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## A Long Low Whistle in the Distance

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# A Long Low Whistle in the Distance

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Film, Theatre and Communication Arts  
Playwriting

by

Blair C Runion

BFA University of Colorado at Denver, 2006

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## Abstract

Erin is returning to her childhood home on a Native reservation in New Mexico. She hopes to see her father one more time before he dies, but she has other motives as well. Her relationships with her family, and with her lover Maddie come under pressure through this change in her life. Between the looming dream of reuniting with her father, and coming to terms with the new stage in her life Erin is learning how to accept herself and others.

Keywords: Native American, Lesbians, Homeless Youth

TRAINS IN THE DISTANCE

the train the train the train  
I've always lived by an Indian train  
and although you said you wanted all of me in Iowa City  
I can still hear that long low whistle in the distance.

-Erika T. Wurth  
*Indian Trains* © 2007

## A Long Low Whistle in the Distance

### CHARACTERS

- ERIN- 21, dark skinned, Native American. Former train-hopper/transient.
- PAULA- Mid 40's, fair skinned, but severely blue-black hair. Native American. Erin & Sam's mother. Married to Carlos.
- SAM- 15, light skinned, Native American. Erin's brother, Paula's son.
- MADDIE- Late 20's, pale, but mixed blood Hispanic/ Native American. Occasional train-hopper/ transient.

The following character voices should be recorded for use:

TV MAN  
TV HOST  
TV CROWD  
TV WOMAN  
TV LATINA  
TV LATINO  
BILLY  
TV NEWSCASTER- (Glenn)  
TV WEATHERWOMAN- (Kathy)  
TV MALE- (Tom)  
TV FEMALE- (Sharon)

### SETTING

The scene is set in Erin's kitchen in her small HUD reservation house. There is an old formica table slightly stage right, an abused fridge to the left, and center stage there is a small window over the kitchen sink. Poverty becomes Erin and rather than seeming as if this room is holding her down, she appears to blossom in it. The kitchen is barren, but clean. A small old TV/VCR combo sits on the counter. A wall phone with a long cord is mounted near the door into the rest of the house. The back door up stage left has a half panel of frosted glass, making it possible to tell someone is there, but impossible to distinguish who they are.

ACT I

Scene 1

(ERIN sits at the kitchen table. The window behind her is open. The TV is on and talk show prattle seeps into the scene. Erin is silent as she watches. She absentmindedly drinks from the cold cup of tea in her hands.)

TV MAN

Look, she don't have no clue what she done. This is my family... my daughter!

TV HOST

What would you like to tell your wife?

TV MAN

I'd like to tell her that I'll forgive her. If this's my daughter then I can forgive her.

(The TV CROWD cheers in the background. A tea kettle on the stove whistles, startling her. She gets up, throws her cold tea down the sink and makes another. She lets it steep, and looks out the open window.)

TV HOST

Alright, here's your wife.

(The TV CROWD boos.)  
(Erin looks back at the TV.)

TV WOMAN

You son of a b&\$#@! What gives you the right? You're a f\*&\*\$# bum, you hear me? I can't believe...

TV MAN

You're my wife! I have every right! You've been sleeping with three different men. I want to know- I got a right to know about my baby girl! It's bad enough—

(Erin hastily changes the channel. A telemundo comes on in the middle of a lover's spat. A distant train whistle sounds.)

TV LATINA

Por favor, mi amor, ¿por qué?

TV LATINO

No me preguntes por qué. ¿Sabes por qué

TV LATINA

No, Roberto, no me gusta. Hablar conmigo, por favor!

TV LATINO

No, Alicia, no hay nada que decir. No queda nada aquí para mí, para nosotros ...

TV LATINA

Nada para nosotros?

TV LATINO

Nada. Ahora sus manos fuera de mi!

(Erin covers her face with her hands and starts to cry. The train whistle sounds again, closer this time. Erin wipes her eyes and then strains to see outside. The sounds of the train grow louder and overtake the TV. She stares at the passing train now visible outside the window. The room seems to shake with the sound and the power of the train.

Paula enters, but waits at the doorway.

Erin watches as the last car roars past the window. She scans the scene outside then, angrily she smashes the cup in her hands against the sink. It shatters.)

ERIN

Damn it Maddie, just, damn it all—

PAULA

You plan on breaking all my cups now? That's the second one. How many do you think I have?

ERIN

They're not yours.

PAULA

Whose are they then? Your father was never here. You're never here—

ERIN

But I am now. Funny though, not you, eh? You're off the rez now. Living the American dream, huh Mother?

PAULA

Which one is that, Mija? The one where I get to raise my children in a happy well-fed home to watch them grow up and be successful? That one?

ERIN

Well at least you have one kid left to raise right, huh?

PAULA

Speaking of your brother he would like to see you, if you weren't holed up over here, hiding from the world.

ERIN

That is not what I'm doing.

PAULA

I'm sure it's better than sleeping on the streets, but you expect me to believe that you like this place?

ERIN

I liked it before.

PAULA

It's been a long time since before.

ERIN

You're telling me. This place looked even worse than I remembered—abandoned, inches of red dirt covering everything—cabinets empty except a few cans of commodities.

PAULA

It's only concrete and plywood, what'd you remember it looked like?

ERIN

At least before it looked like a home.

PAULA

Ah, Mija, you and I both know appearances are deceiving. Besides, it wasn't abandoned. There was a working phone, working water and lights, Carlos let me keep it all working just in case you came back, so it would be yours.

ERIN

But not Billy's, that it?

PAULA

Just not mine and Billy's.

ERIN

So Billy's coming back won't upset your new husband? Are you sure?

PAULA

Carlos doesn't tell me what to do, unlike your father. We have a good relationship built on understanding and trust, not that you, or Billy, know what those things are.

ERIN

I know what they aren't, Mother. I know they aren't entering a stranger's house without knocking.

PAULA

No matter how strange you are, you are still my daughter. And don't get confused, Mija, just because I don't live here doesn't mean this house and these things don't belong to me.

ERIN

If they belonged to you, you'dve taken them to your "other family".

PAULA

Pssh-- you're my family.

ERIN

Oh really?

PAULA

Yes really, Mija.

ERIN

Please don't call me that. It's insulting.

PAULA

What, for me to call you my daughter? That's insulting to you?

ERIN

You know what I mean.

PAULA

I know that you've been a mess since you got back.

ERIN

Oh, really? And just what did you expect, huh?

PAULA

Oh, me, I don't expect anything. I know better than that. You were off on adventures, huh, Mija? Like Peter Pan, chasing after stars, and dreams, and crocodiles. Maybe I should...

PAULA CONT'D

start calling you Tigerlilly. You always were a prissy little princess looking for someone to rescue her.

ERIN

Prissy? !

PAULA

(Laughing)

Prissy, self-righteous, same difference, isn't it?

ERIN

Strange how I come back and immediately I'm being made fun of like a child.

PAULA

But that's all you are, ennit?

ERIN

I'm a lot more grown up than you give me credit for.

PAULA

Then maybe we can have a grown-up conversation about a few important things.

ERIN

Such as?

PAULA

Well, for starters did you miss us the six years you were gone?

ERIN

What do you want me to say, Mother? Huh? That I made a mistake leaving home? I was out there looking for him.

PAULA

Bullshit. Your father never asked you to go traipsing after him.

ERIN

Well someone needed to. He wasn't strong enough to take care of himself.

PAULA

He was plenty strong; strong enough to drink himself to oblivion and leave his family. And what were you, huh? Just stupid and so...young—

ERIN

At least I cared enough to try. He wasn't such a bad father, you know? Not like you make him out to be.

PAULA

Sure, he was nice, always bragging on his girl, so proud when she got a good grade or won best jingle dancer at the powwow. But nice doesn't cut it, not when he was drinking away all our money so all we had to eat were the commodities. He was a real nice man who was starving us to death.

ERIN

Yeah, and you never drank at all, ennit?

PAULA

But I still took care of you, didn't I? Made you all those jingle dresses, cooked and cleaned. All he did was drink and tell you stories. You wanna place blame around here? Fine, but you never should've left, and you know it. He left us to die here, all alone. You should've done him the same favor.

ERIN

Look, he's my father, ok? I love him, and that's enough. It may not have been enough for you, but it's more than enough for me. And now he is finally coming back to say goodbye, and that's important to me, whether or not it's important to you.

PAULA

What if he never makes it, Erin? Then what are you doing here huh? Or are you just using him as an excuse, like before? He's your excuse for running away and now he's your excuse for running home too.

ERIN

I don't need an excuse to love my father.

(Pause)

Is this all you come over here for, huh? Just to give me hell? The phone still works.

PAULA

I can't come visit with my daughter?

(Pause)

Okay, so I'm worried. But Mija, please talk to me. You show up out of the blue after six years and a few scattered postcards for what? Because your good-for-nothing father somehow managed to get a hold of you and convince you he wanted to see you before he died. But what will you do after? You're 21, don't you think it's time to try and start your life?

ERIN

I have a life. I have people I care about.

PAULA

Yeah, then where are they? How come you're here alone? You won't answer my calls, you won't answer your brother's calls. You are so.... You don't have any money. You don't have a job.

ERIN

I don't need a—

PAULA

There's a spot for a cashier at Safeway. Carlos and I thought—

ERIN

I don't want to work at the Safeway. And certainly not Carlos' Safeway.

PAULA

It's a good job; good hours, and since it's Carlos' Safeway he says he'd start you at \$8 an hour. That's fifty cents more than regular. You don't get that kind of offer every day.

ERIN

Oh, yeah, and how would I get to this job? Huh? It's not exactly on the rez, is it?

PAULA

Come on Erin, you know I'd be happy to help you with that.

ERIN

I'm sure you would, but I can't take a job right now, even the charitable kind.

PAULA

Erin—

ERIN

No. I can't. Because he could come home any day, and I have to be ready to take care of him when he gets here.

PAULA

Such selflessness. You do realize you're completely screwing up your life, don't you?

ERIN

Why is it so hard for you to accept that I don't want to work at the Safeway and go to community college? Besides, why should I do what you or Carlos want me to do? I didn't do it at fifteen, why start now?

PAULA

So you're going to live in this godforsaken house eating frybread and canned vegetables, waiting on a man who will never come home? Trust me, the waiting will kill you.

ERIN

I never said I would wait forever. I do have a life out there, even if you don't like it.

PAULA

You'll just be a bum forever then? Hmm, Mija? Is that your grand plan? 'Cause I think your father alone is proof that's a bad fucking plan.

ERIN

I'm not talking about forever.

PAULA

Well since you're all grown up I say it's about time you figure it out.

ERIN

Thanks for the advice, if that's what you call it. But I think I've had enough for today. Please go.

PAULA

Erin I only—

ERIN

Please go now.

(Paula moves to exit then stops and removes a card from her back pocket. She tosses it onto the table.)

PAULA

Your brother wanted me to give you this.

ERIN

What is it?

PAULA

I know you don't remember, but his birthday is this weekend. He would like you to be there.

ERIN

I thought Carlos didn't want me in his home.

PAULA

He said you couldn't move in. He didn't say you couldn't come over. Besides, Sam wants to see you.

ERIN

Yeah, I know. I want to see him too. Maybe.

PAULA

Maybe?

ERIN

If Billy's not here I'll come.

(Paula sighs and leaves. After a moment Erin crosses to the doorway and yells off.)

ERIN CONT'D

Tell Sam I said happy birthday!

(Erin goes to the phone and makes to dial, but stops herself. She hangs up, and then tries to dial again. After a moment she gives up and crosses to the table and sits.)

ERIN CONT'D

Damn it Maddie, why aren't you here?

(Erin puts her head in her hands.)  
(Lights down.)

ACT I

Scene 2

(It is afternoon the next day. Erin's kitchen is empty and shadows play around the room. Outside it is stormy.)

A spotlight comes up on Maddie at a payphone. She deposits money, dials and the phone in the kitchen rings.)

MADDIE

(With the rings)  
One...two...three....

(Maddie hangs up, deposits money again and then dials one more time. This time she lets the phone ring through. In Erin's kitchen the answering machine picks up.)

BILLY V.O.

A'ya couz, you've reached the non-habitated rez home of Billy and the kid. Say what you gotta say after the beep.

(The machine beeps. At some time during the call Erin enters the kitchen and waits in the doorway near the phone, listening.)

MADDIE

Erin? Babe? ... Come on... pick up... fine, alright. Look, I was um, well... I was just callin' to check up on you, and um, to see if you'd heard from your pops yet.... And, I... well I wanted to say I'm sorry I didn't come but, the rez, babe, it just gets me down.

ERIN

(Under Maddie's call)  
Gets you down? Really...

MADDIE

(Continuous)  
You know. I also wanted to let you know I'm leaving Boulder. My work's dried up. I can't seem to take anything good these days. I'm headin' East to check in with the crew, see what they've got rollin'.

ERIN

(Under)  
East?! You're going fucking East? Damn it Maddie.

MADDIE

(Continuous)

I'll call you as soon as I settle. I promise. I love you Erin. I just hope....

(The call times out and the phone dies.)

I love you.

(Lights out on Maddie.)

ERIN

(Unconvinced)

I love you... really...If you love me why aren't you here?

(Erin crosses to the stove and begins to make tea. While she is distracted, the silhouette of an old man crosses outside the window unnoticed. As the water boils, Erin checks the time, then checks out the window for the train.)

Erin sighs and moves to turn on the T.V. A loud commercial for cars comes on. She changes the channel. During the next sequence she continues making tea.)

TV NEWSCASTER

And I know everyone is looking forward to getting out to the Balloon Festival this weekend, but I hear a rumor that this nasty weather may stick around for a while. What can you tell us about that Kathy?

TV WEATHERWOMAN

Unfortunately, you're right Glenn. The radar's showing a pretty solid wall of rain through the evening tonight and continuing scattered showers all weekend long. Currently, large sections of Northern New Mexico are under severe thunderstorm warnings and low-lying areas downstream of mesas are looking at potential flash flooding. While we are definitely glad of the much needed precipitation do be careful driving tonight as standing water on the roadways will be extremely likely. As always I'll have more for you later in the hour.

(Without warning the back door flies open and Sam comes in, soaking wet and muddy.)

SAM

Hey.

ERIN

Shit, Sam! Don't move. Let me run and get a towel.

(Erin hastily exits as Sam stands dripping on the floor. He begins to shiver and starts to undress himself, trying to fling...

(...as little muck as possible. When he has finally made it down to his boxers, Erin returns with a stack of towels and a blanket. Erin helps dry Sam, wrap him in a blanket and cleans up the mess through the next segment.)

ERIN CONT'D

I can't believe you took your dirt bike out in this.

SAM

(Shivering)

How-else-was-I sup-posed-to see-you?

ERIN

Duh, moron, tomorrow, when it'd stopped raining like a damn fountain. Okay, go sit at the table. Lucky for you, I just made tea.

SAM

Dan-de-lion?

ERIN

Of course. Here, drink it. I'll go get you some of his— um, some clothes to wear.

SAM

No, wait... I, uh, I wanted to ask you something.

ERIN

If it's why rain falls from the sky, I'd say you've been skipping too much class.

SAM

Don't ple-ase. I'm ser-ri-ous.

ERIN

Okay, what?

SAM

Will you come to my party?

ERIN

That's why you came over here in the rain? Jeez, Sam, Mom already brought me the invitation.

SAM

Yeah, but according to her she had to "set the record straight" on a few things too. I just...I wanted you to know that I want you to come.

ERIN

Dummy, that's what phones are for.

SAM

Yeah, well, that might work if you ever answered one.

ERIN

That's what answering machines are for.

SAM

I just want to talk to you, Erin, okay?

ERIN

I know.

(Pause)

You want more?

SAM

Yeah, sure.

(Erin gets up and busies herself making tea.)

(Silence)

ERIN

(Towelings off Sam's hair)

I'm glad to see your braid's getting so long. You're beginning to look like a real warrior.

SAM

Carlos hates it. He threatens to cut it off while I'm sleeping- buzz my scalp clean.

ERIN

(Joking)

He just wants you to look like a beaner so he can pretend you're his son.

SAM

Don't say that.

ERIN

Why not? He's always liked to pretend—

SAM

No. Don't call him a beaner.

ERIN

I didn't.

SAM

It's the same thing.

If you say so.

ERIN

(The kettle is ready. Erin makes more tea for them both, but she doesn't sit, crossing to look out the window.)

Tell me a story, like you used to.

SAM

You remember that?

ERIN

Yeah. Those are the things I like to remember instead of, well, you know.

SAM

Okay. You want an old one? An origin?

ERIN

No, something different. Something new.

SAM

What about?

ERIN

Um, I don't know...about hopping?

SAM

Nah, Mom'd kill me. Last thing she wants is for you to grow up like me. By the time you're my age you will've graduated college, and be on your way to being a doctor or something. Not just a bum.

ERIN

You're not so bad.

SAM

Oh, gee, thanks.

ERIN

Come on. Please, Erin? I haven't seen you since you got back. You gotta tell me something.

SAM

I'm sorry I didn't come see you. I had to get the house opened back up. It was important.

ERIN

SAM  
Yeah, but, come on. You owe me.  
(Pause)  
At least tell me why you came back.

(Beat)

ERIN  
I got a phone call.

SAM  
From who?

ERIN  
Dad.

SAM  
Dad? What'd he say? How'd he know where you were?

ERIN  
He always knew.

SAM  
How?

ERIN  
I'm not sure. Things overlap out there. You know people who know people, and word gets through the channels. Besides, Maddie and I weren't ever that hard to find. We circled through the same eight to ten places, you know?

SAM  
Yeah, but how'd he—

ERIN  
Look, it doesn't matter, brother. You want me to tell you the rest or not?

SAM  
Yeah. Okay.

ERIN  
We'd been in Boulder for two months. Maddie was working, but restless, we both were. She wanted to move on, I could tell. And whenever she gets that way I can't sleep, I can't do anything but spend my nights watching the shadows on the ceiling.

And I'd tell myself stories—about the Native spirits hiding in that white city. So many of the old homeless men are Native. Every time I saw one on the streets I'd ask him if he knew the Medicine Men- Dad's crew- some of them would, but they were always...

ERIN CONT'D

too drunk to tell me what they knew, exactly. Too drunk to know if they'd seen him or just heard of him; if it had been somewhere on the front range, or somewhere towards sunrise or sunset. But they liked me because I always shared a drink with them for their time. They appreciate that kind of currency, you know

That night I could feel all the old spirits in the room, and I spent the night telling myself their stories while Maddie snored softly, turning over so often it was as if she was running in her sleep. The night was fading fast, but it wasn't quite dawn yet. I could tell because the light on the ceiling was purple, the darkest color night can get along the foothills. I watched the purple light shift from violet to lilac, lilac to mauve, mauve to peach... but before it could go from peach to lemon the phone rang.

Dad had developed a code for us, so I would always know it was him. Maddie used to make fun of it, but now, it's become our thing too. We never answer the phone the first time it rings through. It has to ring three times, stop, and then ring again. Two separate calls every time. It's expensive to do that from a payphone, but Dad, he didn't want anyone pretending to be him. He called it our 'code of safety'. I counted the rings...one...two...three...and then silence.

I sighed and went back to the cracks in the ceiling, but then the phone rang again. I must have been expecting it, because I got there fast, so fast that my head spun and I had to lean against the wall. It's why I didn't believe it at first. I hadn't heard his voice in so long, and I was surprised at how raspy it was, how dry and chalky. But it was him.

SAM

What did he say?

ERIN

He said: Erin? Kid, that you? I said: A'ya father. He took a moment to catch his breath. I could hear him panting. And then he said: I wanted to let you know I'm dying.

SAM

What?! Dying?

ERIN

Shhh...brother... He said: I'm dying. But I'm coming home. I want to see you. I want to die at home. He coughed then, loud and long. Longer than I thought anyone could cough and still breathe. That's when the phone line went dead. The beeping was so loud, so final- I ripped the phone cord from the wall.

SAM

But where was he? Where was he coming from? Did he tell you when he'd be here?

ERIN

No, brother. He didn't say anything else.

SAM

Oh.

SAM CONT'D

(Pause)  
Who's Maddie?

ERIN

What?

SAM

Maddie. Who is she?

ERIN

No one.

(Sam just stares at her.)  
My friend.

SAM

If she's your friend, why were you in bed together?

ERIN

Cause it's cold in Boulder. What do you care, anyway?

SAM

I just thought, if she was your friend, or your... girlfriend, she would've come with you.

ERIN

Yeah, well, she didn't, okay? What, do I look like a dyke to you?

SAM

You never did like boys.

ERIN

Yeah, well take a good look around, there aren't so many good ones, are there?

SAM

If you say so. How long ago did you talk to Dad?

ERIN

Twelve days, four hours, and thirty-two trains.

SAM

Do you think he's really coming?

ERIN

I think he's really dying.

That's not the same thing.

SAM

No. It's not.

ERIN

You know, it's okay if you are...

SAM

(The phone rings. They watch it. A spotlight comes up on Paula with a phone in her hand. Erin's phone rings three times and then four, and then the machine picks up. .)

A'ya couz, you've reached the non-habitated rez home of Billy and the kid. Say what you gotta say after the beep.

BILLY V.O.

Erin? Erin, I know you're there. You're always there. Pick up. Mija, please.... Sam's not over there, is he? His bike's gone and we can't find him. Erin- pick up the damn phone!

PAULA

(Erin exchanges a look with Sam.)

Don't.

SAM

(Erin answers the phone.)

He's here. He's fine.

ERIN

(Erin hangs up.)

What'd you do that for?

SAM

(Paula dials again. The phone rings.)

You want her coming over here looking for you?

ERIN

(The phone rings again.)

No.

SAM

(Rings again)

ERIN

Well, then I guess it's clear, enit?

(The phone rings again, and then the machine kicks on.)

BILLY V.O.

A'ya couz, you've reached the non-habitated rez home of Billy and the kid. Say what you gotta say after the beep.

PAULA

Sam- listen, Mijo, you can't just run off. I don't care how mad you are. You get back here right now and make this right. You father is very disappointed in you and—

SAM

(Grabbing phone from Erin he interrupts the message.)

He's not my father.

(Sam hangs up the phone. Paula's spotlight goes out.)

ERIN

What exactly is Carlos disappointed about?

SAM

He wants me to join some stupid ROTC thing. Says it'll teach me respect and honor.

ERIN

That bastard! You're Native. What does he expect you to do? Train to become one of the assholes that tried to exterminate us all? It's just so damn insulting. You'd think he's hate the army as much as anyone.

SAM

His Dad served in WWII.

ERIN

So you want to join? Huh? Sir, yes, sir! Devote yourself to the white eyes' Manifest Destiny, is that it?

SAM

No! I don't want to do it, but he won't drop it. And I can't get him to understand that I don't want to mess with guns, not like that. Hunting is one thing, but training to shoot other...

SAM CONT'D

...people and he keeps on me about my hair. Says they're going to make me cut it regardless, so I might as well just do it and get it over with.

ERIN

And Mom's okay with all this?

SAM

Apparently she'd love nothing more than for me to "take on a little responsibility".

ERIN

Unbelievable, as if that's all this is about. Have you even had your ceremony yet?

SAM

No. I was supposed to, but it just never happened.

ERIN

I hope Carlos didn't talk her out of it. I swear, it's like she doesn't care about anything anymore. My hair was past my ass before she let me even trim it—

SAM

Hey, you think, now that you're back and all, I can come live with you?

ERIN

It's fine with me, but I doubt Mom or Carlos would see it that way. I'm just a stupid bum without a job waiting to nurse her dying father.

SAM

That's harsh.

ERIN

Those are pretty much Mom's exact words, condensed of course.

SAM

I know she loves you. She worries about you all the time. I hear her talking to Carlos.

ERIN

I'm sure she's the one who talked him into the Safeway job too.

SAM

Carlos would let you work at the Safeway?

ERIN

According to her he would love to have me.

(Sam laughs)

ERIN CONT'D

It's not only funny, it's inconceivable. Carlos hated me from the minute he set eyes on me. I still can't believe they're married now. You were too little to remember—

SAM

No I wasn't.

ERIN

You were only, what, seven, when Dad left?

SAM

I was nine.

ERIN

No, you were nine when I left for the last time.

SAM

So many people leaving, it's hard to keep it all straight.

ERIN

I'm sorry, you know, for leaving you. I always have been. But Carlos loved you like a son; he doted on you, he wanted you to love him like a father.

SAM

He wanted you to love him too.

ERIN

That was impossible. Every time I looked at him I saw a pompous spic who looked down on us 'cause we were Native.

SAM

Why do you do that?

ERIN

What?

SAM

Call him names? It doesn't make you any better than him.

ERIN

That's the point, enit? He's no better than us, never was. He's just as mired down and beaten up by the system as we are, but he always thought we were below him, some charity cases living out here on the rez. But since he had the hots for Mom, he could fuck her and feed us and feel better about himself at the same time.

SAM

Stop it!

ERIN

It's the truth—

SAM

Who cares? You ran away, you left, so you don't get to talk about them like that. I mean sure, Mom and Carlos are messed up, they're crazy, but there's always food Erin, always electricity, and coats, and shoes, and he always goes to work, and they don't drink, ever. Do you even understand how much better that is? I mean I miss Dad too, and I love him, but Carlos, even when I hate him, he's a lot better at being a father than Dad ever was.

(Quietly)

And Mom's better too. He's made her better. And not because he's Mexican, but because he's a good man.

ERIN

You think that's the only thing, don't you? That I never liked him cause he was Mexican, but that's not the point. I like Mexicans, but not people who pretend they're something they're not. And I don't care if he's a second or third generation Mexican, it doesn't make him more holy than a Native, and it doesn't make him more white than me, got it? Being proud to be an American is one thing, but cultural denial is another.

SAM

You're just looking for a reason to hate him.

ERIN

You sound just like Mom.

SAM

Whatdaya mean?

ERIN

Brainwashed, assimilated! Even when she talks now, peppering her English with Spanish, ignoring your ceremony, as if nothing about who we are, our traditions, matter anymore. So go ahead make them happy, commit the vicious irony—cut your hair, join ROTC—hell, join the army! We're the true American's anyway, we were dying for this country before it even was one.

But remember, no one off the rez knows the difference. Out there you'll just be brown, like every other shade of brown and you'll always stand out whether they call you a spic or an injun. Not that it matters as long as you get your government paid college education, government housing, and government food to make up for all the injustice, all the murder in the name of some white religion that refuses to realize that their favorite son was brown, and not anglo, right Mijo?

(Sam stands angrily and begins ringing out and pulling on his wet clothes, Erin doesn't stop him.)

ERIN CONT'D

Who's running away from the truth now? There's not an ounce of Native left in Carlos' house except for your braid. And you, you'll cut your hair like he wants. And then your brown skin will look Mexican, just like him, just like her. Denying her heritage, her blood, for a fucking man. No man, no matter how good he is, is worth that sacrifice.

But I'll tell you what Sam, you come live over here, brother, and I'll remind you what Native really is. You can come whether they want you to or not, so long as you've still got that braid. Understand? I love you, but I can't stand by and watch him strip the Indian out of you. Dad won't either. Talk about disappointing someone, you should be worried about disappointing him.

(Sam has on his pants, but he holds his wet t-shirt in his hands. Erin's words have reduced him to tears. Sobbing he turns and in a flash of anger he punches a hole in the wall.)

SAM

Ow, shit...

(Sam leans against the wall, still crying, cradling his hand. Erin gets up and crosses to him. She pulls him into an embrace, comforting him.

Behind them, Paula enters from the interior of the house. She surveys the scene.)

PAULA

Well, this is a mess, enit?

ERIN

Mother—

PAULA

No. You've done enough talking, Erin. Enough for now in any case.

(She crosses to Sam.)

Lemme see your hand. A'ya. It's a mess, enit? Got anything frozen Erin? Any ice?

ERIN

Sure.

(Erin relinquishes Sam and goes to make an ice pack. Paula leads Sam to the table.)

PAULA

Mijos, I'm sorry. I know you think badly of me, and I can't say I blame you. I kept so much of what happened to myself because I knew you wouldn't understand if I told you, it's always—

ERIN

No, I'm sorry Mother, but I do understand. I get that you felt you had no other options, but how can you look at yourself now, denying everything that makes you who you are just because Carlos wants you to pretend to be white, just like him.

PAULA

You think I don't know where I came from just because I left the rez? You really think I'm not old enough and smart enough to know these things just because I cut my damn hair? You are unbelievably naïve Erin, and I would've thought you would be more understanding.

(Erin hands Sam ice wrapped in a dish towel. Paula helps Sam hold it while she studies his hand.)

ERIN

Understanding?! Understanding of what?

PAULA

I'm not trying to erase who we are or where we came from, but this life here is something different and you know it.

ERIN

What I know is that out there nobody acknowledges reservations. It's like we don't exist at all. We're just ancient history, and Hollywood movies. And what chance do we have if every Native abandons their past?

PAULA

And you're living the Native life? Is that right? You're the stereotype, a dropout, homeless, and an alcoholic too no doubt, just like Billy.

SAM

Mom!

(Paula squeezes Sam's hand, he yelps.)

Shit that hurts!

PAULA

Watch your mouth, you're fine. It's not broken. But I'm glad it hurts, maybe it'll keep you from punching one of my walls.

ERIN

How sensitive, mother...

PAULA

Please Erin, I'm not trying to villainize your father, but take a good look at our lives. There is honor in raising children, clothing them, and loving them. There are still traditions in our home, whether you approve of them or not. But where is your father? For that matter where were you? Where is the honor in running away, hmm? Because you can glorify it all you want, but that's all you're doing.

ERIN

Maybe that's true, but you're just lying to yourself. You were glad Dad left, I could see it in your face. After all, what'd you need him for? You already had Carlos.

PAULA

So you liked how your father was that last year? Always drunk, storming about with something to prove?

ERIN

He was in pain—he was—

PAULA

No more excuses Erin, no more. You have some mythic vision of your father in your head, and I can't change it, but your father wasn't just an alcoholic, he was a drunk, and he abandoned us. Love him all you want but that's the truth.

ERIN

You left first and you know it. What did you expect him to do?

PAULA

I had a job to do.

ERIN

And a boss to do too.

(Paula slaps Erin.)

PAULA

I am still your mother and you will not talk to me like that.

(Pause.)

I loved your father Erin, but it wasn't enough. I have loved Billy since I was twelve, and I always will, Carlos, or no, but that doesn't mean Billy was good for me, or good for you two.

ERIN

He is our father. Of course he was good for us.

PAULA

Even like that? Just how blind is your devotion, Mija? You're lying to yourself.

ERIN

Maybe, but you lie to everyone else, and you always have.

(Imitating)

“Billy doesn’t drink, not really; I’d never cheat on him! I love him. I’d never fuck my boss.”

(Normal)

I could always see right through you and so could he. That’s why he abandoned you. He couldn’t take you lying to him anymore.

PAULA

Fine. You want to know the truth?

ERIN

It’s about time you started telling it.

PAULA

The truth is, I’ve always known where your father is. He calls me once a week, on this phone here. So I knew he was coming home, or was gonna try to. And, I knew he had called you to come and see him. But I haven’t heard from him in two weeks. So I have to assume he’s not gonna make it. He would’ve called unless he was dead, Mija. So I figure that’s what happened. And you should too. The greatest gift he’ll ever leave you is bringing you back here so you can start your life again. Dead or not, that’s something, girl. It really is.

ERIN

He’s not dead. Not yet. He said he was coming home. And whatever else he is, he does what he says.

PAULA

Erin, don’t be so pigheaded. Your father was dying.

SAM

NO! He’s coming. She got a phone call. He said!

PAULA

I know he wanted to, but he would’ve been here by now. He was only in Missouri. It doesn’t take anyone two weeks to get here from Missouri.

ERIN

It would if he got sick and couldn’t travel. What if someone found him and took him to a hospital?

PAULA

Then the hospital would’ve called. They have before, every time.

ERIN

What if he lost his bag and they couldn’t ID him?

PAULA

That's why he always wore that ID bracelet. This was the number they always called. That's why it is never disconnected. You didn't wonder about that, Mija? About why when you got here a deserted house had a working phone? It was so he could call. And he always called.

ERIN

No, you're lying....

(She starts to cry.)

Lying.

PAULA

Mija, you know I'm not, not anymore. Come here.

(Erin, crying, reluctantly comes closer. Paula grabs her hand and pulls her down into an embrace. The three hug and cry.

Outside there is a long, low train whistle.  
A man in silhouette walks past the window.)

ACT I

Scene 3

(It is the middle of the night and the kitchen is deserted. In the distance is the echo of the train that has just passed. Erin enters in her underwear and a t-shirt. She goes to the sink and splashes water on her face. She fills up a kettle and turns the stove on. After a moment in the silence, she turns on the T.V. and sits on the counter to watch it.)

TV MALE

...you no longer have to! Sharon, take a look at this absolutely beautiful set of knives.

TV FEMALE

They are quite stylish, Tom.

TV MALE

But they are more than beautiful, Sharon! They are ceramic cutting wonders. Crafted right here in the US of A. These knives are sharper than any others of their kind.

TV FEMALE

They look so sharp, Tom!

TV MALE

They are! Here, watch as I cut these carrots.

TV FEMALE

Amazing!

TV MALE

And they will maintain their optimal sharpness forever because they are ceramic, not metal.

TV FEMALE

Forever, Tom?

TV MALE

Sharon, your grandkids will use these knives and they will be just as sharp then as they are today! But the true test is a tomato...

TV FEMALE

That's so true, Tom. I can never cut a tomato right. They always end up as mush.

Not with this knife. See?

TV MALE

Amazing!

TV FEMALE

Here, you try.

TV MALE

Wow! I can't believe how easy that was!

TV FEMALE

(The phone rings and Erin turns off the T.V. Lights come up on Maddie. As the phone rings a third time it stops. Erin runs to the phone. As soon as it begins to sound she answers it.)

Dad? Dad is that you? Where are you?

ERIN

No, babe. It's just me.

MADDIE

Maddie?

ERIN

Hey.

MADDIE

So, where are you, then?

ERIN

K.C.

MADDIE

Kansas or Missouri?

ERIN

Missouri.

MADDIE

Long John still there?

ERIN

Yeah, I'm at his pad actually.

MADDIE

ERIN

You know, it's funny I was really hoping this would be one of those times I'd hear you tell me you were just in town and could you get a ride to the house.

MADDIE

You don't have a car, do you?

ERIN

What does it matter? You're in Misery.

MADDIE

I am sorry, babe, but I can't.

ERIN

Won't. You won't Maddie, that's different and you know it. This isn't Dakota, Maddie, nobody here knows. Nobody would do—

MADDIE

Oh, yeah, because shit like that doesn't happen in New Mexico, enit?

ERIN

Look I'm just asking you not to blame my rez for shit that happened on yours. It's been fifteen years, things change.

MADDIE

(Pause)

I love you Erin, I really do, but—

ERIN

Here comes the but.

MADDIE

I don't ask you to do shit you can't. Why are you asking me?

ERIN

Because I need you, I need you here Maddie.

MADDIE

Is he that bad?

ERIN

He's not here.

MADDIE

Not there like at the hospital or not home at all?

ERIN

Not at all. I've been waiting for him, and I'm, well I'm starting to get worried, Maddie.

MADDIE

I bet.

ERIN

Paula said he was in Missouri. Ask about him, please. See if the crew have heard anything?

MADDIE

I'll ask, but they don't run with any of the Medicine Men, you know that.

ERIN

But they still might know.

(Pause.)

Paula thinks he's dead.

MADDIE

Babe, I'm sorry, that sucks.

ERIN

Is that all you have to say to me?

MADDIE

What do you want me to say?

ERIN

I want you to say you're coming. Damn it, please Mad, please...

(Silence)

Maddie? Please don't hang up on me...

MADDIE

I'm here. I just... it sounds like you aren't gonna leave.

ERIN

How can I? He's not here. He could get here any day.

MADDIE

What if he doesn't come. How long are you going to wait?

ERIN

As long as I have to.

MADDIE

You really mean that don't you?

ERIN

Of course I—

MADDIE

Damn it Erin, I miss you. And I'm sorry that this isn't the way you want things, I really am, but, Babe, come on, you can't wait forever. Give it another week and then join me. I'll even meet you. I'm gonna head out to El Paso in two days. I can meet you at Lyle's. He'd love to see you.

ERIN

I hate Lyle.

MADDIE

He's my best client.

ERIN

That's only because he likes to think he's paying you for art.

MADDIE

As long as he pays well he can pay me for whatever he wants.

ERIN

I don't want to think about you fucking some—

MADDIE

Not again, Erin, please. I can fuck whoever I want to, whenever I want to. You don't own me, remember?

ERIN

Then go ahead. I'll just stay right here. You'll have to come here if you want to fuck me.

MADDIE

Don't do this, ok? I can't be on the rez, I can't.

ERIN

Dad'll come home eventually Maddie. He has to, he promised. After that I'll meet you wherever you are, okay?

MADDIE

A promise from a Medicine Man is no promise of anything. You should know that. How many times before did he promise he was coming back to see you? Every birthday? Christmas?

ERIN

Not this time, Maddie. He will come back.

MADDIE

No, Erin, I love you babe, but you're talking crazy, you know that? I mean be logical here, you haven't heard from him then he's dead. And you can't stay there forever. You can't. And what're you going to do when they find out about you? Huh? Or are you going to pretend you're straight and marry the first man who asks so no one will ever know? You can't spend your whole life—

ERIN

You have no idea what I can do.

MADDIE

What is that? A threat?

ERIN

Possession isn't one-sided Mad. And if you're going to Lyle's then I'd say it's clear.

MADDIE

Are we not together? Is that what you're telling me?

ERIN

Of course we're not together, this is a fucking phone call Mad. You want to come here and really be here for me, then maybe we can be together, but that's up to you.

MADDIE

That's not fair.

ERIN

What's not fair is thinking my rez is so homophobic you'll get gang-raped just by setting foot on it.

MADDIE

Fuck you.

ERIN

No, go fuck Lyle and enjoy yourself.

MADDIE

Erin, come on—

(Erin hangs up the phone angrily. Maddie stares at the phone and then her spotlight goes out.)

ACT I

Scene 4

(Three days later. It is late morning but Erin looks tired and disheveled. The house has taken on a fine layer of red dust. There is silence for a long moment, then the phone rings. Erin doesn't even register the sound. The phone rings four times until the machine picks up.)

BILLY V.O.

A'ya couz, you've reached the non-habitated rez home of Billy and the kid. Say what you gotta say after the beep.

(A spotlight comes up on Sam.)

SAM

Erin? Are you there? I wondered if I could come over and see you... to talk, you know? Um, so... so pick up if you're there. Please, sister, I want to see you. Alright, I guess you're out. But I'll come by around four, then, okay?

(Sam waits for a moment, then hangs up. Immediately he realizes what he's done.)

Shit. The rule, moron.

(Sam dials again, lets it ring three times, then hangs up. Every muscle in Erin's body tenses.

She waits. Sam dials again and as it rings Erin grabs for it hungrily.)

ERIN

Maddie? Maddie, is that you?

SAM

No, it's me, sister.

ERIN

Oh. Hey, Sam.

SAM

I'm sorry about before, I forgot the rule.

ERIN

No, that's okay little brother, that's fine. So, you wanted to see me?

SAM

Yeah, I mean, you didn't come to my party so... can I come over?

ERIN

No. It's not a great time I'm—

SAM

Are you okay?

ERIN

I'm just not really fit for company right now.

SAM

(Quietly.)

Please. Mom won't talk about it. I want... I want to hear you talk about him. I need to... I don't remember. I can't remember...

(Sam starts to cry.)

ERIN

Shh.... It's okay, Sam. Come over. But make sure they know you're coming. Not like last time, okay?

SAM

(Sniffing.)

Yeah, okay.

(Sam hangs up and his light goes out. Erin gets up from the table and begins to clean. She wets a rag and begins wiping off the counters near the window. Her cloth comes away red.)

ERIN

Damn this dirt.

(In the distance a train can be heard approaching. As it gets closer and closer Erin begins to fall apart until she collapses on the floor. She puts her hands over her ears and begins to wail. It is a horrible sound.

Erin regains her composure slowly. After a moment she gets up and grabs for the phone. She dials.)

ERIN CONTINUED

(Counting the rings.)

One...two...three...

ERIN CONTINUED

(She hangs up and dials again.)

Maddie, come on... please...I'm sorry...

(Exhausted Erin sits at the table and lets the phone continue ringing. She puts her head down and listens to it ring.)

The lights dim, until after a moment Sam busts in the back door.)

SAM

Erin? Hey, Erin, are you okay?

ERIN

Yeah, I'm okay.

(Erin sits up and tries to wipe her face with the rag, but succeeds only in smearing red dirt on herself. Sam starts to laugh.)

SAM

You look like a real red injun now. Hah! That's hilarious. Here. Let me wash that out.

(He takes the rag from her and rinses it at the sink. As he hands it back to her he notices the phone. Sam tries to pick it up but Erin grabs it for a moment. There is a contained struggle over it.)

SAM CONTINUED

Come on. Let go.

(Erin does. Sam hangs up the phone. Erin cleans her face. Sam automatically begins to make tea.)

ERIN

Shit, Sam.... It's just too ridiculous to be real, enit? It all feels like one long dream, one long nightmare, and all I can hear is that damn train, all the time. It whistles as it crosses the river half a mile down the line. Then as it crosses one intersection and the next, and the next. All I hear are those damn engines whistling- and it's just like the phone ringing. It rings and it rings and it's never her, never him. Never.

(Pause.)

Maybe he really is de-... maybe he's really not coming back. But he just doesn't feel gone. Not really. Can't you feel him, Sam?

SAM

No, I can't. But I don't know what it's supposed to feel like either. I don't even...

SAM CONT'D

know if I remember what he looked like.

ERIN

If you think hard enough you'll be able to remember. You have to. Remember his hand on your shoulder, or a kiss on your forehead. Just try.

SAM

I don't. The only thing I remember is....

ERIN

Don't stop. Say it.

SAM

I only remember them fighting. I remember yelling, and things breaking and you holding my ears while I cried, to help block out the sound. I remember you taking me outside, and the two of us playing with snakes and bugs. But it would get so loud in here even the train couldn't drown it out, not all the way. That's what I remember.

ERIN

I'm sorry that's all you have left. He was so much more than that once. I wish you could remember him that way.

SAM

Me too.

ERIN

Wait, hold on a second-

(Erin gets up and leaves the kitchen for the inner house.  
Sam tends to the tea.

After a moment Erin comes back with a small  
plastic album. She opens it to show him.)

ERIN CONTINUED

See? There, the day you were born.

SAM

I forgot about these. Where were they?

ERIN

On the shelf in the other room. There's just this album, but, you know, at least it's something. There are more of you in here than me.

SAM

Why didn't Mom bring these with us?

ERIN

I don't know. But at least she didn't throw them away.

SAM

Can I keep this one?

ERIN

It's yours, enit? Why don't you take them home with you? Just don't lose them. Alright, brother?

SAM

Yeah, sure.

(Sam looks through the photos for a moment. Then-)

Hey, Erin- with the phone before—?

ERIN

What?

SAM

It wasn't?

ERIN

No, I was just.... Oh, never mind.

SAM

No, what? Tell me.

ERIN

I tried to call Maddie. She wasn't there, but I already knew that. She left days ago. I just wanted to- I had to try.

SAM

Tell me about her.

ERIN

No. No, Sam, I can't. But I'll tell you about Dad. That's what you wanted, enit?

SAM

Erin, Dad's dead but you're not. Why won't you tell me about you?

ERIN

Not this.

SAM

Who else you got to talk to?

ERIN

(Laughs)

Well, that's the truth, enit?

(Carefully)

Maddie's my girlfriend. I met her in Phoenix my first year out. She had this camera and she kept trying to take my picture, but I wouldn't let her. I told her that every picture steals a little bit of your soul. She said she'd heard you didn't really need one. Laughing was good, you know? And then we just started talked, about everything. She's Native too, mostly, and it's always good to find other Indians when you're jumping. As long as you're all broke you can trust each other. Maddie invited me to hop with her to L.A. and I went.

We spent the whole winter there together in her cousin Juan's beach house. We shared this great open loft balcony bedroom. We made fires on the beach, swam, and played like children, and she took pictures of everything. Juan had this great old guitar that he gave Maddie. He'd taught her how to play a long time ago. She wrote songs for me, and tried to teach me how to play. Every day was music and beach and pictures. It was beautiful. She was beautiful.

SAM

But how did you...? You know?

ERIN

It was natural. I never questioned it. We just did. Not everything has been as easy as that first move was.

SAM

What do you mean?

ERIN

I woke up one morning in January and Maddie was halfway out the door. I picked up my shoes, and my bag and followed her barefoot down the beach as she drug the guitar along behind her in the sand. At the marina she talked a fishing boat into giving her a ride to Seattle.

SAM

Her?

ERIN

She didn't even realize I was there until we'd been on the ocean for a few hours. It was as if she was possessed. Her eyes had shifted, like birds in midair—she was on autopilot—following directions I couldn't hear.

But Seattle was great too. Talk about your Indians. I thought Phoenix had a lot of Indians, but that's nothing compared to Seattle. Almost everybody you see that's brown is Native. It's beautiful.

SAM

What do you do all the time?

ERIN

Sometimes we work. I like farming, picking apples and grapes. Maddie sells her pictures and with the guitar she plays in bars some too. There's something about Maddie. Everywhere she goes there's a gallery owner that's heard of her, and wants to sell her pictures. Sometimes that's enough, sometimes it's not. I've panhandled a little. But Maddie makes more money playing guitar on the street than I ever could just by looking pretty. But it makes me feel good that a lot of the pictures she sells have me in them. I'm contributing that way. You know?

SAM

You begged for money? On the street?

ERIN

Sometimes, we had to. It's only fair, Sam. Just another way to alleviate the guilt of the white eyes, enit? They see us Native Americans and the guilt just twists their insides cause they know that everything they have was stolen from us. They prosper off of our pain. Even the ones that don't know it feel the weight of the past on their shoulders. They feel bad for Western movies, and John Wayne. They feel guilty for playing cowboys and indians, and making their little brothers and sisters die as they played the indians. They remember the indignity of plastic tomahawks and whiskey. They know, and they're only too happy to pay for the chance to separate themselves from Manifest Destiny.

SAM

Being an Indian doesn't mean we can't do anything with our lives. I mean, look at Sherman Alexie and Adam Beach and Carlos Nakai. They're big, right? Important?

ERIN

You sound like an ad for Indian Affairs.

SAM

What? I can't know things?

ERIN

It's just that life isn't like that for everyone. Off the rez famous Natives aren't really famous, you know? We're not people to them.

SAM

Not everybody is like that.

ERIN

More than you can imagine. They think just cause their great great grandmother was half blood Cherokee they count just like you. They never lived here like we did, they don't know what it's like. And there's just no reasoning with them.

I bet you and Maddie just don't try. SAM

You don't know anything about Maddie. ERIN

Neither do you. SAM

Don't you dare little brother. ERIN

Ok, where is she then? SAM

El Paso, or she will be soon enough. ERIN

Are you going to meet her?  
(Beat. Erin shrugs.)  
Well, what are you going to do if you stay? SAM

If? He is coming home, Sam. ERIN

No. He's not. SAM

You're fifteen, you don't know anything. ERIN

I know he's got to be dead. We haven't heard from him in three weeks. He told you he was dying. He's dead. SAM

He could be on any one of those trains, Sam. He could've gone on a bender, passed out somewhere, and just because he had that bracelet before doesn't mean he has it now. And if he were dead— if he were, we'd get a call then too. That's what cops do, Sam, they call. ERIN

Even for bums? SAM

ERIN

Don't call him that. Not every Indian is meant to live on a reservation. We can't all just sit still and stoic like fucking Chief Joseph.

SAM

No one wants to be on the rez, but that doesn't mean we all become professional bums.

ERIN

Look around Sam! What's the difference between an Indian passed out alongside the road here or along the railroad tracks in California, or Colorado, or Missouri? Every Indian's a fucking bum Sam, whether they hop or not. Don't think just because you've never left—

SAM

I didn't have a choice. You left me! And I know how old I was too. I remember him leaving and you running off after him like he was some kind of spirit guide. And what for? You never brought him home like you said. You never did a damn thing you said. You're no better than him.

ERIN

Then why are you here? Go back to Carlos' and cut your braid, Mijo. You have my permission to pretend you're not Native. Go on.

SAM

No, I'm always here, Erin. Even when I'm in town, I'm here. It's in my blood, you're in my blood, sister, but shit, Erin, Mom's right and you know it. You need to get over yourself. You need to stay in one place and work, go to school, do something real; because the world doesn't have to feel sorry for you. It doesn't have to do anything for any of us. You have to earn it.

ERIN

You make me sound like a horrible person.

SAM

You're not.

ERIN

No, I am. Or at the very least I'm a bad sister.

SAM

No, not really. You're just not very good at it.

ERIN

(Laughs, tired.)

Maddie used to say that too. That we weren't bad together, we just weren't very good at it. Maybe that's just who I am.

She'll call you.

SAM

(Teasing.)  
A'ya? What do you know?

ERIN

(The Silhouette passes outside the window as Sam and Erin sit quietly for a moment.

Suddenly there is a rustling sort of knocking at the backdoor. Erin moves quickly and beats Sam to the door. She throws it open and a little stray reservation dog pulls back in fright.)

It's only a dog.

ERIN CONTINUED

She looks hungry.

SAM

They're all hungry. Come here girl...come on...

ERIN

So? What're you gonna do?

SAM

I guess we feed her, don't we? Get me a can of chili. I'll get a bowl.

ERIN

(Lights down.)

(END OF ACT I.)

ACT II

Scene 1

(It is late afternoon, two months later. The kitchen is empty, but we can see the tail end of a train passing out the window. After a moment, there is a knock at the back door.)

MADDIE

(Through the door)

Erin? Babe?

(Pause)

Erin? You there?

(The door cracks open and Maddie scans the room tentatively before entering. She sets her guitar and bag on the floor and moves through the kitchen, then exits into the house.

After a moment she returns, pulls a flask out of her bag, sits on the counter and drinks, humming to herself.)

(Lights fade down as time passes from afternoon to evening.)

(The kitchen is almost dark until Maddie gets off the counter and turns on the small light over the stove. Testing the fullness of her flask,

Maddie moves to sit at the table, casually throwing her feet up on the table top as she does.

After a moment Erin enters from the house carrying groceries and wearing a polo shirt with 'Safeway' embroidered on it. As she enters the kitchen she notices Maddie and drops the bag on the floor. Maddie runs to Erin and kisses her, Erin doesn't react. After a moment Maddie pushes Erin back and examines her.)

MADDIE

Jeez, look at that. You sold out to the beaner.

ERIN

What the hell are you doing here?

MADDIE

You wanted me here, I'm here.

(Silence)

Oh, please don't be mad babe. Look, all that shit before, let's just call it good. I'm over it, okay? So come on.

ERIN

If you're so over it why do you taste like you've been drinking gasoline?

MADDIE

A girl gets thirsty, you know?

ERIN

Is this a lasting kind of thirst, or just temporary?

MADDIE

I'm sorry. Is that what you want me to say? Because I am.

ERIN

No, actually what I want is for you to explain why you're here after dropping off the face of the planet for two fucking months, Maddie. And I want you to tell me the truth, not some drunken fucking sob story, okay? Cause let me tell you, it hasn't been peaches and cream around here, that's for damn sure.

MADDIE

(Maddie takes the last swig off her flask.)

You got anything *wet* around here, babe?

ERIN

Have some fucking water.

(Erin storms out of the room into the main house.)

MADDIE

(Raising her voice.)

Still the fucking same, aren't you? Can't take a damn joke.

(Maddie crosses to the spilled groceries and picks them up. She begins to open cabinets to put things away.)

MADDIE CONT'D

Hey, can I tell you something? I've really missed you. Really. How's that for the truth? I've missed you so damn much that I left Lyle's palatial spread and fat wallet to visit you, and put my dyke life in danger for you. How's that? Good enough yet?

(In a cabinet Maddie finds a bottle of cheap whiskey. She pulls it down and begins to take swigs from the bottle.)

MADDIE CONT'D

But you know, you might be right about this rez. I don't know if there are enough men on the whole damn thing to gang-rape anyone. If you'd told me that, I might've been here sooner.

(Erin comes to the doorway.)

ERIN

On a scale from one to ten how drunk are you right now?

MADDIE

I'm right between not drunk enough, and too drunk to be ignored, I think.

(Erin goes to a cabinet and pulls out two glasses. She takes the bottle from Maddie and pours herself a drink.)

ERIN

You're going to have to do better than that. You didn't just confess you made out with a stranger, Mad, you've been MIA, dropped off the face of the planet gone.

MADDIE

Babe, I'm sorry. You broke up with me. How was I supposed to know you wanted to take it back?

ERIN

I said we weren't together, I didn't say I didn't want to be.

MADDIE

You are so confusing, sister. Either come here or bring me that bottle, you can't keep me from both.

ERIN

Come get what you want.

(Erin pours out two drinks, Maddie watches her, then comes over, takes the glass from Erin, sets it down and kisses her.)

MADDIE

God, I have missed you. You miss me?

ERIN

Amazingly, I have.

El Paso was good. You should've come.

MADDIE

(Taking a shot.)  
Let's not talk about El Paso, please.

ERIN

I made some really good money.

MADDIE

Oh, yeah? How good?

ERIN

Enough to rent a place somewhere.

MADDIE

(Laughing)  
Rent?

ERIN

I've been thinking, maybe you've got the right idea here.

MADDIE

What have you done with my Mad Maddie?

ERIN

Are you questioning my badass-ness?

MADDIE

I'm surprised you aren't. "Rent something? That's so middle America" wasn't that what you told me in Seattle when I suggested it?

ERIN

Part of being mad is being unpredictable, don't you know?

MADDIE

If you say so.

ERIN

Seriously, Erin. Why shouldn't we give it a shot?

MADDIE

I can give you ten reasons.

ERIN

MADDIE

Erin—

ERIN

Starting with the fact that you can't stay anywhere more than 90 days without losing your shit.

MADDIE

Hey, at least I'm willing to try.

ERIN

And why so eager to settle down now, huh?

MADDIE

Maybe it's the next great frontier to explore. And maybe I'll love it, who knows. But I know I won't love it without you.

ERIN

What the fuck happened to you at Lyle's?

MADDIE

You don't want to know about El Paso.

ERIN

But clearly I need to if I'm supposed to make any sense of you.

MADDIE

What's to make sense of? I'm here ready to give you what you want.

ERIN

And what will that cost me?

MADDIE

How about some fucking consideration? You know how hard it is for me to be here. Every man I see makes me want to piss myself.

ERIN

If you don't like it, don't do it. Go back to Lyle's king size bed. He'll be happy to keep you I'm sure.

MADDIE

So you don't want me anymore? Is that it?

ERIN

Let's stop talking about this while you're drunk.

MADDIE

Why? You think I don't know what I'm doing?

ERIN

No. Honestly, Mad, I don't think you do.

MADDIE

I went to El Paso for us.

ERIN

How do you figure?

MADDIE

I wanted to make enough cash to do this, so I could really commit to being somewhere with you.

ERIN

That's funny, cause even with that kind of dedication it took a hell of a long time for you to get here. But I guess it was more important to whore yourself out than support your lover.

MADDIE

(Taking a roll of cash out of her pocket.)

I wasn't in a place to support you before.

ERIN

Sure, shit-faced and rolling in cash, that's exactly what I wanted.

MADDIE

Okay then tell me, Erin, what would you rather I do? Hmm? Oh, you can't answer that one can you? No, we all don't have your talent for wallowing in a little government house, working at a little job and living a little life, waiting for something to happen instead of making it happen for yourself.

ERIN

But I got a job didn't I?

MADDIE

No, you worked at the job they chose for you. That's different. That has nothing to do with you.

ERIN

I have to be ready, I have to be able to stop when Dad gets here so I can help him. It's a sacrifice, and one I'm happy to make for him

MADDIE

You and your sacrifices... Why won't you accept that that's not going to happen?

ERIN  
He will come home!

MADDIE  
No, he won't.

ERIN  
I have to have faith in him.

MADDIE  
It's not a matter of faith, Erin. It's a matter of fact. He's not coming home.

ERIN  
How do you know? You don't know where he is.

MADDIE  
(Quietly)  
Actually, I do. Well, approximately...

ERIN  
You found him?

MADDIE  
No I didn't find him, but I found out what happened.

ERIN  
Maddie, what did you hear?  
(Beat)  
TELL ME!

(Maddie pulls Erin into her lap and holds her. Erin doesn't fight her. The space between Erin's questions seems to linger and breathe. The room is too quiet.)

MADDIE  
I found Michael Ray, you remember him?

ERIN  
Michael Ray was a Medicine Man, wasn't he?

MADDIE  
Yeah.

ERIN

Where did you find him?

MADDIE

St. Charles. He was down by the river. I was trying to take pictures of the boats, the big propellers, you know? And I saw this dirty Indian lying next to an empty dumpster.

ERIN

Did he remember you?

MADDIE

He remembered my camera.

ERIN

Tell me.

MADDIE

I knew it was Michael Ray because he had that stupid parrot feather in his hair. Remember that? I told him I'd never seen an Indian with a parrot as a spiritual guide. He said: Sister, if Captain Morgan had feathers, then I'd use one of his instead of his parrot's. I tried to ask him about Billy, but he had the shakes so bad I couldn't get him to focus. He kept going on about how Billy the Kid was the kind of outlaw that Indian's hated, cause he had crazy Indian eyes so nobody could tell what side he was really on. It took him a couple of drinks, but he settled down.

They'd all been in Columbia on their way East. But Billy was gonna leave them and head West. He borrowed money from Johnslly to call you. That night he laid down with a bottle, when the Medicine Men woke up his bottle was empty and he was gone. Apparently they were mad he wasted the liquor.

ERIN

They would be.

MADDIE

Still, they buried him themselves- real traditional like. Outside of Columbia, right where the cliffs begin, you know? He said there was a great big tree, and they dug down and nestled him into the roots there. Gave him a flask to tide him over on the long walk. Then they put the earth back on top of him. He said it was hard going since they really didn't have the right kind of shovel.

ERIN

No, you're lying.

MADDIE

Michael Ray wouldn't lie. He may be the drunkest Indian in Missouri, but he doesn't tell a lie.

ERIN

Did he say why they didn't call?

MADDIE

They buried the bracelet with him. And then afterwards they were too drunk to remember. Just like the damn Medicine Men, enit?

ERIN

Why didn't you call?

MADDIE

I couldn't.

ERIN

(Pushing Maddie away)

You couldn't?! You're a damned coward Maddie. I've been here, jumping at every train, waiting for him, waiting for a call waiting for a sign of something- anything- and you couldn't call?

MADDIE

Calling was no good. I had to tell you myself, but I couldn't just come. Not without something to offer.

ERIN

Offer?! You could offer me the truth about what happened to my father, what is more important than that? Nothing matters more than him, Maddie, you know that. He's why I started hopping. He's my father! And you knew and...so fucking selfish! And for what? Huh? What is worth you not telling me, Letting me live like this for months! I hate you.

MADDIE

I wanted something to offer our future, for us.

ERIN

Oh, it's our all of a sudden, enit? You can't even wait two minutes before just glossing over the bad news, the hard truth. This isn't one of those times where it's going to work, Maddie. I don't give a shit about our future together. Right now I'm not sure we have one. How about that?

MADDIE

Erin, please don't say that. Not after everything I've done. Please.

ERIN

Everything you've done?! What have you done? Whatever it was it was just for you, I promise, no matter what it is you told yourself. It's always for you. That's why every time you leave town you forget I'm there. You leave me behind again and again, you forget to call, forget to speak to me... So no, please, tell me what was so fucking important that you...

ERIN CONT'D

...had to wait months to tell me my father was dead. Please. Tell me what was so much more important than me this time.

MADDIE

I knew you'd hate me for it.

ERIN

Oh, you're right, I hate you, but not because of this, because of everything you didn't say.

MADDIE

Babe, please I—

ERIN

NO. I can't do this right now. I can't.

MADDIE

(Grabbing Erin's arms)

Erin, stop, please, stop.

ERIN

(Struggling against Maddie)

Let go of me.

MADDIE

Erin—

(Erin struggles and breaks Maddie's grip.)

ERIN

No. Shut up. And take your hands off of me. You have no right. All I asked you to do was ask about him, ask around and tell me what you found out. But you hid it from me, and for what? Huh, so you could come back here with a couple grand and what? What the fuck is the use of a couple grand, Maddie, when that's all there is? Tell me? What happens when your money runs out? You disappear again from wherever we are and leave me to pick up after you.

MADDIE

You're the one who left to come back to this dusty little shack. We had it good in Boulder. I was keeping a roof over our heads.

ERIN

Well excuse me for trying to take care of my family.

MADDIE

We are family, Erin. Or we were.

ERIN

My father's dead. Don't you get that? This, the rest of this, it doesn't matter. Not right now. I have to- Shit, I have to call Paula, and Sam.

MADDIE

Sam?

ERIN

My kid brother.

(Erin crosses to the phone and dials. After a moment she speaks.)

Mom, Sam, you need to come over as soon as you get this.

(Erin hangs up the phone and goes back to the bottle of whiskey. She drinks from it.)

MADDIE

Why didn't you tell me you had a brother?

ERIN

He was mine, Maddie, that's why.

MADDIE

Oh, and I'm the one in trouble, how ironic.

ERIN

Don't you dare.

MADDIE

What about Paula, was she still holding out too?

ERIN

No.

MADDIE

She's smarter than I thought.

ERIN

You need to go.

MADDIE

What?

ERIN

You can't be here when they get here.

Now wait just a—

MADDIE

No, you need to get lost, now.

ERIN

Shit, okay. For how long?

MADDIE

How about we just leave that open-ended.

ERIN

Fine. I'll go to the bar. I'll come back later.

MADDIE

Don't.

ERIN

I won't drink anymore. I'll just go chat with the local bums. Maybe learn something worthwhile about your rez.

MADDIE

That's not what I mean.

ERIN

Then you better say what you mean.

MADDIE

I mean don't come back.

ERIN

Erin, babe, come on, I love you. Talk to me about this.

MADDIE

I am. I don't want you here right now. And I don't know when I will want you here, but certainly not tonight.

ERIN

That's not how this works... you can't do this.

MADDIE

Really? This is my house, enit?

ERIN

MADDIE

Stop saying that. You don't own a thing. This house doesn't belong to you anymore than that shirt. It was given to you by someone who wants something from you. The only thing in here that belongs to you is me. We're neither of us much to brag about, but I love you anyway, and that is something we can hold on to, enit?

ERIN

You love me? No, I don't believe it, and even if I did, what good does that do me? It won't bring my father back.

MADDIE

We're Native, girl, and we don't believe in reincarnation. He's one with the earth now, probably has tree roots growing through his bones. You can't let that keep you from—

ERIN

Do you hear yourself when you speak? Do you? What part of that is supposed to make me love you?

MADDIE

What do you mean make you?

ERIN

Can't you see this isn't right?

MADDIE

What isn't right?

ERIN

(Slowly, as if to a child.)

This conversation. I cannot make myself care about your feelings right now. Until I can it's best if you go away.

MADDIE

Where do you want me to go? Huh?

ERIN

Fuck, I don't care. Go back to Lyle, why don't you. Maybe he can make you some more money; something else to throw in my face.

MADDIE

I didn't come here to make you feel bad, I came here to make things better.

ERIN

I don't need you to make things better, Maddie. Believe it or not I can take care of myself.

MADDIE

I want to help. We're in a relationship, aren't we? Isn't that what I'm supposed to do?

ERIN

You are supposed to do what I need you to do.

MADDIE

Okay, what do you need?

ERIN

I need you to leave. I cannot tell my mother that Billy is dead and have to explain you.

MADDIE

Explain me?

ERIN

I can't do it.

MADDIE

They don't know about me?

ERIN

Sam knows, Paula just doesn't know we're together.

MADDIE

Jeez. I can't believe this.

ERIN

I hadn't been home in six years. That doesn't exactly equate with telling her, does it? Besides, it's not like in white families, this shit isn't done. You know that.

MADDIE

Then how does Sam know?

ERIN

He figured it out.

MADDIE

This is so confusing. I can't even figure out what I'm supposed to be upset about here. I'm pretty sure I'm supposed to be upset about something.

ERIN

No, you're not. Because right now, you don't have the right to be upset with me about anything. You need to go.

Fine. Can I at least leave my guitar here?

MADDIE

I don't care.

ERIN

(Maddie gets up and goes to her bag. Erin sits at the table and drinks. Sam runs in from the inner house. He is out of breath.)

Where is he?

SAM

Sam, just wait a second, calm down.

ERIN

Where is he, Erin?

SAM

He's dead.

MADDIE

Maddie, get out, get the fuck out of here!

ERIN

He's what?

SAM

He's dead, brother.

ERIN

Dead?

SAM

A'ya.

ERIN

(Erin pours a shot of whiskey and hands it to Sam. He swallows it. Across the room Paula enters from the inner house.)

Whiskey now? Shit. All hell's broke loose then, enit? Well, you gonna pour me one, Mija?

PAULA

(Erin pours her mother a shot. Paula drinks it, then notices Maddie.)

PAULA CONT'D

You're Maddie, aren't you? Let me guess, you come bearing frankincense, myrrh, and bad news. That it?

ERIN

Maddie, my mother Paula, and my brother Sam.

SAM

Maddie?

(Erin gives Sam a warning look and another shot. He drinks.)

PAULA

So where is he?

MADDIE

The Medicine Men buried him in Missouri. Outside Columbia.

PAULA

At least I don't have to wonder anymore.

ERIN

Wonder- you never wondered about it once.

PAULA

What do you know? Billy was my deepest true love. And you cannot replace that part of your soul when it's lost. But Mija, it's been lost a long time, and you can only mourn a loss for so long.

ERIN

Bullshit, you never feel anything, do you?

PAULA

(To Maddie.)

She's not taking the news well, is she? How much have you had to drink, Mija?

ERIN

Will you stop calling me that? I am not your little Mexican anything.

PAULA

No, you're just my rude ungrateful daughter.

Maddie?  
SAM

Yeah, Sam?  
MADDIE

When did he die?  
SAM

The day after Erin got the call. At least, that's what the Medicine Men told me.  
MADDIE

He's been dead for two months...  
SAM

A'ya, just like I said. Always said if he didn't call it was because he was dead. And he's dead. That's just like him, enit?  
PAULA

(Paula sits heavily at the table and starts to cry. Erin pours another shot and hands it to her.)

Look, that bottle is getting dangerously low. Why don't I go get a new one?  
MADDIE

(Without waiting for an answer Maddie leaves out the back door. She doesn't take any of her belongings.)

She's a pretty one.  
PAULA

Yeah, she is.  
SAM

You two look good together.  
PAULA

Wait, what—?  
ERIN

Please, Erin, why bother keeping it a secret anymore? You think I don't know?  
PAULA

I wasn't—wait a second, Sam, what did you say?  
ERIN

SAM

Nothing, I swear!

ERIN

You little shit!

PAULA

He didn't tell me anything Erin, but I'm not a fool. I could see it in you from the second you got back. I always wondered—

ERIN

What? If I was a dikey freak?

PAULA

Oh, please, that's ridiculous. Being a lesbian doesn't make you a freak, no matter what people say. You have special medicine Erin. You always did, and sometimes that manifests in different ways. It's a blessing, to have that kind of understanding and knowledge. In the old days gay people were revered, you know that? Then the Jesuits and the missionaries came, and we weren't allowed to use our medicine anymore. That's when so many natives started hating gays.

ERIN

Really? And I'm supposed to believe that you're not mad? That you are just that fucking happy about your daughter's choices?

PAULA

Oh, no—let's not start talking about choices. That's a completely different discussion for another day. You know I don't agree with all of your choices, but I love who you are. And this is who you are, Mija.

ERIN

Jeez, this is just not my day.

PAULA

You're over-reacting.

ERIN

Believe it or not, Mother, while this is certainly not how I imagined coming out to you, I really think the bigger deal is Dad being dead.

PAULA

He's been dead for two months.

ERIN

But we haven't known for two months, have we? We've known for about half an hour. That calls for a little fucking emotion, don't you think? A little sensitivity?

PAULA

(Beginning to laugh)

Sensitivity? You're the sensitive one, Erin. You're so certain that the world is out to sabotage you, but it's not. And you are so mad, mad at Maddie, and Sam, and me, and Carlos, and your father... You don't need to be mad daughter, you need to grieve, so stop fighting the world and feel the pain. Let yourself go.

ERIN

And I'm supposed to believe it's that easy? To just move past all the shit here, and feel something different than what I'm feeling? Huh? Why the fuck can't I be mad if I want to be?

PAULA

Because self-destruction is behind all that anger, and guilt, and you don't need to carry that with you. You have to let it go.

ERIN

Fucking hell...

(Beat. Paula takes the whiskey bottle and pours two equal shots, leaving approximately the same amount in the bottle itself.)

Now what're you doing?

PAULA

Moving on, Erin. That's what we need to do, enit? We are going to toast to your father and say goodbye to him in a way he would appreciate. Say your peace, drink and then when Maddie gets back I'm taking us for food.

ERIN

I don't want to eat.

PAULA

You'll eat. It's good for the grief.

ERIN

Stop telling me what I'm going to do, what I should do, what I should feel—

PAULA

Hey, let me be your mother, alright? Just for today. How else am I supposed to tell you that I love you? I love you so much I don't care about anything else, so why should you?

ERIN

Because it matters.

PAULA

A'ya, it does, but not right now. So please, put yourself aside and let's put your father first. It's been what you've done for years, what's so hard about that right now, when it's actually time? Let's work on letting him go, together. Alright, Mija?

ERIN

(Giving in)

Stop calling me that.

PAULA

Alright. Sam, you first. Talk about your father. Say what you miss, what you remember. Go on.

SAM

Um... I remember this one thing, it seems, I don't know, lame, or something...

ERIN

Nah, brother, it's not lame. Go on.

SAM

It was my seventh birthday, and I remember we were going to go out for pizza, but the car broke down, and Dad spent all day trying to fix it, so we could get to town. I sat in the car and turned the key over and over and over, whenever he told me to. He was more upset than me when it wouldn't start... that's it, I guess. It's funny, it's hard to even see his face anymore, but I can see him leaning over the engine of that stupid wreck we used to have, cursing at the steam.

(Pause)

I wish he had come home so I could really remember him, or have something else to remember, I guess. But I will miss him.

PAULA

Erin?

ERIN

Dad... I don't know what's worse, never getting to say goodbye or feeling just so lost without you, because, somehow, I've always been lost without you. And I know it doesn't make any sense, but you leaving only made me feel even more attached to you, desperate for you to return. But looking back at everything, I wouldn't change any of it, even if I could go back because just knowing you were out there with me, made me feel...oh, I don't know exactly, but it made everything easier.

And I know that doesn't make up for anything that you did, but I loved you because you couldn't stay put, and because at least you knew it was better to leave than to stay here like you were.

And out there you were a legend Dad, you really were. It takes talent to hop for as long as you did, even if nobody but us understand that. And Dad you had some good friends, crazy friends, but good. The Medicine Men are damn fools, but I'm glad they gave you a proper burial.

PAULA

They did?

ERIN

Well, as proper as four drunk indians can manage. I'll let Maddie tell you. She'll do it better since she talked to Michael Ray herself.

PAULA

That old drunk. Anything else, Mija?

ERIN

No. Wait. I love you Dad, and I'll miss you, but I won't cry anymore, I promise.

(Pause.)

Okay. Now I'm done.

PAULA

Billy, when we were twelve you kissed me out on the hogback. Right on the lips. I had never been kissed before, and there is a part of me that hasn't been kissed since. You were like a mirage that I had managed to capture for just a moment, but I will always love you Billy. Always.

Okay, Mijos, to your father. To Billy.

(They toast and drink. In the distance a train whistles. The wind can be heard whipping up. Red dust seems to come in around the windows and doors with the force.)

PAULA CONT'D

I think he's here. Listen to the whistle on the wind.

ERIN

No, that's the train.

PAULA

No, Mija, that's no train. That's your father.

(The silhouette reappears at the window, clearly visible. Lights fade down so that the only sight left is the silhouette.)

(End of scene.)

ACT II

Scene 2

(Later that evening. The house is dark when Erin and Maddie come into the kitchen. They are giggling, and kissing. Maddie sits Erin on the table and grabs a bottle of whiskey from the counter. She opens it and takes a swig.)

MADDIE

You don't even know how beautiful you are, do you?

ERIN

Shit, you really are drunk, aren't you?

MADDIE

Nah, you're just pretty in the moonlight.

ERIN

(Grabbing the bottle.)

And what am I during the day?

MADDIE

Gorgeous.

ERIN

Oh, sure.

MADDIE

You are. Where's my camera. I need a picture of this.

ERIN

It's too dark for pictures.

MADDIE

I'll turn the light on.

(Erin takes a drink as Maddie goes through her backpack, until she pulls out a very nice, new camera. She turns on the light over the sink.)

ERIN

Holy shit, look at that camera.

MADDIE

It's nice, enit?

ERIN

Expensive, more like it. Where's your old one?

MADDIE

I sold it.

ERIN

But I bought you that camera.

MADDIE

Gotta travel light, you know?

ERIN

Put it away.

MADDIE

Erin?

ERIN

No, I don't want to do this now.

MADDIE

You knew the lens wasn't in good shape. I needed all kinds of new stuff, and it just seemed time for an upgrade.

ERIN

Upgrade? Huh? That a metaphor or something?

MADDIE

Why do you always do this? Why do you get so mad? Look, you're beautiful, and I love you. I mean, shit, even in this yellow kitchen light you're like a fucking angel. Erin, Babe, come here.

(Maddie tries to embrace her, but Erin pulls away.)

ERIN

You think it's that simple, don't you? You tell me I'm pretty take my picture and I'll forgive you.

MADDIE

I am sorry Erin. But there's not exactly a manual on how to have the perfect relationship.

ERIN

Actually, I think there are a couple.

MADDIE

(Laughing)

See, you're mad as hell and you still make jokes. This is why I love you. You know that, don't you?

ERIN

Give me that bottle. I need another drink if you're going to take any pictures of me tonight. I know I look like hell.

MADDIE

Nah, every picture I take of you sells for six times what I can get for anything else, and you know it.

ERIN

(Teasing)

Aha! I am just the cash cow. I knew it.

MADDIE

Do you ever even look at our pictures? Huh? Do you ever see yourself? You're the reason I have everything I have. This might as well be the camera you bought me, since you made me the money that bought it.

ERIN

Is that so? What about all the pieces of my soul captured in that old camera?

MADDIE

They're not in that camera. They're in here.

(Maddie touches her chest, and Erin starts to laugh. As she does, Maddie begins to take her picture.)

ERIN

(Laughing)

You're like some fucking romance novel, aren't you? How do you come up with all those lines? Huh? They're too good to be just plucked out of thin air.

MADDIE

You know where they come from...

ERIN

If you say I'm your inspiration, I'll break your nose, even if it is my favorite part of your face.

MADDIE

This nose, right here? This is your favorite part? Not, say, my lips?

(Maddie tries to kiss Erin, but is pushed away.)

ERIN

Nope, no distractions. Tell me.

MADDIE

How can I answer when you told me I can't tell you the truth?

ERIN

Well, then lie.

MADDIE

Okay... my grandpa left me a notebook filled with his best wooing lines. He would be dancing at a powwow, and circle a woman, whisper one of these lines in her ear and she would fall in love with him and give him ten strong sons. He had fifteen woman with ten sons apiece in each stop on the powwow circuit. How does that suit you?

ERIN

Much better. Thank you.

MADDIE

Okay. Can I kiss you now?

ERIN

Maybe. If you can catch me.

(Erin jumps down from the table and takes off into the house. Maddie hastily sets down the camera and follows her out.)

(End of Scene 2.)

ACT II

Scene 3

(The next afternoon. Maddie and Erin are still only half-dressed. Maddie is watching Erin make frybread on the stove. She has her guitar on her lap. She is strumming out "Dog Days" by Florence + The Machine, but pauses occasionally to take a picture of Erin.)

ERIN

I don't know what is so photogenic about making frybread.

MADDIE

You.

ERIN

You're so cute it's nauseating.

MADDIE

If you're nauseous should you be cooking?

ERIN

Haha. Very funny.

(Erin sets a plate with a couple pieces of frybread on the table. Maddie starts to eat one gingerly.)

MADDIE

Hot. But yummy.

ERIN

Good.

MADDIE

I don't think I've had frybread since I left home.

ERIN

I never made it for you?

MADDIE

We never had all the stuff.

ERIN

That's funny. An Indian who can't remember the last time she ate frybread.

MADDIE

We don't all eat it.

ERIN

Those who don't can't call themselves Indians.

MADDIE

I ate sopaipillas in El Paso.

ERIN

That is not frybread.

MADDIE

It's Mexican frybread, enit?

ERIN

If you say so.

MADDIE

I do. I also say yours is better.

ERIN

Liar. There's no honey or sugar on it, how can it be better?

MADDIE

It's just exactly what it's supposed to be, that's how.

(Beat. Maddie eats, Erin cooks.)

So, Paula was pretty cool about the whole thing, wasn't she?

ERIN

Which thing exactly?

MADDIE

Us.

ERIN

Amazingly, yeah.

MADDIE

I guess I was wrong.

ERIN

Sure, but how could you know that? I mean, I hate what happened to you. It was wrong, and they never should've done it.

MADDIE

They were just stupid boys.

ERIN

They were your cousins.

MADDIE

Yeah, well. I don't go to Dakota anymore, do I? I'm just glad that you don't have to go through what I did.

ERIN

I hate that for you, that you feel like you can't go home.

MADDIE

Hell, who wants to go back to the rez anyway?

ERIN

I wish you'd come with me though, anyway.

MADDIE

How many times do I have to say I'm sorry Babe? I am, okay, I just...it's hard, you know?

ERIN

I'm so tired of excuses.

MADDIE

What? I can't have feelings now?

ERIN

Of course you have feelings, I just don't understand why you couldn't even call me and tell me what you knew. What's the excuse for that, huh?

(Maddie stands and crosses to Erin.)

MADDIE

I said I was sorry about waiting to tell you. I just, I couldn't stand the idea of telling you while you were alone.

ERIN

I'm not alone here.

MADDIE

Is it so wrong that I wanted to be able to help you if you needed it? I wanted to be with you when I told you.

ERIN

You could've been with me the whole time you know.

MADDIE

But then I wouldn't've run into Michael Ray, and we'd be stuck here forever, fighting over the same stupid shit we're fighting about now, living in this little shack and waiting for money to fall on our heads from somewhere.

ERIN

But you were in El Paso instead.

MADDIE

So what? I can't try and make a little money to help us out? Is that it?

ERIN

I just don't like how you make your money in El Paso.

MADDIE

The money didn't come from Lyle, you know? I didn't make it sleeping with him.

ERIN

Where'd it come from then?

MADDIE

Lyle decided to publish a collection book for the show he opened at his gallery. He also made a whole bunch of limited edition prints to sell. They did really well.

ERIN

How well?

MADDIE

We had six with a run of 50 each. They sold out. So he is going to do a different set of six with a run of 100.

ERIN

How big is Lyle's cut?

MADDIE

It's going to the gallery. Not to him.

ERIN

He is the gallery.

MADDIE

(Pause.)

Twenty-five percent.

ERIN

My, God! That's high.

MADDIE

Not really, he's acting as my agent too.

ERIN

What do you need an agent for?

MADDIE

One man bought a full set and the collection book. He's a writer at the El Paso Times. He wants to do a book on me.

ERIN

A book?

MADDIE

We already have a publisher interested. Homeless young people are all the rage these days apparently.

ERIN

With all that money and an apartment you're no longer homeless, what about that?

MADDIE

What a buzzkill. I thought you would be excited about all this.

ERIN

Why should I be?

MADDIE

Do you even know how many pictures of you are in that book?

ERIN

What does it matter? They aren't mine, they're yours.

MADDIE

They're ours, Erin. At least, I thought of them that way.

(Erin ignores this and devotes herself to the frybread. There is a long beat.)

ERIN

What was that song you were playing a minute ago?

MADDIE

Something I picked up. This weird British band. But it's a catchy song.

ERIN

Do you know the words?

MADDIE

I don't remember them all. But there's this one part:

(Playing along.)

Happiness, hit her, like a bullet in the back...

ERIN

How uplifting.

MADDIE

Do you have to work today?

ERIN

My mother's married to the owner, remember? I don't ever have to work unless I want to.

MADDIE

Cushy.

ERIN

No, not really. I'm actually off today. Carlos wouldn't let me skip work unless I was de... well, you know.

MADDIE

I want to go hiking up on the hogback. Will you take me?

ERIN

You just want to take pictures of me, don't you?

MADDIE

Why wouldn't I? You're beautiful.

(Erin lets Maddie kiss her. Then Erin turns off the stove and takes the last of the frybread to the table. Maddie clears away her guitar and they settle themselves to eat. They practically sit on top of each other, and Erin has her legs flung over Maddie's.)

ERIN

This is nice, enit?

MADDIE

Yeah, it is.

ERIN

If I don't leave with you, how long are you going to stay?

MADDIE

Why wouldn't you leave? Billy's not coming back.

ERIN

No, I know, but I feel like I can't leave Sam now.

MADDIE

He's a teenager.

ERIN

I know. And that shit's hard, enit?

MADDIE

Do you mean you won't leave now, or you won't leave ever?

ERIN

I don't know about ever. But at least for a couple months.

MADDIE

I can't stay that long. I have to hop back to El-Paso eventually.

ERIN

When's eventually?

MADDIE

Before Christmas.

ERIN

But would you stay until then?

MADDIE

That's two months...

ERIN

Yes, genius, it is.

(Pause)

MADDIE

I could try.

ERIN

You mean it?

MADDIE

Sure. Sure I mean it. But I can't make any promises.

ERIN

Wouldn't want that.

MADDIE

Don't get upset. Come on. We were doing so well.

ERIN

I'm sorry. I just... I feel like I want to try and do something around here, and I don't want to alter everything for you if you're not going to stay.

MADDIE

Right. So let's just move somewhere else then. Somewhere off the rez. Shit we could move into town even. Just to get a little breathing room, you know?

ERIN

I'm not paying for another house when this one is right here.

MADDIE

You don't have to. I'm only saying that if I leave it's because of the rez, not you.

ERIN

I know what you meant by that, but that's ridiculous. This isn't Dakota.

MADDIE

Maybe not, but I still don't feel safe here. I don't feel in control.

ERIN

Why do you have to be in control? Why can't you just let things happen? Trust me, this is where we should be, for now.

MADDIE

Since when is the rez a way of fixing something. This place, this job, hell, even this house- they all seem to be changing you Babe, and I don't know why you're letting it.

ERIN

Why can't you just trust me, and stick around and try it before you say you don't like it?

MADDIE

We're Indians, we don't trust anyone.

ERIN

But this is different, Maddie, this is me. You have to trust me.

MADDIE

Why? You don't love me. Enit, right?

ERIN

I do.

MADDIE

No, you don't. You haven't said it once, not even once since I've been here. I'm doing everything I know how to do to make this better and you—

ERIN

I'm not asking you to make this better. You can't white knight this situation, Maddie. What you can do is be honest with me and trust me. You think I don't love you? Well maybe it is touch and go but I trust you. I trust you implicitly, with everything I have, with my body, with myself. Do you think I would let anyone else take those pictures of me? Let anyone else steal that much of my soul?

MADDIE

I shouldn't've come.

ERIN

How the fuck did you get from here to there?

MADDIE

You don't want me here. All I did was bring bad news, ruin whatever it is you've got going on, apparently. I'm sorry.

(Maddie gets up and leaves the room. Erin yells after her)

ERIN

I wanted you here months ago!

(Erin angrily goes to the stove. She takes all of the frybread materials and begins to clean up. As she does a train whistle starts in the distance. After a moment Maddie comes back in with pants on, carrying a few items. She goes to the back door.)

ERIN CONT'D

You have really good timing. The train's coming.

MADDIE

I don't have to go.

Then don't. No one's making you.

ERIN

Yes, you are.

MADDIE

Fine. I just don't want to do this anymore. I'm so tired.

ERIN

Okay. I'll be at Lyle's if you want to call.

MADDIE

I won't.

ERIN

Well, here.

MADDIE

(Maddie reaches into her pocket and pulls out a large wad of money. She sets it on the table.)

What is that for?

ERIN

Your modeling fee.

MADDIE

(The train whistles again, closer. Maddie picks up her bag and her guitar and exits. Erin stands at the sink, watching out the window. The train begins to pass. Erin watches it, the lights fade down around her, until she is silhouetted in the window.)

ACT II

Scene 4

(A month later, near Thanksgiving. It is early evening and Erin and Sam are seated at the kitchen table. They are busy looking over papers for Erin's GED.)

ERIN

I still can't believe I'm letting my little brother tutor me in math.

SAM

Well, I know it, don't I?

ERIN

Sure you do, I just never thought I'd need to do Algebra again.

SAM

Just to pass this, and a couple more times maybe, in college.

ERIN

Oh, God, college. What am I thinking?

SAM

You're thinking you're going to have a good life.

ERIN

Maybe one of these days. Gotta get into school first.

SAM

On the plus side, you won't have to pay a cent for it.

ERIN

True, but I'll still have to move to go there.

SAM

Where are you thinking?

ERIN

Maybe Colorado, maybe University of New Mexico...I don't know. I don't really like Albuquerque. Everything around there looks like it needs a new coat of paint.

SAM

So does everything around here. Here. Try this one.

(Erin works at a problem and Sam watches her. Beat.)

SAM CONT'D

Have you heard anything from Maddie?

ERIN

She sent me a letter. It had another wad of cash in it.

SAM

Maybe she's telling you the truth about all this. Maybe her photography's actually taking off.

ERIN

It's not that part I don't believe. Here, this the answer?

SAM

(Checking her work)

Yeah, it is. What are you going to do when you move? Are you going to move in with her somewhere?

ERIN

Why would I do that?

SAM

Why wouldn't you?

ERIN

I don't want to play guessing games while I'm trying to do math. Thank you.

SAM

Okay. Sorry. Forget I said anything.

ERIN

I will. Give me another one.

SAM

(Sam gives her a new paper.)

Here, this one's harder.

(Erin works)

You know, I think she does really love you.

ERIN

A'ya? And what do you know? Huh, Mijo?

SAM

I know enough. You should give her another chance.

ERIN

She can come back whenever she wants. I just can't leave right now. You know that.

SAM

It doesn't mean you can't call her, invite her.

ERIN

No, that's exactly what it means.

SAM

You are so stubborn.

ERIN

No, I just have to stop focusing my whole life on Maddie. I mean, isn't that the point of going to school? To make something of myself, not of her. I think I've helped her career enough, don't you?

SAM

She's an artist. She'll always need a model. You know, in her new photos?

ERIN

You saying it has to be me?

SAM

No. I just... I mean, if it's not you- are you ready for that?

ERIN

Why don't you make some tea?

SAM

You got a Coke instead?

ERIN

What, just 'cause I'm working now you think I'm keeping Cokes in here?

SAM

Erin...

ERIN

Alright, grab one for me too.

(Sam goes to the fridge and gets the sodas.)

Great. Check this one, kid.

SAM

It's right.

ERIN  
Alright, give me a really hard one.

SAM  
You think you can handle it?

ERIN  
I can handle anything.

SAM  
Then call her.

ERIN  
Will it make you shut up and teach me math?

SAM  
Yes, in fact, it will.

ERIN  
Okay, fine then.

(Erin gets up and crosses to the phone. She stops and pauses.)

SAM  
Go on, Mija.

ERIN  
You're younger than me, you can't call me that.

SAM  
Just call her, sister. Stop stalling.

(Erin dials and lets it ring three times. A light comes up on Maddie. Erin she hangs up and dials again. Maddie answers.)

MADDIE  
Babe, that you?

ERIN  
Maddie?

MADDIE  
Hey, it's me.

ERIN

Maddie, I'm... I'm sorry. I miss you.

(Lights fade down until the two are in only visible in their spotlights.)

MADDIE

I miss you too. Did you get my letter?

ERIN

Yeah. It was really nice. Thank you. You know you didn't have to send me any money.

MADDIE

Yeah, well, they're your pictures too, you know. I figure you should at least get a little cut.

ERIN

Maddie, I wanted...

MADDIE

What, Babe?

ERIN

I want to see you.

(Pause)

I love you.

(As the lights fade we hear the train whistle in the distance, echoing.)

(End of play.)

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## Vita

Blair C. Runion received her BFA in Technical Theatre from the University of Colorado at Denver. Her extensive theatre background includes acting, directing, stage management, props, non-profit boards, and playwriting. Her works have received readings with A Theatre Group in Silverton, Colorado, and at the University of New Orleans. Her play *Anchor Baby* was produced by The Cabin Fever Players in Lake City, Colorado in 2008. In 2011 she became a Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival National 10-Minute Play Finalist with her 10-minute version of *A Long Low Whistle in the Distance*.