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Decolonizing Playwriting through Indigenous Ceremonial Performances

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DECOLONIZING PLAYWRITING THROUGH INDIGENOUS CEREMONIAL PERFORMANCES

BY

JAY B MUSKETT

BA, Theatre, University of New Mexico, 2013
BA, Media Arts, University of New Mexico, 2013

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts
Dramatic Writing**

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Decolonizing Playwriting through Indigenous Ceremonial Performances

by

Jay B Muskett

BA Theatre

BA Media Arts

MFA Dramatic Writing

Abstract

This dissertation attempts to express the importance of storytelling within the Indigenous Theatre framework. It does so by first analyzing the progression of the writer's unique upbringing and analyzing the influences of story upon an indigenous identity. I will also attempt to describe the aesthetics of Native Theater along two lines of methodology which includes praxis described and developed by Hanay Geiogamah and Rolland Meinholtz. I will also explain how the script *1n2ian* tries to follow those concepts of Native Theater to create a ceremonial performance that uses a blending of both methodologies.

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Introduction

*In beauty I walk
 With beauty before me I walk
 With beauty behind me I walk
 With beauty above me I walk
 With beauty around me I walk
 It has become beauty again
 Today I will walk out, today everything negative will leave me
 I will be as I was before, I will have a cool breeze over my body.
 I will have a light body, I will be happy forever, nothing will hinder me.
 I walk with beauty before me. I walk with beauty behind me.
 I walk with beauty below me. I walk with beauty above me.
 I walk with beauty around me. My words will be beautiful.
 In beauty all day long may I walk.
 Through the returning seasons, may I walk.
 On the trail marked with pollen may I walk.
 With dew about my feet, may I walk.
 With beauty before me may I walk.
 With beauty behind me may I walk.
 With beauty below me may I walk.
 With beauty above me may I walk.
 With beauty all around me may I walk.
 In old age wandering on a trail of beauty, lively, may I walk.
 In old age wandering on a trail of beauty, living again, may I walk.
 My words will be beautiful...*

Walking in Beauty: Closing Prayer from the Navajo Way Blessing Ceremony

The term, *Story*, sits firmly on the adolescent side of a person's timeline. For some reason the word conjures up an image of being young. The word itself feels and sounds a little bit misleading as it hides behind that youthful shield which does not fully express the wide encompassing reach and importance that comes with it. It hides the important contribution it has had within the framework of humanities evolution. As an adult there is a tendency to lose the word in favor of a more concrete term as children tell stories, not grownups, and by doing so, the word has lost some weight in the search

for a type of urgency which include synonyms such as, article, fiction, and narrative, which all seek to legitimize the act for adult usage. All those words, as grown up as they are, lay under the wide umbrella of story, but not one of them encompasses the power and imagery that that lone word implies within itself.

Stories and the need to express them are the means to strengthen and preserve culturally sensitive societies that are on the decline but also heighten the perception and conviction of the individual. Stories are a meeting of generations according to Linda Tuhiwai Smith who states, "The story and the story teller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story," (Smith). Through stories the people of the past still retain a voice in which to guide, comfort, support, entertain, and teach. All vital elements for a working community.

When is the last time you heard a really good story? We are bombarded by story from everywhere today that it has subtly taken over our lives which has somehow diminished its presence and importance as a lot of modern story is labeled under the dismissive term of entertainment and while that is and has always been an aspect of story, there is so much more to it. Entertainment carries with it the connotation of luxury and in effect is deemed unnecessary. It belittles the idea that people, have a need for it. Story has marked humanities progression from primal urgencies to intelligent rational philosophies. Story made the world less scary and more manageable and developed the first communities which banded together to work towards a common goal. As humanity developed and evolved intellectually, story did the same. It became

more personal. More Individual and more suited for a society in which the idea of inclusion is blurred from a community perspective to that of an individualistic one. It is this change, brought and forced onto another society that insures community stories that hold up the collective as one diminishes in favor of the individual whose depiction is that of oppressed by the community.

The story of the individual is important, but it is only important if that story leads to a bigger one in which the individual either shuns, enters, or creates a new perspective and way of life. This, I hope is one such story. My story. Of how I write and what I write and the progression of my craft. However, that is just part of the whole. I cannot proceed to talk about how I improved as a writer without talking about how I developed as a human being. The two go hand in hand and if I must have a grand thesis involved then it would be thus; story and the act of performing a story are essential elements of self-identity that dictate the progression of the individual throughout their life. By restoring story to those who have none or think they have none is to prolong their existence and through time possibly expand the group's wellbeing and sense of self-worth. I can only prove this through one case, my own. So, strap in, because we are going to go back in time, back to the eighties.

Chapter One: Origins

I do not remember the first time I started writing. I remember the first lessons of reading and pronunciation of vowels and combination of sounds between letters but actually using those combinations for myself, would not come until much later. I remember lessons such as that of the leading vowel being kicked in the butt by the

preceding one regardless if there was a consonant in the way or not which makes it yell out a certain yell. I remember being forced to do homework again because I would take a ruler and run a straight line down the page and then place the respective loop where it was supposed to go. Lower case d's and t's, h's and l's, was it all it really worked for, but it was considered a cheat, so back I went, forced to write each letter individually, like a sucker. The woman who taught me I owe a lifetime of gratitude as once I could decipher and speak the scribbles known as the alphabet, no library was safe from my perusing and loitering.

The first stories I remember writing were heavily based upon a clear obsession of the times and there was nothing more influential in the mid-eighties than that of the release of the Nintendo Entertainment System. I remember at the local *K-Mart* there was a super advanced display within the electronics section that featured the technological advancement with a hands-on demonstration. I would spend the entirety of my time in that section playing *The Legend of Zelda* until I was dragged away either by my mother or that of security so that others may get the chance to play upon this new wondrous technological device.

I cannot tell you the hours I spent playing games growing up. I absorbed their stories over and over again that they became a part of my own upbringing and my perception was that I would rather be a part of their world than that of mine. Despite the cultural warning of allowing too much videogaming and the effect it had on developing thought, I was engaging parts of my own mind through story that evoked the rudimentary aspects of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero's Journey*. I was isolated a lot as my

parents had to commute off the Reservation (Rez) and into town for work and a lot of the time it was just me taking care of myself. I did my fair share of exploring but not too far as there was a real danger of being eaten out there in all that wilderness. Coyotes and Rez dogs are not to be trifled with. What little exposure I did have to the outside world was supplied by books and television and the world outside my own always fascinated me so in effect I devoured as much outside world stories as I could get. It made me a bit of a media hoarder in my adult life as the intention is the same now as it was then, which was to experience as many stories as possible and live vicariously through as many lives as time permits.

I knew I had the capacity to write stories, but I did not think that anyone would be interested in reading them, so it was always something I downplayed. The first story I remember writing for myself is of course a knock off of *The Legend of Zelda* and of the protagonist, *Link*. The story was about an elf who had to go into this mysterious cave filled with traps and monsters and at the end of which there was a dragon hording an enormous gem. I remember getting to the end of that story and then feeling that I had no place else to go. Dread began to encompass the story because I did not want it to stop, I did not want that to be the end. It did not seem right, so to combat that I wrote, "*The End*," followed by three questions marks, which I thought added depth and tension for the reader and most importantly anticipation at the prospect of going back for another adventure.

There is one other significant moment during my years at *Washington Elementary* that factor into who I am. It was third grade reading hour. An hour in the

afternoon our teacher would read to us as we sat at our desks, some hunched over, heads laying across their folded arms while others leaned back against their seats, eyes either closed or aimed at some invisible point within the space. We had gotten through *Charlotte's Web*, *Stuart Little*, and other critically acclaimed books aimed at young people but none of these I found interesting. The last book of that school year though changed my life. I am about thirty years past that moment, but that piece of literature has stuck with me tighter than any story has. Wilson Rawls is the reason I write, as I fell so blatantly hard in love with *Where the Red Fern Grows*, that after reading it, all I wanted to do was to tell stories and possibly own a couple of hound dogs. He too can share some of the blame for the way I am and as you can see, I have no problem pointing a finger at a dead guy.

Time passed, and I kept writing and reading. Nothing I have written survives this part of my life as my middle school years, I found myself downplaying everything about myself as it was a time when you were not supposed to be good at anything or face the mockery and cruelty of mid-school children. Teachers recognized I had something, a spark but I know now too that they also saw the other half of that, which was a lack of drive. Part of that recognition, I realized years later was that I was one of the few Natives who did what they were supposed to do. I was labeled one of the good ones and damn if that did not affect me all the way up to this point. There as a bit of pride to take in that but truth be told I did not want to be there, the want to go to school, the child enthusiasm had left me early as they were teaching me things I did not want to

learn, or rather, things I was not interested in learning. To escape I read, *a lot*, and when that became monotonous within itself, I stopped going to school all together.

It was during one of those boring classes in which I wrote my first scene. I remember sitting there having to write and I wished that there was a form of writing in which I only had to write the dialogue. I knew I was decent at that and it was the only real aspect of writing that I really loved. Writing out the voice, giving it life, as a means of making up for the lack of my own voice. It felt right, it felt important. I remember writing it on the back of the notebook, not within the actual paper itself which as I reminiscent, leads me to think that for some reason I had judged it as whimsy and not worthy of marking it down on real paper. This form did not belong with the other material I wrote as I did not know how to frame the work in any context. It was just scrap to me, notes and musings and nothing more.

Surely even at that age I had to know what theatre was. I knew what performance was and I had to have seen someone on a stage at some point in my early life, but no memory comes up as an example. Theatre did not exist in my life nor that of my Rez friends. Not until my eighth-grade trip to Washington DC did I see my first show in a real theatre. It was Ford's theatre which is the same theatre that Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in by John Wilkes Booth. The show was *Kudzu* and involved an alien. I do not remember too much about it except that I was trying desperately to sit next to my crush and at one point the alien comes gliding in near the end of the play in lit up neon rollerblades. I do not even recall if I knew what kudzu was at the end of that play.

Something from space, right?

I knew about performance because I knew about the dancing during that of ceremonial, which takes place every August in Gallup. To me, performance was dancing. Performance thus, was a religious element, and only for those who had put in the time practice, and research to fully comprehend all its meaning. I was a contemporary Indian and on the Reservation that implies "*whiteness*." I was okay with not diving deeper into my culture. As I tried to fit into the wider and what I thought at the time, a more glamorous looking world, I was denying myself cultural self-knowledge and self-respect. I did not realize, and a lot of others did not either that we were all being brainwashed and a lot of it was voluntarily. All the stories that come with popular culture were all showing me people who I aspired to become because they all did such wonderful earth-shaking things. These heroes were all brave, all suave, all men, and all white. There was a correlation to follow and boy did I. I did not want to be different, I did not want to be Native, and what I was seeing as representation seemed to confirm what would happen to be if I kept choosing to be, "Native."

I am hard pressed to think of anyone who was not white that I would consider a role model. I was too young to appreciate my father, which I know is a part of the story of youth and I did some mean things to make him feel bad because when I saw him, all I saw was this stern old man who never really opened up to me in any real way. I know now it was exactly the opposite as the fault was within me. Most Natives I did see, I tended to look down upon which was both influenced and unwarranted judgement. I did not realize that we shared a common trauma, a common story. The people on the street, the ones who look for themselves in the bottom of a bottle and other various

substances had the same identity issues I did. I attributed those who could not get it together as victims to the past which attributed to the excuse of their self-pity. I saw our stories as similar, yet here I was and there they were. I did not realize how lucky and how hard my parents worked both to financially and emotionally support me in my endeavors. It was not until much later; a lot longer than I would like to admit that I realized the story of our lives which were highlighted in tragedy were distorted.

The story of the Indigenous is a tough one to go through as the woe-is-me story is certainly valid, however if you look at the tragedy from another perspective a different story emerges. A story that is about resiliency, discovery, hope and balance. Upon Freitag's arc the Native population have faced the crisis and now the choice must be made. What are we going to do about it? I chose to be a warrior, but as my tattoo suggests, the arrows of my ancestors have evolved to that of a pencil. My choice of modern weaponry.

Chapter Two: Influences

My dad was an artist who never got to be an artist as I was an unexpected child. From an early age my father decided to spend his time learning the various skills needed to raise a child and unfortunately art at home on the Reservation was not a priority. The art my father had done in the past however was everywhere, tucked away under coffee tables or the tops of dusty bookcases. My memory is filled with little figures made of ceramic or wood and odd doodles within the corners of bare plywood which were our walls, lying in wait to be discovered.

My grandmother and grandfather from my mom's side, which we lived right next to, did not really encourage any other type of profession other than the nine-to-five grinds. It is the Rez, you take any job you can and out there and do what you can. You hustle. The idea of intentionally choosing a field in which there is no regular bi-weekly check did not sit right with my grandparents nor with my mother. The only one who I felt was in my corner and gave me the opportunity was my dad. *Treat your craft seriously*, he would tell me. I did not know what he meant at the time.

Art and life are both part of Hozho¹ within the Navajo culture. You cannot really separate the two. When I say my family does not have any artists, what I mean is that there is none who solely practice art as a means of income. The one person who did create art was my grandmother who is long retired and restless. She took up an old hobby that she had to give up in her youth, silversmithing. She set herself up a little desk in the hallway leading up to the bedroom, along with all her tools. Every day you can find her scrunched up in that tiny space tapping away or blowtorching pieces of metal.

My Grandmother's art is as pure as one can get as she does not create as a means for herself, although I know she feels a sense of satisfaction within her creations, which is the gleam in her eye, that we all have. Her art transcends beyond the need of coping or expressing. No, she creates for the joy of others. Spreading beauty to those around her as she walks through life just as Hozho instructs. She who bends metal to her

¹ Robert S. Drake's attempt at translation for Tom Holm, PhD at the University of Arizona American Indian Graduate Studies Program in his explorative writings in *Native American Religions and Spirituality*, states "Hozho" as: ... the Concept of Balance and Beauty. Consideration of the nature of the universe, the world, and man, and the nature of time and space, creation, growth, motion, order, control, and the life cycle includes all these other Navajo concepts expressed in terms quite impossible to translate into English.

will, gives out her creations free, unmarked of her signature. Turquoise bracelets, rings, earrings, squash blossoms. Diné Jewelry, the symbols of the people, each one a story within themselves. When asked why she does not mark her creations her reply is that she does. She breathed life into them, but the design, the beauty was already inside so what right does she have to claim that as her own. There is nothing that I can create that will ever match up to any of these.

I was not cut out for college my first go around. I did not know how to work the ins and outs of this bigger society. I discovered that everything was a straight path and it is all just constant movement. "*Here,*" is a fleeting moment that is underappreciated while "*there*" is a constant journey to get to. It was hard to find Hozho within this and I flunked out my first semester. It turned out to be the best thing for me as I went out into the world and learned skills, learned hard work and how necessary it was and that chances came about only once as well as the fact that much of the world would expect twice as much work from me than others due to the color of my skin. I worked day labor, digging ditches, moving piles of rock from one place to another and back again. I worked graveyards at a service station that had a reputation of being easy to hit due to how close it was to the freeway. I worked thankless holiday hours for very little pay and recognition which would not lead to anything beyond what it was. What kept me going was during the free time I had I attended a small community college and learned various aspects of storytelling, both on page and visually.

All the hard work payed off. I graduated... with an Associates and was recently laid off and unemployed. Three months of nothing. Not a bite. I lost my car, which made

me lose priority spot at day labor as people with cars could ferry workers to the bigger construction sites which paid more money for the referrals. I was living to survive, and when I lost my apartment, I had no choice but to return to the Reservation. The world was telling me it was time to move on, return home. Regain Hozho. Returning to the Rez supplied just as many opportunities as the city did only I was home with family so there was very little threat of being left out. I was lucky in that regard, but that did not lessen the humiliation one feels as what set in was a crippling lack of self-worth. I failed. Like a lot of others. The question was, what next? *Burger King* is always hiring, sno-cone stand, herd sheep, go nomadic? Possibilities, right? I enrolled at UNM the next semester partly because I did not want to be on the Rez. I intended to finish up with a Bachelor's in media arts as I was a self-proclaimed film guy, but something funny happened on the way to the cinema. I enrolled in a theatre class.

My great grandfather on my dad's side was a real Indian. I mean a real, *real Indian*. My dad's Indian, *this cat*, I'm telling you, was a real *Indian*. He was a famed moccasin maker. All over the four corners, people requested his gear because they were the most comfortable and the hide would last through the wear and tear of numerous seasons. It was said that he only took the hides of the swiftest deer, ones who ran among the wind so fast that wind could not catch them to ruffle their fine fur. They say that warriors who wore his moccasins walked in silence, even in the snow and that the mud would dry itself rather than mark up the pure white abalone soles. His skill was undeniable. He was considered a master of his craft.

It was my grandmother at the age of twelve years old, who would ride the four corners of Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico to deliver her father's gear. Year after year she did this and it was thought that she would take over his trade. She didn't, instead through her travels she discovered a love for animals and a love for weaving. My grandmother was fierce, the toughest woman that had ever walked the reservation. She lived the old life, her and her husband. Traveling from camp to camp along with the seasons with a herd of sheep. They had a lot of kids, *a lot of kids*. When the only entertainment is the radio which only got clear reception four hours a day, they found very productive ways to pass the time. Some of those products grew up, had products of their own. Grandma Muskett was not perfect, but she descended from warriors which means I am descended from them as well.

To be a warrior is more than an excuse to fight and be combative. It is a means to live. We live through our creations. Our children and our art are ourselves. My grandmother's woven rugs were just as much a piece of her as her children. Traditional woven rugs with elaborate patterns, each one unique, and each one telling a different story as they were created during specific periods of her life. She wove her creations and gave one to each of the grandchildren. Mine hangs upon the wall, in sight, always within sight. When she could not weave anymore and was bedridden, she did not let that stop her. The patterns continued and shaped themselves beneath the shades of her eyes. Her fingers would unconsciously weave invisible strings into elaborate patterns that only the Creator could perceive. She never stopped weaving.

Chapter Three: The Theatre

Discovering theatre was like discovering heroin. And although I have never tried heroin, living life and meeting folk, you learn weird things. A user I had met once described using heroin for the first time. *"It's like coming home."* He had said. *"Warm and gold."* Discovering theatre was like that. It was like coming home. Despite this, my path to earning a BA in Theatre was a difficult endeavor. I was old, much too old I thought, and it definitely showed as I was desperate for friends, for some type of connection. I felt disconnected to everything. I thought I had failed within my first dream and I was not sure I was going to make it through another round so I looked for anything that would help me find some contentment. I went to theatre classes and threw myself at the work. I meant to learn the practicality of the craft as I thought that the skills were close enough to that of film that I could jump the aisle between them both. I worked on productions and while there is a bit of community there, I still felt very much, the odd man out. It was all a very loose connection at best but still a connection nonetheless. I went to class and worked but it was all very unceremonious. I did not bother to walk. Graduation did not feel like an achievement because I did not really feel a part of the theatre community.

I moved back to the Rez. The depression that set in was a lot harder and heavier than the first time. My attempt to bring theatre back to the people was an overall failure. The town was not conducive to it nor were the people. Why, is something that I am still trying to figure out but a major portion of the disconnection that Natives have with Theatre is the lack of representation. Theatre is not something that the people can

believe they can be a part of, yet. There was a prejudice there that I was not sure how to confront and due to that, the lack of participation was disheartening. I slid. *Far*. I was on the verge of giving up and accepting an entry position within the Health Education Department of the Indian Health Service, which I had abandoned once before to pursue my bachelors at UNM. It was not a bad job, it was just what I did not want to do for the rest of my life and those kinds of jobs are the type that people get comfortable with and do not abandon. When my mother heard I had turned the job down, *ooh boy*, well home was a mess for a while. I used a lot of the tension as writing material. It was my father who once again put things in perspective. "*Work, until someone has to pay you.*" Not his best is what I thought at the time, but damn if the man didn't prove himself to be right.

The problem laid in the process I had established. I was trying to lead the outside world into the Rez. What I should be doing instead is leading the Rez into the wider world. The only way to do that was to write. I would write and expand our borders to *include* rather than *exclude*. I went to work and followed my father's advice. Treat my craft like a job. We had a storage unit close by that was next to the sheep corral that I thought was perfect. Every morning I would walk to this storage unit with a handful of books, paper and pencils. Four hours of reading, four hours of writing. It was more reading than writing at first as winter had set in and the place had no heat, so I would pace, bundled up with a book in my hand around the desk to keep warm. Later I was able to get a tank of propane into the little heater which gave me the opportunity to sit and write without the worry of freezing to death. It was in that little shack that I learned

the discipline of being a writer. I conducted rules for myself. Write every day. That was the one I stuck to, no matter what. That is the one that is going to lead me places and that is the one in which my creations were guaranteed a life and sure enough the projects stacked up. I was building a library of work.

My first play was a little paranormal piece about priests who were killed on the reservation who ring a phantom bell which calls a paranormal scientist from across the country to investigate with the hope of finding actual proof of the thereafter so that he might contact his recently dead child. There was a lot there and someday maybe I will revisit it. The second piece turned into what is now called, *Life Within the Cracks*, and is about the dislocation of the individual on both a physical and mental level. I also completed a novel that will never see the light of day. That piece really was to see if I could maintain a story for that long. I did, barely. There was also a screenplay for a science fiction film involving spacecraft that flew through space and dove deep into the water. Best of both worlds, but super expensive and extremely impractical for any studio to take a chance and I have no interest in making it. *Do you? Or do you know somebody? ...no?* For a year I wrote and honed that routine which eventually lead to an exercise component as well as practical grammar work that I thought I needed. I was taking myself to school and the discipline was paying off. I felt at peace within my creations. Accomplished. I was creating a product all from within. My own being created these worlds. The world then sent me a gift for my hard work. A chance. An opportunity.

I once tried to trace my family history. I got as far as what the Navajo's called the *Long Walk*, a forced walk by US Cavalry to a reservation hundreds of miles away. Those

that survived were forced to live on land that did not support them. They had to learn how to be subservient and when the dead began to stack as high as those who did not survive the walk, they wondered if it would be better to join those that were left behind and shot as a means of mercy. There is no Muskett, registered at Ft. Sumner, but then again there would not be. My last name is not a normal Navajo last name nor is it one of the common last names given to those registered. My last name stems from a warrior's name. A long-lost name to one who fought against the Calvary and slayed his enemy and took his weapon. A long-barreled musket.

I had sent *Life Within the Cracks* to several people once it was completed and the feedback was that of surprise. They all knew I was a hard worker but to learn that I could also write and that I had opinions and experience within the craft blew some minds. A mentor had just moved to Santa Fe and was tasked with making the Performing Arts Department at the Institute of American Indian Arts relevant again. He asked if I wanted to come along and help him. I jumped at the opportunity. I was tasked to put together a three-hour playwriting workshop as a way of getting my foot in the door. I did and while I was conducting that workshop I learned I had a knack for expressing big ideas and making them manageable as well as being able to listen, give quality feedback that encouraged students to explore not just their writings but also themselves. I was offered a position which ruffled some feathers as some learned that I did not have a master's degree and technically I should not be doing what I was doing. To keep my job, I would have to enroll in a program. Along with that I would also have

to change up my pedagogy to reflect a more Indigenous mindset which to me at that time, pointed to religion.

I did not go to church very often as I was growing up, instead what my family did was breakfast. Every Sunday my Grandmother, my mom and my aunts would make breakfast for the family. Those breakfasts were filling up more than my stomach, it was filling my soul. The reason for being, the reason for continuing, all in one room, sharing the most important meal of the day. It gets you going, gives you drive and were meant to get us through the week as a lot of the conversation acted as debriefing, discussing, planning, plotting in some cases, and basically informing one another that progress is being made within our Hozho. It also acted as reminder of what was important to one another. Passion was encouraged, up to a point and we were expected to do things that either made us a better human being or something that helped the world be just a little bit better. It was humbling and encouraging. That is what those breakfasts did, they reminded us we were special because we are all so different. It was our story. That was my church growing up and it has been hard to find that as an adult.

The only thing that has gotten close to that feeling and idea is theatre. Theatre in my opinion is at its greatest when it has something to say about the individual within the context of their society. When the wishes and dreams within a hopeful consciousness sees and questions in the mirror the visceral primal tendencies of their own humanity. This duality of being, physical and psychological are always at odds in some way. The traits that kept us alive when the world was teeth are still alive in the form of subconscious actions which keeps the drive going. *Purpose*. In whatever form

that might be for the individual. I did *this* to get *that*. When a play or story explores these issues, it is an attempt to bring that duality together. The best way to display it as such is to focus on the individual as they are. Theatre does this. For me, good theatre is that which strips away the layers and get to the core of an individual or of an idea.

Chapter Four: The MFA Program

I came into the program with two objectives for myself. The first was to collect as many different prompts as possible so that I have plenty of stuff to work on when it was only up to me to create the things I create. Second was I wanted to train myself to be able to write a lot quickly and coherently. A third objective set in as I was in the program and that was to get some of my other work into other people's hands so that I can improve upon my other writing skills. I do consider myself a playwright first and foremost but learning how to be a generally good writer in multiple disciplines ups my chances of paying the bills and very soon paying back these loans. *If anyone asks, I'm good at writing, digging ditches, and moving piles of rock from here to there.* Being accepted into the program was a good thing. I am a better writer because of it. Almost a master, some would say, but with that said there is still room for development even at this stage of the game.

I once tried to get a job as a blogger, because someone mentioned it was a good way to develop that writerly voice, so I was intrigued, and the first order of business was to figure out what a blogger was. I am still not sure, but I did write a few things and put them up on the *big ole' wide world web* and even got a couple readers that were not my mom. I had a gimmick because I thought I needed one. Netflix once had a review ratings

system and I was for a moment obsessed with reaching number one. I managed to break into the low three figures until Netflix was like nope, *your opinion does not count*, and changed the review system and purged all the reviews. I kept it up regardless through as this venture was an attempt to discipline myself but even my love of movies could not get me to sit down and write. What I did write and post lacked serious dedication as any reader could tell I was not really into it. Regardless I kept at it, because there was progress but none of it was really productive as I was mostly doing it to say I was doing something.

Eventually I had enough samples of my writing which I was able to send people. *See, I am a writer, I wrote all that stuff, right there. With words, and whole sentences even. So, what if it is misspelled and looks like a first draft, it is a free flow conversation with the universe about art man. It will blow your mind, when you learn what I thought about Transformers .* Not surprisingly I did not hear back from any of the places I submitted to. Somehow, I managed to console myself and sulk in the realization that I was lacking something that I was not sure how to fix on my own. I did not have a writerly voice, and I am supposed to be a writer. What I did manage to put together was writing that was not fun to read or listen to. I did not know how to write a voice, I did not even feel I had one within my actual life so how was I supposed to develop this one? Well, how do you get to Carnegie Hall? I knew the answer but wasn't that what I was doing? Practice? I was writing, putting in the work, how come I was not getting better. I had to look in the mirror and admit that I could not just rely on my beauty this time. I

had to develop a personality. Then I had to learn how to write with it. I looked at my beautiful self and despaired.

A lot of what I do, I feel is, channeling empathy and reframing it upon a point of view. The characters I encounter and write about are just voices, strong voices that split from my natural internal voice. I was too comfortable exploring the various voices of story that I was not sure the writerly voice I hoped to develop would be genuine. What I was trying to do was be clever and cheeky but that was not me, not at the time. Framing this writerly voice as internal is the reason I could not write with what I felt was real authenticity. The writing was not talking because it was not meant to communicate. It was meant to fill space, which no one took the time to examine because it was clear that I was not saying anything worth listening to. I did not have a writerly voice, which eventually killed the half-hearted dream of being a blogger. It was not until I started writing for the program that I realized what I was looking to develop in the first place; my performance voice.

The performance voice is like the writerly voice, but he is not as smug. He does everything with a bit of flair, panache, as they say. This voice channels the passion and importance a storyteller feels when telling a story. It is my version of the oral tradition and it is what I hear as I write. I am not personally convinced that this could act as a performance within itself if I so choose to perform it but the writing flows much more smoothly when I am wearing that proverbial top hat. It certainly is a style and is fun to engage, also a little creepy in some way, but this is something I would not have been able to develop without the program's exposure to the multitude of ways in which

playwrights have broken the rules so that structure, tone, and narrative work and conform to the story and not the other way around. It was good to see the plethora of differences.

Revision work was also extremely valuable to me as a writer. It was through this process that I feel I improved the most as I had always been content with the first draft and the completion of a story. It did not feel right to me to force my hand so hard during the revision. It was uncomfortable, and truth be told once I am done with a story I move onto the next one. There was no going back, because there was nothing left to learn. The various elements of revision tactics I learned made the process fun. I am not saying that I can do it all on my own, but I have tools now that allow me to approach the story from various angles of thought that produce results. It creates action.

I expected to write a lot which I did but what caught me off guard was the academic exposure which forced me to think on a much grander scale and to think critically of the whole method of theatre. I did not do well in those classes, outside of having the ability to facilitate questions that took up time, but I was glad I had gotten the exposure as it helped immensely when I started to develop my own work based upon the pedagogy of Native Theatre. As I learned more, and the scripts progressed I learned why theatre and performance attracted me. The personal connection I felt that eluded me as an undergraduate was reframed as I read the thoughts, wishes, hopes and theories of other Native performers and writers. It was clear I was looking for the wrong connection and that while personal ones are nice to make, it was a cultural connection, one that spoke to my being in a much clearer and confident voice, that I found comfort

in. That voice I discovered, performance or otherwise, is the voice of my people, my ancestors who did not know how to be heard until now.

Chapter Five: Native Theatre Pedagogy

What is Native Theatre? Well, I am glad you asked. Native Theater is defined by a few qualities which differentiate it from that of European theatre. However, to fully understand the various aspects of Native Theater, the importance of the oral tradition in which it stems from must be explored and understood. Storytelling, time, space, community are important within the framework of Ceremonial Performance which chooses to focus on Indigenous rhetoric, praxis and philosophy, but first let me tell you a little bit about what it means to be Indian.

I am going to let you in on a little secret, *I am not really Indian. I mean I am, I swear, really. I can show you my CIB. Toss a piece of paper on the ground and I will cry.* I have always gone through my life feeling not Indian enough for the reservation in which the old timers spoke a language I was encouraged not to pick up, and too Indian for everyone else who lived off the reservation. I was caught on this line that borders the two different worlds of the Rez and for the lack of a better term, *"American."* What's more is that it felt like I was not allowed to venture too far in either direction. I was to stay on that line, which was always a position of questioning the Indianness in me. It was not until much later as an adult that I understood that the label, is still just a label and only has the power that I give it. The choice was imaginary and very real. Of course, I am both an American and a part of the Indigenous community. I can embrace both cultures despite being told I could not by various factions within them. The problem lies

in that one of the cultures seems to be very large and encompassing and the other very personal. It also does not help that the encompassing culture at times has at times developed an active agenda of quashing and assimilating the other culture.

AnnaMaria Pinazzi states in an essay entitled, "The Theater of Hanay Geiogamah," that, "to be Indian is just an idea which a given man has of himself. According to Geiogamah, what distinguishes an Indian is essentially an extremely delicate balance between "excessiveness" and "control," (Pinazzi). Dropping out of college right after high school points to this excessiveness that was too much me. I was expected to be able to function in a society I was clearly not ready for. I was never told how to be an adult. There is no manual, *is there?* It was all too much to do, with too many steps and no direction or guidance on how to proceed. With so much excessiveness how can anyone find any control? This lack of control leads to a lack of purpose.

I always felt like there was something to search for and that until I found whatever that might, that I would remain in a constant state of unbalance. Pinazzi defines this feeling as such, "The white man's ways have disrupted the Indians' knowledge of themselves and others, leading to that lack of control... To be an Indian means therefore to be able to restore harmony between oneself and others, between man and the animals, the earth, the universe," (Pinazzi). What she describes is the lack of Hozho which would manifest as this constant feeling of being not really who I should be due to a loss of control, the same loss that many of my ancestors have felt and seen firsthand. The loss of control and ability to make our own choices and create our own

destinies is a hard feeling to keep bottled up. The world was telling me I was Indian and therefore was not worthy of attaining anything more than what I had but if I was to embrace my Americanism then it would be all good. Turns out that is a lie also. That is the Indian that America wants. Confused and helpless.

This lack of focus applies also to the art that an artist creates, and it certainly pertains to the material a writer writes, especially when it comes to that of who the intended audience is. Diane Glancy writes,

I want to write a play for the Western theatre because that's where the world is, yet I want it to be an agency for the Native universe, the mix-blood universe I know, caught between past and present, tradition and assimilation, preservation of a way-of-life that has all but vanished while forging a contemporary worldview in the process of being created.

...there are two main issues in the translation of Native American work: external and internal. The external translation is the translation of one culture into the understanding of another. How do I communicate the Native world to the non-Native, while maintaining a Native aesthetic and perspective? How do I translate the Native experience without losing the spirit of the Native experience in the translation? (Glancy)

The rub for most Natives as Glancy suggests is that there seems to be a lack of ability to explain and understand the perspective of one subculture group to another. What she does not express is that this happens within the individual as well.

I will admit when I decided that *1n2ian* was going to go a certain way and buck some of the mechanics that I had learned through the semester within the program, I was nervous. The main question was what would the reception be? Could I achieve an actual Cultural Performance through the script and how would it even be recognized as such? Geiogamah again steps in and supplies an answer, "In Judging an Indian play, readers and viewers should keep in mind that the most important function of the Indian dramatist is to communicate with his own people," (Geiogamah). I would not know if I achieved this until after the production, however the cast has done a great job of acclimating to the structure and the story so that is definitely a good sign being that most of the cast is Indigenous.

Because *1n2ian* followed the confines of ceremonial performance, it brought up the question, can a nonnative understand and translate accurately the sub textual anguish and disconnection of Native America from the rest of the country? I was worried, but I was confident enough in the story itself that it could do the heavy lifting of at least being entertaining to a general audience. I had decided not to make any more major changes to the script except for minor adjustments to dialogue and simplifying some of the narrative. I knew that the person who came on to take on the task of directing would require a full locked text which exhibited human moments and not to rely too much on translating cultural ones. There would be a bit of journey in learning by the production and to make major changes would be unnecessary and at worst detrimental.

A defining aspect of theater is the recognition of drama in which the western approach very much differs from that of the Native perspective. Geiogamah states,

For any drama, an action must take place, and a response-a result of the action-must occur. This usually produces a conflict of some sort. For Indian people, I said to myself, that action, and the resulting conflict, has been the struggle to survive, a centuries-long dramatic effort to stay alive, to hold on, to not be vanquished, to hang on to something... our ability to hang on, to trust each other and not give up, in spite of poverty, alcoholism, and oppression... survivability is an abiding and continuing sense of responsibility, of duty, and of thankfulness that we were ever born, that the Creator let us have life. (Geiogamah)

Through this definition the drama and the conflict of Native Theater can encompass many different possibilities, but the center piece would always be that of survival of the individual and that contemporary native stories are going to hinge on that of the disconnection that the individual feels within the life that the Creator gave them.

Ceremonial Performance is meant to negate the power this disconnection has upon the individual as a means of learning and healing. Ceremonial Performance is formatted so that it facilitates both the story and the connection inherent within theatre. Geiogamah goes on to say,

The primal function of getting a story, a point, across, of educating and enlightening people, goes a long way back in human history and is the

basis of ceremonial performance because it involves the community... Participating in a ceremony, we become aware that the elements of culture are in us, embedded in us, that they are inserted and ingrained into us at birth and are there when we need them. A sense of trust develops, trust in ourselves and in others, trust in our heritage and the strength and beauty of it... The dynamic creative process of ritual becomes a component of the ceremony itself and contributes to heightening both the occasion and the sense of occasion, with both the performers and attendees sharing the heightened awareness.

(Geiogamah)

Geiogamah goes on to list three crucial elements needed within ceremonial performance which include, ceremony, spirituality and ritual.

The ceremonial element comes from the meeting of both the performers and the audience. The ritual element is that of the steps within the play/story/ceremony that occur. Within this context the three elements laid out above are considered as only one element; the play as in the theatrical text, the story that is explored by the text and the ceremonial, which is the connective tissue and spiritual link to the people. The inclusion of the ritual is the process for both parties to follow and experience.

The spiritual element is the hardest aspect in which to conjure but once it has then if the creativity of the story is rooted within the community, then it facilitates all the ways in which the elements can achieve its objective. Geiogamah writes, "The entire

creative content of a ceremonial performance-the themes, issues, and dramatizations- originates within and is cultivated from the life of the tribal community, from the tribe itself, from families and clans and various groupings, and from individual members,” (Geiogamah). By keeping the creative aspect rooted within the community, the story stays relevant and there is an easier prospect of utilizing the spirituality that is present within the act of common thought, action and recognition of the thin transition between body and spirit that encompasses all living beings. Once this element is engaged, then sharing between the individuals is ready to commence.

The voice is the easiest way in which two people can share. Diane Glancy writes, “The voice or spoken word is a living energy. A force field. A creator. It has spirit, mind, and heart. When a story is written, it suddenly is trapped by written letters on a static page. The voice is killed, or at least caged... The whole history and past of a tribe is there in oral tradition,” (Glancy). Long thought primitive, the oral tradition of passing down stories from one generation to another is perceived as a fragile system, which is not the case at all. Evidence of this perception dwells within the belief that something is being lost between the constant shifting of the story from person to person. On primary inspection, the oral tradition only seems that it lacks the certainty that the written language affords in preserving the entirety of the information given. Yes, it is true that stories have the potential of being lost and those that survive through preceding generations go through a deviation in which elements of the original story are changed or potentially omitted entirely. This is, in fact, an asset of the oral tradition in that the change to the story keeps it relevant to each generation of people. The People do not

serve stories, the stories are set up so that they always serve and evolve with the needs of the people. The stories leave a potential for growth and are themselves flexible. The stories do not provide all the answers that life asks but those that are passed down should be considered as the means in which one can find those answers in the way that Hozho intended.

The oral tradition also serves another purpose. Its strength building on a psychological level. To say that my great grandfather's moccasins connected the wearer to blend in with the natural world either through silence or durability speaks of the idea of a level of harmony and balance, a non-disturbance of the natural doings of the world. To say that something that was created by someone in such a way suggests that there is a balance within that creator. A sense of peace by skilled mastery in which practice is needed to perfect the performance of making and being. The story of my grandfather is the build of character, how much he had, and how much he put out into the world. Our history is who we are. Telling our stories, our way, the way it was meant to be told is a necessity as it returns a little bit of our dignity. A little bit of our pride. A little bit of ourselves. To be able to record these stories, the culture's as well as my own personal one's is both a blessing and a necessity. These same reasons are also the reasons I practice theatre. It is a part of who I am. It is as necessary to me as Sunday mornings.

Once the story has been decided on, the task of translating that what has been founded by the oral tradition to that of the written form is difficult to do. Diane Glancy states her process approaching dramatic writing as using the, "wreckage and loss of the past, and weaves it with a selvage, which is the act of preservation by its presentation

on stage. Native writing is a combination of retrieval, restoration, and preservation of the culture in all its layers... and how it can be presented on stage, a vehicle that it does not fit because Native writing is round, or circular, and a stage is usually rectangular.” (Glancy).

The clash of Native storytelling and that of the Western tropes in which theatergoers and practitioners are most familiar with can kill the potential of many stories before they even start. This is the challenge in which Indigenous artists struggle as they are told the craft should be constructed and compiled a certain way, that does not make sense within the ideological framework of the individual. This is a fundamental difference in that the individual explorations with one protagonist’s point of view does not touch upon the community in which that individual is brought up in. It is this singular representation that implies that the individual and the needs of such are more important than the needs of the community. Glancy goes on to say, “when I am in the first stages of telling a story with one person talking, my voice is not alone. There are other voices, old voices, riding upon the voice of my voice and then the voices of the characters in the play. Even though the play is original, and something outside the actual history of what was there, that I was not there to know, the history of Native life is there, even if a facsimile, which is running far ahead, and I am unable to catch it.” (Glancy).

Chapter Six: Methodologies

There are two established Methodologies which I came across that framed the basic structure of the thesis play. The first is that of Rolland Meinholtz who was an

instructor at the Institute of American Indian Arts. He was tasked along with Rosalie Jones, a dancer and Louis Ballard who specialized in music to introduce theater into the Native art curriculum within the school. What they did was search for the roots of theater within Native cultures and came up with some guiding points that are still used in many Native Dramas today. It was Lloyd Kiva New who started the initiative, as he believed in the power of theater and the potential good it could do within Indigenous hands. He wrote, "that young Indian people must be trained in the fullest degree regarding all aspects of theatre: the history of universal forms, the technical aspects, acting, speech, and movement. Against this understanding they must then be led to examine Indian culture for that which is theatrical and then find ways to interpret those unique aspects for contemporary audiences," (Kiva).

What the trio of Ballard, Jones and Meinholtz discovered was that "Indian Theatre in performance would present a series of short events. A single unified dramatic piece is not representative of Indian ceremonial performances." (Meinholtz). In order to capture the essence of these short events within the text *In2ian*, was to include the requiems that for themselves work as short testimonials of a traumatic event that leads to a devastating end. The requiems can stand alone, however, as the story progresses then the thread that is the issue can be revealed. This relational cause and effect are there to facilitate those familiar with the western tropes of theatre and grounds the individual while maintaining its intent within the ceremonial framework.

Another element I used from Meinholtz is that the use of scenes that both "non-naturalistic" and "non-scenic." (Meinholtz). The point of both within the context of

Indian Theater is the recognition that nothing can beat the power of the imagination and that it is an asset itself to be used for the advantage of telling the story. By using the term non-scenic, the intent is to use the fluidity of the imagination to maintain a connection between the various elements of Native Performance. The most important of which grounds both parties to that of the environment which in itself could be seen as a motivating factor within the story. This element combined with that of “all time is in flux and always susceptible to transformation,” are the heart of the requiem scenes that is the thread that keeps the balance of the piece stable amidst the jumping through time. The audience gets to see what happens to both mother and daughter who are separated through time and space but for little snippets of brief interaction that set the inciting incident and the climax in motion. Nearing the end of the piece both mother and daughter are reunited as the timelines converge, not only on the physical level but also that of the spiritual level, as the woman we knew as characters become archetypes of the Diné religion.

Meinholtz goes on to state, “The arc of a dramatic climax in our theatre is flatter and is of longer duration than in Western theatre.” (Meinholtz). He goes on to make a confusing comparison of the image, however his point is the same. The perception between the two cultures, Indigenous and contemporary, of what constitutes heightened stakes amid the dramatics greatly differs. This was a harder element to translate within the text especially for one whose influence has been of western story tropes. I tackled the creation of the climax to make it personal and mountainous such as Freitag’s arc to that of the personalized characters within the piece, namely Dezba and

Dana. However, since the overall story is that of the MMIW, the ceremonial performance climax is reached and represented by the origin story and the requiems. I did this because there is no suitable solution to this conflict, and to represent a happy ending in either climax would be disingenuous.

The second methodology is that of Hanay Geiogamah whose work and analysis are a foundation which other Native artists emulated within the conception and the creation of Native Theater in the United States. The creation of a Native Theater to Geiogamah felt essential but where to start and how to conduct such an endeavor seemed secondary to the idea of the grand experiment of just doing. "We were not consciously thinking about the lofty concepts of ritual, or spirituality, or ceremony, and especially not about rituals within rituals or ceremonies within ceremonies. We didn't allow these terms to complicate the work and instead trusted our instincts," (Geiogamah). Once I knew what the script was about, there came an extra depth of responsibility, knowing that the concept of ceremonial performance has particular elements that it has to have. How one reaches those ritualistic elements within the script is subjective but the overall idea to do so means that described rituals could be conducted wrongly or with wrong intent. As creator of the script, how does one do that, knowing the responsibility? The same way Geiogamah describes. He goes on to say that trust is needed in the other collaborators that will come down the line to help bring the creation to life. This is hard to do but a major point of ceremonial performance is that the people who partake in the ceremony each take and learn their own path within.

To Geiogamah, what he calls traditional theatre and performance, which later becomes ceremonial performance, “This style of traditional [ceremonial] performance would incorporate music, a special kind of text, dance, costumes, masks, stories, and characters in myths and legends, integrating ceremonial form,” (Geiogamah). *1n2ian* has aspects of all these elements within the text, however I felt that I was not outwardly ready to tackle some of these elements personally. I did not feel like I had any authority to write specifically about these events. What I did do, however, was to leave enough open space for interpretation within the text such as having the requiems include a moment of song and music that can be interpreted in multiple ways. This would allow those with more knowledge about these specific cultural moments to get more involved up to the level of their expertise.

As much as I use Geiogamah’s framework, philosophy and aesthetic for Native Theatre, there are some fundamental differences in my approach. One such as difference is that I am not making theatre solely for the indigenous. I am making theatre for everyone. Sure, there are specific aims taken so that within the piece, both audiences, indigenous and otherwise, will take something different from the story. Having to live in two worlds for most of my life means that I can also speak to those worlds in a comprehensive way. With *1n2ian*, I tried two objectives. The first and most pertinent was to get the general audience to understand just how big the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women problem is. The second, aimed at the Native audience was to introduce a bit of closure to those who have lost someone or at least give them the opportunity to do so within the production.

While most of this research into Native Theater was conducted independently of the mechanics introduced within the program, I would have been unable to understand why the differences in mechanics between Western and Native Theaters are important and what they uphold as important if I had not gotten the exposure and practice through the writing. It made me ready to take the next steps of conducting more in-depth Ceremonial performances which I would have not known how to do so otherwise.

Above all, the program has made me a better writer and dare I say, a better person. *Hey, I saw you roll your eyes and yes, I am serious.* I am a changed person because of it and the proof resides within the things I created. These creations would not exist in the way they are under any other circumstance. The art I created is shaped by my progression as a person. I happened to go through what is described and I feel like it was, a midlife crisis. Or at least, I really, really, hope that's what it was because it was very hard on me, and I cannot imagine what a real-life mid-life crisis would feel like if that was not one.

My own subjective consciousness and the idea that my thoughts, my stories will be lost in this infinite bigger picture frightens me. It is so big a picture that the only way I can wrap my head around it is to imagine the universe as one big infinite etch-a-sketch which will eventually be shaken and wiped away. Hozho claims that as part of itself also but it does not lessen those sleepless nights when I was wondering if I was thinking my final thoughts on the off chance that I did not make it through the night. Why wouldn't I make it through the night, I cannot surmise but it was/is a real fear. I was terrified for a while, at first, not being able to feel what I call the "*now*." It is now, the sensations one

feels, the sounds one hears, the thoughts one has at this precise moment in time. That gives the ability to “*be*.” The thought of losing all that and becoming a “*was*,” is very scary to me. What scared me most about nonexistence is that as a living person I would eventually have to see the people I love unconditionally enter this nothingness before me. Death would take their love away from me and when it was my time, my love too would be taken away. It shook me, and I could not afford a fancy red sports car so what I did was write and write and write some more that eventually the realization set in that I was so afraid of dying because for the first time I was comfortable and finding worth in being me.

Our environments certainly do shape us, and the fact that the program was there meant it was a part of me coming through that. There are still some deep dark nights, but they are more and more sparse with every play I write, every story I tell, every memory I mine. The plan is to write myself immortal and hope for the best. I am of the belief that the art is there so that you can try to understand the artist. My voice, my story matters and while not every story is or could be considered good. I can attest that at least it is genuine. All the writing I put together are aspects of the world that I am trying to understand myself. There is a subtext of discovery and realization within each of my plays, sometimes expressed outwardly by the characters and sometimes subtly expressed and realized by only the writer.

Chapter Seven: The Work

I had two plays under my belt and limited theatre experience when I entered the program. The first play still sits in a filing cabinet, waiting for me to someday go back to

it. The other one became *Life Within the Cracks*. What follows next is a brief blurb and description of the various pieces written while in the program. This is not the full list but the ones I feel that have a life beyond the confines of paper and were more than just exercises, although I got a lot of great stuff out those too. Every chance I got I tried to compose a new story with complete ideas in form or in thought and a lot of what came out was directly influenced by me trying to cope with teaching full time and being involved in the program full time. Time was always an issue and to a lesser extent, the distance also was something I had to fight, so there were times when I was writing for the sake of turning something in rather than that of trying to engage personally within a story. That is not to imply that I did not try my best as I approached crunch time assignments as training opportunities in case I did manage to sacrifice enough goats to get hired on as writing staff. Graduating is not the end of anything. It is the start actually and a goal of mine coming in was to push myself to create and write under multiple conditions as well as write up different voices, points of view etc. as close to demand as possible. I juggled as many of themes and plots and characters as I could and am overall happy with the results. There were a lot more successes than that of dead ends or nonsense. That is not to say that what is left off this list has no merit, it does, for sure, I am just unsure what that might be exactly. Those are surprises and puzzles for future me.

Life Within the Cracks (Full Length)

This play is the most personal of the ones I wrote as it captures the constant waiting and augmented time that encompasses the reservation. The story is about

connection, how we need it, and how it is necessary for an individual to progress in the face of loss, doubt and self-pity. This was also the play that the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival picked for a reading in Abilene Texas. This was also the piece I sent to get into the program and has also had the most readings within. I did not know it at the time, but this piece is my first attempt to write what Native Theater Pedagogy calls Ceremonial Performance, which did not translate at all to the two very nice judges at KCACTF.

The Weight of Shadows (Full Length)

I spent a lot of time on this play and if *Two Worlds Theatre and Film* didn't express interest then it would have been my thesis play. I also think this is the most difficult to pull off scripts that I have written in both execution and universality. I wrote this one strictly for a Native audience and while I am sure it is an entertaining piece I do not know if a general audience will get anything specific from this narrative other than that of the structured drama. The story is about a family who are holding onto their piece of the reservation as hard as they can despite the so-called progress that comes calling upon them which forces the family to come to terms with who they are and what they want. But are they too late and what is the cost?

Athena at the Tropics (Full Length)

This piece taught me that not everything I put together is deserving of praise as well as that some stories need more work than others out of the box. I was excited when the idea for this story came together which I wrote entirely in one weekend. The

challenge here was to use elements of the classic Greeks and what ended up happening is that I utilized several famous classical characters and gods and put them all in a reservation bar that I used to frequent. Reception was lackluster, but there is still something there involving the Greek gods and the Navajo gods meeting.

The Porno Play (Full Length)

The challenge with this piece came with the instruction, write a play that involves a scene in which sex takes place on stage. This was a challenge in and by itself, so the solution was to write something close to the vest and what came out is my experiences working at an adult bookstore while I was living in Tucson Arizona. It is raunchy and not suitable at all for the majority of people but it has one of the most fascinating characters I have ever met. This play is filthy but surprisingly also contains a lot of heart.

This Life (Full Length)

A story that involves peyote. Two lifelong friends travel the cosmos together when they partake in peyote which shows them things that hit a little bit too close to home. Now they have the choice of staying amid the cosmos or back to a tough reality to implement the change they are reluctant to create. I love two person plays and while not my best it was fun to write and there are some pretty memorable moments within to explore. I got to experiment a bit with non-realistic setting as well as that of the various fluxes of time that is a component within Native Theater.

War Whoop (Short)

One of the few pieces that I decided to perform myself at *The Cell Theater*. This story is about the water protectors and what happened at Standing Rock and the Keystone pipeline. While it is a comedy, there are a lot of tongue in cheek moments in which I take aim squarely at the oil corporations and the continued disregard that the federal and states government have over tribal sovereignty. Along with those staples of comedy, I poked fun at the Indians who wanted to get up there and say they were a part of something, of which I was one. Responsibilities are what kept me here is what I keep telling myself as I avoid eye contact with the mirror.

Water War (Short)

A pseudo-documentary theatre piece in the same vein as the Laramie Project in which the future of the world's water is told by those who lived through a world war. When I wrote it, it seemed pretty farfetched but as time passes, the horrific reality of the piece has found a bit of a foothold. It paints a bleak world that I hope does not come to pass. I took the mechanics of this piece and added it to my thesis play in the form of the requiems.

Plaz (Short)

A holiday piece in which a mother travels to the city in search of her child who she had given up for adoption. Needing money, the mother plans to "plaz" and finds a young woman fitting the same age as the daughter she had to give up all those years ago, working the clinic. Knowing that she will never find her daughter, the mother speaks her peace. This short play centers around the themes of isolation, death and

regret as well as that of being open to other people's experiences. It is a nice little self-contained piece and it still needs work but there is something beautiful here. It just needs a bit more coaxing out.

Upon the Sea it Beckons (Short)

This is a gothic horror piece based on a true story. Two lighthouse keepers are stranded upon their lighthouse as bad weather keeps all else away for months. One of the men passes away while madness claims the other man who comes up with a scheme to keep his sanity as well as not be blamed for his co-worker's death who everyone knew he loathed. I love when I am free to get wordy within the work as the gothic setting and time frame of the piece, late eighteen-hundreds, allowed me to just go wild with the dialects and paint dark pictures with dark words.

Run-Set-Take (Short)

This is a political piece that I wrote for the students at CNM who used this piece in a festival along with work by other local writers. It was great to be included. The story is a bit all over the place and I am surprised CNM decided to use it as they were not lacking other great stories. Ultimately this piece was created as a way of coping with Trump being elected as President.

Once Upon a Pond (Short)

This is an experimental piece in which the idea is that a pond is remembering it's life by the people who come and fish upon it. A lifetime passes for a father and son who

share personal and uplifting moments with each other all of which are facilitated by the pond itself. I do not think I will go back to this one anytime soon, but I do feel there is something special here. It reminds me of my dad.

Shepherd's Special (Short)

This piece is about the coveted reservation bingo prize, which consists of flour, potatoes, spam, corn and squash and the three elderly Native women who all want it. This was a bit of fun and I did not really expect it to go anywhere other than to make people laugh. I was extremely surprised when *New Native Theatre* decided they wanted it in their short play festival and was even more surprised when after it premiered, a person representing a theatre program within Minnesota State Woman's Correctional Facility asked to use the play for their group.

In the Weeds (Unfinished)

This piece I still find intriguing as it involves a prisoner on death row and a chef who is tasked in making his last meal. The play is structured like a meal with each scene being labeled with what I would consider my last meal if given the choice. I am not sure about the overall story which takes huge liberties on practices and policies, but the overall structure is still something I would like to explore.

The Trading Post Trilogy (Unfinished)

This piece involves three different time periods centered upon the construction and maintaining of a Reservation trading post. I have plans to go back to this one sooner

rather than later. I remember that it was the middle segment that I had the most trouble with as it had something to say about race and other minorities on the reservation.

The White Buffalo (Pilot Script)

A collaboration with a member of the cohort, this piece is what we described as a Native Sopranos involving a family who run a small reservation casino with big dreams of expanding not only their empire but also that of the tribe itself amid legislative officials who want to take everything that the treaties didn't.

Border Patrol/Coyote Piece (Pilot Script)

Another collaborative piece, this story centers upon a border patrol agent who sneaks people safely across the border while her liberal husband makes a bid for a political seat which comes with conservative strings attached including a mandate to apprehend this person who is undermining the department of homeland of security.

Weird Immersive Project (?)

Another collaborative piece in a structure I have no clue about. Interactive, immersive theater gone big. In my head this would be like an amusement park attraction or maybe like a Halloween thing in which there would be a mystery to solve, if one wished, a world to save or ruin, if one wished or just observe as one wished. The story is there but the guest is free to create their own narrative within. As I write this I

am starting to think that what I want to create is actually *Westworld*, but without the robots.

ReZombie (Feature Length Script)

The zombie apocalypse on the reservation? A love story for the ages?

Grandmother's and Billy Goats saving the world? Yes, yes, and yes.

Chapter Eight: *1n2ian*

I started my thesis play three years ago, or rather I started writing what would become my thesis play as the story behind the genesis of this piece belongs to one man. One of the reasons I write is to keep memory alive and a major part of that is also writing about people who are dear to me. This is a bit hard to explain and is best done so with at least two tabs of acid, and since I cannot partake because I got to write the rest of this, I will give you time to prepare. When you start to feel it, read on. *You back with me? My god, what is that behind you? Haha, just kidding.*

You ever meet a real person? I mean a real, real person, who just goes about their life in just such a real way? I have one of those of friends from high school. We have been friends for, *yikes*, over twenty years. He is the realest person I know. No offense, you are real too but this cat, is like real. Like real, real. He has no pretentiousness within him whatsoever, a pure soul who lives his life, the realest real he can. What I mean is that he is the type of person who goes out and experiences life and is not deterred one bit by all the cultural doubt or minority strife that comes with being Native. He has no inferiority complex due to being raised in a dominant hierarchical

culture. Honestly, he goes about his life the way white folk do, seemingly confident, in control and in charge. I have no idea how he does that.

I have seen my friend grow up and be underestimated over and over again, see situations in which the system was actively against him and situations in which he was actively against himself. I have seen him learn and grow and try and try again because that is just what life is. It is a series of failures, trial and error, trial and error until you figure it out. His philosophy is that setbacks are not stopping points within one's life but moments of "*not yet.*" He is an incredible person, an amazing individual, who has wisdom and goodness to share with the world but because of his station in life, will more than likely not get the chance. All the greatness that is my friend deserves to be shared. His story deserves to be told and to include as much of him as I can within this piece is my way of honoring him.

The play at that time was called *A World Away* and was about my friend and his adventures with an old Vietnam vet he used to hang out with. I do not recall at what point the story took upon the subject of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW). It was a gradual turn I feel as the violence between daughter and father was always there, but it was not until late stages of the development that I turned it's focus towards that issue. It turned out to be the right thing as this is what the story was supposed to be about in the first place.

Also, with this piece came something I wanted to avoid which was namely that of using my culture as a means of capital, or the perception of such. I have come to the

determination in my maturing that selling out in the way it is slung by artists as a disparaging act is a young person's ideology. I certainly thought my ideas were precious and that they were one of a kind, shepherded in thought and form by something I loved and thus perfect in every way. Artists go through this whole phase when they decide that being an artist was the profession for them, that "selling out," is the worse thing that an artist can do. Fair enough, it is not wrong, it is not right, it is just a point of view that protects the artist from their own sense of integrity. This integrity is what I feel towards elements of my culture living upon the stage. To be honest this is something I am still working out and gauging from the research I did, the subject is not often examined. I believe that this is a representation problem and the inherent contract between audience and performer.

First however we must approach interpretation. I am not an expert in my culture even though I practice what I know of it as much as I can. It is a learning process of constant lessons and reinterpretation following the idea that you do as you want to be. Live, examine, adjust. Then repeat until you feel content in whatever way that may be. You might not get to that point, but the idea is to keep growing, keep evolving. Native stories are sparse for many different reasons, but this idea that it is a rarity, will draw people. I feel that this idea in itself is very close to the side show barkers yelling, come see an authentic Indian, right this way. Because of the finality felt within that of the written word I am very hesitant to place deciding matters of cultural progression and ways of life into a piece of work. What I feel and think about a cultural element with a lifespan might change within the progression of that life. This in itself is not too much of

a problem if you approach from an artist perception. Write a new piece that explores the new idea. It's character, anyway right, and like life characters and people are subjective. Easy right? Well yes and no. The consequence of wanting representation is having to meet it. To be Indian, is a lifetime of work and contemplation and practice, so there is a real threat of continuing the tokenism of the mystical Indian being an authority of some lost wisdom. I don't know what mysticism is attributed to me personally as I have never felt mystical. I can make a wooden pencil look like it is made of rubber and create the illusion that I can pull off my thumb but that is about as far as my mysticism goes. Yet I see that there is a want of something from the ruling culture to encompass this perception for them. Just because there is a want of diversity and stories from an Indigenous point of view does not mean we can just throw anything out there. That's not story as identity building but story as fetish, which the consequences are... well me. To tell a story knowing that it focuses on this fetishization is bothersome. Even if I did two shows in which contrasting ideas of Indianness is displayed the problem then arises that the choice of this and that is correlated to the amount of Indianness encompassing the individual. This is a huge issue on the Reservation that I don't think is explored and explained to those who live outside those borders. This idea and act disregard the idea of identity because I am fully aware that the characters are representing themselves as true to nature as the performance allows, however to the audience that might not hold form. There is no separation of character from personal identity. I am not saying this happens in all cases but to deny to that it doesn't happen is naive. That is why I am cautious in that regard.

To be perceived as that token Indian illegitimizes my authority amongst my own people. There is a tendency within any group that has had something taken away that they are usually overprotective of what they managed to keep. To be perceived as benefiting from sacred elements would have consequences among the group that I am trying to reach that could close some avenues of progression. I understand that some knowledge is not meant for some, yet. The idea of stories belonging to one group and only that group never sat right with me. Stories are meant to be told and if a story is only aimed at one small section of humanity then it does the opposite of what stories should do. There was a time within humanities history in which this exclusion of other's stories might have had a purpose within the development of society. Outside communities were strangers and it was best to keep what was ours, ours, as it kept everyone safe. It kept everyone together.

There are many older Indigenous who stick to this idea as a means of preservation and while I do not think I am spilling any super-secret information about Natives, there are still some within my culture who disapprove of the idea of sharing something as precious as story with outsiders. There is some right to be wary of course as misrepresentation or misconception are all something cultures, especially diminished ones, face. However, what they fight against with this tactic of inclusion among their own is the very thing that is diminishing the culture. To not tell a story is to diminish its purpose which halts the people's progression as a growing community. Exclusion is the reason why stories are lost. Time is the greatest enemy to stories, so it is humanities

responsibility and best interest to preserve them and the only way to do so is by keeping them alive and active and to do that is to keep telling them in as many ways as possible.

This is not to say that stories are not without their ethical dilemmas as well. Stories themselves are rituals participated in by both the teller and the listener. The important stories are those that include a group and is kept alive for that group by members who can tell the story so that whatever message the story is about reaches that intended audience. The reasons vary but the intent is that of making sure the audience knows that the story is special and that a certain frame of mind is needed to comprehend the full intentions of the telling of the story. The physical action connected to a story, even if it is that of preparedness, speaks to the story's importance. The story itself is an entity to be respected as well as all the elements contained within.

By writing a very abbreviated version of the Diné origin story I am perpetrating several taboos, the most important of which is, I am not qualified to try and tell other's that story which does change according to geography. The second reason is that I am telling a sacred story, off season as the origin of the Diné is only told during the winter. The third reason is that I am using the imagery of the story in a way that it was not intended. To several people within the culture I am giving away the significance of that story along with betraying those members who believe in it and build their identity around it. There was a certain amount of personal justification that I had to conjure to write and connect the story in such a way. I realize now there is no real way to escape this aspect. To take any action is to constitute change and purpose so the respectful way

of approaching a story is to constitute the purpose which in this case was to relate the origin story to that of the MMIW.

The production of *1n2ian* is the first in which I got to see something I wrote come to life first hand. I had a few other small productions here and there, but I was never a part of that moment of development. The process also differs in the few productions I worked on as a stage hand as those stories were already put together in such a way that there was an expected outcome. We knew what those babies look like all grown up. This was not the case with *1n2ian* because it was written under the umbrella of Native theatre and there was no way to surmise what it would become particularly because the director who was brought on was not Native. I had seen collaborators and artists insist upon and put up defensive walls around themselves and their work and ideas as a means of not compromising who they are. I was intent on not doing that because as stated earlier I was trying to include and not exclude those who wished to be a part of bringing life into this story.

Truth be told I would be perfectly fine with being that type of writer who hands over the script and let the professionals do their thing. To do this is to take extra care within the script work and use the language utilized within to promote active subjective interpretation. There was very little intent at the time of the writing but there was a realization that because cultural elements involving the story could be utilized, did not mean that it should. The script needed to be user friendly for skilled and unskilled alike to make sure that nothing would be taken for granted.

I feel the work is on me in this regard as it would be unfair and professionally damaging to insist that only a certain type of individual be allowed to bring a cultural story to the stage. That is not the inclusion I hoped to occur but the thought of having to explain how to be Indian to someone was something I was not looking forward to doing and was not sure I could do so in the first place. I was relieved when the director entered the production open minded and open hearted to the idea that this production would be a new experience. I did not feel it was my place to step in the way of that journey because as writer and creator I lacked the distance from the material to facilitate the learning.

When rehearsals actually begun there was an issue in that as the writer, I was not sure what I could do at that point to be productive and did not want to get in the way of another person's contribution to the project as they discovered it. The ceremony between the cast and the director, as they learned to conduct the various rituals between them and what they mean individually to secure the whole, does not necessarily need me. This choice led to what I felt was a bit of tension between myself and the director. Was it debilitating to the production? I do not think it was, but it also probably did not make the endeavor any easier to accomplish. What I can say is that I would not have backed off so much if I did not have confidence in the director. Outside of my actual presence, I have made myself as available for questions or clarifications as I could without taking on the role of the doting writer.

Chapter Nine: What's Next?

As my time within the program gets closer to concluding, I feel both apprehensive and impatient, which I know are not going to go away anytime soon. I graduate, hopefully in May and will earn a piece of paper that states I am a master in what is essentially storytelling. I am like a bard in a very mundane Dungeons and Dragons game. So what next? Part of my brain is saying, *"Well you tell stories, of course then people will give you money."* The other half replies, *"That's hard to do."* In which the reply is, *"No it's not, make up a sign, set up in the park with a pencil and paper, maybe a typewriter if you want to be a hipster and sell to the pretentious romance of the craft."*

A possible step forward is that I can envision a way for us as Indigenous to be stronger, which is to continue on my path as an educator. The goal is to implement a ceremony/performance aspect into the Native school curriculum as a means of strengthening and preserving the cultural aspects that our ancestors lived by. The hope is that by doing so, not only are the individuals more prepared for whatever is waiting for them in the outside world but to also regain that sense of balance within themselves as this new sense of identity grounds the individual with a sense of overarching purpose. Through theatre and ceremonial performance there is a strengthening bond within not only the student group but also with that of their ancestors. This curriculum can instill the dignity and beliefs of those who were stripped of it, as a way of reclaiming our right to be human again. The result would set up the future generation with a more guided sense of purpose led by a more guided sense of leader.

The return to the cultural practices of our ancestors is a wonderful sentiment to get behind and uphold, however we must be wary of taking steps back instead of forward. There must always feel like there is a steady progression and by analyzing why certain practices are done the way they are done and expressed conjures the intent as well as the meaning of that practice and whether or not it suits the growth of the individual. The point is not to know not to do something but to know why doing so is bad as well as the upside of learning why doing something is good. There needs to be a mutual respect for knowledge for both the past and the future along with the acceptance that what an individual chooses for his own path is but one way and that there is no one path to follow or one solution to pick from.

Native Theater is based upon the practice as research approach because it is not something one can jump into and employ. Because of our past, our steps forward need to be steady and consistent as we reacquaint ourselves with our former practices as we explore other practices to incorporate into our story. It evolves with the people, so we might as well get to the habit of making progress. Either through ourselves or through others. I practice my art which is more than just writing. I am practicing how to be a human being through the act of writing character. I am practicing what it means to try and understand what it is about humanity that makes our story unique beyond and between the wide spaces of the physical entities that comprise the cosmos. My practice is exploration of the divine within the shell that are our bodies and to explore the part of us that looks for peace and runs the gamut of who we are through thought and

emotion. My practice documents the progression of humanity, the greatest and worst things about us, as the duality of existence and experience intitles us all.

Conclusion

I came into the program with no preconceived notions other than that I would write as much as I could. As I progressed through the semesters however there was an awakening to how much I could do just with my writing. As a student of history, I could have my chance to preserve some of it and possibly reshape the warped perception applied to Native identities into something more progressive. Using inclusion, I could both preserve and strengthen that identity as well as teach and inform to the general audience. Exclusionary tactics only isolate and make strangers out of people when the intent should be to include and get to know one another in a proper respectful way. This would require the work to be accessible in a nonnative cultural way at least to start with, then by proceeding through the text could one begin to understand the various cultural elements important to the people which are universal as well as learn the history of the people to see how they got where they are at present.

As I leave the program I hope to continue to get better at my craft. To write more clearly, more personably, and just be able to transcend race and creed so that I might connect with the individual no matter which stage of life they are at. Drew Hayden Taylor wrote, "... legends and stories were not meant to be quaint children's stories. They were told to adults as well as children, and as you get older, you could tap into a who new understanding of the story," (Taylor). I want to be so masterful of a storyteller that they survive the corrosiveness of time. I want to tell people my story as

well as get the opportunity to hear theirs. I want to tell them the story of the Diné about how we came upon this world and more importantly how we get through it. I want what the first storyteller wanted when telling the first story. I want to be remembered.

For the past three years my job has been to create, and now that the structure of that job is changing it is up to my self-discipline as there is no deadlines to push me, no readings to stress me and no critiques to enlighten me. It's back to the real world, where I am going to have to push extra hard to get my work seen. I've seen others stop writing entirely for one reason or another, so it's more than just talent, learned skill and hard work that is going to help me. There is a bit of luck mixed in there as well. The goal of course is to be good enough that I get invites to play in someone else's sandbox while constructing my own work and pursuing my personal goal of just trying to be a better person.

It's always been about the stories. Not the writing itself, but the tales that push the pen around the page. The stories. That is the thread throughout my life, it's how I measure specific, meaningful moments of my past. They are marked by stories, some of which I've forgotten such as; a story about an encounter between two men caught on opposite sides of the civil war who fight the urge to kill each other, a story about an automated house still going through the motions, oblivious that they are serving long dead masters, a story about a cat burglar who utilizes actual cats in the heist. I don't remember the creators of these stories, only that they had a huge impact in who I am at various points in my life. These stories went on and stayed alive and active as they exposed, entertained, and informed, all of which contributed to the creation of an artist.

Stories are about hope. They speak of possibilities, learning and growth. All stories relay some type of information and they demand cooperation. One to tell, one to listen, one to instruct, one to learn. Stories are the reason communities exist for better or for worst. Stories speak to the goals, to the fears, to the joys, to the heartache of the individual. It can both break down and build up. My story thus far is still being written but I hope to tell it just as I have done so here. With hope that it speaks of a young man, now middle aged (*yeesh!*) who just wanted to be comfortable with who he is. A man who wanted to learn everything he could about himself amid what seems like an infinite universe. A man who wants to make a positive difference or at least believe he is on the path to doing so. A man who tried to do right by everyone despite deep detrimental faults and who at the end of his life tried the best he could to walk within the balance of Hozho. That's a story I hope people remember and hope people will get something out of. My story is an interesting one and is a story worth writing.

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Appendix: 1n2ian Script

1n2ian

by

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CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
Dezba	A young entrepreneur	20's	Female
Dana	A Chef	20's	Male
Georgina	A young Native woman	20's	Female
Wolfred	DEZBA's Father, Shell's Brother There is a bit of a showman in his demeanor	40's	Male
Donnie	Wolfred's Friend	40's	Male
Shell	Dezba's Mother	40's	Female
Patricia	Shell's Partner	40's	Female
Mother/First Woman	Shell's and Wolfred's mother	Varies	Female
Shadows	Played by ensemble.	Any	Any

Time: Modern
Place: City near a reservation

Author's Note: It's important for representation that the cast be culturally specific. If not possible then the spirit of the people and the culture must be respected.

Requiem can be played by the ensemble who should also step in for the Shadows and various background parts when appropriate.

SCENE I.

SHELLY and her MOTHER sit around the fire inside their home on the reservation. They speak the dialect of the people

Mother smudges the space as she begins her story, the SHADOWS come alive and relive the creation.

MOTHER

In the beginning, there was only the air spirit people. They lived in the first world, but their world was in disharmony. They had forgotten Hozho. The way of the world. The balance that is needed within us, them and the mother.

(she touches the bare ground and picks up the loose sand to pour it.)

They had to flee, and they moved onto the second world, where disharmony followed them. Again, they fled, to the third world.

SHELLY

How come they're not coming back?

MOTHER

Shh.

(pauses)

The third world, the air people found it was not suitable for them, so they had to keep on searching. They searched and searched but could not find a way through and they thought it was the end, until Wind came and greeted the people. "This way." Wind spoke to them, and they followed Wind through a maze for many days and when they exited they found a fourth world. But it was empty. The air people were happy because of all the emptiness which wouldn't get in their way, but the gods were not. So, they instructed the air people to harvest corn. Two ears. One white, one yellow. They were placed under a blanket with eagle feathers and the Holy people danced around them. Then Wind gave his blessing and from those two corns came First Man and First Woman. Then came us. We were born of the Wind, look at your fingertips, do you see where the wind kissed you? The Wind gave us our breath to live in this world. And when the Wind leaves us, we become speechless and then we die. The fourth world also eventually became dangerous. A flood full of monsters chased the people and animals who fled to this world. In each of the world's the people faced danger. And in this one, it is the same.

You must be strong, daughter. And when you get old and have daughters of your own you tell them this story as I told you and you teach them to be strong. The reservation has become too dangerous for us to stay. You understand? That's why we must leave.

SHELLY

Can't the warriors protect us?

MOTHER

The warriors are gone.

SHELLY

Where are we going?

MOTHER

North.

SHELLY

To find the next world?

MOTHER

If I knew where to go and how to get there I would.

Mother gets up and begins to pack a suitcase full of clothes. Shelly digs through a small chest.

SHELLY

What about dad and brother?

MOTHER

They won't be coming with us.

SHELLY

Why?

Mother stops packing and goes to Shelly.

MOTHER

Your dad. He did something bad. The white men want to keep him.

SHELLY

For how long?

MOTHER

I don't know...

SHELLY

And brother? Did he do something bad too?

MOTHER

He... he's going away to school.

SHELLY

Oh.

Mother begins to pack again.

SHELLY

Are we going to walk in the snow?

She finds the piece of turquoise.

SHELLY

Found it.

MOTHER

What?

SHELLY

We need to give this to brother.

She hands it over.

SHELLY

Turquoise. From the squash patch. So that if he goes too far away and can't find his way back again he'll always have Dinetah with him.

Mother takes the rock. She holds it then puts it in her pocket.

SHELLY

Are you mad at dad?

MOTHER

Shhh. It's time for bed.

Shelly lays down and Mother covers her.

MOTHER

You know why I called you Shell? Cause you're beautiful as one, but also because shells are tough. They protect and are strong. You must be strong. You hear me. Always be strong. Now sleep. Dream of our ancestors and ask them to guide us.

Shell settles down and falls asleep. Mother sings a requiem of her home.

Mother gets up and goes outside. It's cold. She digs out the rock then throws it as hard as she can.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE II.

Storefront. The Words "Hozho" are written upon it.

DEZBA jiggles her keys as she tries to open the door.

She's juggling a purse, a couple of small Navajo Rugs, coffee and her calm.

Across the lot, DONNIE had been waiting and now he approaches.

DONNIE

You own this store?

DEZBA

Who's asking?

DONNIE

Interested parties. Just wondering is all.

DEZBA

What, were you watching me from over there? Fuck off.

DONNIE

Jesus, what's your problem? I'm just asking. You don't have something to hide, do you? Big space for just a little person. I've heard a few things about this place.

DEZBA

And I've heard a few things about your place as well.

DONNIE

Not surprised you know me.

He takes a step forward.

DEZBA takes a step back.

DEZBA

Everyone knows you and that little shit bar you own.

DONNIE

Well, your kind always do manage to sniff out the watering holes.

DEZBA

And we know which ones are safe.

DONNIE

You come around honey and I can guarantee you a safe and good ole time. You opening up? Like to come in and check out your wares.

DEZBA

We don't open today. Just dropping off stock.

DONNIE

C'mon, just a little peak. You going to turn down a potential sale? Something tells me that there is something in there that is going to interest me. No? Guess I'll have to take a look around some other day.

DEZBA

You do that.

She pats her purse and leaves her hand hovering just over the opening, her body takes on a posture. Readiness. Her fingers slowly move their way into the open purse.

DEZBA

I'll give you the special treatment.

Beat.

DONNIE

You have an attitude about you, you know that? I didn't serve for your kind to be all mouthy.

DEZBA

You a soldier? Me too. Except we call ourselves warriors. You know what the difference is?

(scoffs)

Soldier. I'm an active combatant in the American Indian Wars. Don't think that it's over. Not until the last one of us is dead. History has taught us two things, walk wearily upon this world and don't trust your kind.

DONNIE

My kind, and our mercy are the only reasons you are still allowed to keep what you have. You keep on yelling that big mouth of yours.

DEZBA

So, you can hear my truth. I don't like being snuck up on.

DONNIE

I don't need to do no sneaking.

DEZBA

Men are always sneaking. Always on the hunt for prey.

Donnie gives a look past Dezba into the store windows. He sees Georgina watching. His gaze lingers, then switches his back to Dezba.

DONNIE

You sure about that? You shake like a rabbit. Have a good day.

He exits.

Dezba watches him walk away. When he is out of sight. She gathers her things in her free hand as best she can and breaks down into a panic attack. She suppresses it as best she can and pries her fingers out of her purse. It takes her a moment for her to stretch the shape out of them.

Inside the store, Georgina fiddles with her ornate turquoise necklace in nervousness. She is unsure what to do so she gives a respectful moment and when Dezba looks more situated, opens the door.

DEZBA

What the hell are you doing here?

GEORGINA

I work here. Remember?

DEZBA

I meant inside. How did you get in?

GEORGINA

Look. I'm showing initiative on my first day on the job, so I showed up early to fold clothes, make coffee. Reorganize the store and feed the guests. I also looked through the books. You could afford to pay me more money by the way, especially now that I have a secret to keep. Hint hint. I got a scratchy back.

DEZBA

Buy a new bra.

GEORGINA

These girls are free range and won't be caged. I want you to know that I am in this like sixty-five percent, but if need be I can pull off as much as eighty.

DEZBA

How
Did
You
Get
In?

GEORGINA

I picked the lock.

DEZBA

What?

GEORGINA

Don't look at me like that. I did you a service.

DEZBA

How?

GEORGINA

Now you know, that people of the likes of me can get into this place with only a bobby pin.

Dezba tries as subtly as she can to glance outside.

It doesn't work.

DEZBA

Good to know.

GEORGINA

Actually, I'm pretty sure if I just jiggled the handle it would have opened up. Not that you would have to worry about inventory. You never planned to sell any of this did you?

DEZBA

You looked at my books?

GEORGINA

Of course, I did. I think you mistake the meaning of what a business is.

DEZBA

Technically we're a non-profit, or at least are going to be. Hopefully.

GEORGINA

What, are you a dirty hippy? How are you going to live making no profit?

DEZBA

With these.

She unrolls one of the Navajo Rugs.

GEORGINA

Dezba, you can't sell those. It's disrespectful.

DEZBA

I can, and I will. Shell left them to me.

GEORGINA

It ain't right. This soon. She's not even in the ground yet.

DEZBA

She would approve.

GEORGINA

No, she wouldn't. I wasn't even allowed in that room, remember? I was like a hundred times more adorable back then too, but you take one pair of scissors... You've seen it. It's too much temptation, you know this. Just string after string. Up and down, up and down. There're only a few things you can do when you come across something that look like that. You either play it like a harp or snip snip.

DEZBA

The other thing you can do is create a rug.

GEORGINA

Yea, all them creative types. But that is more than just someone's boredom. It's function. These saw use. Blood, snot, soup, rain, they were touched by the elements. This rug had purpose, and you selling them, so someone can put them on a wall is worse than snip, snip. You know how many hours of life her fingers breathed into this rug? Wind's kisses rubbed away from her fingers that's how long. Let alone the time that went into that one, or that one. Or all those. You're giving away her lifetime.

DEZBA

Not her lifetime. Just three years' worth and I'll be able to get the rest of the year's rent for this place that my student loans didn't cover.

GEORGINA

That's totally delusional. They got you for life sis.

DEZBA

Georgina no one owns you any more than you allow them too. And I didn't get to this point in my life by acting sane.

GEORGINA

Obviously. So, who was the old man?

Beat.

DEZBA

You saw that?

GEORGINA

I did.

DEZBA

Watch out for him.

GEORGINA

Why?

DEZBA

Just do it.

GEORGINA

As part owner of... whatever this is...

DEZBA

You're not part owner. You work for me.

GEORGINA

I own fifteen percent.

DEZBA

No, you don't.

GEORGINA

Ten then.

DEZBA

I should of never have got you off the rez.

GEORGINA

Don't believe I said thanks by the way.

DEZBA

No, you didn't.

GEORGINA

Well, shit thanks. Didn't know you were going to be all uppity by helping family. It was about time too. Patricia was definitely getting on some bullshit.

DEZBA

It weirds me out that you call her Patricia instead of mom.

GEORGINA

Her too, that's why I do it. Her womb was a prison which I escaped from and she's the crazy ass warden who wants to shove me back in there. She just won't let up and it's because of you and Shell, who you're just like by the way, and I mean that in the least complimentary way possible. Why do you always have to set a good example? I always knew Patricia wanted me to be like you. First it was all,

(mocking mother voice)

"Get your education. Be a scholar like Dezba. Oh, she's getting such and such money from this rich asshole foundation."

(normal voice)

So, I did. I scholared myself. I scholared myself good. Lead by example I thought, Show her all the things. Got up early, took a shower, drank coffee, checked out books from that place, even took a pencil and paper my first day of class. Didn't work though, cause apparently, I awoke the beast from her beautiful slumber after a long shift, used up all the hot water and drank the last of the coffee that I just had to toss out in front of her. Bean water is not at all precious and worth hollering about that early in the morning. How was I supposed to know, that the early birds who get the worms starve off the others? That's why I stopped. I have a kind heart.

DEZBA

There is a whole lot of things wrong with what you just said, and you took a free fry bread making lesson at the chapter house.

GEORGINA

And now you are looking at the best fry bread maker on the rez.

DEZBA

(teasing)

Your mom hear you say that?

GEORGINA

You better not tell her.

DEZBA

I'm not going to tell her, if you do what I say.

GEORGINA

Fine, I'll give up my ten percent. That still leaves me with...

DEZBA

Nothing, well I guess I can pay you. For your time and all unless... I ever tell you the benefits of indentured servitude?

GEORGINA

I am not eight anymore, that's not going to work again. Even back then you were stingy.

DEZBA

I definitely got that from your mom. Not Shell. Moving all over the place, we didn't have money.

GEORGINA

What is it with you Navajo's and wandering. You guys just wander all over the place. You find them under rocks, up in trees. Probably one in the white house somewhere just got lost wandering around.

DEZBA

We're nomads. First it was my grandmother and Shell, then Shell and me. It's part of the family.

GEORGINA

I mis underestimated you. If I would have known you would become all successful and everything I would of beat up on you sooner.

DEZBA

I still would have whooped you.

GEORGINA

Cause I gave you too much time to study my ways. Didn't know you were a fighter. Should have known. Your bun always getting untied cause you scrap too much.

Georgina goes to DEZBA and unties her bun. She fixes it.

GEORGINA

Nothing wrong with running.

DEZBA

Yes, there is.

Beat.

GEORGINA

But I'm serious though. My mom wants me to be you. Shit. I think she wants to be you. You're the reason she got all ambitious.

DEZBA

Voices?

GEORGINA

Stupid name for a newspaper. Voices in the Wind. What kind of messed up, stereotype, Native crap is that? Only voice I hear in the wind is her yelling. "Get a Job." Opened up your own store right after graduation, how is anyone supposed to live up to that? I can't wait to tell her it's non-profit. That'll show her. Well, she finally got off my ass about school. Now she's on about me opening up a business. Improve the rez. Open a business? How is that going to improve things? People ain't got no money anyhow. But just to show her that I do in fact have a heart, and that I do listen to her. I rose to her challenge, eventually. I thought real hard and when the opportunity presented itself I opened up the perfect business. But was it good enough for her? Hell no. Selling snocones is hard. Even during the summer. It wasn't those flea market snow cones either with those tiny ass spit cups. I set up right down the road from Twin Lakes elementary. Flagged down the school busses as they left. Silver always spends, if the bank won't take it then I'll melt that shit down into arrows. They're going to accept it one way or another. Luckily for them it never got that far.

Georgina shows off her squash blossom necklace.

GEORGINA

Paid for by the good children of Twin Lakes.

DEZBA

You call that a squash blossom.

GEORGINA

Just like Patricia. Unrealistic standards. They're baby squash and that's real turquoise, the rock that signals success. I'm a success story. The snocone queen I was called by all the kids on the bus. Where do you go after Queen? King? I don't accept ceremonial positions. That's why I was glad to come with you. You obviously need my help. Patricia can neigh say all she wants. Look at me now. Five percent in this doomed venture.

DEZBA

I'm not giving you five percent either. You can sell a thing or two if need be, but we need this stuff.

DEZBA goes to the door and peeks out.

GEORGINA

I'm pretty sure we agreed on something.

DEZBA

I said you pay ten percent of my rent and I'll let you stay with me off the rez.

GEORGINA

You must have made that deal with me after I had a case cause it's shitty.

DEZBA

Knowing you, you probably were drunk. You do that out here, be prepared to get tossed into the drunk tank.

GEORGINA

That's fine. I don't plan to go all out here, just yet. Community full of strangers, and I don't know who's out there. People have a better chance of turning up here. Bet the cops even find people to arrest.

DEZBA

You know, it's what it is. Just be careful. Don't tell your mom but I stopped reading her paper. Every month, a couple of new names to add to the list. How high do you think those names go up?

GEORGINA

All the way to the next world.

Beat.

GEORGINA

Your name is not going to show up there.

DEZBA

Can't be sure.

GEORGINA

That's your grandma speaking. What could you possibly do to be more careful?

Georgina reaches into Dezba's purse and pulls out a very large gun.

GEORGINA

Are you going to declare vengeance on your enemies? Look at this?

DEZBA

I ain't going out there without it.

GEORGINA

The rugs you'll get rid of but Shell's gun you'll keep. Look what they made you into.

Georgina puts the gun back.

GEORGINA

Honestly, I wish Patricia would step away a bit. She probably risking her life getting into people's business about this. I tell you she went up into a political fund-raiser and started asking all these questions about some trip on some boat a few years back. I don't know the particulars, but I can guess she wasn't inquiring about sailing. Feather's got ruffled, or in politicians' case, scales got oily or whatever. That kind of sunk things in you know. This shit is organized. They be taking people from all over the place. Sisters, mothers, aunts, children. Not all of them were as lucky as Shell.

Beat.

GEORGINA

Subject change to something just as depressing. You ready for the funeral?

DEZBA

No.

GEORGINA

You seem to be keeping it together.

Dezba shrugs.

GEORGINA

You speaking?

DEZBA

She would want me to but... It's not like she was my mom.

GEORGINA

Bullshit. I know a lot of aunts who wouldn't do that shit for me. You never called her mom?

DEZBA

I did. Once. She got really upset and since then it's always been Shell.

GEORGINA

She knew what she was to you.

DEZBA

It sounds weird to say her name. It sounds empty.

Beat.

GEORGINA

And your father?

Dezba gives her a hard stare then looks back out the window.

GEORGINA

I'm just asking. But do you think he'll show up?

DEZBA

I don't give a damn.

GEORGINA

That was his sister.

DEZBA

He abused her.

GEORGINA

The war/ took a lot of our warriors.

DEZBA

Bullshit. Shell had to fight off strangers, she didn't need to fight family too.

GEORGINA

Well, he got what was coming to him.

DEZBA

No, he didn't. He's still alive.

GEORGINA

Girl, you got a hateful heart. Much too hateful for someone who grew up with two lesbians.

DEZBA

You know what messes me up most about getting up there? Knowing that I got to get up there and all those people are going to be whispering and gossiping about Shell, me, you and Patricia and of course Wolfred.

GEORGINA

Forget those people. It's your time to make your peace with a horrible world that would take such a beauty as Shell away. Her life was a gift. What? She was my mom too.

DEZBA

I should just go up there and speak truth. She wouldn't want me to talk about her. She would want me to use that time to speak about what's important. That every woman gone and missing is a failure on all our parts.

GEORGINA

Are you crazy? You can't speak the truth at a funeral. You'll mess up everyone's time.

DEZBA

So, what? Truth never hurt anybody.

GEORGINA

Truth is all hurt. If you're going to do that then I'm not sitting with you. I don't want to be a part of your madness. And if Patricia jumps up there and tries to spank you in front of the casket then I'm not going to stop her. I hope she does spank you. Serves you right for being stingy with two percent. Truth is not as good as you make it. It's ugly. Don't look at me like that. I know things. I know every truth I have learned has killed a little bit of my spirit. Dreams I had, big dreams once, and truth killed them. The truth of gravity killed my dreams of flying.

DEZBA

You would be dead without that truth.

GEORGINA

Would I?

DEZBA

Yes. You would have thrown yourself off some cliff expecting to rise up like they say the air people did back in the day.

GEORGINA

Exactly. Truth killed that possibility. It set doubt and you can't fly with doubt. Belief is better than truth. I can sell belief a whole hell of a lot better than truth. Or at least I could if this were an actual business.

DEZBA

This is a business. We provide a place for our people. Those who need it.

GEORGINA

For how long?

DEZBA

Forever if need be.

GEORGINA

That's too long.

DEZBA

You'll still get paid, so just do me a favor and show up to work.

GEORGINA

Are you saying I'm unreliable?

DEZBA

Mmmm. I'm saying you're about sixty-five percent reliable. I wasn't kidding about that drunk tank. First place I'll check when next I don't hear from you.

GEORGINA

Well, at least I know you'll go out and look for me.

DEZBA

Same you'd do for me.

GEORGINA

Kind of pales in comparison to what I would do if you go missing. You can rest assured that vengeance would be had in your name.

DEZBA

Thanks.

GEORGINA

That's what you do for family.

Beat.

GEORGINA

Should I let them out.

Dezba goes to the door and checks outside.

DEZBA

Yea I think he's gone.

Georgina walks to a door that leads to a basement and opens it. She shouts down then moments later a number of women begin to come out.

GEORGINA

Let's go now. Daylight is a burning. Bars are open, so is the plaz center so tap them veins so the money flows smoothly. Don't give out too much though, you might have a need for it in an emergency. Don't need you all weak and shit. If you trying to find Hozho then it's opposite direction from all that.

Dezba is handing out bundles of clothes but stops to hit Georgina on the arm.

DEZBA

What is wrong with you?

GEORGINA

What? Don't act like we're not in the same boat as they are. What I say should be heeded by all. We all find that path to the next world eventually. But it doesn't have to be today.

The women keep coming as Dezba runs out of clothes to hand out and starts handing out water, packaged cinnamon rolls and tiny pouches of tobacco as they leave the shelter.

DEZBA

I prefer you to offer it, but do as you will. You all be careful out there. I stay till ten so if you got nowhere else to go come on by. Watch out for each other.

Some of the women say thank you, others just nod and leave. All walk the same walk. Protective and weary.

Dezba watches them go.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE: FIRST REQUIEM

Mother enters and smudges the space then continues her story.

MOTHER

First man and First woman fled with all the animals in the fifth world. They thought they were safe, but the monsters proved that there is no world that they cannot penetrate. The world was chaos and darkness which were caused by dark clouds that came down from the holy mountains. First man went to investigate and at the top of the mountain, he began to sing within the darkness. Then there was light. A rainbow. First man looked at his feet and he saw a piece of turquoise. He picked it up and it turned into a beautiful baby girl. He took the baby home and First woman saw the child and said this is not a baby, this is a girl, waiting to become a woman. We need to celebrate this moment.

Mother sings a Requiem. The Shadows come alive.

REQUIEM

Montana. It was crow fair. I was with my family. Every year we go and we watch the dances. This year was supposed to be my year to dance. I had started putting the dress together from hide, dyed with the colors of the flowers and grass that rise from the snow on my reservation. They were too early this year, Spring was still just around the corner and they wilted and died. I kept looking though, I kept telling myself that I was about to become a woman and that women don't give up. My time to dance was coming and I had to be prepared. I kept at it and I found some that the cold couldn't kill. And when it was my turn to dance, they would dance with me, be a part of me. It would have been my beginning. We got to the fair, and I saw everyone in my entire world. Cousins, here and there, grandmas and grandpas, aunts and uncles, everyone. I thought I saw the whole reservation on that day. I also saw a lot of people I didn't know. Everyone was all bumping into each other as they tried to get around. I remember standing in line for food and I had to go to the bathroom. It was just right there. I made my way and found a port-o-potty that was empty. I get inside but the door wouldn't lock, so I stuck one foot against it. It didn't stop him from coming in. He must have been watching me. He used me then strangled me. Then slipped out. It was only a matter of minutes when they found me. But he was gone. I was buried in that dress. Just me, and the flowers, and the grass.

SCENE III.

WOLFRED is at the bus stop in his wheelchair. He is holding a cup of change.

DANA enters and sits.

Beat.

WOLFRED

Hey, You Native?

DANA

Yea.

WOLFRED

Ah, Wolfred.

He extends his hand.

DANA

Dana.

They shake.

WOLFRED

It's going to be a while. What you doing?

DANA

Waiting. I have an interview.

WOLFRED

Not a good impression to show up late.

DANA

I got time. It's a couple of hours away and I just need to clear my head you know? Get my game face on. Besides I'm supposed to be taking it slow.

Dana shows Wolfred his legs. They are heavily scarred over.

WOLFRED

Ouch. That looks like it hurt.

DANA

You have no idea... oh. Sorry.

WOLFRED

It's all right. I did once.

Wolfred pulls his wheelchair up alongside Dana on the bench.

WOLFRED

Smoke?

Wolfred offers Dana a cigarette.

WOLFRED

Take one for later. Don't smoke, then get rid of the case and burn it as an offering. Be good for your interview.

Wolfred forces Dana to take the cigarette.

WOLFRED

This is a ritual and they always involve smoke. Whenever strangers get together they share the smoke between them. It's how we purify a space so that it's worthy of our beauty. Hozho, I don't know what your tribe calls it. Where you applying at?

DANA

Restaurants mostly.

WOLFRED

Dishwasher? Server?

DANA

Chef.

WOLFRED

No shit. Wouldn't have known it by the looks of you. No offense. How does one become a chef?

DANA

Went to school.

WOLFRED

Chef school?

DANA

Culinary.

WOLFRED

And they teach how to cook?

DANA

Somewhat? It's mostly business classes. How to open a restaurant, menu's, dietary needs. Stuff like that. Ended up dropping out because I didn't want to make what everyone else made. They teach the same old shit. Stuff I can get out of a cookbook. I didn't want that, so I did something different. I specialize in Native cuisine.

WOLFRED

Frybread and mutton?

DANA

Among other things.

WOLFRED

Really? What you good at making?

DANA

I'm still in the experimental phase. Beans, corn, wild game, potatoes. tomatoes. Sticking to stuff that was here pre-fourteen-ninety-two.

WOLFRED

The good old days. Deer, elk. Buffalo. That's the dream right there. Buffalo every night. That and stew. You can't beat that. You know how to make stew?

DANA

Anyone can make stew. Anyone can make frybread. I do more than that. I feed more than just the hungry, depressed Indian. I feed their souls.

WOLFRED

Their souls huh? Well I would like to see that. You should come down to the bar and cook for us. They haven't served out of that kitchen in years, but I served with the owner, he might let you try some things out. There might be some scratch in it for you, then if not, leftovers. I'm headed over there later today, you should come along.

DANA

I really should be going to my interview.

WOLFRED

And be denied again. You don't get jobs that way man. You need to know people who know people and I know people. Besides, you get hired by anyone else, you think they're going to let you cook what you want? They're going to tell you to stick to what they like. I'm offering you an opportunity. You said you a chef, be a chef. Now what is it that you really want to do?

DANA

I always thought owning a food truck would be cool.

WOLFRED

There you go. A food truck. I can see that. People smile when there is food around. This could be your first step. Show us how good Native food is.

DANA

All right then.

WOLFRED

My man. C'mon then. Forget the bus, let's wander like the real Indians do.

The two transition away from the bus stop.

There is trash littered on stage. Dana pushes Wolfred and they pick up trash as they come to it.

WOLFRED

You know how to panhandle right? There are rules. Do's and don'ts. You can't just run up on anyone and ask for change. I mean you can but... The rude ones pay the best. I like them. They know they're assholes. They don't have time for bullshit but they're not inhumane, so they'll toss whatever they find in their pockets. Just make sure you ask them before they get to their cars cause then they get real defensive. Other types of dudes are fifty-fifty. The ones that look nice, the so-called good people. They annoy me, so I won't cross the parking lot to ask them like some of them others do. Only if they cross my path. Roll over there so I can pick that up.

Dana pushes Wolfred to a piece of trash. He picks it up and puts it on his lap. They continue.

DANA

You get money for that?

WOLFRED

For picking up trash? No man. It's a responsibility. This place will be sparkling when we're through. All this doesn't belong here anyway. Before all this was the true earth. Trees, bushes, animals. You feel it? Underneath you? Real dirt. Just waiting to bust out this asphalt cast. Spread itself up to the heavens. I can feel it even in this thing. I roll around and I can feel the earth push against it, push against me. My mother used to tell me it was Changing Woman trying to reach her husband the sun. That's what rocks want, when they are buried deep under there. They want to climb their way up and breathe. Look at all this. Development they call it. Making use of the land. They don't know shit. If they could see what I see. There's a tree right there. A river comes down from the mountain over there and hydrates all these bushes here. Tall grass, can you smell it? I can. Underneath all that filth. All this rigidity. It's all still here, just... waiting. In another life I would be out here hunting deer or... buffalo.

Wolfred circles an imaginary buffalo and mimes shooting an arrow. He mimes the trajectory, the hit, and then the death of the animal.

WOLFRED

Right in the gullet. I love the hunt.

Wolfred wheels himself to a full plastic bag. He picks it up and goes through it.

WOLFRED

Here's some good eating.

DANA

Don't do that.

WOLFRED

What? I'm a hunter and a gatherer. Look at this.

He pulls out a half-eaten burrito.

WOLFRED

People just throw food away that others would kill for.

Wolfred takes a bite.

DANA

Bleh!

WOLFRED

Perfectly good. Beans and rice.

DANA

I'll stick to elk and deer. Food is about comfort.

WOLFRED

Comfort? I don't know the meaning of the word.

Beat.

DANA

How far we going?

WOLFRED

Got to make a stop first. Right up there. Hey, you mind running and getting something for us to drink.

Wolfred pulls out a few bills and hands them over. Dana takes it and exits.

Across the way is Dezba's store where she is folding clothes next to the window.

Wolfred reaches into a bag and pulls out a pair of compact binoculars. From the window she notices.

WOLFRED

Shit.

He grows uncomfortable as Dezba walks towards him.

DEZBA

What are you doing here?

WOLFRED

Hello.

DEZBA

What are you doing here?

WOLFRED

Just checking out the newest store in town. Heard I was related to the owner and wanted to come and see for myself.

DEZBA

Were you following me? Stupid question, of course you were.

WOLFRED

Nobodies following you... anymore.

DEZBA

Are you kidding me? Women are disappearing. How do I know it's not you?

WOLFRED

You think I can do that with these.

Wolfred hits the side of his wheelchair.

DEZBA

I'm calling the cops.

WOLFRED

Go ahead, you don't think I wouldn't keep tabs on my own daughter.

DEZBA

It's that old man who runs the bar. I should have known you would know him.

WOLFRED

It's for your own safety. Like you said woman are disappearing.

DEZBA

I don't want you or your pervert buddies looking over me.

WOLFRED

You should be thanking us. You never know who might jump out of the bushes. One day, here, the next, gone. But because of me, that won't happen to you.

DEZBA

Call off your dogs. I don't need your protection.

Dana comes back with two tiny cups.

DEZBA

Is this one of them? Stay away from me.

Dezba knocks one of the cups out his hands.

DANA

Okay. Who are you?

WOLFRED

My daughter.

DANA

She can't be your daughter.

WOLFRED

Why not?

DANA

Cause you're like... old. She's way too hot to be related to you.

DEZBA

You are a pig.

DANA

It's a compliment.

(to Wolfred)

You got some good genes.

DEZBA

You're disgusting.

WOLFRED

Hey, show your father some respect.

DEZBA

Respect? For you? Fuck off.

WOLFRED

You don't know what I've done for you. What I've had to give up.

DEZBA

You've never given up anything unless it was to your advantage.

WOLFRED

I've given up plenty.

DEZBA

Like what?

WOLFRED

I just came in to see you. That's all. Okay. That's it.

Wolfred turns himself around.

WOLFRED

You shouldn't believe all that Shell told you. I'm not a bad guy. All I want is for you to be safe.

Wolfred exits.

DEZBA

What are you doing with him?

Dana picks up the empty cup and tries to give her the full one. She knocks it from his hand.

DEZBA

I don't want anything of his. Don't you know he's all messed up?

DANA

He seems okay.

DEZBA

You'll see.

DANA

I don't want to get involved.

DEZBA

Then run away.

DANA

He seems cool.

DEZBA

You must not have known him very long.

DANA

Almost an hour.

DEZBA

Who are you?

DANA

Dana.

DEZBA

That's a girl's name.

DANA

Mine too. Plenty of Dana's out there.

DEZBA

I don't know one.

DANA

Well the only one that matters is the one standing here. What's your name?

DEZBA

Stay away from me.

Dezba yells the last part as she walks away. Dana takes a moment to watch then runs after Wolfred.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE: SECOND REQUIEM

Mother enters and smudges the space as she continues her story.

MOTHER

All at once the little turquoise baby grew into a full-grown woman. She changed so quickly that First Man and First Woman didn't know what to do. They knew they couldn't keep her, as she was changed, and so they named her Changing Woman. She was grown and wanted to know the world, so she hugged her parents and went out to discover who she is.

Mother sings a Requiem. The Shadows come alive.

REQUIEM

North Dakota. I was getting ready for graduation. Had most everything lined up, except I had to get to town somehow to take my SAT's. My mom and dad worked all day, so I had to hitchhike. I knew the stories and the warnings, but I wasn't going that far. It was just town, and people knew me. I walked for an hour because I had this big coat on. It got hot though and moments after I took it off, a car pulled over. I was glad, because I was hoping to get there early, take the test and get home to cook.

My grandparents were supposed to come over. They wanted to know about the whole thing. The entire process of entering college. They were so happy when I announced I would do so. First in the family they declared over and over again to everyone on the rez. I thought it adorable these sixty something year old were living vicariously through me. It was just school. They never got that opportunity for higher education, so in some way this was their accomplishment too. It meant a lot to me to try and excel at something they were denied at. Like a weird silent form of revenge, an act of rebellion. They didn't get that either though. This couple picked me up. I thought it was safe cause there was another woman there. I got in and everything was fine. For a while. I dozed off a little and when I awoke they were having sex. I got out of the car and tried to leave but he grabbed my arm. I tried to pull away and yelled but then she grabbed me by the other arm... She held me down. Afterwards. They tossed me out of the vehicle without my clothes. I didn't know where I was, and it was cold, and it was dark. Cold. That kind of cold, it never leaves you.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE IV.

The Bar. Donnie sits behind the bar when Wolfred and Dana Come in.

WOLFRED

Donnie, Donnie, Donnie Pour the drinks. Today was a good day.

DONNIE

Oh yea? Glad to hear it. Who's this?

WOLFRED

My new friend.

DONNIE

I thought I was your only friend.

WOLFRED

I would never give you so much power. This is Dana.

DANA

Hey.

DONNIE

What you drinking?

DANA

Beer.

DONNIE

No frills, no thrills, just beer. You want it in a jug with three X's on it?

DANA

Was that a thing?

DONNIE

Oh, hell yea. I got folks up in West Virginia. You know hill folk. Goes back generations. Bunch of inbreeding hicks who wanted freedom from anything resembling that of a government. Real free men. As far as they concerned they home up in them woods and they wouldn't drink anything less than four X's. It was how we separated the men from the boys. We survive the toughest of things. You can tell just by looking at me. The same blood that flows through their veins, tainted and all, runs all up and down this here. But I don't got to tell you about blood. You know all about that. What tribe?

WOLFRED

Can't you tell? Long sloping forehead, small hands, and tiny frame. This man is a pueblo. But not just any pueblo.

(Wolfred gives Dana a sniff)

He's a Zuni by the smells of him. Smells like bread.

DONNIE

Well I'll be goddamn. I thought you were extinct.

DANA

Not yet.

DONNIE

Don't believe I've met a Zuni before. Nice to meet you.

DANA

Yup.

DONNIE

(slight chuckle)

You Indian all right. Of course, you want beer. Triple X kind. Let me get that for you.

Donnie goes to bar and pours then serves Dana.

WOLFRED

Well come on. We're celebrating. The day finally came. My daughter, Dezba, talked to me and it was like a voice from an angel.

DONNIE

What she say?

WOLFRED

She told me to fuck off.

DONNIE

And I'm sure it was from the bottom of her heart. At least she didn't call the cops.

DANA

She threatened to.

WOLFRED

She knows better. She knows to respect her elders. Taught her right. She's just channeling her mother's fire is all. It'll dim. In time. All those lies Shell told her, she'll come around, Watch.

(to Dana)

What are you doing? Come on and sit with us. Tell him about it.

DANA

I didn't even know there was a store there. It use be the plaz center. I used to go plaz there. Fifty a week is not bad, considering it's only my blood.

WOLFRED

They be overpaying since you only a half breed. What percentage are you son?

DONNIE

That's messed up.

WOLFRED

What? It's a legitimate question.

DONNIE

They got you all labeled as if you came right out of the kennel. Half this, half that.

WOLFRED

I want to know.

DANA

I'm half Zuni and half Navajo.

WOLFRED

The homemaker and the thief. I love when enemies get together and put animosity aside to get it on. Your dad steal your mom from the pueblo? Or was it the other way around?

DONNIE

You just showed up at her work? That means that she must know someone's been following her. I'm not trying to go to no jail for stalking.

WOLFRED

You weren't stalking. You were investigating. On my order. Besides she knows nothing about that. Right?

DANA

I guess.

WOLFRED

See? He guesses. I know.

DONNIE

You sure about that? Look at me. Are you sure?

WOLFRED

She ain't going to say anything. Besides its done. I know of where I can get a hold of her now.

DONNIE

Until next time.

WOLFRED

There won't be a next time. I'm making things right. Shell is not around anymore to mess things up, so you know... I'll make things right. It's not like I messed her up. I wasn't around so blame someone else for that. Besides that's not everyone anyway. You get messed up by your parents?

DANA

Who isn't messed up one way or another by their parents?

DONNIE

(pointing)

Don't get him started.

WOLFRED

I didn't have parents to mess me up. The boarding school raised me. My dad spent most of his time up in county. Died during a riot. Seems the other prisoners thought he had to pay the extreme for his crimes.

DANA

That bad huh?

DONNIE

Best to leave it be.

Donnie pours a shot.

WOLFRED

He taught me a thing or two before he left. My Mother and Shell, they abandoned me to the school. I got past it and the last thing I wanted to do was go home. I didn't have one anymore, so I ran away. I didn't know where my mom or my sister had gone off to, so I was all by myself for a long time until the creator put them back into my path. Mother was already sick by then and Shell... she wasn't the Shell I remembered. She had grown. We didn't get along and we had it out. I got out of hand and figured I was better off. Didn't plan on coming back but then I heard that I had a daughter here. That was worth coming back and facing everything... It would have been... eventually it would have gotten better if Shell hadn't slipped poison into her ear every night about me. That woman cost me, far more than I would like to admit. She had venom in her blood and it took me a long time to find out. So, yea there is a little resentment. But we're Indians. Nothing we ain't used to. It's get old fast or die young. My daughter. She just looks young.

But she got old woman blood, flowing through her veins. A woman who knows better. A woman who's seen it all and is waiting for more of it. She's the only reason I stick around.

Beat.

DONNIE

Tell him the dart story.

WOLFRED

Don't go bringing that up.

DONNIE

He ain't allowed to play darts in here anymore.

WOLFRED

I don't know what he's talking about.

DONNIE

Yes, you do and you're lucky no charges were pressed.

WOLFRED

Luck? I knew that eye was fake. That's why I aimed for it. You think I would just go around throwing darts at real eyes. I got more sense than that.

DANA

You hit a guy in the eye with a dart?

WOLFRED

It wasn't a real eye. I knew because it wouldn't shift the same way as the other did. You can't be shifty in only one eye and not have someone notice. I took advantage of his weakness. That's right out of the, Art of War. I was a cunning warrior that day.

DONNIE

Instead of a drunk one.

WOLFRED

Oh, I was drunk too, but the warrior still prevailed. Donnie, we can be many things at the same time.

DONNIE

So, you keep saying.

WOLFRED

Until I convince you.

DONNIE

I'm not the one who needs convincing. All I'm saying is that we lost a good customer because of that temper you said you had under control and the need to show off.

WOLFRED

You see any trophies? I don't need to show off. And even if I did, I got a right to show people the things they doubt.

(pulls out his knife)

See this? I'm an expert. Split a fly in two at fifty paces. I was supposed to let that guy ... You know what I'm not going to get into it. Customer. Is that all I am to you? You hear that everyone. I'm only a customer. I'm only good if I have a few dollars to give up. It's not like I served in any goddamn war or anything. Nope, only a customer. If that's the case, then you're only a bartender. I demand service.

DONNIE

Demand all you like, I don't answer to the calls of Indians. You get served when I feel like it. Right after the dogs.

WOLFRED

Yeah, yea. I got to use the head.

Wolfred exits.

DONNIE

So, what did he recruit you for?

DANA

He said there was a chance that I could find some work around here.

DONNIE

You a veteran?

DANA

No.

DONNIE

Can't help you. You fell for his scam.

DANA

We'll see.

DONNIE

Dude has a heavy conscious. Don't tell him I said that though. It's the most innocent of his vices. They always come out that way.

DANA

What do you mean?

DONNIE

That man served and let me tell you he has seen some and done some shit. A man can't hold that in forever. I should know. Every man needs an outlet or...

(he uses his hands to emphasis an explosion
around his head)

Just you wait.

DANA

I ain't waiting for that.

DONNIE

We're all waiting for that. We all...

(again, he makes the same gesture and noise)

It's just that some of us cause collateral damage. And if that's the case then precautions, and preventions must be undertaken.

DANA

The war do the same to you?

DONNIE

Oh, it definitely fucked me up. But I got through it, thanks to him ironically. When we got back he insisted on having a ceremony done for us. That was some freaky shit right there. Smoke and singing and shadows. Reality bent and blended as worlds converged. It was crazy, and clearly not meant for folks the like of me. I'm glad I went through it though cause he seemed to need it. He seemed to be doing better afterward.

That's because he thought the hard times were over. Little did he know. The war didn't do all that to him. He walked out of that plane back into civilization the same way I did.

DANA

He didn't mess up his legs in the war?

DONNIE

Nope. He might say he did, but I know the truth. His sister did that to him.

DANA

Damn.

DONNIE

I don't know the specifics, but apparently, they had a major falling out. He did something and when he went to make amends she wasn't having it and blam. Sawed off shotgun filled with rock salt. Right into his back. Not the first time he had been shot, I can attest to that, but he never expected that, and it shook him. Should of, but never saw it coming. Wolfred is... well, for some reason he just keeps on surviving. It's a cruel thing to live sometimes. What did he offer you?

DANA

Cooking gig.

DONNIE

You cook?

DANA

I just do what I can to make my way.

DONNIE

By cooking.

DANA

This and that.

DONNIE

This and that? I get it. Just because we are men of the battlefield doesn't mean what you do is any less. Everybody got to eat right. Might as well eat good if you got to do it every day. Nothing wrong with that. People got to eat. When you serve them though do you wear a frilly apron?

DANA

It's not an apron. It's a...

DONNIE

What was that?

DANA

It's just not an apron.

DONNIE

Then what is it?

DANA

Well, it's a uniform.

Donnie gives a deep laugh.

DONNIE

Sure, it is. My momma made sure to always be in uniform, strike of dawn and all day until it was night out. She went to battle every day, serving up those who didn't appreciate her. She was her own little general.

DANA

I bet your mama slap your mouth if she heard what you were saying about her.

DONNIE

Well lucky for me, she dead. She could cook though, let me tell you. Every Christmas, she made miracles for me and my many dads. Never enough though for any of them. But you know, the days, some were good, some were bad. After a while they all tend to blend together into this patch of grey. Then you know what it looks like?

DANA

Colorless.

DONNIE

Damn right. Even the brightest of red, don't mean anything anymore. You empty? On me, but don't tell him that.

Donnie grabs the empty bottle and goes to grab another.

DANA

So, you're not looking for any food prep here?

DONNIE

We have a kitchen... Don't say that I am though.

DANA

What about special occasions? You all have get-togethers and whatnot?

DONNIE

Yea, but mostly to drink beer.

DANA

I'm just saying. I'm willing to offer my services for a chance of setting something up.

DONNIE

What kind of food?

DANA

Good food. Fill more than your belly. Food that will balance you. That'll ground you. A good meal, a hard-earned meal. There ain't nothing better. You make up half the menu, and I'll do the other half focusing on my specialty.

DONNIE

And that would be? Indian food? Some of these men are far from home and don't need to be going any further in their diet.

DANA

That's why you'll put together the other half of the menu. You know these people, you know what will remind them of home. There's power present when you eat the food of your people.

DONNIE

Hmm. I'll give it a thought. Don't be asking and then not be able to handle the job when I come at you with it.

DANA

You cover the supplies, I'll cover the time.

DONNIE

All right, cook. I got you.

DANA

Chef. A cook cooks. A chef creates.

DONNIE

Fair enough, Mr. Chef.

They shake. Donnie doesn't let go of Dana's hand.

DONNIE

What did you think of his daughter? A looker right. The other one too.

DANA

The other one?

DONNIE

The one they keep in the back. She should be up front. Got a mind to... Anyway. It just strikes me as interesting. Got me wondering what he's up to.

DANA

What do you mean?

DONNIE

Just connecting dots. He introduced you two?

DANA

It wasn't a very friendly interaction.

DONNIE

Probably for the best. Not your circus, not your monkeys. That's just a saying. Getting her back in his life is just another small step towards a long path to redemption. She won't let him back in though and he don't deserve it. He too far gone.

DANA

You seem to know way too much about this yourself.

DONNIE

Hazards of the job. The world's dangerous. Just keep on keeping on.

Dana looks around.

DANA

I better go check on this fool.

DONNIE

Wolfed? He's gone by now.

DANA

He left me? I ain't paying for these.

DONNIE

It's on his tab.

Donnie takes a shot.

DANA

Then give me one more.

Donnie does.

DONNIE

So, where you off too?

DANA

Don't know.

DONNIE

Yea right. Don't forget about what I said. Don't go strolling in the wrong direction and getting involved. If you were smart, then this is the last I'll ever see of you. But I know better. Wolfred sure knows how to lure them in, but those are waters you don't want to tread.

DANA

That sounds a bit threatening.

DARYL

Collateral damage. We're soldiers.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE: THIRD REQUIEM

Mother enters. She smudges the space as she continues her story.

MOTHER

Changing Woman traveled the land and she happened upon a curiosity. A man. Not like her father, not like anyone in fact as the man she had come across was the Sun. He was warm and bright and wherever he shined life. He was charming, and it wasn't soon after that she fell in love with him. He loved her too, just not the way she wanted to be loved. Regardless they fell into one another and had a child. She was happy but the two were not meant to be together as the sun only follows his own path. Mother and child were left alone.

Mother sings a Requiem. The Shadows come alive.

REQUIEM

Arizona. I turned eighteen and that's when they kicked me out of foster care. Got up one day and they just showed me the door. I had nowhere to go that night and I managed to find a shelter, but they were at capacity. I was walking away trying to find a place to sleep when he found me. He looked nice and I needed a place so yea. We partied the next couple of nights. He introduced me to a few new party favors. It was fun. I felt free. Like an adult. Ended up staying with him for a while. Then he introduced me to his friends. He said they would be willing to give me money. What he meant was that they would be willing to give him money. I didn't know any better. I just wanted to keep what I had. I went on like this for a while. Until the wrong friend came in. It was all fun and games at first, but then... he noticed the symptoms, before I did. He took me away from the others and we drove to a city I didn't know. He introduced me to some people and it was the usual. At first, I was game, new experience and all. It started to go a bit too far and was a bit too painful. Then a whole lot of painful. I fought. Made a whole lot of noise. I knew people heard me. I could hear them. No one bothered. They were just glad when it got all quiet again. The guy who I was staying with. Didn't shed a tear, didn't get mad, didn't do nothing. All he did was shrug and turn his back on both of us.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE V.

Dana is sitting in front of Dezba's store which has just closed for the day.

She comes out and sees Dana sitting on the curb with a basket next to him.

DEZBA

What the hell are you doing here?

DANA

Well hello to you too.

DEZBA

If he sent you...

DANA

He didn't send me.

DEZBA

You sound buzzed.

DANA

Had to strengthen the spine.

DEZBA

Why are you here?

DANA

It's a nice evening. I'm hungry, thought you might be too.

Dana motions towards the basket.

DEZBA

You serious?

DANA

Absolutely.

DEZBA

I don't know you.

DANA

I know the perfect way to remedy that. Sit.

Dana pads the other side of the curb.

DEZBA

Here?

DANA

Don't act like you haven't eaten a picnic in a parking lot. Sit.

DEZBA

No.

DANA

C'mon. I'll give you a good reason. I'm a nice guy.

DEZBA

Everyone thinks they're nice.

DANA

I'm also talented and ambitious. For a Native that's a lot. What do you have to lose?
Anytime you can walk away.

Beat.

DEZBA holds up her purse.

DEZBA

You know what I have in here?

DANA

Napkins I hope, I forgot them.

Beat.

DEZBA

You're serious?

DANA

Yup, must have left them on the counter. That's okay, you can use my shirt.

DEZBA

I'm not eating with you.

DANA

No?

DEZBA

Why would I?

DANA

Do you hate men or something?

DEZBA

Did he tell you that?

DANA

No, but I heard about your aunt. That shit is pretty rowdy.

DEZBA

Yea, and so what?

DANA

After spending some time with him, if that's what your aunt felt she needed to do, then hey, that's what she needed to do. You must feel that special kind of love. The-I'll-handicap-everybody-I-need-to-so-that-you're-safe, kind of love huh? All I ever got was a hug.

Dana reaches into the basket. Dezba reacts and reaches into her purse.

DEZBA

Don't you try anything.

DANA

Chill, chill. I just...

Dana brings out two small sandwiches.

DANA

Fried spam on a warm tortilla with green chili.

DEZBA

Spam? You sure know how to wine and dine.

DANA

Speaking of which.

Dana pulls out a bottle of Boone's Farm.

DEZBA
Boone's farm?

DANA
For a classy lady. A jumpy one too.

DEZBA
I have a reason to be jumpy.

DANA
I'm not offended.

DEZBA
It's not safe.

DANA
I know.

DEZBA
How do you know?

Beat.

DANA
I just know.

DEZBA
...

DANA
I know.

DEZBA
You lost someone?

DANA
...

Awkwardness sets in. DEZBA unwraps her sandwich gives it a sniff but doesn't eat it.

DANA
Sister.

DEZBA

I'm sorry. My grandmother always said it was hazardous to be a woman on the rez. Monsters who pretend they're men, until you get older and realize they are real. You'd hear stories. Rape parties, rape vans. Shit like that. Beatings. Poisonings. Bodies. All over the rez, everywhere, even way up North. They call reservations reserves up in Canada. That's pretty crazy. Reserves, like the Natives are animals. Sometimes the family gets lucky. Find a body under mysterious circumstances. We all know though. Every now and then tribal police tag a suspect, but you know what happens? No jurisdiction over non-Natives. Feds don't give a crap about Indian law and they're not going to let no brown jail hold a white person. Then they call us animals. But the real animals come and go as they please out into the reserves to get their thrill and return to their wives and kids like it never happened. They destroy a life so that they can maintain theirs. We're nothing to them. Quickest way to kill a culture is to eliminate the women.

Dana gives Dezba some space. She timidly goes through the basket.

DEZBA

You weren't kidding. Spam sandwiches.

DANA

I only provide the best.

DEZBA

What's this?

She holds up a small box.

DANA

Careful. That there is special.

DEZBA

Special? This?

DANA

You don't have to eat it. I'm perfectly fine with you just watching me. May I?

Dezba hands over a sandwich that he unwraps. He takes a bite and talks as he eats.

DANA

Getting to know someone is a weird thing if you think about it. A lot of the times its centered around food. Where do you think that began? Why is that sharing a meal with someone is a bit intimate. I admit there is valuable information in how and what people eat, but we associate meals as safe. Did you know there are taboos against combative action concerning meals? It's like the first thing we tried to civilize about ourselves. To eat, is to experience a bit of peace. I guess that's it innit? Ain't the formalities of dates weird.

DEZBA

I didn't know I was going to be on one, and this isn't a date.

DANA

No, you sure? It sure feels like a date.

DEZBA

What the hell am I doing? You're with him.

DANA

I'm not with him. I just wanted to see you again is all.

DEZBA

He's using you, you know.

DANA

So, I've been told. I'm prepared.

DEZBA

And you still insist.

DANA

I can take care of myself. Besides there is a gain in this. Not you, a job, possibly. You want some of this or not?

Dana holds up the bottle.

DEZBA

I don't drink.

DANA

You going to judge me if I do?

DEZBA

I don't think that would stop you.

DANA

No, but I like to keep things on front street.

Dana uncaps the top and takes a swig right from the bottle.

DANA

I love that. Right from the bottle. Makes me feel like a pirate.

DEZBA

He really didn't send you?

DANA

He has no clue I'm here.

DEZBA

And if he did?

DANA

I imagine we would exchange a few words. I don't really care. You going to eat that?

Dezba notices she's still holding the sandwich and decides it's okay to eat.

DEZBA

You made these?

DANA

I'm a chef.

DEZBA

A chef? Anyone can make a sandwich.

DANA

I admit it's not my best. Besides if I broke out the four-course meal now, then you'll expect it again next time.

DEZBA

There will be no next time.

DANA

You said that about seeing me again and here I am.

DEZBA

I knew you were a stalker.

DANA

I leave the stalking to those who hunt.

DEZBA

You don't cook what you hunt?

DANA

No, I do not. I let more skilled people do that for me. You hunt?

DEZBA

Maybe.

DANA

Wouldn't surprise me, you look... capable. You're definitely more Indian than me.

DEZBA

Shell taught me. She thought it would be a useful skill. We traveled, a lot of back country away from people. What money we did have we used for gas, so being able to go out into the woods and catch your meal, well, it was a lifesaver. You ever ate something you hunted and killed? There are a lot of values in the hunt. Patience and appreciation. Just think about that. You're on the prairie, decked out in your buffalo robes. You find some dung and you smear it on yourself, so you can smell like them. You creep up in the tall grass, silently. The wind is blowing in your long hair and it's looking all majestic and shit. You knock an arrow and you wait, and you creep. Finally, it gets close. You smell it. A gigantic bull. Beautiful creature. God's creation. You pull back on the string and your muscles are tense because it takes a lot of pressure on the pull to take down a large animal as it is. And you only got one shot because if you miss, he's coming right at you. You take a deep breath then hold. Time stops for an instant right before you release the arrow. You hold back. You feel the sun baking onto your skin. The sweat drip from your brow. You smell the life of the world and damn doesn't it smell ever so beautiful when it's that close to death. At that moment you and the buffalo are the most important things in the world. The only thing that matters. Then you let go. The arrow flies and it flies true. The animal is startled but the sting is not enough to panic it. It looks around, takes a few steps then all of a sudden it gets wobbly.

It falls and as you run up to it, you look in its eyes, apologize for the pain and then give thanks to him as he journey's home. You do your best to soothe its confusion. It wasn't supposed to die this way. He was supposed to grow old and feeble and the wolves were supposed to take it. Who am I? There's fear in his eyes but it's a different type of fear from what we know. Life fades quickly as that fear turns to acceptance. You begin the death song so that the buffalo will find its way up there. And when you're done, life presumes. I bet that buffalo is the tastiest thing you'll ever have. All because of what is lost and what is gained.

DANA

Our people never hunted Buffalo, did they?

DEZBA

All Indians hunt buffalo when they sleep. They used to be everywhere they say. All over the place. They used to say that in the old days you could tell where a herd was over the horizon from the cloud that came from their breathe.

Beat.

DANA

Whoa.

DEZBA

I know right.

DANA

Is that what you'd do then? Hunt all day if you could?

Dana sits next to her leaving some space. Dezba gets up anyway.

DEZBA

No, I do like it though. Gave me a bit of respect for what I eat.

DANA

That's great. You hunt, and I'll cook. We'll open a restaurant. Killed and Grilled. We'll call it.

DEZBA

It has a ring to it. I already have one partner though, I don't need another.

DANA

Oh? Boyfriend?

(enthusiastically)

Girlfriend?

DEZBA

Business partner. My sister.

DANA

That's cool. I'd buy something, but all my money went into dinner.

DEZBA

Oh, did it?

DANA

Afraid so. Getting to know you has put me in dire straits.

DEZBA

I'm not responsible for your bad decision.

DANA

Well I certainly don't want to be. You seem much more qualified than I to make my bad decisions. Owning a store an all. You a genius or something?

DEZBA

You don't need to be a genius to open up a store. Just a lot of work and a lot of planning. This is phase one.

DANA

What's phase two?

DEZBA

More like phase twelve but we'll get there. I would really like to build this place, and have it act as a community haven. Woman could come by when they have no place else to go. A safe place where they can clean up, shower and sleep.

DANA

A shelter?

DEZBA

Yes, but more than that. We would include outreach as well, along with community services, certified courses, tangible real-world skills education, stuff like construction, maintenance, farming. Imagine be given all that you need to start your own garden. Or, set of livestock, sheep for their wool, goats for their milk and cheese. I know, I know we're lactose, but people could sell it. Options, that's what I want to set up here. Not a store. But a building full of options.

DANA

It sounds like you've been thinking about this a long time.

DEZBA

All my life.

DANA

I'll tell you what, you might not like him, but you sound like...

DEZBA

Don't say his name. I'm nothing like him. There's nothing about him that is worth comparison.

DANA

Really? He is a veteran. You got to agree that he's at least brave right?

DEZBA

Brave? What the hell do you know about bravery? Brave people sacrifice for others despite the fucked-up consequences. When have you ever showed bravery? When have any of you? Oh, you all are there when there is a possibility of sex but when we really need you... It's just us. Huh? Where have our warriors gone? Why have you all stopped protecting us?

DANA

I don't know. Come back and sit with me. No more questions about your past. At least have what's in the box.

Dana holds it up. Dezba sits down next to him and takes the box and opens it.

DEZBA

What is it?

DANA

It's cake.

DEZBA

Cake?

DANA

Navajo cake.

DEZBA

Am I supposed to eat the corn husk?

DANA

No just the orange part. Don't be that way. Trust me. I know how it looks but the recipe is thousands of years old. My ancestors brought it up from the old world. I tweaked it a bit but it's essentially the same. Take a bite and experience the past.

Dana takes a little bit of it and eats it to demonstrate it's safe.

DANA

It tastes like the good times.

Dezba reluctantly takes a pinch and eats it.

DEZBA

It's actually pretty good.

She takes some more.

DANA

You bake it in the ground.

DEZBA

And I'm done.

DANA

Come on. It's traditional... Technically. How cool is it to participate in something your ancestors did in the exact same way? That's fucking cool.

DEZBA

It's cool I guess. Thank you.

DANA

If you want to know my true passion, then it's baking. Sweets are my thing, but I tell everyone I specialize in Native cuisine because... you know. It sounds more impressive. Don't get me wrong I do, but, yea baking.

DEZBA

Why don't you open up a bakery?

DANA

I thought about it. I don't want to do just one thing? I want to do as much as I can. I set up shop somewhere, that's it. My ambition only goes so far before conformity takes over.

DEZBA

What about a restaurant?

DANA

Don't have the head for that. But a food truck. I've been thinking that sounds doable.

DEZBA

A food truck?

DANA

Hell yea. Drive around all day slinging food out the back, to whoever may come. That's a dream I can get behind.

DEZBA

What's stopping you?

DANA

Funds mostly. Jobs are hard to come by now a day, especially for someone like me. Always just manage to keep afloat so buying a vehicle... well it aint happening. Not for a while and not the way it is so if it's to be then it's going to have to come another way.

DEZBA

Someone like you?

Dana doesn't answer for a moment.

DANA

I have a condition.

Dana rolls up his pants leg and shows off his scars.

DEZBA

What the hell happened to you?

DANA

Accident. I was twenty-two and following this group to a party out on the rez. Weather rolled in. Nasty. This is what they said happened, I don't remember any of it. The people I was following said there was this huge flash of lightning and sparks as it struck an electric pole. They stopped, so I stopped. I don't know why I got out though. Stepped on a live wire. They said I just lit up and it tossed me twenty feet onto the other side of the road. I woke up a couple of weeks later with six toes missing and big chunks of my calf gone. They did skin grafts and whatever else they could and to their credit, I still have my legs. Can't stand on them for too long though. Nerves are fried and sometimes they just give out. Part of being a chef and a cook nowadays is mobility and being able to stand long hours in the kitchen. I just couldn't keep up. Probably why I like to bake. Mix it up, put it in and wait. I try not to let it stop me though. I figure if I have a food truck I can rig it, so I have a place to sit and create.

Dana rolls his pants leg back down.

DANA

So, you have any members of family that don't piss you off?

DEZBA

Just my step sister and her mom. They're from a different rez so they're a bit different but so far so good. I worried though. A lot. About her, being out on the rez, so I brought her out here with me. Like it's any safer for us out here. I know it's not but still. My only thing about this place, it's not the rez. I really would like to do this out there. The place where my people died for. That's where it's really needed. That's the place that needs changing. As messed up as the rez is, I love it so much. I wouldn't want to be farther away from it than I am now. You know what I'm saying?

DANA

I do. It's home, good times or bad.

Dezba and Dana lock eyes and there is a moment where they truly see each other.

DEZBA

Look this was all very nice of you but...

DANA

No, no, no. Don't do that.

DEZBA

I don't...

DANA

Let it be and let us live. Just for this moment.

DEZBA

What does that mean?

DANA

Let's just let the moment be the moment.

Dezba gives up. When she tries to get up again he gently grabs her hand. She's surprised, and instinct tells her to pull away, but she stops. Dana stands. They kiss.

After a moment Dana pulls away.

DEZBA

I don't want to be hurt.

Dezba turns away.

DANA

Me either.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE: FOURTH REQUIEM

Mother enters. She smudges the space then continues her story.

MOTHER

Mother and child lived and grew. The child went to his father the sun. The father asked about his wife and the child asked why he was abandoned. The father exerted that he had never abandoned them and that every day he watched them upon his journey. Did the child not feel the extra warmth? Did the child not feel loved? Did his wife feel this way too? The child was still upset and called his father a monster. The father replied that there's monsters in all of us. It's always in there, whispering and lying, trying to be heard, trying to convince us to become monsters ourselves. But some of us become monster slayers who protect and take care of the people. The boy promised his father that he would become a monster slayer and rid the world of the things that might harm his people. When he left his father, the child took the name Monster Slayer. He slayed as many of them as he could and became a great hero, however, not all the monsters died. They just learned how to hide better. The monsters learned how to be better monsters.

Mother sings a Requiem. The Shadows come alive.

REQUIEM

US/Canadian Border. I don't remember how I got there. I truly don't. It's just a blank spot in there. I remember leaving my mom's house then... at the time it was all fuzzy, so I didn't realize I was missing something. It kept bugging me, but I couldn't get a grip. I couldn't see well either, but I heard the metal clanking of a large door. I thought I also could hear the sound of lapping water. Footsteps, heavy, consistent. Calm. That scared me then I felt a pin prick upon my arm then, more darkness. What I was missing came back to me as I dreamt. I had left my mom's with my daughter. I awoke and started screaming, then I felt pain as someone punched me. It didn't feel like a fist though. I was told to shut up and when I didn't they said that they would kill my daughter. That if I wanted what was best for her that I would do as I was told. I did. Each time I just kept thinking, at least she's safe. This was my life for a while, room after room, body after body. Until one day I was picked out of the line up for a special get together. It turned out to be a boat party. I was expected to mingle and make these suits feel special. One of them had one of those little pins of the flag attached to the lapel of his suit, just like politician's wear. I debated then made my move. I cornered him and tried to tell him my situation. He looked me over then backhanded me, before dragging me down deeper into the boat. They didn't bother closing doors, so I could see what was going on in other rooms as I was shuffled about. That's when I saw her. Two men walked out adjusting their tie, one even adjusted his little American flag pin. Two more guys went into the room that held my daughter. The door shut. That was the last time I saw her. The first chance I got alone, I bit into my wrists. I didn't feel any pain, or if I did my body didn't register it. It was too late for that.

SCENE VI.

Young Shelly and PATRICIA are running through the woods. They're scared. They're being chased. They hide.

SHELLY

Did you see them?

PATRICIA

No.

SHELLY

Shh. Don't cry Patricia.

PATRICIA

I'm scared Shell.

SHELLY

They won't find us.

PATRICIA

Who are they?

SHELLY

I don't know.

PATRICIA

Was that your brother?

SHELLY

...

PATRICIA

Is it?

SHELLY

Shh.

PATRICIA

We can't stay here forever. I need to get out of here.

SHELLY

They'll see you.

PATRICIA

I can't stay in here.

Patricia begins to panic and hyperventilate.

SHELLY

Hey, hey. It's okay.

Shelly grabs hold of Patricia

SHELLY

Patricia. Look at me. Everything is going to be okay.

PATRICIA

You don't know that.

SHELLY

I do. I won't let anything happen to you.

Shelly pulls Patricia close.

SHELLY

They're not going to get you. Okay?

PATRICIA

They're getting closer.

SHELLY

When I tell you. You run home. Get someone.

PATRICIA

Who?

SHELLY

Anyone.

PATRICIA

What are you going to do?

SHELLY

Give you time to get away. You need to be brave. Remember Pine Leaf? She was a great warrior. A great Chief. She stood up for her people. You need to be strong like her.

PATRICIA

I'm not a warrior.

SHELLY

Neither was she. Neither was Lozen, Buffalo Calf Road, or Running Eagle. They weren't warriors until they had to be. Now's the time. Shh.

Undistinguished voices and catcalls can be heard.
Menacing laughter.

PATRICIA

There's too many of them.

SHELLY

Don't worry about that. Just run. Follow the deer trail. You know what to look for?

PATRICIA

I can't leave you.

Shelly gently lifts Patricia's chin. She kisses her. The world stops for one instance just for the two of them. Shelly pulls away and the world starts again.

SHELLY

Get ready.

PATRICIA

Don't do this.

Shelly grabs a tree branch off the ground.

SHELLY

Remember. The deer trail. Count to five and don't look back. Be brave. Ready?

Shelly runs out, so as to not change her mind.

SHELLY

C'mon you sons of bitches.

Shelly runs to the middle of the stage and swings the branch around fighting off invisible bodies. She's fierce as she embodies the women warriors.

Patricia sneaks out and runs.

Shelly keeps fighting but the invisible bodies are too much for her. She goes down and is beaten. The sound of dogs almost drowns out her cries. Her clothes are ripped. Her legs are forced open. She doesn't cry or whimper but instead lets out an enormous war whoop and keeps fighting.

A familiar figure stands over Shelly and she stops.

SHELLY

No! Not you! Not you.

She takes another hit, then another, and another, then she is silent. The monsters snarl over their prey. The big monster, the leader, howls. The other's follow suit with the howling which eventually turn to grunts.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE: FIFTH REQUIEM

Mother enters. She smudges the space and continues her story.

MOTHER

The child of First Man and First Woman grew old. All her children came to her one by one as she had many in her lifetime. They came to offer their mother support and see her on her journey to the next world. They were all sad, because she was their reason. Their everything. They cried, and their mother came to them and said not to be sad. The old woman instead instructed for them to pray. While they did that, she would sing the path of the world. She said that when there were done, there would be a new balance within their lives. A new Hozho that they could see and depend on. The offspring prayed, and the old woman sang.

When they were finished, the old woman that was left to sing was no more. In her place was a young woman. She said, I was made turquoise and changed to a woman. Now I am young, changed from old. I am Changing woman still, but I am also more now. I am the cycle of life which the people must follow. I am that which is your birth and your death. Earth and dirt, flowers and grass, mountains and valleys.

Mother steps aside. The shadows pray.

The funeral of Shelly Walker.

Dezba comes on stage. She is wearing traditional dress.

DEZBA

Shell was not my real mother. But she earned the title anyway. My real mother abandoned me, so it was Shell who raised me, sometimes by herself, sometimes not. She was strong. She stood up to monsters. She wasn't afraid to fight and face an attack and she did just that when it happened. She fought and sacrificed herself so that Patricia, my third mother, could get away. Shell wasn't expected to live. But she did. She healed the scars she could, coped the best way she could with the ones she couldn't. She was not the same after that. The attack shook her, and she returned home, back to her reservation, back to where her ancestors lived and died and that's when she came upon me. She went to college. Earned a bachelor's in social work and made real change. She was good. Pure... Shell's brother, my father... is not a good man. Shell told me that he used to beat my mother. That he was the reason I was abandoned. He's damaged and when he heard about me he tried to take me away from her. She resisted. She fought, like she always did, and rather than see me grow up with a deranged man, a dangerous man. She took that sawed-off and proved that she was the protector we all knew she was. She was a warrior. She was a free spirit. She touched many lives. She changed and protected the world. My world. And that's more than enough for some but not for her. She fought for her people. She fought for their daughters, for their sons, for their elders. She fought for you. She fought for me. She fought and fought and fought that them scars were presented and worn like medals. Eagles gifted her with feathers. Those who saw her seemed to only see the fire. Those who knew her best got to experience the water. She was more than the best of us. She was the earth itself. She reflected the beauty and purity of who we are. She created a better world. I know that if she were here she would tell me that I'm her best creation.

Dezba reaches into her pocket and pulls out a piece of turquoise.

DEZBA

When I was eight years old, she gave me this. It's just a rock, I said. She replied that it was so much more. It was turquoise from my home, the same rock that changed to a woman who then changed to our mother, whose womb the corn grows from. This piece of our home, Dinetah was from someone who loved me more than life itself, and that no matter how far I went, it would always bring me home. To family. To her.

Dezba walks over to the casket. She puts the rock in it.

DEZBA

She is my home.

Dezba begins to sing the death song. She gets a little way in before she collapses on the casket and cries.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE: SIXTH REQUIEM

Mother enters. She smudges the space and continues her story.

MOTHER

Changing Woman and her husband the Sun had problems. Their love needed work. Men and Women in general were feeling isolated all throughout the world. They forgot aspects of each other, which meant they forgot themselves. Relationships between all men and women are difficult. Even First Man and First Woman had problems. One day First Man came back with a kill. He gave the kill to First Woman who ate and ate and ate, and when she was done, she failed to thank him. Angry, First Man yelled at his wife and First Woman yelled back that she didn't need to give thanks because it was she who gave the man purpose. She saw that men had learned to covet her various parts, treating them more important than that of her entire being. She thanked herself and the holy people and the wind for making her as she is. First Man became angry at this and decided to leave. If she would not respect him then he would not respect her. The pair that was made together, split and went on their own. They each became strong in their own being. Stubborn. They said they cared not for each other, but only for themselves. But as they turned their backs on one another, their hearts wept.

Mother sings a Requiem. The Shadows come alive.

REQUIEM

I was raped. I was beaten over and over again by the others but when it came down to the business, it was just one guy. When it was over, he left me with them and they hit me over the head with a rock and abandoned me. I laid there for a bit. Watching the top of the trees wave back and forth. They seemed so fragile to be pushed around by the wind like that. I cried and waited for death, and as my eyes drifted from the top of branches down to the trunk, I saw it. It wasn't fragile at all. The deeper you dove the more it revealed itself to be sturdy and strong. Rooted. I heard noise, I thought it was him. That he had come back to finish me off or go for another round. I got ready to fight, but it was her. My love. She went and found help. They caught the guys. All but the one. When I healed, I went to court and pointed them out. The Judge's eyes went up and down upon my form. I could see from his look what he was. He was a monster too. There was to be no trial. Tribal jurisdiction does not extend to those who are not Native. The men were released, and the judge actually apologized to them for having to put up with such horrid conditions such as that of reservation jail. The one person the tribal courts could prosecute was nowhere to be found, and although he was not physically present, he did leave something. He left another victim besides myself.

SCENE VII.

Dezba is in the store with Georgina.

GEORGINA

I thought you did a good job. I don't know what people expected but I was moved.

DEZBA

Thanks.

GEORGINA

People just talk to talk, you know? Gossip keeps their mind on the little picture because they can't see the big one. It didn't help that Wolfred didn't show up. People were expecting him and that really got the chicken's squawking.

DEZBA

And what did you squawk?

GEORGINA

You don't want to know. Speaking of things, and not knowing. What are you hiding from me?

DEZBA

What are you talking about?

GEORGINA

When I came in, you were on the phone, and you briefly went, and I quote. uh, uh, umm. I'll call you back. You were flustered. Was it phone sex?

DEZBA

No. You startled me is all. You haven't come in for three days and I wasn't expecting you until at least day six.

GEORGINA

I'm not that bad.

DEZBA

You can get that way.

GEORGINA

Well I cut the benders down to three. Progress, and I don't believe you. Who is he?

DEZBA

Nobody.

GEORGINA

So, it is a he.

DEZBA

No.

GEORGINA

C'mon. As your sister, I get dibs on mocking him and making him cry.

DEZBA

No, you don't.

GEORGINA

Ah, so you're sweet on him, but he will cry. Boyfriend? Fuck buddy? What's the story?

DEZBA

I'm not having this conversation with you.

GEORGINA

You are a changed woman. You're getting soft. You know how I know, for one, you're blushing. Didn't think Indians could do that. And two, you had cupcakes in your fridge.

Since when do you make cupcakes? I thought they were store bought at first but why would you take them out of the box? To pretend to have talent? We both know, you're talentless. But I got to say I was surprised by the first one, and by the third I was just blown away... Who would of thought... wait... How many did you have?

DEZBA

One.

GEORGINA

(thinking)

Hold on... Math.

Beat.

GEORGINA

You gave one away. Those were love cakes. You baked for your boyfriend? That is so freaking, Betty Crocker. I thought you were better than that. Eww. You must love him to... wait.

Beat. Eureka moment.

GEORGINA

You can't bake. You can't do anything. I'm surprised you know where the kitchen is.

DEZBA

I can cook and do things.

GEORGINA

You can burn, I guess that's kind of the same thing. You didn't bake those love cakes, did you? He did. You fell for a baker?

DEZBA

I didn't fall for anyone.

GEORGINA

Is this a mid-life crisis? You fell in love with a baker. He's fattening you up with his special dough.

DEZBA

He's not a baker... He's a chef.

GEORGINA

Well thank god. Where does he work? Tell me it's at the casino. Can he hook us up?

DEZBA

I'm not telling you anymore.

GEORGINA

You have too. Now that I know, I have to vet him.

DEZBA

Vet him?

GEORGINA

I can't let you go out with someone and not know who he is. If you disappear then I know who the first suspect is. So, lay it on me. Everything.

DEZBA

He's just a guy.

GEORGINA

Name?

DEZBA

(hesitantly)

Dana.

GEORGINA

That's a chick's name. No wonder he bakes.

DEZBA

He's a chef.

GEORGINA

So where does he work?

DEZBA

I don't want to say.

GEORGINA

Is he good? Does he work at one of those fancy restaurants?

DEZBA

No...

GEORGINA

What about over at the grill? Sports Page? Flea market? What the hell does he cook then?

DEZBA

He works at the Bar.

GEORGINA

Which one? American? Tropics?

DEZBA

He cooks for the veterans.

GEORGINA

You serious? That place?

DEZBA

A job's a job. He's making it work. That's better than most of the men you dated.

GEORGINA

This ain't about me. So, you are dating him?

DEZBA

I don't know. We hang out.

GEORGINA

How much?

DEZBA

Enough.

GEORGINA

He brings you sweets every time?

DEZBA

Yea, that's a bit weird.

GEORGINA

That's the Indian way of telling you that he loves you.

DEZBA

Shut up.

GEORGINA

It's true. If this were a hundred years ago he would be offering your dad one hundred horses. I'm worth one hundred and seven. I'm worth exactly seven more horses more than you. Mustangs too. War ponies at that.

DEZBA

You finished?

GEORGINA

One hundred and seven. How you meet him?

DEZBA

He was with Wolfred.

GEORGINA

Holy shit. He did offer one hundred horses for you.

DEZBA

No, he's like my dad's care taker or something. Was. But I know they still hang out from time to time.

GEORGINA

And you're okay with that?

DEZBA

Shit no. But what can I do?

GEORGINA

What do you do? You hike up your Native britches and do what your ancestors did. You run your man's life, because they are not responsible enough for them to do it themselves. I'm serious. That's the way my grandmother use to do it. The women were in charge. They owned everything. The house, the property, the clothes, one hundred and seven horses. Everything. The men were just around. Every now and then they catch a rabbit or a deer, we give them a little slap and tickle and it's all good. We ran the home, we ran society. We are the backbone. So, if you go to your man and say, "no, you will not be friends with my dad!" That Native instinct will kick in and he will obey. It also helps if you have a rolled-up newspaper in your hand.

DEZBA

It's hard to believe you're single.

GEORGINA

Shows what you know.

DEZBA

What?

GEORGINA

Nothing. I know right. Don't you wish for the good old days?

DEZBA

You're dating someone?

GEORGINA

I don't date. I don't believe in labels.

DEZBA

Who is he?

GEORGINA

My get rich ticket.

DEZBA

How near death is he?

Beat.

DEZBA

I was kidding.

GEORGINA

Whatever. At least he's not a baker.

DEZBA

What's he do?

GEORGINA

I don't know. He came in one day to look at the wares, if you catch my drift, but don't try and change the subject. This is about you and Mr. Poppin Fresh.

DEZBA

I don't know what it is. I didn't want to like him. Especially since he came with my dad.
But he's so...

GEORGINA

Ooh, look at this dude...

Dana comes into the store.

GEORGINA

Hey, pervert. We sell woman's clothes here.

DEZBA

Georgina!

GEORGINA

What?

DANA

(points to Dezba)

I came to speak to her.

GEORGINA

Her?

Georgina looks between the two of them and puts two
and two together.

GEORGINA

You! And her! Love cakes!

DEZBA

DANA

(simultaneously)

No.

(simultaneously)

Yes.

GEORGINA

I fucking knew you had a man.

DEZBA

He's not my man.

DANA

I'm not?

DEZBA

No. I told you to wait for me outside.

(to Georgina)

He's not my man.

GEORGINA

Uh-huh. Well if he's not then you can come over and cook for me anytime. I make the best fry bread around these parts.

DANA

Oh yea?

Dezba pulls Dana aside.

DEZBA

Don't get any ideas. Look over there.

Dana obeys.

DEZBA

He's not my man, but you best walk away.

GEORGINA

Ah-ha. There's that Native fire. I knew it. All he had to do was cook for you. You're a food whore.

DEZBA

I'm taking you back to the rez.

GEORGINA

Huh-uh, this is getting good.

Georgina reaches into her pockets and pulls out some change.

GEORGINA

Here's part of my rent. Take the rest out of my one percent.

DEZBA

Not enough. Don't want it.

GEORGINA

Then I'll give it to him. I'm sure he has a couch or something better for me to sleep on.

DEZBA

He doesn't have shit.

DANA

I can hear you.

GEORGINA

You see that? You got yourself a man who cooks and listens. You hit the jackpot and you're still going to deny him.

DEZBA

I didn't deny him.

DANA

She didn't. Well publicly yes. But I went the distance. Second date.

DEZBA

Shut up.

GEORGINA

What did you make her?

DEZBA

Don't answer that.

DANA

Indian tacos.

GEORGINA

You whore.

DEZBA

He makes better fry bread than you.

GEORGINA

(insulted)

How dare you.

(to Dana)

You sir, I challenge to a cook off. Bring the dough, the lard and two of your best pans, and I'll show you.

DEZBA

Okay, okay. You get back to work and you, outside.

DANA

I came to tell you the good news.

DEZBA

What?

DANA

I have the money

DEZBA

What money?

DANA

I went right away and picked one out. Come check it out. Super spacious.

DEZBA

A van?

DANA

Next thing to do is fix it up, put in a stove, set up a prep station, storage, mini fridge.

DEZBA

You can't be serious.

DANA

We are moving on up baby. To that deluxe apartment in the sky. Second floor here we come.

DEZBA

You got no idea how to run a business.

DANA

No, but I can cook. I'll exchange the food for money. How much more do I have to know?

DEZBA

What's your overhead? Do you have your food permit? Waste permit? Did you register at the BBB? Did you understand any of what I said?

DANA

No, but you did and know how.

DEZBA

I already run one business.

GEORGINA

With my help. And technically it's not a business.

DEZBA

Shut up.

GEORGINA

Just saying.

DEZBA

You can't run a business.

DANA

Why not?

DEZBA

Because, because...

DANA

I'm an adult. I can do anything. Right?

Beat.

DANA

You knew about this. That this was what I was shooting for. Did you not believe me?

DEZBA

...

DANA

All this time?

DEZBA

I thought you were just talking whimsy.

DANA

I believed you.

DEZBA

Well, that's different. I had a plan, things in motion. I went to school to build this.

DANA

So, I'm not qualified now?

DEZBA

No.

DANA

...

Beat.

GEORGINA

Ouch. It was fun while it lasted huh?

DANA

Why are you so mistrustful of men? How do I threaten you when I've supported every single idea that you've shared? Of all the men in your life... can't we just agree that of all the assholes in your life, I'm the least assholely. I don't need your support, but I would appreciate it. I can do this without you... but I don't want to.

Beat.

DEZBA

You want this?

DANA

I do.

DEZBA

Then what does my opinion of it matter?

DANA

Really?

DEZBA

...

DANA

That's it.

DEZBA

If you say so.

DANA

...

Beat.

Dana walks to the door. He stops.

DANA

I think you building a woman's haven will bring about good. Always thought so. Whenever you talk about it, you shine. I would never choose to take that away from you.

DEZBA

I'm not taking anything away from you. You leave with the same things you came with.

DANA

And what's that?

DEZBA

Just you. Yourself. Same as I because that's all we have. Everything else fades.

Beat.

Dana turns and walks out.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE VIII.

The home of Mother and Shell.

SHELLY

Did you do it?

MOTHER

It's buried.

SHELLY

Good.

MOTHER

You can't keep her.

SHELLY

I'm going to.

MOTHER

People will talk.

SHELLY

So, what?

MOTHER

Shell... What will you tell her when she asks? She can't know the truth.

SHELLY

She's mine. You buried the umbilical cord, right? By the front door facing East?

MOTHER

That doesn't mean you can keep her.

SHELLY

Look at her. She's one of us. She's your grandchild. Don't you want to look at her?

Mother turns away.

MOTHER

It's safer if she's away.

SHELLY

I'll protect her.

MOTHER

Not from him.

SHELLY

Even from him.

MOTHER

This is my fault. I thought he would change. I thought him going away would make him be different. Or at least... that the white man's school would teach him to forget us. Instead he's just more of a monster and now he's just accepted it. I should have drowned him when he was little. Save him the trauma his father inflicted upon him. Taught him. Save him from the thing he's become. He's still out there though...

SHELLY

I'll protect her.

MOTHER

He'll find out. He'll come back.

SHELLY

Then he'll get what's coming to him.

MOTHER

This is not the life I would have for you.

SHELLY

It's the only one I got. Look at her.

Mother reluctantly looks.

SHELLY

She is strong.

MOTHER

Good. We all have to be.

Beat.

MOTHER

What will you name her?

SHELLY

Dezba. She looks like a warrior, so we'll call her Dezba.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE: SEVENTH REQUIEM

Mother enters and smudges the space. She continues her story.

MOTHER

First Man and First Woman had gone their own way. Changing Woman had seen love and lost, life and death. All were alone. The first year of separation between First Man and First Woman were easy. They celebrated and spoke ill of each other. The second year was less joyful. They missed each other and wished for what the other provided. Love. Connection. Respect. Alone the pair had lost their Hozho. They didn't know this of course, because it's not until you find Hozho that you realize you were missing it. And sometimes the only way to find what's missing is to give up everything.

Mother sings a Requiem.

REQUIEM

Go out and look. That's all I intended to do. Just look. I don't usually string along older men, I mean, for fun sure on the off chance that he might buy me some things. It's pretty difficult being a woman out there. It feels like... avoidance. Avoid this person, avoid that person, avoid this situation, avoid that situation. Everything is avoid, avoid, avoid. Sure, I know the good reasons for doing so. Another name in the newspaper, another missing. My mom made sure I knew the facts as terrible as they were. One in two Native women have been sexually abused. One in two. It was just one of those things, growing up on the rez, that you have to come to terms with. It was going to happen. What's even more messed up about it all is that we could expect it from a family member. I don't understand how we got this way. Are we just that helpless? Are we just that traumatized that we accept it as a norm? I didn't. I thought, those girls were stupid. Think and be preventative. I'm sorry for my harshness and my naivety. When he showed up to where I worked, I scoffed. Nice try buddy, I thought. I waved goodbye and said I would call him. I turned the sign to closed and lowered the blinds. Nobody had come that evening. It was just me in there. I turned and began cleaning, when I heard the door open.

He was inside, and he was holding a bobby pin. He had this grin, you know? This mouth full of teeth and a shine in his eye that could only be hunger. I told him to leave. I thought I was still very much in control. He grabbed me and tried to use me but when he couldn't, he got angry. Very angry, and his reaction to that... It hurt. As I flew from this world, my only thought was, who's going to protect my sister now? Who was going to be there for her?

SCENE IX.

The Store. Dezba is behind the counter on the phone.

DEZBA

Yeah, I was wondering if you had a patient there. Georgina Yellowbear. Yes, that's her real name! Okay. Thank you.

She hangs up the phone and immediately dials again.

DEZBA

Hello, yes. I was wondering if a patient was sent there? No new patients. Is there anywhere else someone with substance abuse problems would be taken? I've tried the drunk tank. No? Thank you.

She hangs up the phone.

DEZBA

Where the hell are you?

Dana comes in.

DEZBA

Did you find her?

DANA

I checked around. Nobody's seen her. Maybe she went home.

DEZBA

She wouldn't leave without telling me.

DANA

Call her mom.

DEZBA

Are you crazy? That'll just send her into a panic... What should I do?

DANA

Call the cops.

DEZBA

Call the cops? I thought you were going to help me with this. Call the cops. They don't give a shit for some missing Native girl. One of them is probably the sick bastard that took her.

DANA

We don't know she's been taken. She'll show up.

DEZBA

She's missed eight days of work and she hasn't come home. That's not like her. I should've given her, her stupid fifteen percent.

DANA

I'm telling you. She's probably shacked up with some dude.

DEZBA

No, because she wouldn't waste the opportunity to rub it in my face that she found a better boyfriend than me.

DANA

Am I? Are we still...

DEZBA

Are you kidding? Now? My sister is missing.

DANA

I know, I know. Calm down. We'll find her.

DEZBA

How?

DANA

We need to widen our scope.

DEZBA

I've asked everyone I know. None of the other girls have seen her. Who else is there to ask?

DANA

Well...

DEZBA

No.

DANA

He could be useful. Him and Donnie.

DEZBA

I'm not going to ask him for help.

DANA

You have any other ideas?

DEZBA

No.

DANA

If you're really worried about Georgina, then this is the way to go.

DEZBA

Fine.

DANA

It will be all right. Wolfred can be reasonable. Has been so far.

DEZBA

What does that mean?

DANA

I'm just saying.

DEZBA

Did he give you something?

Dana turns away.

DEZBA

He gave you the money. Didn't he? For your freaking van. Goddamn it, now he owns you and by extension me.

DANA

He doesn't own anything. It's my... our business.

DEZBA

How much did he give you?

DANA

Enough for the van.

DEZBA

How much?

DANA

Three.

DEZBA

Three thousand dollars? Are you out of your mind?

DANA

I couldn't work at that place anymore. I want more than to be just a line cook. I want to create. I want to sustain. I want options, so yea I took his money.

DEZBA

How much have you paid back?

DANA

Some.

DEZBA

How much?

DANA

You know what, it's none of your business. I don't go about asking how much your store makes. Or how much you owe.

DEZBA

Oh, so when you asked for my help what you were really saying was fuck off.

DANA

No, I was generally asking you for support. To be by my side. But you got scared. Cause you were feeling the same thing I was feeling for you. But it's easy for you to run isn't it? It's better to run and break things off before you get even more invested. I couldn't figure out why though, until it hit me that you were expecting me to do what those other men did to you and your family. Deep down you thought I was still the same as them. I'm just another abuser to torment you and just because I haven't done it yet, you expect I will. But it was you. You abused me. You let me believe in something that you never really did. Didn't you? You always had an out, always planned to put me on the curb. That just made me even more sad. You're scared.

DEZBA

Yes

DANA

And that's keeping you away from living. From experiencing something that could be great.

DEZBA

You have no idea. You have no idea what it feels like to go out and face the world every day and squash down that part of yourself that is terrified. Day in and day out. Fear that the last thing my family is going to have of me is some inked name splashed upon a newspaper. A life, you say? There is a fifty percent chance that in the end that I'll wind up just as a combination of letters that nobody will read. Then at some point, I won't even be that. I'll just be a number, a number that gets stacked on as it happens to others. You're just a man, just like Wolfred. Always trying to be dominant. Always trying to keep the upper hand. Let me guess. You tried to pay him back some and he declined.

DANA

Maybe. Yes, okay, yes. All the more reason for us to be together. Are you really that afraid of him?

DEZBA

No. I'm afraid of finding out that the man I have feelings for, is just another monster.

DANA

... You have feelings for me?

Beat.

DEZBA

If I tell you. You own me.

DANA

If you tell me, it's I you own.

The two close the distance from one another.

DEZBA

You and Georgina are all I have. And if she's gone... and you...

DANA

Listen to me. I am not one of your monsters.

DEZBA

I'm sorry. I can't...

She turns away.

DEZBA

I'm sorry.

DANA

...

He turns away.

DEZBA

Don't. Please. I don't want to be alone.

DANA

You can't ask me to stay after you told me that you don't want me.

DEZBA

Please. Help me find her.

DANA

That's what I've been doing.

DEZBA

No, you ain't. You're making this about you.

DANA

I'm making this about us. Do you love me?

DEZBA

No.

DANA

Truth, even if it scares you. Especially if it does.

DEZBA

I don't know. Look the fact that I'm still here having this conversation should mean something. Don't you think?

DANA

No. You need to say it.

Beat.

DEZBA

Yes, fuck, yes. Fine. Yes. Help me find my sister.

DANA

Where?

DEZBA

I don't know.

DANA

I can go. You don't have to ask him for help.

Beat.

DEZBA

No. I'll go. We'll stop by the bank first.

DANA

Okay.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE: FINAL REQUIEM

Mother enters. She smudges the space and finishes her story.

MOTHER

First Man and First Woman were miserable without each other. The love they felt was slowly turning toxic. Poisonous to not only themselves but it was passing on to others. People did for themselves and the world became a haven for those who would become monsters. They learned to adapt and hide the monster until they thought it was time. Until they had their victim. It was Changing Woman who saw this. It was her that noticed Hozho was missing. Changing Woman searched for her husband and found him along his route. They quarreled, and the heavens shook, and the monsters rejoiced. They could make the world that people had fled to in search of hope, more hospitable to their kind. This was a world made for them, and they would rule. The conflict between man and woman was too much. Too strong. The quarreling would tear them apart and all would be game for the monsters picking. They sat back and waited and waited and waited for the world to crumble around them. They laughed and licked their lips and opened their maws, waiting for their food to come to them.

Mother sings a Requiem. The shadows, all of them, come alive.

REQUIEM

Dinetah, Turtle Island, North America, we are the first daughters of this land. We have always known danger and we have always fought. Nobody knows exactly how many of us are missing. We survived invasion, smallpox, colonialism, boarding schools, genocide, and we will survive this. We will find a way to get past this. We are the descendants of Warriors and Philosophers, Scholars and Scientists, Holy Men and Holy Women, Guardians and Protectors of Life. Our people sacrificed themselves for us and they will not be forgotten. We will not be forgotten.

The Shadows echo that last statement.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE X.

The Bar. Wolfred and Donnie are playing darts. They have been heavily drinking. Donnie is wearing Georgina's Squash Blossom.

WOLFRED

You ain't never going to win.

DONNIE

Just you wait. I'm going to robin hood your dart.

WOLFRED

Not on your best day.

(noticing the necklace)

You better take that off.

DONNIE

What? I like it.

WOLFRED

You and your trophies. You're playing with live fire.

Wolfred throws and wins. Donnie goes behind the bar and picks up a newspaper. He starts cutting into it with scissors.

The door opens. Dana enters.

DANA

Wolfred, I got your cash. All of it.

Dana hands him a paper envelope full of money.

WOLFRED

Really?

DANA

I want to be free of the debt.

WOLFRED

I told you that wasn't necessary. Consider it a gift.

DANA

No, I appreciate it, but I would feel better if you took it.

WOLFRED

No.

DANA

No?

WOLFRED

You keep it. I'm an investor now. I'll take sixty percent first of every month.

DEZBA

(offstage)

The hell you will.

Dezba, listening from the doorway, comes barging in.

DEZBA

You're going to take your money, and we after today we are going to be free of you.

WOLFRED

You mean your money?

DEZBA

Our money. I'm not going to let you hang this over our head. You won't taint this.

WOLFRED

Don't tell me what I'm going to do. Just like your mom. Just like Shell. Telling me what I can and can't do. She couldn't keep me away. She tried hiding you, traveling all over the goddamn place, cause that's what our mom did when she abandoned me to that hellish school. I know she wishes I never came back.

DEZBA

We all do.

WOLFRED

She kept things from you, you know? Shell. That's what kind of mother she was. She lied right to your face. She wasn't your aunt. No mother died during childbirth. It was her.

DEZBA

What are you talking about?

WOLFRED

She didn't think I would find out, but I did. I'd be damned if I was going to let your mother hide you from me. Living with heathens. They ain't your people. Your own people ain't your people. I won't just let you leave again.

DEZBA

Mom died during child birth. Shell...

Beat.

DEZBA

Oh god.

WOLFRED

When I discovered you were mine? I cried. Genuine tears. A daughter. My own little daughter. Someone to finally give me purpose. Someone to love me for who I am. I came to bring you home. Back to our land. I walked into that apartment. Shell was trying to get in the way. You were in the crib. She started punching me, so I knocked her down and pushed her aside and then I saw you. You were so beautiful. I reached down to pick you up but before I could, that bitch hit me in the back. I thought I was going to fall, so I grabbed the side of the crib, but it gave way. You fell. I couldn't hear anything, but I saw that. You fall to the floor. I felt your pain as you hit the floor and I thought it killed me. It was actually the rock salt that went into my back, fused to my spine. It was intense fire, then... nothing. My own blood. Mother to my child, tried to murder me in cold blood.

DEZBA

God Damn You...

Dezba reaches into her purse and pulls out the sawed-off. Wolfred's shocked as she levels the gun on him.

Dezba stops short of pulling the trigger as she notices the Squash Blossom around Donnie's neck.

DEZBA

Where did you get that?

Donnie pulls the necklace off.

DEZBA

Where did you fucking get it?

DONNIE

Get what?

DEZBA

That's Georgina's squash blossom.

DONNIE

I don't know what you are talking about.

Dana attempts to go behind the bar. Donnie pulls out his own gun.

DONNIE

Nope.

DEZBA

Where is she? Where the fuck is she?

DONNIE

You best watch your tone.

DANA

Just take it easy man.

Dana slowly tries to move himself between Donnie and Dezba. Wolfred pulls up beside him and holds a knife against Dana's back.

DEZBA

You take her? Huh?

DONNIE

It wasn't hard at all. Right there in your very own little sanctuary. I wasn't alone either.

DEZBA

You had a hand in this?

WOLFRED

It was the price.

DEZBA

The price?

WOLFRED

I gave up my pick to keep you safe. That's how much I love you.

DANA

Your pick? All those women?

DONNIE

Don't be stupid. Not all. There are a lot of us out there among you.

Donnie levels the gun on Dezba.

WOLFRED

What are you doing?

DONNIE

It's got to be done.

WOLFRED

We agreed.

DONNIE

I don't give a shit what we agreed on. Things have changed.

WOLFRED

She's not going to say anything.

DONNIE

You're delusional. This is the way it's got to be.

WOLFRED

No. Don't do it.

DONNIE

We can't let anyone go.

Wolfred takes the knife from Dana's back and points it at Donnie.

WOLFRED

I'll drop you.

Beat.

DONNIE

What's the alternative?

WOLFRED

We all go home.

Beat.

DONNIE

There is no going home.

Donnie raises the gun.

Wolfred charges Donnie who changes his target.

LIGHTS OUT.

Two shots ring out.

Beat.

Mother comes out as FIRST WOMAN.

She moves to a frozen Dezba and embraces her. It takes a moment for Dezba to return the embrace.

FIRST WOMAN

Remember the stories I told you. Five worlds. We were given flesh in the fourth one, but our line goes back to the first one. Because we are a part of Hozho. We are balanced. But like our ancestors who found the holes to the next one, it is the world that is moving all about. You know how our ancestors escaped each world?

DEZBA

How?

FIRST WOMAN

They flew. Way up and found the way to the next world. Most of us have forgotten how to fly, so when the world gets all unbalanced. We go along with it and it's that that makes us feel helpless.

DEZBA

Can I fly?

FIRST WOMAN

If you want. But you don't have to go it alone. Flying is much easier when you have a reason to.

They move to Dana. They embrace him, and he returns the embrace. First Woman moves downstage and faces Wolfred. She caresses his cheek. The couple stand next to her.

FIRST WOMAN

It was our daughter who made it safe for us again. Changing woman came back from being old and lived a new life, a new cycle. Every year you can see that cycle. She's born in spring, grown in Summer, fell in love during the fall and became one with all in winter. Her life is a part of our lives. She alone tells her husband when to go, and when to stay for he knows not his own strength and trusts her with all his being. In return she keeps the world moving so that he might always shine his best light on all of us. The conflict that the monsters thought would break them, instead is what reunited them. When Changing Woman was reunited with her husband she sang a death song. This was the song. You are male, and I am female. You are of the sky and I am of the earth. You are constant in your brightness, but I must change with the seasons. As different as we are, we are of one spirit. As dissimilar as we are, you and I, we are of equal worth. As different as we are, there must be solidarity between us. There can be no harmony in the universe unless there is harmony between us. If there is to be harmony, my request must matter to you. There is to be no more coming from me to you than there is from you to me. That is how we keep Hozho. That is how we heal. There will always be monsters, and they will always fear our love.

A drum beats and Wolfred falls.

A drum beats and Donnie falls.

Dezba and Dana become Shadows and fly.

The couple hug and lay down in an embrace. They grow into corn. First Woman stands over them and begins to sing the life song.

End

of

Play.