He is dressed in old jeans, a bright blue shirt good enough to steal and a pair of old cowboy boots even a dead man wouldn't want to wear. He has an old corn cob pipe stuck in his mouth and his thick gray hair is tied none too neatly in braids.

JACK FORBES inhales deeply on his cigarette and coughs so hard he blows ashes all over his shirt. Despite the years that mark his face, there is still a great deal of strength to be seen there. He has the air about him of a man who meets life headlong and unflinchingly. He has the look of a man accustomed to being in command.

RED HORSE

Man you're age, ought to have learned how to smoke by now.

JACK FORBES stops coughing and looks over at RED HORSE. He wipes the back of his hand across his mouth before he speaks.

JACK FORBES

I made you a star. You should be happy.

RED HORSE

I wanted to be a planet.

JACK FORBES

You can pretend against it but you had it all. My films made you larger than life.

RED HORSE lights his pipe, puffs on it contentedly.

RED HORSE

I was not larger than life. Just thicker above the neck.

I made faces for a living. You call it acting. Running twenty miles a day in front of a camera to hit somebody over the head with a rubber tomahawk is not a serious way to go through life.

JACK FORBES

There you go, poor mouthing everything. You're just angry at me because you couldn't handle the success.

RED HORSE

I didn't know I had any.

(Pause)

After all, I was in your movies.

JACK FORBES

You had your name up in lights. If that's not success, I don't know what is.

RED HORSE

You're right. You don't know what is. The kind of success you always wanted was the kind where you end up crawling on your hands and knees at two hundred miles an hour just to make a deal.

JACK FORBES

You had success. You just were TOO Indian to capitalize on it. I see you haven't changed. You can say what you want about being in my films, but I filmed what I knew. I don't regret it.

(Pausing for emphasis)

In the old West, men were men.

RED HORSE

And they smelled like horses.

FORBES stares off into the distance, seeing something unseen.

JACK FORBES

Remember the first film I directed you in?

FORBES smiles at the memory, turning to look at RED HORSE.

JACK FORBES

RETURN OF THE APACHE DEVIL. It was a two reeler made for the old Republic studios. Made the whole damn thing in three days. It made money hand over fist.

RED HORSE

How could I remember that far back? When you've fallen off one horse, you've fallen off them all.

JACK FORBES

Republic thought I was a genius. Two reels in three days and a first time director to boot. Hell, if they'd only known. I was in Mexico two days before and DRANK the water!

(Tugging uncomfortably at his pants)

I went fast because I HAD to go fast. I had the one shot trots. Should have bottled that stuff and sold it to producers with directors behind schedule.

RED HORSE

We shot more film when you were on the toilet. That's why we finished the film so damn quick.

JACK FORBES

(Indignantly)

That's a goddamn lie!

RED HORSE

(Calmly)

Indians never tell lies. They just don't tell the truth.

JACK FORBES

(Tapping his chest with his finger)

I directed ever damn foot of that film.

RED HORSE

Same method in toilet. When you find something that works, I say use it every chance you get.

FORBES scowls at RED HORSE and then bends over and opens a paper bag at his feet. RED HORSE watches with obvious interest as FORBES takes out two cans of beer. FORBES glances at RED HORSE to see if he wants one. RED HORSE nods yes with evident eagerness and FORBES opens both cans.

RED HORSE starts to reach for the beer but a thought suddenly occurs to FORBES and he just misses handing the can of beer to RED HORSE. FORBES takes an absent minded sip out of the can of beer meant for RED HORSE.

JACK FORBES

Tell me Red Horse, why did you ever come to Hollywood in the first place?

RED HORSE

(Staring at the can of beer with fascination as he answers)

I was dreaming. I hoped to penetrate a house of knowledge which I believed lay beneath the sea. When I returned to the land of men, I wanted the spirits of this great knowledge to make my people walk in beauty.

JACK FORBES

(Incredulous)

You came to Hollywood for that?

RED HORSE

(Shrugging, withdrawing the hand that had reached out for the beer)

Well actually, I went out there to get a job falling off horses in cowboy and Indian movies but when I got there,

(Winking at FORBES)

Italians already had all the jobs.

FORBES take a long pull on the beer that he had intended for RED HORSE.

JACK FORBES

Well, that's Hollywood, for you.

(Taking a sip from the other beer can, seemingly quite unaware that he's drinking from both cans of beer)

It has the courage of its own lack of convictions. But remember my old friend. I gave you a job. I gave you your chance. It didn't matter to me if you were a.....

RED HORSE

(Interrupting)

I lied to get the job.

FORBES chokes, mid-gulp, and beer dribbles down his chin.

JACK FORBES

What?

RED HORSE

I told you I was Italian.

JACK FORBES

Uh, really?

(Tries to remember, looking somewhat confused)

Uh, I thought that....uh...

RED HORSE

You didn't find out I was really an Indian until our third film, SON OF THE APACHE DEVIL. I was the only one who didn't get a sunburn. That's how you found out.

JACK FORBES

(Shaking his head, suddenly remembering)

Now I remember. I always said you rode a horse too good to be an Italian.

He tilts his head back, drains the beer intended for RED HORSE. He shakes the can to make sure it's empty then tosses it over his shoulder. It bangs against the back wall of the cabin.

RED HORSE almost rises out of his chair, as if his body is trying to follow the path of the beer can. There is a look of abject longing on his face. He eyes the paper bag at FORBE's feet with hope and expectation.

One handed, FORBES sticks a cigarette in his mouth and lights it, unaware of RED HORSE's distress.

FORBES coughs rackingly, with the first inhalation of the cigarette. He looks over at RED HORSE.

JACK FORBES

So you faked it a little at a time when everybody faked it a lot. So what? It doesn't matter now. The point is, I kept you on. I made you the first Indian star of the shoot 'em ups. And I hired more real Indians in my films than any other director.

(He has another coughing fit, which he soothes with a swig of beer from the other can)

You can't take that away from me!

RED HORSE

What's to take? I always figured the Great Spirit gave you your chance to direct motion pictures. It was the Great Spirit who chose you to make so many Westerns about Indians.

FORBES almost chokes on his beer.

JACK FORBES

For a second there, I thought you might actually be complimenting me on something.

RED HORSE

(Nodding slyly as if in agreement)

I think you were the Great Spirit's choice.

FORBES finishes the second beer, and shakes the empty can.

JACK FORBES

Thanks Red Horse. I'm truly flattered.

RED HORSE

The Great Spirit would have wanted somebody who wasn't going to mess it up by knowing anything.

FORBE's hand tightens around his cigarette, snapping it off behind the filter. He realizes he has been had.

JACK FORBES

You talk more than any Indian I ever met.

(Pausing for emphasis)

Talk is silver.

(Taking a long dramatic pause, broken only by the sound of the empty beer can rattling off the wall as he flips it over his shoulder)

BUT SILENCE IS GOLDEN!

RED HORSE's body again unconsciously tracks the flight of the beer can.

RED HORSE

And a fart is nobody's friend. Let's have ANOTHER goddamn beer!

FORBES nods in agreement with the sentiment. He starts to bend over and has another coughing spasm which leaves him gasping for breath, pale and shaken. He looks over at RED HORSE.

JACK FORBES

You don't really like me do you?

He averts his eyes then and reaches down and gets two more beers out of the bag. He holds the cans in his lap, keeping his eyes on them.

RED HORSE takes the corncob pipe out of his mouth slowly and cradles it in the palm of his hand as if it suddenly were very heavy. He looks suddenly very weary.

JACK FORBES

When I think of all the years, all the things we went through. Out on location in the middle of a thousand nowheres, not quite in hell and no ways near heaven. Seems like I spent two whole lifetimes with you....and with your people.

He opens both cans slowly as if the act helps him shape his thoughts.

JACK FORBES

I made it possible for you to live in a better way. I gave you money. I gave you fame even. And even though it was Hollywood all the way where everything is bent, I think I pretty damn near always was straight with you.

RED HORSE

In that I agree. In Hollywood, honest meant undetected. But you were straight with me in your heart.

JACK FORBES settles back deeper into the rocking chair, extending a can of beer to RED HORSE

JACK FORBES

So how come, that being true...all those years...you never took my hand in friendship?

RED HORSE

(His hand about to close on the beer)

Maybe because there was always the rustle of paper money when your hand came out.

Angry, JACK FORBES withdraws his hand, letting the beer can come back to rest in his lap.

RED HORSE lunges futilely at the can of beer.

FORBES bolts a gulp of beer angrily, from the can he's been offering to RED HORSE.

RED HORSE balls his hand into a fist, as if he wishes to take a poke at FORBES but holds himself back, thinks better of it, and unclenches his hand.

RED HORSE

You don't need to take it so personal. There was always one more take, one more horse to fall off of. I never did anything for you that I wasn't paid for. That is a difficult way to live.

FORBES drinks again from RED HORSE's beer

JACK FORBES

I never cheated you. I was generous. I paid you what you were worth and then some. A man can look back on that with pride, can't he?

RED HORSE watches him drink, licking his lips.

RED HORSE

What I did you always asked me to do for money, you never asked me to do it for you because I was your friend.

FORBES waves both cans of beer for emphasis.

JACK FORBES

Christ! I didn't want to take advantage of our friendship!

RED HORSE

Until you do something to test it, friendship has no strength. It has no heart until you risk it.

FORBES starts to hand the can of beer to RED HORSE as if suddenly remembering that it is his beer.

JACK FORBES

I held back...

(Unconsciously drawing back the can just as RED HORSE lunges for it) because I respected you.

RED HORSE

You can't expect that of friends in this life. Respect is only good after you are dead. Then you hope your friends don't let their horses stand too long over your grave.

FORBES grimaces and downs the rest of RED HORSE's beer.

JACK FORBES

Well you give me a pain in the

RED HORSE

(Half angry about the past and about the beer, cuts in)

Don't tell me pain stories. I fell off three hundred and fifty horses of a different Technicolor. I rode across your screen. I danced for you. I fell off horses for you. I got shot for you. I was living in two worlds and the Great Spirit was working the night shift. When you said do a rain dance, I did a rain dance.

(Banging his corn cob pipe angrily against the wooden arm of the rocking chair)

When the script called for a woman, you changed me into one. Don't tell me about pain!

JACK FORBES

I feel pain too. Like the one in my heart right now. I always liked you....Always....You treat me badly. Would it break your red rear end to admit to liking me, even a little? Just once, maybe, for old times sakes?

RED HORSE

(Smiling cagily)

Supposing I did like you, always did like you, I wouldn't tell you.

JACK FORBES

It isn't fair. I'm always getting the shaft. I guess I shot too many movies and not enough actors.

RED HORSE

Being liked is something that is known and doesn't have to be told.

JACK FORBES

We all like to be liked. What's the harm in saying it?

RED HORSE

Plenty harm. All these years, you are the same man who drank the water. You never changed. If it wasn't a cattle stampede or dynamiting the dam, you couldn't feel it. If I saw a hundred people on horseback, I looked for someone I knew. You worried if they had taken their wristwatches off or whether or not the horses would do something unfortunate on camera when they rode by. I looked for a home in every face I saw. But what did you look for?

JACK FORBES

(Defensively)

I was always looking for the big picture.

RED HORSE

There was never a big picture. Only big people with hearts as big as the sky,
for the man who had time to see it.

JACK FORBES

I must be crazy, talking about movies to you. You never sat in the director's
chair. I had to move mountains. I had to play God!

(With a dreamy sort of look on his face)

In the beginning, was montage. Then it was an endless parade of forty-nine year
old starlets in soft focus who had never been kissed. I was a good director!
Hell, I was a great director because I was lonely. Because in that silence that
surrounded me, I chased the greatest loneliness of all that a man can aspire
to. I moved and shook. My power was in my ability to motivate, to show the
donkey the carrot.

He drinks from the other can of beer.

RED HORSE

(Eyeing the beer can)

You never had it so good.

JACK FORBES

Or parted with it so fast. Yes sir, Red Horse, you're a genius in Hollywood,
until you lose your job.

RED HORSE

(Looking at the bowl of his pipe)

Well, life is a choice of choices. You could have ridden some other horse,
chased some other sunset.

JACK FORBES

(Shaking his head)

I don't think so. I didn't know anything else. Didn't want to know anything
else. A director is a guy who aims at something he can't see and hits it, if
he's lucky with bullets from empty guns.

(Finishing his beer and tossing the can away)

A director has certain responsibilities.

RED HORSE

A human being only has one. Being human.

JACK FORBES

I could never explain my life to you Red Horse.

RED HORSE

It's not my job to understand your life. That's the white woman's burden.

JACK FORBES

(Wearily)

Leave my ex-wife out of this.

RED HORSE

Even so, I always understood you. You wanted to hit the big jackpot which meant
you had to become a slug in the machine. You wanted to get into the big poker
game of the ages but you bluffed with the same hand for too long. They brought

in a new dealer and your Westerns fell off the same horse I once rode. A six gun stopped beating four of a kind.

JACK FORBES

(Staring at the old Indian with simulated disgust)

You are a philosopher. That is not good. They'll say you use drugs.

FORBES throws the last beer can over his shoulder. RED HORSE winces as it bounces nosily off the wall.

RED HORSE

I WOULD if I could get any.

(Staring down at the bag in front of FORBES chair with longing)

But beer is up another dollar a six pack. I say the world is coming to an end.

JACK FORBES

(Nodding in half drunken agreement)

Have another beer Red Horse.

RED HORSE

Maybe you should stop being so generous with my beer.

FORBES takes out two more cans of beer, sets them in his lap and begins to open them. His fingers are now very unsteady. He pauses from this task to put another cigarette in his mouth. RED HORSE leans over and lights the cigarette for him.

FORBES thanks him with a nod, takes a few puffs and then has such a violent coughing fit, the cigarette flies out of his mouth.

FORBES bends over, tears in his eyes, barely able to breathe.

JACK FORBES

I didn't have to be a film director. I could have been a gynecologist.

RED HORSE

Cowboys and Indians can't last forever but women are something the world can't live without.

JACK FORBES

(Shaking his head with regret)

I used to have a real personality but a producer got rid of it for me. I spent a lot of time working for people who tried to put my head in a wine bottle.

RED HORSE

You should have quit when it started to fit.

JACK FORBES

(Announcing decisively)

Another beer. Just the thing to wash the rotten taste of Hollywood out of our mouths.

At least I wasn't a Hollywood phony. People hated me for myself.

FORBES drinks from the can in his left hand, nods in satisfaction, and

then treats himself to another gulp, this time from the can in the other hand that he has just opened for RED HORSE.

RED HORSE

(Sighing)

My generosity knows no bounds.

JACK FORBES

Forty years a director. I spent most of my life in half lit rooms with half lit people. I was drunk on success, drunk on money, drunk on power.....and I was drunk too. And then, right into the toilet. I went from the house on the hill to the phone booth on the corner of walk and don't walk. It should have meant more than that.

RED HORSE

I always said the same thing about your films.

JACK FORBES

What's wrong with my films, you drunken old totem pole!

RED HORSE

Aside from me being in them, everything else is what is wrong with them.

JACK FORBES

(Gesturing angrily with the beer cans, spilling some of the beer)

You take that back! My films were true to life. They meant something! They were steeped in authenticity!

RED HORSE

They were steeped in something.

JACK FORBES

Oh, I may have cut a few corners here and there but I attempted to depict what I could see.

RED HORSE

A crazy man and a not crazy man think the same way. The difference is where you start.

JACK FORBES

(Gesturing even more wildly, spilling more beer)

If you didn't like my films, if you didn't believe in the...in the moral integrity of my films, why did you stay all these years?

RED HORSE

I didn't have to believe in your films, only your money. You had the most believable money I ever saw.

JACK FORBES smashes the beer cans against his chest, spraying himself with beer.

JACK FORBES

Let me tell you something, you miserable model for a buffalo nickel, I had to believe in them. Every producer insisted so he wouldn't have to. I sweated out

every word uttered in every one of my films.

(Contemptuously, FORBES flings the half-filled beer cans over his shoulder, spraying both of them in a fine shower of beer)
What other director can say that?

RED HORSE

(Wiping beer off his face, looking disgusted)
Kissing yourself above the knees is hard work.

JACK FORBES

Remember that death scene in *THEY RODE BOLD FOR GOLD*? You helped me write it yourself! You can't tell me that scene didn't have something!

FORBES is very much caught up in the memory, making elaborately drunken gestures with his hands.

JACK FORBES

The faithful Indian returning to warn his white master of the ambush, only to drop dead at his feet. I said to you, Red Horse, you gasp out your words of warning in English, then look far away into the distance and say your dying words in your own tongue. Thinking of your wife and child back at the wigwam, never to see them again. You gave your all for the white man but your heart returned to your people at the last moment. It was your greatest moment on screen and it wasn't even in English. I did that. I insisted that the last words you spoke should be Indian. I made it authentic. It was just the right touch. I had the audiences crying in their socks! Remember! It was so successful I had you do it in all the other movies.

RED HORSE

You also said not to say it in real Indian. You just wanted to make it sound Indian.

JACK FORBES

I said that?

RED HORSE

I wouldn't forget something like that.

JACK FORBES

Well, so what? It's the thought that counted. It sounded Indian. Nobody could tell it wasn't Indian. I didn't want to offend any particular Indian tribe. I had producers to answer to.

RED HORSE

I could tell. My people could tell. Which is why I went ahead and said it in my own language anyway.

JACK FORBES

You what? You did what?

RED HORSE

In my death scene, I spoke my own language.

JACK FORBES

(Staring darkly at him, rebuke on his face)
If I had known, I'd have skinned you alive. No director has to take that kind of insubordination!

RED HORSE
Aren't you curious to know what I really said?

JACK FORBES
It was a death scene, the highest point in the film. I'm sure you said something appropriate.

RED HORSE
(Deliberately speaking in the stiff, unnatural Indianese of the old bad Westerns)
Translated, it went like this. No. This ...not ...arrow.. in... my... stomach. I... just... excited.

JACK FORBES spreads his hands to the heavens above as if inviting a lightning bolt to put him out of his misery.

JACK FORBES
And to think, I wasted a whole life time liking you. I should have stuck with the Italians. They ride horses like old people make love but they don't shaft you when you're NOT looking.

RED HORSE
(Snorting derisively)
They only shaft you when you ARE looking.

JACK FORBES
Red Horse, you're the kind of guy who takes a sack full of kittens down to the river to drown them and then starts to cry... because you can't get them to skip.

JACK FORBES
(Pointing an accusing finger at Red Horse)
What did I ever do to you anyway. Is it because a lot of Indians think you're an Uncle Tomahawk because of the films you made with me? Is that what you're holding against me? Are you blaming me because some people think you're some kind of stupid wooden Indian Hollywood clown?

RED HORSE
I enjoy being a clown. That is my sanity. If you laugh, you survive death, if you don't you die out. To be an Indian and to be too serious is to be blind and trapped in the white man's frantic world where death is not an old friend, just a terrifying interruption.

JACK FORBES
I take what I do seriously, what I have done. In Europe, they still watch my old films. They call me a great artist. They appreciate my vision, my sensitivity.

RED HORSE
To be appreciated. That is a very serious hell. It is a power too strong to be

overcome by anything except flight.

JACK FORBES

(Defensively)

I put things on film that had never been seen before. I spent my whole life at it. It had to mean something to you, to your people.

RED HORSE

Your films landed where the hands of man never set foot.

JACK FORBES

I sought truth.

RED HORSE

You could have had the dreams locked in men's hearts. The dreams of my people. You could have had my hand in friendship. That is all the truth a man need know.

JACK FORBES

I helped keep your people alive. I created visions of your life, maybe not accurate in every detail, but the meaning was there. I gave the world moments of your people's lives for all to see.

RED HORSE

Always the outside, never the inside. You may have shown the world the dances we did but never the dances inside ourselves. The fire you lit for us, flashed and flared and danced on the silver screen but showed us only the dark in which we lived.

FORBES is overcome with a sudden, convulsive fit of coughing. It leaves him looking very ill and old and worn out. He looks at the old Indian next to him and there is pain in his eyes that is not from the illness inside him.

JACK FORBES

All these years, have you hated me?

RED HORSE

Could I hate you when the whole world was watching? You always had the courage to make a fool of yourself and then you were willing to take the rest of the world with you. I never felt exploited or used. Mostly I was amazed at your earnest stupidity.

RED HORSE looks into FORBES eyes, understanding the pain there.

RED HORSE

I was born a savage. You called me forth from my reservation prison, dressed me up as a Noble Savage or a vicious one, taught me to ride horses I couldn't afford to own and to pretend to kill men I had no reason to hate.

I put away the cowboy boots that really fit and wore the costumer's moccasins that didn't fit and never would.

I danced dances for the camera that meant nothing, chanted chants even I didn't understand, scalped bald men and endlessly rode in a circle around Western

Civilization.

You always said you were looking for truth but instead I always thought you were looking for some purity in my primitiveness.

You called me forth in a hundred different costumes no man of my tribe would have been caught dead in, painted like devils too evil for us to even dream of.

You brought me and my people exotic and disguised onto the silver screen in every shape and color and flavor of reality but our own. And why?

Every time I fell off a horse when a white man shot his six shooter for the seventh time, I always asked myself what was in it for you.

Then one day I figured it out.

I was a guilty pleasure. I was something suppressed in your own life. I and my people were an experience, civilized white people are denied the luxury of indulging in.

So we were summoned forth but our reality didn't match your forbidden fantasy.....so you recast, rewrote, recut and reclothed the missing part of your heart's forbidden desires, just to give the rest of the world a chance to satisfy it's own deepest secret fears.

Some of my people called me Uncle Tomahawk because I danced for you. Because I got shot for you, because I always fell off horses so beautifully for you.

But I seduced the world with your foolish help. I gave the world an interesting lie. I kept truth for myself.

JACK FORBES

(Shocked)

How could you live a lie?

RED HORSE

How could you film one?

JACK FORBES

I was approximating a truth. I felt it to be true. I had my beliefs in some of it. I was cynical, God knows. I gave the hicks what they wanted to see. I never disappointed my audience. Well, not for a long time anyway. Later I lost control of myself and lost my grip on the audience too.

RED HORSE

(Looking at the empty beer cans on the floor)

Drinking wore away the first half of your strength.

JACK FORBES

(Agreeing)

My ex-wife, who fancied herself, considered herself entitled to the second half. I did my last films with what was left.

RED HORSE

I still don't know how you spent your whole life chasing a truth that would not fit in your hand or heart.

JACK FORBES

(Looking at something outside the room, as if staring at his own past)
Maybe because I was in love, in love with all the faces in the dark I never knew. Maybe because I thought when I found my audience, I would somehow find myself. When I touched them, I would touch me.

Maybe because people were too full of feelings I couldn't express in me, because I could be content with an image.

I was looking for a place to die on the photograph of my soul. I lived like some kind of deranged ghoul who put cameras in Geronimo's coffin in order to interview Indian worms.

Sometimes I think I am an evil old man because I chased a truth about a people who wouldn't tell it to me, because I wanted selfishly to put it all in one stunning montage, in one brilliant symbolic lap dissolve, seeing you and your people chained to my wishes, turning from untamed bodies dancing on trees to a pair of eyes staring beautifully in the dark.

RED HORSE

You are a dying man. It is in your voice. It is in your eyes.

RED HORSE reaches out and puts his arm around JACK FORBES shoulder.

RED HORSE

This is a good joke. It is all behind you. It is up to other people to stumble upon new lies. You will make no more films, my old friend and that is well and just, for I do not wish to fall off any more horses.

JACK FORBES

(Voice trembling with emotion) The goddamn doctors say I've got cancer. For once, I expect the goddamn idiots are right. They say I don't have much time. I feel like they are right about that too.

I just came to say goodbye.

RED HORSE smiles. He seems strangely cheerful at the news.

RED HORSE

What doctors tell you, my bones tell me. I too am nearing my time. Big parts of my body are ready to fall off. It is a hell of a good joke! We can race and see which one falls apart first.

I was beginning to get angry at you. I have been waiting up for you. I have been saving up some of the most interesting lies, also lots of dirty stories.

I have been holding off on the dying business, waiting for you to catch up. If you think I am going to fall off three hundred and fifty goddamn horses of a different Technicolor for you and got bumps and bruises and damaged parts for every damn inch of me, having gone through all that, then die all alone, you're

crazy!

We are old and out of horses. We are past sex and the arrogance of it. We have lived a lifetime together and the hurts and lies of the past are not only over, they are forgiven.

All our lives, we have loved each other, as friends, as human beings.

I have always known this because I am Indian but you have only suspected it because you are white and stupid and as crazy as three ducks with wooden legs trying to be quiet.

Now it is right that we will be together at the end. I am glad you did not stay in Hollywood, to die among strangers. What I can not understand, is what took you so long to get here. I almost had to sit on matches all day long just to keep the heart fire lit.

JACK FORBES

(Smiling)

I had to help my ex-wife get her cat down out of a tree. The reason I'm late is because I'm such a poor shot.

RED HORSE

You always were a gentleman. You never hit a woman with your hat on.

FORBES tries to hide the tears leaking from the corners of his eyes. He tries to straighten his back, get a grip on himself.

JACK FORBES

What gets me...I...all these years...what I tried to do...tried to say...how I carried myself...I was so...so damn afraid you wouldn't like me. Goddamn! I tried so damn hard to be your friend..I hoped...why am I so goddamned dim that I have to wait till the last reel to find out the truth?

RED HORSE

The truth only waits for eyes not filled with longing.

There is a silence between the two of them. The thought hangs in the air between them, like a bridge that spans an old, deep river they have always longed to cross.

JACK FORBES bends over and gets out two cans of beer, the last two cans in the sack. He opens them, holds them in his lap, a can in each hand. RED HORSE stares at him, his hands balled into fists.

JACK FORBES peers into the growing darkness of the day

JACK FORBES

I think the matinee is almost over. We didn't ride off into the sunset and we didn't get the girl.

The old Indian puts his pipe in his shirt pocket with an air of putting it away forever.

RED HORSE

I died in a hundred movies and I never felt like I feel now that I'm actually doing it.

JACK FORBES

If it feels like you've had to go to the bathroom for five years, and can't, you and me are in the same movie.

RED HORSE

Death may turn out to be funny. I hope not too damn funny. If there is a happy hunting ground and we go there, Jack Forbes, it better by Christ not be a movie set.

JACK FORBES starts to take a drink from RED HORSE's beer.

JACK FORBES

Hell, don't worry about it. If it is, you're a personal friend of the director, and we'll get ourselves a rewrite.

(Lifting RED HORSE's can of beer to his lips)

I already got a good idea how to redo our death scene.

RED HORSE lunges forward and grabs his arm at the wrist.

RED HORSE

There is no death, only a change of worlds.

(Snatching the beer can out of FORBE'S hands)

AND IN THE NEXT WORLD, BRING SOME OF YOUR OWN DAMN BEER.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT II

A graveyard with burial platforms at the back of the stage. Later that same day. They are walking slowly across the stage. They seem to have come a great distance. Both men are using canes, in the manner of men using a staff to help them climb uphill.

JACK FORBES

Why are we here now?

RED HORSE

(Smiling)

Maybe so we will know where we are going to be later.

JACK FORBES

Well you don't have to be so damn cheerful about it! Say, this place reminds me of a movie set. You know, if we added a little bit of fog, some wind and...

He holds up his hands as if framing what he sees for a camera.

RED HORSE

An outhouse reminds you of a movie set.

JACK FORBES

(Looking around excitedly)

No really. If we put the wind machine over there...

(motioning to the left)

and then slowly let the fog drift in with the wind.

RED HORSE

You don't need a machine. You open your mouth....There is fog and wind.

This is our sacred burial ground. It is the hill of our ancestors.

JACK FORBES

Who's buried here? I don't see any names on the graves.

RED HORSE

Their names are a sleep and a forgetting.

There is a silence between them, like a shared sorrow.

JACK FORBES

Why did you bring me here? To show me the past?

RED HORSE

No. Places in the past hold no fascination for me. That is not what I am looking for. Not the past, not the faces that call to me even now in our present darkness.

It is youth itself I seek. To find that moment again when I was just a step or two forward on the path of life.

(Looking away)

I touched something once, sensed something in the world about me. At the moment, I had kinship with the world and became one with it for the rest of my life. Now at the end of things. I wish to make my way to that moment once again. I wish to feel what I once felt. That is all, to stare for one second with eyes made young again, for that one big-hearted moment, at the secret face of my destiny. And then happily will I sleep. Gladly will I then move to the quiet at the end of the road.

JACK FORBES

You have surprising things in you. I never got any of that on film.

RED HORSE

Is it something a camera could see?

JACK FORBES

No. But you never really understood the special magic of film. You try to give men dreams, you try to give them stars they can look up to as they walk along.

RED HORSE

More lies than dreams. Too much sight, too much sound....and not enough vision.

JACK FORBES

If you had walked where I walked, stood where I stood...Goddamn, it's too late to make you know what I know. You were always on the wrong side of the camera. You were an ACTOR...a kind of tourist who thinks he's a scenic route and visits himself.

I never met an actor yet that understood that film isn't about how people think and feel, its about how they act and behave.

RED HORSE

I would rather that films were about the things that dance in men's hearts.

JACK FORBES

The box office usually went for the things that dance in women's underwear. So you don't always get what you want. Hell, I never got anything I wanted. I always got what I thought I wanted.

(Regretful)

I'd like to live my life all over again.

RED HORSE

So you would not make the same mistakes?

JACK FORBES

No. So I could make even more of them. It's the only damn way to learn anything important.

RED HORSE

We both told lies for a living. I told them to you. You told them to the world. Before we get to where we are going, before we climb to the last place where we are going to be in the sky, I ask you as a man, was the journey worth the going?

They stop and look at each other. Suddenly they are almost shy, uncomfortable with each other.

JACK FORBES

Well how the hell would I know!

(Waving his cane for emphasis)

You went where I went. We made Westerns. We led our own parade. The trouble is, now the parade's gone by.

RED HORSE

If it was a parade, it went down a street that didn't exist.

JACK FORBES

Not real enough for you? Real never did too well at the box office. It didn't sell tickets. What did you expect? We're talking about Hollywood here, not the hill of ancestors.

RED HORSE

Only time I ever felt good about Hollywood was seeing it in the rear view mirror.

JACK FORBES

Hollywood wasn't all bad. I used to like the autumn.....when the birds changed color and fell out of the trees.

Still I would have killed for the chance to make just one more film. Just one more. Oh Christ, I miss it!

RED HORSE

To hunger for use and to go unused is the greatest hunger of all. Try not to think about it.

(Starting to walk toward the front of the stage)

Come along.

JACK FORBES

(Motioning back at the burial grounds)

Isn't this where you were taking me?

He rushes forward to catch up with Red Horse. He moves up beside him and almost goes past him, his eyes turned partly back at the burial racks behind them.

RED HORSE

No. Time takes us here. We go past this place. I am taking you to the edge of the world.

They come to the edge of the stage. JACK FORBES, impatient at the slow pace the old Indian has set, is about to pass him, when he stops abruptly at the edge of the stage. He flails his arms, teeters, looks terrified and jumps back.

Red Horse leans over and looks down. He seems very calm.

JACK FORBES

Jesus Christ! I almost walked over the edge!

He edges carefully up to the edge of the stage, very fearful and looks down. Obviously he is at the edge of a very high cliff. The ground is a long way down.

RED HORSE

It's a cliff.

JACK FORBES

I know its a cliff! You idiot! Why didn't you warn me!

RED HORSE

Since we came here to jump off it, it didn't seem important.

JACK FORBES

What!

RED HORSE

(Looking over the edge, smiling)

It's a good day to die.

JACK FORBES

(Looking over the edge also)
It's a good day to kick your teeth in!

RED HORSE
If you have a glass of water, I'll hand them to you. These are my just-for-the-camera-teeth. They always hurt like hell.

JACK FORBES
I've never understood the Indian sense of humor. I never could get the joke. If my arms weren't so tired, I'd offer to put you to bed with a shovel.

RED HORSE
It's no joke. If you are not afraid of death, let us jump to meet it. It will make us young again.

JACK FORBES
What do you think I am, some kind of idiot?

RED HORSE
You're white aren't you? Well, then I rest my case.

JACK FORBES
You're not funny. You're just a loud noise with dirt on it.

RED HORSE
I am funny. You are funny. Life is funny. You take things too seriously.

JACK FORBES
You want me to jump off a cliff and you TELL ME I take things too seriously?

RED HORSE
Yes. Otherwise you would look forward to the jump. There's a big laugh waiting at the bottom.

JACK FORBES
Listen arrow head! Alive is ALIVE but dead is DEAD!

RED HORSE
And an elk is not just a horse with a hat rack.

JACK FORBES
What? Sometimes I almost understand you. And then I feel real bad. I don't mind dying. I just don't want people to say I was crazy too.

RED HORSE looks over the edge again, as if estimating the distance.

RED HORSE
Are you ready to jump?

JACK FORBES
No you goddamn dumb Indian! I ain't gonna jump off any damn cliff!

RED HORSE
You say that now. But later, maybe in mid-air, you are gonna thank me for

thinking of it.

JACK FORBES

Do you know what you're talking about? Dead! You're talking about getting dead, falling dead, being dead! Dead!

RED HORSE

You'll get used to it.

JACK FORBES

Why did you bring me out here? Aside from the snappy jokes?

RED HORSE

This is no joke. This is the serious stuff. We stand out here and get right with the Great Spirit, then jump. Trust me. It'll be a hell of a good laugh right there at the end.

JACK FORBES

I don't believe in the goddamned Great Spirit! And if you think...

RED HORSE

Calm down. I'm gonna do the right magic things, I'm gonna take care of you. I'll fix it up with the Great Spirit. Trust me on this.

JACK FORBES

You are one big arrow in the ass, do you know that?

RED HORSE

(Lifting his hands to the sky)

Great Spirit, two Indians stand before you, asking your help.

JACK FORBES

Hey! What are you trying to pull?

RED HORSE

(Motioning him to be quiet, whispering to him)

Ssssh. It worked when I lied to get into the movie business, why wouldn't it work to get you into the Great Beyond?

JACK FORBES

(Grabbing his arms and pulling them down)

You can't fool around like this! This is the Great Spirit you're talking to!

RED HORSE

So OK, so I don't tell him every little thing. I figure from this distance, his eyes ain't so good.

JACK FORBES

You ought not to joke so much with the Great Spirit. He may decide you aren't funny. Also his funny may not be your funny.

RED HORSE

A fat lot you know. Manys the time, me and the Great Spirit used to close up the Saddle Up bar. Fact is, he can't hold his booze. I personally have drunk

him on his ass!

JACK FORBES

Right. You go drinking with the Great Spirit and you drink him under the table. Coming from a guy who wants me to dive face first off a cliff, this makes one hell of a lot of sense! Tell me, how do you tell if the Great Spirit is drunk? Does he belch up clouds or what?

RED HORSE

Well one time we was drinking like sixty and I could see it in his eyes he was knocked white...his eyes looked like two sheep droppings in tomato soup and I said. "Great Spirit you are drunk. You are so drunk you can't even see in a straight line."

He said.

(Voice slurred, imitating someone drunk)

"Am not!"

I said. "Prove it."

The Great Spirit looks across the bar and says

(Imitating a drunken voice)

"See that. There's a cat coming into the bar...see him plain as day, a ugly old black cat and he's got just ONE BIG OLD EYE.

And that's how I knew he was drunk when he saw the one eyed cat.

JACK FORBES

Huh?

RED HORSE

That cat wasn't COMING into the bar...he was GOING OUT.

Jack Forbes has the look of man who has been forced to eat spinach or something equally unpleasant.

RED HORSE

I also say, the Great Spirit's funny and my funny, are the same damn thing.

JACK FORBES

(As if talking to himself)

The worst of it is. I never can tell when he's pulling my leg or not.

RED HORSE

You just look out there and you'll see how absolute nut funny the whole damn world is! Like us both getting old and big important parts of us falling off like dead fenders on Indian cars and you know real damn sure, the Great Spirit got more jokes than Navahos got sheep.

JACK FORBES

(Still talking to himself)

As many times as this bastard has pulled my leg, I ought to be able to pole vault without a pole.

RED HORSE

(Hands up to the sky)
I invoke the Spirits!

JACK FORBES

(Sarcastic disbelief)
Shouldn't you be speaking in your own language? I mean if you're really talking to...

RED HORSE

No. It makes me sneeze.

JACK FORBES

Oh I get it now. The idea is, I jump over the cliff and I like it because anything would be better than listening to you.

(Looking down)
Yeah. Its looking more attractive by the minute.

RED HORSE

(Lifting his arms to the sky again)
Great Spirit! We are pretty damn well out of steam! We are all dead from the neck down! I just touch on a few things here, then over we go and you know all the rest. Well, this Indian Jack Forbes, he is a friend of mine but you know he is stupid as hell.

JACK FORBES

That's it. Flatter me in front of your friends.

RED HORSE

Yes Great Spirit, he is as stupid as fleas on a wooden dog!

JACK FORBES

Try not to oversell me. You'll have him believing I'm a relative of yours.

RED HORSE

(Looking skyward)
Today is the time of going away. Always for us Indians, is the time of going away.

JACK FORBES

Are you talking about leaving, dying or the end of the world? Not that I'm able to keep score.

RED HORSE

Both.

JACK FORBES

Which both?

RED HORSE

Both both.

JACK FORBES

Your math isn't any better than your English. Well hell, its getting pretty

late in the day. I guess we've had about all the comedy we can stand. What say we go back?

RED HORSE

(Looking down from the sky)
What do we have to go back to?

JACK FORBES

So life starts to look a little rocky and the only thing you can think of, is we should dive over a cliff! A guy can get seriously depressed hanging out with Indians. Let me tell you Red Horse, knowing you has not been all sweetness and light!

RED HORSE

You are just angry because you did not think of it first.

JACK FORBES

I give up.

RED HORSE

If you have anything to remember, now is the time to do it.

JACK FORBES

I had the kind of life which mostly I try not to remember.

RED HORSE

That is sad my friend. There must have been things that gave joy.

JACK FORBES

Like what?

RED HORSE

You had women.

JACK FORBES

They had me.

RED HORSE

You had fame. Everyone knew your name.

JACK FORBES

Me and Jack the Ripper. Household words. On the tip of every tongue. But will they still cash my checks after I'm dead?

RED HORSE

And you have me as a friend.

JACK FORBES

(Looking down at the cliff bottom)
Lately, even that is beginning to wear thin. This thing with the cliff for instance.

RED HORSE

I know. You should have thought of it first. I'm the actor and you're the

director. But you got to admit, its a horse of a different Technicolor finish!

JACK FORBES

Oh yeah. It'll make a hell of a final shot. Its great stuff movie-wise but I keep wondering where the hell the stunt doubles are?

RED HORSE

Here's your chance to show them French guys that like your films so much, that you really are an ...(stumbling over the word) an ought--tool, ottertour,...auteur. You even do your own stunts.

JACK FORBES

Hey! Don't get me wrong. I like the script! Its the casting that turns my stomach. I think of the kind of splash I'm supposed to make on the rocks below, and I know I'm too tall for the part.

RED HORSE

You'd be surprised to see just how short you become by the time you hit bottom. Believe me, you'll scale down to fit the part.

JACK FORBES

You're coming down with a bad case of dialogue.

RED HORSE

Think of it as a movie that really moves.

JACK FORBES

Who do I have to sleep with to get out of this picture? Somehow I just can't see myself as a smear on the landscape.

RED HORSE

Why should you be any different than any of your films?

JACK FORBES

Everybody's a goddamn film critic. By god, you almost got me convinced. For two cents, I'd jump.

RED HORSE

See how white people are! I start talking serious stuff here and right away, there you go bringing money into it.

JACK FORBES

Well you aren't any better. What was all this Indian mystical looking for your youth stuff?

RED HORSE

That's the part where we jump over the cliff.

JACK FORBES

Don't explain it to me.

RED HORSE

No need. You'll figure it out on the way down.

RED HORSE goes to the edge, holds himself as if ready to jump.

RED HORSE

Spread your wings my friend. Trust me. I say it is time to glide off into the sunset.

JACK FORBES

Aren't we supposed to kiss a horse first? I mean if we're going to remake one of my worst Westerns, we might as well go all the way.

RED HORSE

Quit fooling around. This isn't no damn Western!

JACK FORBES

Is it a horror film?

(Looking down, obviously bothered by their nearness to the edge)
From where I'm standing, that category gets my vote.

RED HORSE

This is where I give you back to yourself.

JACK FORBES

Its the way that you want to wrap the gift that gets me.

RED HORSE

Are you going to jump or not?

JACK FORBES

No. I think that is a definite OR NOT. Mind you, I've always been attracted to violence, I'd just rather see a punch than feel one. Besides, when I said I wanted to leave a lasting impact on the world

(Motioning toward the cliff)
this wasn't what I meant.

RED HORSE

Don't you want to be young again?

JACK FORBES

You're the craziest damn Indian I ever met!

RED HORSE

There you go again. The first little thing you don't understand, and you go call me a crazy Indian! Just because it doesn't make sense to you, doesn't mean it doesn't make sense. That's white people for you, if it doesn't fit in their hand, they can't find it.

JACK FORBES

And I suppose that's why you went to such great pains to tell the Great Spirit just how stupid I am? I don't know what Indians know so you offered me up as

.....

RED HORSE

Maybe the Great Spirit won't notice your skin is a little too light, but no way he's going to think somebody as stupid as you is an Indian. Trust me, I was

making excuses on your behalf.

JACK FORBES

I'd like to ram an arrow right up your...

RED HORSE

Why should I want one where you got one?

JACK FORBES

You're a goddamn piss-ant! You know that!

RED HORSE

Those are fighting words!

JACK FORBES

Your whole goddamn tribe is a bunch of piss-ants!

RED HORSE

Yeah. I know. But they're family. I have to make allowances. But what you are, is a horse's ass.

JACK FORBES

You know. One of these days you are gonna push me too far. One of these days and then

(swinging his cane in the air in a menacing manner)

KAPOW! I'll hit you so hard you'll have to stand on your hands to find your face!

RED HORSE

This is as good a day as any.

(Lifting his cane up, holding it like a club, taking an offensive stance)

JACK FORBES

You think I'm kidding!

(Gripping his cane firmly, making as if to strike)

C'MON.

They circle each other warily, canes raised, like very inept boxers.

RED HORSE

I hit you just once and it's all over for you!

JACK FORBES

Listen. If I swing and miss, just the wind from it will knock you down.

RED HORSE

I will probably knock you into yesterday!

JACK FORBES

I will probably knock you into last week!

They make a complete circle around each other, moving somewhat closer to the edge of the cliff without being consciously aware of doing so.

RED HORSE

One blow and your central goodie will journey to the spirit land!

JACK FORBES

My what? Oh yeah. Well, I'm going to hit you so hard the socks you don't have, will be knocked off!

RED HORSE

(Threatening)

Dead! That's what you'll be!

JACK FORBES

(Counter-threatening)

Dead twice! You'll be dead twice!

RED HORSE

Twice your twice!

JACK FORBES

Oh yeah!

RED HORSE

Oh yeah!

Each man seems to be waiting for the right moment to start but neither seems particularly eager to be the one to take the first swing.

JACK FORBES

I'll knock your eyes out!

They move closer to each other and it seems that they are finally going to swing at each other but as each begins to move his shoulder, each of them stops, clearly waiting for the other to strike the first blow.

RED HORSE

Goddamn it, so go ahead! When I whack you, your nose is gonna be where your ears are!

JACK FORBES

Go on you coward! What are you waiting for?

RED HORSE

If I hit you it'll all be over. I'm trying to make the fun last longer. Go on, hit me! Take your best shot!

JACK FORBES.

I'm the director. YOU HIT ME! We'll see how long the fun lasts!

They rush at each other but manage only to exchange places from left stage to right, dashing past each other. Neither one has shown any real movement to take a swing at each other.

RED HORSE

Your mother sleeps with goats.

JACK FORBES

(Shocked)

What?

RED HORSE

I said your mother sleeps with...

JACK FORBES

I know...I've got photos. And you're living proof that goats that sleep with people can produce offspring.

RED HORSE

Oh yeah.

JACK FORBES

Yeah.

RED HORSE

How come you don't...

JACK FORBES

I ain't angry enough yet.

RED HORSE

Me neither.

JACK FORBES

You're a lousy actor.

RED HORSE

You're a lousy director.

They stare at each other. RED HORSE shakes his head. They are obviously at an impasse.

RED HORSE

This isn't getting us anywhere. What's the worse insult you can think of?

JACK FORBES

(Thinking about it)

You ask me, I think I married it.

RED HORSE

Like I said, this isn't getting us anywhere.

JACK FORBES

At our age, we're too old to be offended by anything.

RED HORSE

OK, I'll count to three and then we both let go.

JACK FORBES

Sure. Use up all the numbers you know.

RED HORSE
ONE!

JACK FORBES
It's been nice knowing you.

RED HORSE
TWO!

JACK FORBES
Well nice is a big word.

RED HORSE
THREE!

JACK FORBES
More like a pain in the..

This time they really take a swing at each other. The canes smash against each other and the battle is joined. There is a frantic flurry of blows but they are standing too far apart to do much more than smash cane against cane. This wild flurry of blows, cane against cane, exhausts them both. The fight is fast and furious but not much more happens other than two feeble old men smashing sticks together like strange children playing a game.

JACK FORBES
(Gasping for breath)
Have I hit you yet?

RED HORSE
(Equally out of breath)
As weak as you are, how would I know if you had?

This last statement seems to spur JACK FORBES on, because he attacks with renewed vigor. They are expending a great deal of effort, dancing back and forth across the front of the stage. First one pushes the other back with the fury of his attack, only then to be pushed back in turn by a sudden frantic retaliation by the other combatant.

Both men are rapidly approaching exhaustion.

Their swings become more erratic. Now instead of their canes crashing against each other, now there are times when they miss completely.

They are just too old for this kind of physical effort. They can barely lift their canes high enough to strike out at each other.

They back off a few steps, staring dully at each other, as if trying to get their second wind. Each would like to give it up, but neither knows how to quit.

They both seem about to speak, their lips about to frame something but nothing can be said. It is a question of honor now.

Wearily, they jointly rush into battle again, but are so tired that they miss each other completely and go spinning dizzily past each other with the force of their swings.

This takes them right to the edge of the cliff. They end up teetering on the rim of the cliff, arms flailing wildly, both men nearly plunging over the cliff. Both canes fly out of their hands and land behind them.

Sudden concern for the other man, manifests itself in both of them. Simultaneously, they grab and try to yank each other back from the edge of the cliff.

They end up, arms wrapped around each other's heads, dragging each other about ten steps back from the edge of the cliff, giving them the somewhat addled appearance of the oddest dance couple that ever took to a ballroom floor.

For a second it seems like they are both engaged in a contest to pull each other's heads off. They stop moving.

They both let go, stand up and stare at each other, embarrassed.

JACK FORBES
Whew! That was a

RED HORSE
(Finishing it for him)
close call.

JACK FORBES
I'd say it was a....

RED HORSE
(Agreeing before he can finish the sentence)
near thing.

JACK FORBES
That was....

RED HORSE
Yeah...uh. Don't remind me.

JACK FORBES
Well....That was...

RED HORSE
OH yeah..Certainly.

JACK FORBES
That was....

RED HORSE
Oh yeah...You said it.

JACK FORBES

(Getting irritated as he realizes he hasn't finished a single sentence yet...speaking LOUDLY)
I MEAN THAT WAS....

RED HORSE

You can say that again!

JACK FORBES

GODDAMN IT! I HAVEN'T SAID ANYTHING YET! STOP INTERRUPTING ME!

RED HORSE just shrugs.

JACK FORBES

What I was trying to say was...It was lucky I was around to save your miserable ass!

RED HORSE

What the hell are you talking about? I SAVED YOURS!

JACK FORBES

Says who? You ungrateful bastard!

RED HORSE

Those are fighting words!

They both turn and look back at their canes. Then they turn and look at each other. Suddenly they both look old enough to be God's father. There is absolutely no fight left in either of them.

JACK FORBES

We already did that page of dialogue. Maybe we should cut to the finish. I feel too dead for words.

RED HORSE

You look too dead to skin.

JACK FORBES

I declare a truce. You see my ass around here anywhere? I think it got tired and fell off.

RED HORSE

Now you've REALLY said something.

JACK FORBES

Let's sit down before we fall down.

RED HORSE

It only took you 70 years to come up with a good idea, this is it.

Both men move forward and sit at the edge of the stage, dangling their legs over the edge of the cliff. They are exhausted. It shows in the way they slump down beside each other.

They sit there for a while, saying nothing, too worn out to talk, completely exhausted by their battle.

JACK FORBES

(Having a violent attack of coughing, which leaves him even weaker)
Do I seem to be breathing?

RED HORSE

Not so anyone would notice it. You'd have me fooled.

JACK FORBES

(Coughing)
I wish I had a cigarette.

RED HORSE

A thing like that will kill you.

JACK FORBES

Then, I wish I had two cigarettes.

RED HORSE

Cliff is faster. And better.

JACK FORBES

We aren't back to that again are we? Forget it. I am too busy thinking about breathing.

RED HORSE

(Looking down)
Suddenly, I remembered.

JACK FORBES

Well don't. Have a bowel movement instead.

RED HORSE

Our trouble is that we need to go out in style.

JACK FORBES

Our trouble is that we've both GONE OUT OF STYLE.

RED HORSE

That's why death is such a good idea.

JACK FORBES

Definitely you're having a bowel movement. Course with you, that PASSES for thought.

RED HORSE

Now's our chance to be legends in our own time!

JACK FORBES

Goddamn! Don't explain it to me. I don't want to die throwing up.

RED HORSE
You're afraid to let go.

JACK FORBES
You're godamn right!

RED HORSE
Letting go is the only way to hold onto everything.

JACK FORBES
What's that supposed to mean? I never know what the hell you are talking about?

RED HORSE
Because you never LISTEN. Words are important. All of that which made us men in this world is gone. To stay in that world would be a sad truth and a sadder death. Now there is much to talk about. There are things, words we must say.

JACK FORBES
It's just words. I've heard it all.

RED HORSE
But understood none of it. A word is like a wind and a thousand words are like a storm to the man who hears them in his heart.

JACK FORBES
I'm not stupid you know. I CAN understand something...provided everybody speaks very slowly and doesn't use any words bigger than a producer's brain.

RED HORSE
You are smart, just not wise. A wise man would leap at the opportunity to jump over this cliff.

JACK FORBES
I don't think I like the way you put that. But never mind.
(Looking down, shuddering)
I am beginning to appreciate my own lack of wisdom.

RED HORSE
In life, you had a passion for life in one hand. But is not wisdom, another hand with a passion for death? If we do not seek death, if we lie to ourselves now, if we think life is still ahead of us then we are like two blind old snakes touching our own tails and thinking we have found a new mate.

JACK FORBES
Look I'm tired. Everything aches. The movie is over and I feel like a man left only with a sense of having seen it. Nothing more, nothing less. Take pity on me.

RED HORSE
You want me to push you off the edge?

JACK FORBES
No! You goddamn idiot! I want you to put the four dollar dialogue back in your

goddamn hat and just tell me what the hell you are trying to talk me into!

RED HORSE

You and me. We jump over the cliff and become legends.

JACK FORBES

Are you serious about this?

RED HORSE

May lightning strike me dead if I---

JACK FORBES

Never mind the special effects. Why?

RED HORSE

You know why YOU should jump off this cliff. You just don't know how to say it.

JACK FORBES

(Definite, looking down the cliff)

I KNOW I don't know it!

RED HORSE

You don't know you know it.

JACK FORBES

Listen, I come from a long line of people who've never had any reason to jump off cliffs! You either have cliff jumping in your blood or you don't. Trust me on this, I am full of DON'T.

RED HORSE

(Shading his eyes, looking up at the sun)

This is traditionally the best time to jump. What do you say we get it over with?

JACK FORBES

I put cliff jumping in the same category as me getting pregnant. I mean there's a curiosity appeal to it, I grant you. I'll always wonder what its like to experience it, but they're both temptations I know I can always resist. Am I getting through to you? I hope so because I've had enough for one day.

(Rising stiffly to his feet)

I mean I've HAD IT. I'm going home.

RED HORSE

(Triumphantly)

Exactly. I knew you knew it!

JACK FORBES

(Shaking his head)

You've fallen off too many horses. It's affected your mind.

RED HORSE rises stiffly to his feet so that he stands beside JACK FORBES. He motions toward the cliff as if displaying a wonder for all to see.

RED HORSE

(Excited)

We jump home!

JACK FORBES

(Pointing down, as if humoring a madman)

Down there. That's home?

RED HORSE

Home. Youth. Everything that we were, everything that we will always be, is waiting for us down there.

JACK FORBES

And then after you fell off the horses, they probably stepped on you. That would account for it.

RED HORSE

It's hard trying to explain things to white people. It makes my tongue tired just thinking about it. Look, what happens if we leave here and go back?

JACK FORBES

You mean.....

RED HORSE

I'll ask them, I'll answer them too. I don't want to grow a mustache waiting for you to figure it out.

We go back and we do whatever dreary kind of business is left for us to do. Eventually, maybe not today, maybe not this week, but the day after or the week after, one and then soon, both of us will be dead.

And that's how the world will find us. Two old men who used to be something in the world long ago, now two old heaps of bones the world is tired of. They'll see us as souvenirs of another time and place, two bone piles who have lived past their prime. Antiques you white people call them. And that's the last image we'll leave them with. Is that the way we want our film to end?

JACK FORBES

No. It sounds bad but

(Indicating the cliff)

this looks worse.

RED HORSE

This is a very special cliff. There's no way to get down to the bottom.

JACK FORBES

Which means?

RED HORSE

We don't just die, we disappear.

JACK FORBES

I must be an idiot. I still don't get it.

RED HORSE

What happens in Hollywood when you haven't got a deal, when you haven't got a job.

JACK FORBES

You're dead.

RED HORSE

And when you're broke and can't convince anyone you can be trusted with the big money it takes to make a movie. When you can't walk the walk and talk the talk....

JACK FORBES

Just as dead...maybe deader.

RED HORSE

We aren't going to make any more movies are we?

JACK FORBES

Never.

RED HORSE

But they won't know it, if they don't see us die.

JACK FORBES

You mean....

RED HORSE

We become creatures of legend. They'll come looking for us. Somebody will remember. They'll see my face on a dusty old film, they'll see your name on the credits of one of our old disasters and somebody will say, hey whatever happened to....and they'll come looking. Idle curiosity at first. Later, the mystery will deepen. And when no one can find us....

JACK FORBES

Like flies to honey!

RED HORSE

They will not know we died like men. They will only know we vanished like images on film, like the lies we gave the world.

JACK FORBES

By god, you're insane!

(Thinking about it)

It's so crazy I'm beginning to like it! It's got story value! How will they remember us? Not as a toothless old Indian who's fell off too many horses...

RED HORSE

or a broken down old film director who spent his last years following horses around with a shovel.

JACK FORBES

But as two men alive only in the past and disappeared in the future!

RED HORSE

It's all down there. Everything that we were. We will become a magic stolen from the world. They will not remember we were old. When they can't find us, it will convince them, that the world has been denied some greatness of which only we were capable. They will talk of our lost talents as if we had once touched the face of God. They will talk about the film we could have made. They will mourn our passing.

JACK FORBES

But we wouldn't be around to hear the kind lies they'd be telling about us.

RED HORSE

But we'd have our laugh right down there at the bottom. That's something they could never take away from us. We failed at life but we'll succeed at death.

JACK FORBES

This is what you meant about making us young again. It's so crazy it makes sense. I was afraid of this. Its bad enough to die but I'm going out crazy too.

RED HORSE

I guess that means you are going with me.

Now they are both standing at the edge of the cliff. By the way they carry themselves, they are now considering it in a very different way. They step a little closer to the edge.

JACK FORBES

It's crazy.

RED HORSE

The kind of crazy if you are very lucky you have just once in life.

JACK FORBES

I always felt you were a bad influence on me. This is my reward for spending too much time with Indians.

RED HORSE

We die in one world and are reborn in another.

JACK FORBES

Do you really believe that?

RED HORSE

(Shrugging)

Call it a wild guess.

JACK FORBES

But we will die.

RED HORSE

(Cheerfully)

All over the place.

JACK FORBES
Will it hurt?

RED HORSE
It is the kind of pain you feel when you fall off a horse.

JACK FORBES holds out his hand to RED HORSE.

JACK FORBES
Take my hand in friendship. I don't want to fall off this horse alone.

RED HORSE
(Taking his hand firmly in his)
This is a movie first! Two men falling off one horse!

JACK FORBES
Are you ready?

RED HORSE
No retakes. We have to get it all on the first take.

JACK FORBES
(Looking down)
I've never fallen off a horse before. What do I do?

RED HORSE
Look down. When you bite the dust, it's best to know where to grip with your teeth. What do you see?

JACK FORBES
Clouds. I can't see the bottom. I don't know what I see.

RED HORSE
I see the wind. It is that same wind that swept us out upon the world in our youth. In that wind, we knew great battles and peace, great hungers of body and ambition, lies that were larger than life, truths so small they slipped through our fingers. We feasted and were fed upon. We were honored and treated like a dog. We found friends among our enemies and enemies among our friends.

JACK FORBES
What else do you see?

RED HORSE
It is not what I see that counts. I am the actor. You are the director. What do you see?

JACK FORBES
Hell I don't know! Maybe the face of a friend I didn't know I had. It's something I never looked for before. Funny how nothing else looks important now. I guess I've lost my touch for seeing the big picture.

RED HORSE
You haven't lost it. You've just started looking for the center of the world. Look harder.

JACK FORBES.

I don't see anything. Just the horizon.

RED HORSE.

Good. Let's aim for it.

It's better than nothing.

Hand in hand they go to the edge of the stage and begin to leap.

The stage goes black and stays black. The lights come up. They are gone.

Curtain.

THE DEATH MOTHER

Based on IN THE BELLY OF THE DEATH MOTHER by Craig Strete copyright 1988, Doubleday NY from the book DEATH CHANTS.

The lights come up and we see an old Indian woman standing in the doorway of a sparsely furnished shack. The interior of the room is dimly lit. Only she is clearly visible as the lights come up.

OLD WOMAN

(Looking up at the sky)

Sky Grandfather why is it on this day, when the sun burns like a fever dream animal, I have no feeling in me, no pain or hope or even a sense of loss?

Oh Sky Grandfather, I saw how things were in the darkened room this morning. Now, as I wait for him to die, to sing his death song, why do the shadows that walk through my days make me still and quiet within myself. Why do I not scream and tear my hair?

There is the sound of a hawk, screaming in the air above her.

OLD WOMAN

(Turning to listen, as we now hear the sound of chanting)

There is a strangeness in this house, in the air, as if something has leapt out of the grave and passed through the old stone walls.

Suddenly the chanting sound takes on the aspect of that of someone weeping. She steps through the doorway and the light comes up and we see an old Indian man crouched in a corner of the room.

OLD WOMAN

What's wrong? Why do you cry?

OLD MAN

I cry because I touched the faces of the dead. I felt their cold lips brush against mine.

OLD WOMAN

You should take the medicine.

(Staring at the bowl at his feet)

OLD MAN

I'll take it when my bones are two days dead and piercing mother earth, seeking cool water.

OLD WOMAN

It is late in the day and you are tired.

OLD MAN

It is early in the morning and I, just born, shall go dancing in a warm grave in the belly of the death mother.

OLD WOMAN

I think not. Everything is old and dying and long past in our world.

OLD MAN

The sun reaches across the sky, burning the day left to me. I have seen the last of it. I shall see it walk the sky no more. I've had a vision and the land of dark beckons me, old woman.

OLD MAN

(Lifting his hand and staring at it)

I can see the bones showing through.

He seems suddenly pleased by that. There is a strange, terrible smile on his face.

OLD WOMAN

It is now when I should feel something that I feel my face grow cold. It is now that my own heart goes distant like a star in an unfriendly sky.

OLD MAN

(Proud of it)

I am a stranger to you, as I have always been and will be. Such is my way.

OLD WOMAN

I feel nothing for you, only small sorrow for myself. My life has been empty, with no blood on my knife and no children to crawl across the cold years with their welcome gift of sudden and lasting warmth.

OLD MAN

Such a one as I am, such a being does not bring forth children. I am the beginning and the ending of things.

OLD WOMAN

You have taken my youth from me, stripped it from me long ago and the memory of it does not sleep easily, if it sleeps at all.

OLD MAN

Be done with your chattering. You destroy my peace of mind.

OLD WOMAN

You are too eager for death, old man.

OLD MAN

I welcome the growing cold, the cool hiss of it. Yes. I desire it greatly.

OLD WOMAN

You wish to be rid of me, rid of this life.

OLD MAN

Yes.

OLD WOMAN

Years gone by, your words would have stung like hail on bare skin, but I am past all that now. And you, you are a

ghost, a shadow even now, old man, but you have long been dead with the wanting of it.

OLD MAN

You can not look at the world and see the Great Mystery, therefore be silent.

OLD WOMAN

I stare at the world that has been ours and see the Great Emptiness. We should have had children! We could have chosen life over your magics, your strange journeys into...

OLD MAN

Be still! I have no regrets! I have lived as I willed it! Now is not the time to change the path, old woman. That time is past. You could have had a different life but you walked my road so let that be an end to moaning about it.

OLD WOMAN

Why have you always pursued me with your coldness, given deadening chase to the heart of me? Why always to me, I who have wished only to live with you and love you?

OLD MAN

Power was more to me than you. Power I could not always have. But you I always had.

OLD WOMAN

You were born with the dead. You are a grave shadow but yet with my old heart in your hand, I, now old and gray and used up, I am the loving one you murdered.

He turns his one good eye toward her and is shocked by what he sees, reacting visibly.

OLD MAN

The bird of death, long and black and eyeless, hovers above you and sand pours from the empty sockets of your hair-covered skull! I see it with my own eyes!

OLD WOMAN

The illusion may pass but not the reason for it.

OLD MAN

You!

(Shaking his head at the wonder of it)

As I die, so do you! I, who see many things no one else can see, did not know it!

OLD WOMAN

I felt the little knife of death in my chest this morning and knew the sun would not see me again.

The old man seems to shrink back inside himself.

OLD MAN

This is not something I had counted on. New thoughts, unwanted, spring to my mind. Feelings I hate within myself arise and overcome me.

OLD WOMAN

But if suddenly you regret everything you had ever done to me. If you wanted to ask my forgiveness, for which there is rightness to that act, still you could not bring yourself to do this thing because your heart walks on the ground. Your whole life was based on mastery, over me, over the world of shadows and men. If you let me see a tender heart, your true sorrow, I would gain mastery over you and that you could never allow. You are a man with many dark secrets, but the darkest, most unspeakable secret of all, is an old love for me, a love unspoken and buried like a war pipe in the grave of yesterday. A woman knows these things!

OLD MAN

Women are forever talking. There is no end to it.

OLD WOMAN

As you think of me do a thousand thousand remembered cruelties assault you, each memory like another bitter branch on your funeral pyre?

OLD MAN

(Angrily)

What is it you wish of me? Can you not leave me alone?

OLD WOMAN

Not forgiveness, no, that was not in you for the asking, but sorrow, that at least you could admit to.

OLD MAN

(There is a sudden change in his face and he slumps down, looking suddenly defeated)

Yes, old woman.

(The words coming slowly and painfully, bowing his head)

I've treated you badly.

OLD WOMAN

It doesn't matter

OLD MAN

I know you do not mean it. For women, always mean it.

OLD WOMAN

Should I sorrow over all the women you've had, the boasts you made to me about it, reveling in your own proud male blindness?

OLD MAN

Most of the stories were lies.

OLD WOMAN

Lies perhaps but I had believed them and been hurt, again and again.

OLD MAN

(Ashamed)

When the power eluded me, when the tantalizing magics danced just beyond my grasp, then and only then did I find solace in my women. But even then, I talked more conquests than I had made, I was young and that was my way.

OLD WOMAN

Lie or truth, the hurt was the same.

OLD MAN

You know all my old evils and cruelties. And there were many of them.

OLD WOMAN

Don't talk about them.

OLD MAN

I had my women and...

OLD WOMAN

Yes. There were women to share the warmth you could not give me. But why talk of it? That warmth has long since cooled, the fires are dead, and the arms that held you do not have you as I now have you.

OLD MAN

I traveled in distant worlds. It was something you could not understand. I walked with the night walkers, danced under strange suns, tasted strange burning water from hidden rivers no man ever saw. I could not take you with me. That at least you understood. You stayed in your own world and you were safe there. You were just a woman who had never traveled.

OLD WOMAN

And so you needed the taste and touch of strange women who would understand your strangeness in ways that I could not. I have heard the tale often but does it ever excuse the old hurts?

OLD MAN

Yes. Strange and beautiful women who ran with me to the far places, women without human names and I found solace and what little comfort from the spirit storms I walked in. So it was.

The old woman folded her hands in her lap.

OLD WOMAN

You knew a pretty woman when you saw one. There was one called Nihali. You talked of her often. You loved this one much.

The old man's eyes seem to cloud with memory.

OLD MAN

Yes, that one. It was in the heat of a now dead summer. She was a night child, half woman, half darkness. I burned in terrible fire for that one. But she is gone as they are all gone and I am here with you. So it is.

The old woman bowed her head.

OLD WOMAN

I still remember the hurt, old man.

His eyes flash with anger, anger more at himself than at her.

OLD MAN

You cried that season more than ever. You waited up for me late in the night. Your heart smiled when I came back to you but your eyes said something else. I always knew the feelings that lived in your eyes. They were truer than the heart which is often a great pretender.

OLD WOMAN

(Not looking at him)

I tried to understand.

OLD MAN

But failed, as you must, being only a simple living woman of one world. For what did you know of my great medicine? I was a Great Spirit Being and drank of things that other men could not taste.

OLD WOMAN

There was a time when I wanted to scratch her eyes out or drown myself in the river. That feeling is as dead as my youth. I told myself that what you did was nothing bad-hearted. That all men did it. It was a lie because few men

love night spirits but it comforted me, that old lie. In time, old man, I think I even forgot it was a lie.

OLD MAN

(Feeling the bones of his chest)

My time comes soon, old woman. I dwell in sorrowful ways upon the old hurts, but I was what I am and will always be.

OLD WOMAN

This is not time to ask forgiveness, nor can you speak for that because it is not your way. It is all long forgotten. You were good to me in your fashion and we had a life together. Out of strangeness we wove it and nothing else matters.

OLD MAN

It is not for you to forgive me anyway. I must forgive myself if that is what must be. Only I know what I have done. I have lain with the dark and terrible ones.

There is still an element of boasting in his speech for the old habit dies hard.

OLD MAN

The scars of that must survive in me always.

Something passes like a shadow across his face and for an instant he looks haunted, tormented by all the old treacheries.

OLD WOMAN

(Staring at him, eyes widening as she makes a discovery)

I see into your power and to the distance beyond it, to the end and the overcoming of it, once and for all time.

OLD MAN

You would go against me! You who have never felt revenge in the snake of your old woman's heart! Now you are to tell me your heart is ready to leap with fangs from your breast?

OLD WOMAN

And why should you not fear me for I am grievously wronged. Should I not strike back?

OLD MAN

Yes. But a feather can not break the wind. Leave such things to men. Women are no good on that path. Secrets are power and they fall to no woman born.

OLD WOMAN

(Obviously lying, the lie coming uneasily to her tongue)

You know me and you do not know me. Why I...I... had my guilty secrets, too.

The old man smiled, not believing her. He felt pain in his chest but the thought that she could possibly have a secret sin still made him smile.

OLD MAN

Keep your secrets, old woman. You might scare me with it and the shock would kill me.

He almost laughed at that. His mockery reaches her not at all.

OLD WOMAN

I must tell you about it. I don't want you to feel so guilty, thinking you are the only one who has gone down strange roads. It will ease your heart to hear it. I never had the courage to tell you before.

OLD MAN

(Contemptuous)

Nayee! You never had the courage to...

OLD WOMAN

(Interrupting him)

I slept with a bonepicker. With the night guardian who dances the bone dance in the sacred burying grounds of our people.

OLD MAN

You didn't do it!

(Waving his hands, as though shaking something away and his voice breaks like a traveling wind)

OLD WOMAN

But I did.

(Holding on to the lie, sensing its power)

A long long time ago. And why shouldn't I? Is the world of spirits for men only? A woman can live at night as well as a man.

OLD MAN

NO! NO! It cannot be!

OLD WOMAN

It was a night when you were with some other woman, witch, or human kind, I did not know or care and I was alone. It was a time of season change when the whole world is restless. Not like now, not like the burnt ashes of unchanging winter. It was night and the stars seemed to fall in my hair and the windows were open to the wind and sky and he who waited for me...

OLD MAN

When?

(Raging, not believing but yet..)

WHEN?

OLD WOMAN

It seems like only a few nights ago. Like last night and every night. I heard the birds dancing night love in the trees. I saw people passing on the distant road and every voice and sound, birds and unknown travelers seemed to whisper, 'Why are you alone?'

OLD MAN

You lie!

OLD WOMAN

I felt that if I stayed a moment longer by myself that my heart would tear itself out of my breast. I put on my best dress, the one trimmed with porcupine quill and elk teeth. I wore my white buckskin leggings. Yes and I went into the night and sought him out.

OLD MAN

No one would touch you!

(Screaming)

Who would dare my wrath, my great killing powers!

OLD WOMAN

Yes.

(Smiling at her own cleverness)

Your power was great and all men feared you. All living men. But the dead fear nothing.

OLD MAN

Who?

(In a rage)

Who was it?

OLD WOMAN

The night walker. The nameless one. He was young and old and ugly and handsome. He was all things and nothing. And he was strong and quick in the dark and he waited for me.

OLD MAN

LIES!

OLD WOMAN

He undressed me beneath the burial rack of my father's father. His hands were like ice on a frozen man's dead face but they burned me just the same.

The old woman unties her long braid, slowly unknitting the one long clump of gray hair. Carefully, like a young girl flirting, she does not look at him.

OLD WOMAN

He never spoke but he caught hold of me in the dark and in his strange embrace, I forgot you.

OLD MAN

You are lying!

(It sounds more as if were trying to convince himself)

You made it all up!

Slowly he rises to his feet, stands in front of her.

OLD MAN

He would not have had you. I know their ways and you had nothing he would have wanted, not power, not beauty.

OLD WOMAN

Oh, but he did.

She watches his face now and the desire burns in her to put her mark upon him. Her back straightens as if filled with a sudden surge of new found strength.

OLD WOMAN

But I did not know that you cared? Now you must know how I felt each night you were gone.

OLD MAN

(Looking stricken)

Why should I care? I do not care. In the telling, it does not become real to me, this...this...

(His hands shake)

this...imaginary night of long ago!

I still say you lie!

(Uncertain)

And even if you found him, even if you had night-seeing eyes to see the spirit being, he wouldn't have wanted you. They have eyes only for great power or great beauty.

OLD WOMAN

But I was beautiful that night.

OLD MAN

You were always ugly.

OLD WOMAN

To you, perhaps. But I knew how to make myself pretty for him. His eyes and hands told me a thousand times that I was beautiful.

OLD MAN

You are out of your mind. Approaching death, that terrible bird I see on your shoulder, hungry and shriveled, has driven you crazy.

(Seizing upon this idea)

Yes! That has to be it! That is the explanation, for it was never your way to lie. Never!

OLD WOMAN

Is there madness in my manner or speech or do you just so greatly fear my truth?

OLD MAN

You were drunk. You dreamed it. It did not happen, you only think it happened.

OLD WOMAN

(Shaking her head)

One night, if it had only been one night, then yes, I could have been drunk. One night even that I could have dreamed. But it was many nights, a hundred, a thousand, how many I do not know, for we were both hungry in the dark. Like that, drunk or dreaming, it is only possible that it happened.

The old man begins to weep.

She is silent, not looking at him.

OLD WOMAN

How does it feel to sense something breaking inside yourself as it was broken in me, shattering into anguished fragments. To have dreams rise and die and to have memories of nights long ago like spears through your heart.

OLD MAN

How can it be, that in a few words, a lifetime of mastery, of dancing unaffected above the shallow things of everyone else's life seems shattered. Like an eagle with an arrow through its wings, I fall from the sky and your earth which has never been mine comes rushing up to meet me. Now I do not know who I am any more.

She remains silent, continuing only to not look at him. He touches her arm with one trembling hand but she seems not to notice.

OLD MAN

What are you thinking about? Do you hear what I say? Answer me! For the first time I feel that I do not know what is in your mind. What are you thinking about?

OLD WOMAN

Why..er..about him..Yes, that's it..And I shall think of him until the end. He was all I had.

The old man reels back as if struck.

OLD MAN

You make it up. You want to frighten me!

OLD WOMAN

Why should I frighten you?

(Serene, unconcerned)

We both did what we wanted to do.

OLD MAN

You were mine. Mine!

(Weeping)

OLD WOMAN

Once...but not only yours.

Death comes into the old man, creeping outward from the heart. He has time for only a few words.

OLD MAN

You've ruined me.

He slips to the floor, no longer able to stand up.

OLD MAN

Now I am afraid of death. Afraid! Always I thought I understood the living. That I saw into their hearts and knew all that was to be known. But now, I know I have never known you, never known the secrets of your heart! I never had mastery over you. Never! Never mastery over you who I thought to be life itself. And now I am ruined. Ruined! For if I could not conquer life, then death will certainly destroy me!

He looks up into her eyes and sees the answer.

OLD WOMAN

Yes.

And it was the most terrible word he has ever heard in his life and it is the last word.

She watches in the dark, waiting to die beside him as soon she must

OLD WOMAN

I can die happy now with lies on my lips. I, who had no need of them in life. I feel young, almost reborn.

She straightens the arms of her dead husband, as if trying to make him rest more comfortably in death

OLD WOMAN

You are mine now. You died belonging to me and to no one else, not to yourself, or to the spirits of the far country. I wait for death happily now, for the heart of woman is only happy when it owns all it has conquered.... And my magic has been so strong,.... that I have conquered the world..... I have conquered you...the only world I have ever known.

FADE TO BLACK

KNOWING WHO'S DEAD

Based on KNOWING WHO'S DEAD copyright Craig Kee Strete 1988, Doubleday NY from the book DEATH CHANTS.

The lights come up on three Indians, center stage, two young men and one old man. The stage is bare. TATO and ELK BOY are carrying NATCHEZ, the old man, cradling him in their arms between them. They are making halting

progress directly toward the audience.

TATO

(Struggling with the weight, almost stumbling)

How far is it to the burying ground?

ELK BOY

I don't know. But dead people sure are heavy.

TATO

Dead people ought to be like tires. That way you could let the air out of them and they'd be easier to carry.

ELK BOY

Or you could leave the air in and roll them to the grave. Course with our luck, we'd probably have a traffic accident.

TATO

I feel like we are climbing a hill to oblivion.

ELK BOY

Ah, yes, oblivion. Other Indians have been there before.

TATO

And more will follow them. Sometimes the world is built that way.

ELK BOY

We must be getting close to the middle of nowhere. Do you think it is possible that we have been carrying this dead old man ever since the world began?

NATCHEZ

(Opening his eyes)

I'm not dead yet.

TATO

Yes you are. Shut up.

NATCHEZ

(Appealing to them)

I'm not dead. No really. I'm almost well.

Their forward progress is now halted. They stand at the front of the stage.

TATO

Stop making trouble. You ought to be glad we volunteered to carry you.

ELK BOY

Some people! You lug them to hell and gone and what thanks do you get, nothing, just at the last minute, somebody wants to start an argument. That's old people for you.

(Shakes his head, looking displeased)

You just can't do them a favor!

NATCHEZ

(Trying to be reasonable)

Look, I ought to be able to tell whether I am dead or not.

TATO

Listen old man, if we let everybody decide everything for themselves, what kind of world would this be?

NATCHEZ

A far better world than...

ELK BOY

Stop your damn complaining. We are doing all the work. We are doing all the sweating. All you have to be is dead. It's easy. There's no work involved.

NATCHEZ

Easy! Who cares about easy! Let go of me!

(He begins to struggle in their arms and it's all they can do to hold onto him)

You can't bury me! I'M NOT DEAD YET!

ELK BOY

You opinionated old people are always making trouble.

(Almost stumbling)

You have to have everything your way or you complain, complain, complain. Listen at your age, you're lucky to be dead.

NATCHEZ renews his wriggling in their arms. It throws the young men off balance. They trip and all three fall to the ground. NATCHEZ is the first to recover. He jumps to his feet, stands over them.

NATCHEZ

See. I now present an even more convincing argument. I am standing up. Could I stand up if I were dead?

TATO

(Dusting off the seat of his pants, helping ELK BOY to his feet)

Must be rigor mortis. I've heard of cases like this. Yep. You're stiff as all get out old man. You ain't really standing up. You're just stuck in the ground like a war lance.

NATCHEZ

So watch this, stupid young man and be convinced. I will amaze you with my living elasticity.

To refute this, NATCHEZ immediately bends over.

ELK BOY

What's an elas-picity?

TATO

I don't know. Its either one of them fancy mixed drinks white people make to rip the back of your head off or he's got a tattoo that forms words when you flex your arm. You never can tell with old people. Its just one stupidity after another.

NATCHEZ

If I had rigor Mortis, I couldn't bend over like this now could I?

They stare at him in puzzlement. For the first time, doubt begins to show in their faces. They seem to be considering the idea that the old man might not be dead. NATCHEZ tries to straighten up but his back is locked in place.

NATCHEZ

(Wincing with pain, tries to move but can't, looks embarrassed)

I'm stuck! You young men are gonna have to help me!

TATO and ELK BOY exchange a knowing look.

TATO

You'd do anything to get out of this, wouldn't you?

ELK BOY

Some people just don't know when to quit. They just make up any little thing and we're supposed to buy it. Jesus! What does he think we are, a couple of tourists?

TATO

First he says he isn't dead, but he is, now he says, he's stuck. He's a shameless old liar is what he is, if you ask me.

ELK BOY

Yeah. I heard about corpses suddenly sitting up on their burial racks. Muscle spasms is what it is, or they ate something that didn't agree with them and its just gas. Probably he ate stinking burritos and now the old faker is having one of those damn gas attacks. Guy just don't know when to quit lying. He's not stuck, he's just folded up with gas.

NATCHEZ

(Straining, his face contorted with effort)

I TELL YOU I'M STUCK!

ELK BOY comes over, grabs NATCHEZ's arms from behind, puts his foot on his back and tries to straighten him up. The old man shrieks with pain but nothing happens. He cannot straighten up.

ELK BOY

OK, I'll give him this one. He IS stuck. That's the most rigorous mortis I've even seen.

NATCHEZ

If I was telling the truth on this one, I could also be telling the truth about not being dead. How's that strike you?

TATO

Quit fooling. You're too dead to skin.

(Bending over to stare in the old man's face)

Now you're really giving us a hard time old man. How are we going to bury you at a right angle?

ELK BOY

(Looking unhappy)

I tell you old people are nothing but trouble.

(also bending over to look at the old man so that all three are bent over in the same position.

Well, he sure isn't going to fit in the coffin this way!

TATO straightens up, moves closer to the old man and then suddenly tries to push the old man's head down.

TATO

Maybe I can fold him.

NATCHEZ

(Shrieking)

You maniac! I can't bend that far!

TATO

Maybe if you come over and help me. We'll both jump on his head and our combined weights ought to....

NATCHEZ is so angry he rises up of his own volition.

NATCHEZ

You got me angry now! A dead Indian is not a good Indian! My vengeful spirit is going to break your noses!

ELK BOY

At least he admits he's dead now.

TATO

He's a hard man to convince.

NATCHEZ

(Outraged)

I am not convinced!

TATO

Let's discuss it. I'm willing to discuss it.

ELK BOY

That's very Indian of you.

NATCHEZ pulls out a knife. He stabs TATO with it. TATO clutches his chest, falls back and then collapses to the ground, dead.

NATCHEZ

Now who's the dead one?

ELK BOY looks at the old man, then looks down at the still body of TATO. He seems puzzled.

ELK BOY

Well, I have to admit. Tato LOOKS a lot more dead than you do.

NATCHEZ

That's because he's dead and I'm alive.

ELK BOY

(shrugging)

Hard to say if he's dead or not. Maybe it was just something he ate.

NATCHEZ

Let's pick him up and carry him to the burying ground.

ELK BOY

It seems like a reasonable thing to do.

They pick him up, carrying him in the same manner as NATCHEZ had been carried.

ELK BOY

He really looks dead. How is it that you know who's dead and who isn't?

NATCHEZ

(As they begin to carry him offstage)

I am old and have death always on my tongue. I know the taste. Not quite as refreshing as cold beer but a taste all the same. And you...you are young....as young as I was once...and the young do not understand death.

As they are about to leave the stage, TATO speaks.

TATO

I'm not dead.

ELK BOY stoops over, so that one hand is free to pick up a large rock. He lifts it menacingly over his head just as they are about to exit the stage. ELK BOY raises the rock and strikes.

NATCHEZ

Why did you hit him with that rock?

ELK BOY

Sometimes you just get tired of life being.....one big argument.