

INDIGENOUS

a play

by Joe Hoover

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CHARACTERS: Conor: male, mid-20s
 Sally: female, early-mid 20s
 Sophie: female, early-20s
 Pam: female, early 50s
 Wesley: male, mid 50s
 Mike: male, early 30s
 Rodney: male, mid-30s
 Stuart: male, early 50s
 Nadine: female, mid-40s

SETTING: An apartment in Omaha.
 A home in suburban Omaha.
 An Indian reservation on the plains of South Dakota

TIME: Late 1990s

SCENE 1: A party in an apartment in Omaha. Lakota drum music playing on a stereo. CONOR awkwardly dancing to the music. Enter Sally.

CONOR
Hi, I'm Conor.

SALLY
Oh, hi. Sally. So you're the guy this party is for. You're leaving Omaha to go to work on the, uh whaddya call it--

CONOR
The Indian reservation.

SALLY
Right. Yeah. Wow. Okay. I hear it's pretty rough out there. The plains.

CONOR
Yep. Six hours away. And a whole world away.

SALLY
But beautiful. Rough and beautiful. Like, dead buffaloes everywhere, but at least there's buffaloes.

CONOR
Well, they're pretty much decomposed by now.

SALLY
Oh, right!

CONOR
Didn't just die on their own of course. We have a lot to atone for. We really screwed over the indigenous.

(SALLY reacts as if she's been jolted)

SALLY
Excuse me?

CONOR
I said we really screwed them over.

SALLY
No, what did you call them?

CONOR
Indigenous?

SALLY
(aroused)
Oh my god. Say that again!

CONOR
Indigenous.

SALLY
(getting hot and bothered)
O Jesus. One more time.

CONOR
Indigenous. Are you okay?

SALLY
(overcome)
You have no idea what that word does to a gal.

CONOR
Really? Indigenous?

SALLY
Oh God....again.

CONOR
Indigenous. I'm not sure if I should be doing this.

SALLY
Say it!

CONOR
Indigenous. Is this healthy?

SALLY
Just. Speak. The Word.

CONOR
Indigenous.

SALLY
Don't stop.

CONOR
Indigenous. You seem to be losing control.

(SALLY lets out a moan and clutches him.)

SALLY
Oh Conor, working with the indigenous! You're so brave! I heard they have chickenpox out there.

CONOR
Well, I already had my chickenpox.

SALLY
(disappointed)
Oh.

CONOR
But it still could be kind of dangerous. With the indigenous.

(SALLY groans)

CONOR
I'm sorry! I didn't mean to say that! It was just a reflex! I'm not comfortable with your public sexuality.

SALLY

No apologies! Such a courageous helper of the--the--the--

CONOR

(reluctantly)

Indigenous.

SALLY

(grabbing him by shirt)

Jesus God.

(pulling away, sharp, accusing)

Will you be doing religious things? I have a cousin who worked somewhere like that. Church planting. Are you a church planter!

CONOR

No! I grew up Catholic... But you can't fit the indigenous into categories like that. The Machiotta are very spiritual in their own spirit of spirituality.

SALLY

(grabbing him again)

All spirituality. No categories! Machiotta!

(pulling away, again skeptical)

Machiotta? Isn't that like a coffee?

CONOR

No, that's Mochiatto. They're Machiotta. There's the Lakota, the Dakota and the Machiotta.

SALLY

What poetry they have! What rhythm!

CONOR

Like Gershwin. I really hope to get asked to sundance. Getting asked to sundance is like winning the Pulitzer Prize out there. It means your accepted. One of them.

SALLY

I work in a picture framing shop. I'm painting, too, and that's great. But it's kind of like, What's the point? Have you always known you wanted to work out there?

CONOR

Ever since I saw a photo of a Machiotta child crouched down in a prairie, malnourished, skin and bones, stomach bloated, with a vulture just off in the distance, I knew that was the place to go.

SALLY
Skin and bones and vultures!

(again, skeptical)
I thought that picture was from Ethiopia.

CONOR
It's a common mistake.

SALLY
Ohhhh. Thanks for clarifying.

(VOICE OFF)

HEY CONOR! IT'S YOUR MOM! SHE'S ON THE PHONE!

CONOR
Tell her to leave me alone!!!!

(to SALLY)

Hah! Moms. No. I'm just kidding. It's this kind of game we have.

SALLY
You're fascinating.

CONOR
Yeah. Well.

(shouting off.)

CONOR
What does she want!

VOICE
Just to talk.

CONOR
Tell her I'm adoring the tabernacle.

SALLY
I'm so flattered.

CONOR
No, she would be happy thinking that I--it's not important.

(shouting offstage)

Is she still dying?

VOICE

She didn't say she wasn't.

CONOR

Okay. Well, TELL HER I'LL CALL HER LATER. LIKE....NEVER!

(to SALLY)

See, it's a joke. Like kids? *Like never!*

SALLY

She's dying?

CONOR

No, she's not dying. She just likes to pretend she is.

SALLY

Oh. Does she sleep in a coffin? Your family is just top of the line wild.

CONOR

Oh, that's nice. No, she doesn't.

SALLY

So, what exactly are you doing with the Machiotta?

CONOR

Helping them. You know, like they say: Give me a fish and I'll eat for a day?

SALLY

Yeah. There's a second part to that. What is that?

CONOR

Give me a fish every day and I'll eat every day! So, I'll be in fundraising, working to give the Indians a lifetime supply of fish!

SALLY

Yes! Why give someone only one fish! That's such a stupid policy! Give them fish for the rest of their lives!

CONOR

Yes!

SALLY

Oh, that's just wonderful. I have to go. My boyfriend's waiting for me downstairs.

(Gives him a big kiss.)

See you around. Maybe I'll come visit you. You and the--

CONOR

Indigenous?

SALLY

Oh God, he can wait...

(They embrace and melt to floor. Suddenly CONOR stops)

CONOR

You know, I've never, uh...

SALLY

Really? Are you kidding me?

CONOR

No.

SALLY

My boy, you are in for the ride of your life.

(Lights down)

Scene 2--PAM lying on a couch in her home in Omaha.

PAM

I was a girl once, of course, and we were having a slumber party. And we were up late at night until the morning. We played games and talked about boys and all the usual stuff. We were, I think, eleven. And about four, five in the morning the milkman comes driving by, and we girls are on the porch, about five of us, in our pajamas. And he pulls up to our house and drops off the milk. And we ask him if we can go for a ride. There we are, in our gowns!! We're in our pajamas and a couple of us are in our gowns and he's in this nice brown, or no, sort of a gray blue shirt, or slate blue, or something, and his hat, and cuffed pants. And he lets us go in his truck! And we go! It was 1962. You could do this back then. We go driving around the block, dropping off milk, and we're in the back and hanging on, and each of us gets to go drop off the milk at different houses. I went to the Braymans. I ran up there in my bare feet, dropped off the milk, got the empties, ran back, the cement was cold. I think I heard something inside their house, a

cat, or a woman, or maybe just the house creaking or, I don't know. They had a big, heavy wind chime on the porch. It looked like it would only move in a tornado. I jumped off the porch and I banged the windchime and it chimed ding ding ding dong!!! And I ran back to the truck and the girls helped me back on the back and then off we went. We went about six blocks with him. It was just, it was just....

(Pause)

And then he brought us back.

(Pause)

And we got in our sleeping bags. And slept for half an hour. And then we had French toast. I could have died. They could have laced the French Toast with strychnine and I wouldn't have cared, because I was happier than a girl could ever be.

(SHE starts to cough.)

Honey! Can you get me some more water? All these lovely memories keep flooding back to me. Did he ever call back? Where did he say he was going? Dakota? Which one? They didn't join up did they? Make one huge state? The bastards. Trying to be bigger than their neighbors to the south, Nebraska. Well, at least he's been doing adoration, which will keep him somewhere in the ballpark of grace. I mean, maybe just the bleachers, but anyway. So, he hasn't called? Does he know I'm dying? Why doesn't he take me seriously? He never even looks at me. When I put my arm around him he shudders. His back gets tense as if I'm a cobra that just dropped onto his back. Am I so awful? I'm a nice person. I delivered all those goddamn bottles.

SCENE 3--ROD and TAYLOR (MIKE) on a street in suburban Omaha.

ROD
Hey Taylor?

MIKE
Yeah?

ROD
Why don't you have an Indian name? Taylor doesn't sound very Indian.

MIKE
Who says?

ROD
Me.

MIKE
Rodney's not very Indian either.

ROD
We're not talking about me. We're talking about you. Don't keep changing the subject.

MIKE
What kind of Indian name you think I should have?

ROD
I don't know. Maybe...Mike.

MIKE
Mike?

ROD
Mike. One syllable. One sound. Tough. Mike. Like Red Cloud. First name. Red. That's tough. Red.

MIKE
That is a tough name. Red.

ROD
Red.

MIKE
I'm a tough guy you know. I can get through anything.

(Pause)

ROD
Yeah, I know.

(Pause)

MIKE
So, which house we going to?

ROD
I don't know Mike.

MIKE

You really gonna start calling me that?

ROD

Why not? No one out here's gonna know.

MIKE

You know the Omaha was our enemies.

ROD

The Omaha didn't have any enemies. They were a gentle tribe.

MIKE

Really? I thought they were our enemies.

ROD

In basketball. We used to lose to them all the time. They were a gentle tribe, but God were they brutal on a basketball court.

MIKE

This looks like a good house.

ROD

What should I do, just knock?

MIKE

Yeah, that's what they do when they come to the rez. They just knock and ask us if they can organize our softball tournaments.

ROD

Okay.

(Knocks. Door opens.)

STUART

May I help you?

ROD

Yeah, we're here to offer you poor pathetic people--

MIKE

Rodney!

ROD

I'm sorry, we just wanted to know if you would like us to paint your fence or mow your lawn or something?

STUART

Oh, are you a lawn service? Actually, we have someone. Although he is a little pricey come to think of it.

ROD

We'd do it for free.

STUART

For free?

MIKE:

Yeah, we're volunteers. We've come to help out. We know you can't always do everything for yourselves out here.

ROD

It's our religion, our spirituality that gets us out here. We're on college spring break.

STUART

Oh, how nice! What college do you go to?

MIKE

Well, we don't go to college.

ROD

But some college is probably having a spring break about now.

STUART

Good point. Well, that's awful nice of you to volunteer, and I could use the help, given certain family circumstances here, but most people probably are able to pay for their help around here. Or they have their kids do things. This isn't exactly North O or something.

ROD

North O?

STUART

North Omaha. The poor part of town. We're doing okay out here. There's a lot of well-off people here actually.

ROD

That's why we're here. Because this is the worst neighborhood in Omaha.

STUART

The worst--we have a private security patrol. Look, there's a new golf course right over there.

MIKE

Exactly. A new golf course is the first sign of urban decay.

STUART

What are you even talking about?

ROD

You're hiding. What are you hiding from? You're hiding behind your nine iron. Which is very hard to do.

MIKE

You're hiding behind your yacht.

ROD

They don't have yachts out here.

STUART

I don't have a yacht!

ROD

What I tell you?

MIKE

Look, you need us. You just don't realize it. We want to help. Now, let's cut the crap and give us something to do.

STUART

Okay, okay. Well, have you ever cleaned out gutters?

ROD

Do we look like we belong in the gutter? Like drunk Indians?

MIKE

It's okay Rodney. He doesn't mean that.

ROD

Josh.

MIKE

Sure, we can help with that. What. What's that look? Why you lookin at me like that? Is it because I'm black?

STUART

You're black?

(pause)

MIKE

Josh.

ROD

See, we're laughing. Macchiato people make fun of you it means we accept you!

STUART

You accept me? Who are you to accept me. I'm the one who has to accept you. I'm doing a huge favor letting you clean out my gutters you know.

MIKE

I know. I know. Where's the ladder. Let's get going.

SCENE 4: CONOR sitting at a desk at a tribal development office on the Machiotta reservation, holding a letter.

CONOR

(reading aloud)

The sun rose a dusty pink over the plains as seven Machiotta children, seven scrumptious little bugs, marched across Highway 16 to start a new semester at the Machiotta Lil Tykes Warrior Camp and Day School. Then, without warning, a huge eighteen-wheel truck barreled down the highway--without a driver and careening out of control. And that truck was named ALCOHOLISM! Whap! There goes the first little child! And then another truck--DIABETES! Smash. The next girl! Then Heart disease! Another little belle of the pow wow. Gangs! Bam! Lack of Employment Opportunities! SMOOSH! Corruption. Splat! Two centuries of Thievery Oppression Genocide and Fry Bread! POW! Seven small little knapsacks of joy splattered along the highway. If you had seen those trucks coming wouldn't you have screamed at those kids to get out of the road? Wouldn't you have run across the highway and snatched them out of harm's way? Or would you have ignored it and prevented them from getting whacked? Well, we can see those trucks coming, we know those trucks are coming, but we on the sidelines, watching it happen, we don't do a thing about it. Your donation is a way of screaming at those kids to get off the goddam highway so they don't get smashed by a runaway truck.

I think this is my best one yet.

(Enter NADINE)

NADINE

Hello!

CONOR
Oh hi.

NADINE
Hi. Are you the one writing these letters?

CONOR
Yes.

NADINE
I have just been so moved by them I had to drop off my donation personally.

CONOR
Oh, thank you. That's great!

NADINE
Oh these people. What we put them through!

CONOR
Yeah, these people. Just so you know, just for future reference, "these people" isn't the best thing to call these people.

NADINE
Oh?

CONOR
There's another word you can use.

NADINE
What's that?

(pause)

CONOR
Indigenous.

NADINE
Excuse me?

CONOR
I said... Indigenous. Anyway, thank you for the donation. We really appreciate it. I better get back to--

NADINE

No, wait. Tell me more about the...

CONOR
Indigenous?

NADINE
(as with SALLY, getting aroused at "indigenous")
Yes. Them.

CONOR
Sure. Well, you know, they were forbidden to speak their language.

NADINE
Who were?

CONOR
The Indigenous.

NADINE
Oh, terrible!

CONOR
They couldn't practice their religion.

NADINE
Who couldn't?

CONOR
The indigenous.

NADINE
Oh, brutal.

CONOR
Their land was taken away.

NADINE
Whose land?

CONOR
The indigenous's.

NADINE
Oh, vicious! I can't take it anymore.

(SHE grabs him and they start to sink to the floor. Enter WESLEY.)

WESLEY

Hey! You're the guy that writes up these letters telling people how terrible it is out here? Making us look like a bunch of pathetic welfare cases and broken down suicidal wino gangsters, just so you could raise money from rich white people?
(MORE)

(CONOR jumps up.)

CONOR

Oh, hi, well, I guess so. I mean--

WESLEY

Nice job! Good strategy! Really really good young man. We really need the dough. The tribal council is all over us. Get that center built. You're doing a hell of a lot for us. Eight million dollars in a month. Keep laying it on in those letters. It's the only way people out there will ever care about us.

CONOR

You know they really just write themselves. I start and things just come out!

NADINE

What do you mean, lay it on? Do you mean all that terrible stuff isn't true? All the diabetes and smashed up kids?

WESLEY

It's true. Other parts are true too, the good parts of us. But you need both for it all to make sense. We wouldn't be who we are without the hard things. But we need to get that place built.

NADINE

What is the place exactly?

WESLEY

The Kiwanis-Machiotta Native Life Center.

NADINE

Kiwanis? What does that mean in your language?

CONOR

No, it's the Kiwanis Club. The lead donation came from the Kiwanis Club in Malvern, Pennsylvania.

NADINE

So, it's going to really help?

WESLEY
Sure.

(pause)

Well, keep it coming kid.

(WESLEY starts to leave and stops)

Conor. I have never done this for a non-Machiotta.

(Suddenly formal)

I invite you to my Sundance.

CONOR
Really? Wow! Thank you. Omigosh. Thank you. When is it?

WESLEY
It's in the month of the shooting stars.

CONOR
Oh. Okay. Um, I should probably know that. But, in my calendar that is--

WESLEY
June. NBA finals.

CONOR
Oh. Okay. Good. That will be fine.

(Turns away from WESLEY and completely, silently, freaks out in delirium. Turns back calmly)

I'll start practicing. Great. Thank you.

WESLEY
Keep up the good work Conor.

(Wesley leaves)

NADINE
So, he was actually indigenous, huh?

CONOR
(drawing her to him)
Yeah. So, where were we?

NADINE

When you're around the real thing, it kind of loses its glamour. Anyway, here's your money. I gotta go.

SCENE 5--PAM in the living room.

PAM

My son, the Indian saver. When did he start caring about Indians anyway? They don't need him. When did he start caring about anyone? If only he knew about my time with the milkman. I've told him, to be sure. But somehow it didn't sink in. It bounced off him like he had a missile defense system. What is it that keeps a son from showing the modicum, I say the modicum of respect to his mother? Why is that? What if he were the milkman. What if he were the milkman and I was his mother, as a little girl. What if Conor the milkman giving me the ride knew I would be his mother someday. What if all the normal rules of the universe were all screwed up and he was older than me but still my son. Would he have taken me on the truck? Would my boy have taken his own twelve year-old future mother on that white truck? He would have if he'd seen me then! He doesn't know what a sweet young little girl I was! I was sweet and I was little and I had a bracelet made of sweet tarts strung together, and I never ate them. I had discipline! I had focus. He would have loved me as a kid. All's I want for him is to sit still so I can look at him. God knows I don't really want to talk to him. Does that sound horrible? I just want to look and see what I've created. He never looks me in the eye. He hates me. Hates me. I'll teach you who to hate. He thinks I'm bad. I am a very appropriate woman. I am not bad. For all my praying. how could I be bad! You answer me that! I'm a holy woman! I'm as holy as they get for chrissakes.

(Pause)

I don't know who I am: Me or him. I don't know if I'm myself or Conor. I lost track of my life somewhere back in the delivery room. Nothings been the same since I opened myself up to eight pounds four ounces of God's will. And let me tell you, God's will isn't exactly the State Fair. Where O death is your victory! Where O death is your sting! I should have held you in, never let you out. Had you grown inside me and take over me. A grown man living in me, womb all the way up. We should keep them in there until they know how to live. Nine months is not long enough. They need at least 39 years! He's a nightmare. He's always done whatever he wants. And now I'm dying and he can't even...Stuart! What prayer do you use to put a kid back in your womb? Is there a saint for that?

(pause)

St. Paul Newman? What the hell does that mean?

SCENE 6--CONOR at the development office, writing. Enter WESLEY

CONOR
Hey Wesley.

WESLEY
You know, I was looking over the books. We're a little short this month aren't we? We need to get \$100,000 more so we can start laying the foundation.

CONOR
Oh, wow. I thought we had enough already to do that.

WESLEY
It's the tribe. They're really pushing this.

CONOR
Okay. Well, I'm already working on a new letter to get the money. Surprised we can't even start laying the foundation. I mean, you've been trying to build this thing for...anyway. I'm not all clear about tribal politics.

WESLEY
Okay then.

CONOR
Oh, by the way, I'm excited about that sundance. I've been reading more about it. It's about making a flesh offering for one's people, so good things will happen to them. What in my religion we would call grace. Not that I'm my religion. Because I'm not the religion that I am. Or any religion really. I'm just open. To everything. Because everyone should be everything. Because then nothing is left out. Except you guys should stick with your thing, because your ways are awesome and there's drums.

WESLEY
You're going to sundance?

CONOR
Yeah.

WESLEY
With who?

CONOR
You. You asked me.

WESLEY
Oh. Sure.

CONOR
Oh sure as in you remember you asked me, or oh sure as in you don't believe me but are humoring me. Do you want me there? I would respect it. I would totally respect it.

WESLEY
Init.

CONOR
I don't know what that means. But anyway, you must've forgot. But anyway, yes, it's true, I'm dancing in your sundance. But we can figure that out later, all the details. When is it by the way?

WESLEY
The sundance?

CONOR
Yes.

WESLEY
It's in December.

CONOR
Oh. Really? Wait, I thought you said it was in June. I thought they were always in the summer. Where it's harder to do it because the sun his hotter and you can atone better for what you did wrong.

WESLEY
Ours is in December.

CONOR
Okay.

WESLEY
Just make sure you raise that money. Our people need that place built.

CONOR
Yeah. Yeah.

(Exit WESLEY. The phone rings.)

CONOR

Yeah. Oh, hi Dad. Yeah. I know. I know. Look, it's not real. We can't indulge her. You give her a little she takes...she's not. She's not she's not she's not. She's going to live until she's 900 is the real problem. She's got everyone fooled, okay? I don't want to waste my time with this. She's like a little girl, just wanting attention. She's a possum. She changes the breathing on her body so she seems half dead. You can't trust her. Be stronger than that. Don't let her use you.

SCENE 6--PAM in the living room. Enter Mike.

MIKE

Scuse me, your husband said I could get some lemonade. Usually I'd ask for some Maddog 20-20 but I don't drink anymore. Josh. This week. Josh. I'm losing track of what part I'm kidding about and what I'm serious about.

(SHE coughs)

You okay?

PAM

I'm dying.

MIKE

Well, shit happens.

PAM

Say, you look familiar.

MIKE

Oh, I get that all the time. People say I look like Bruce Lee, or Scarface. Some people say I look like John Wayne. Which is ironic...

PAM

Let me get you--

MIKE

No, no, you just lie there. Tell me where it is.

PAM

It's in the cabinet, right above the picture of John Wayne. You're very sweet.

MIKE

One of my relatives died. But I didn't cry. Indians don't cry. Unless we see trash on the highway. One tear.

PAM

I have a son you know.

MIKE

Yeah, that's cool. Where's he at?

PAM

He's...well, he's...are you an Indian?

MIKE

I didn't do it! It was my brother. He's the bad one. I'm the good one. For reals. I got papers.

PAM

No, never mind. What are you doing here?

MIKE

Cleaning your gutters.

PAM

Oh, god, they needed cleaning! Thank you! I hope we are paying you well!

MIKE

You're not paying us dookie! It's modern day slavery!

PAM

Well. Stuart! Stuart! Will you get in here! You're not paying these young men--

MIKE

I'm just kidding. We're volunteering. We want to help you people. But we're not just here to clean gutters. We was brought here for a mystical reason. We had a vision. Of a woman lying in bed. With a conflicted heart. We are Machiotta. And my partner and I here were drawn to this house, this house right here for these purposes.

PAM

How did you know I had a conflicted heart!

MIKE

Because. Everyone has a conflicted heart.

PAM

Well, mine is more conflicted than most.

MIKE

Really? That's kind of arrogant.

PAM

I never thought of it that way. So you weren't drawn here, specifically.

MIKE

No. Well, in a way. Hey Rod!

ROD

Yeah?

MIKE

Get in here.

(Enter Rod. They confer. They turn around.)

ROD

You thought we were here to take shit out of your gutters? No, we just used that as a way to....

(They make hands into guns)

MIKE and ROD

All right lady, give us all your money! Give it to us. Now!

PAM

I'm dying. So why would I care if you shot me? Especially with your fingers.

MIKE

Finger guns are very painful guns. You better beware what you ask for.

PAM

Kill me! I had my day in the sun. Or night, I should say. A junior milkman. Milkmaid! I was a milkmaid, and no one can take that away from me.

ROD

Forget it. This ain't working.

(THEY put guns down)

PAM

What the hell is going on here!

ROD

When Machiotta people tease you it means your accepted! You're one of us!

PAM

Oh. Okay. This is fun! I want to be accepted by strange Indians who clean my gutters.

MIKE

Now, Mrs. Lady.

PAM

Pam. I'm Pam.

MIKE

Now look Pam. Look at all this shit. We probably should steal from you. You got too much stuff here. We want to get rid of this shit for you.

ROD

You could take this whole thing out, put in a trailer.

MIKE

Yeah, a really nice trailer.

PAM

I've always liked trailers. They look so cozy.

MIKE

Hell yeah! Trailers are the best!

ROD

They take away the tipis give us trailers and we adapted. It's like fry bread. They slaughtered our buffalo, shoved us on these reservations and gave us lard. Which we made into frybread. Which is now our traditional sacred food. Which is killing us. But hey you're doing to die anyway. Today eating fry bread is a good day to die.

PAM

Well, we do have a lot of things we don't need. Honey, could you get in here? Why do we have all this shit!

MIKE

Because you're hiding. You're hiding behind your nine-iron.

PAM

Stuart! I'm dying anyway, what does it all matter?

(Enter Stuart)

Why are you hiding behind your things. Your...what club was it?

ROD
Nine iron.

PAM
Why are you hiding behind your three wood?

MIKE
No, it was his nine iron

PAM
Trust me he hides behind his wood a lot more.

MIKE
Tell him his wealth is just an accumulation of objects that keep his mind distracted from actually dealing with himself. His true self. Deep down, where he lives, and moves, and has his being. He's got a lot of things he needs to clear away before he can deal with reality. Deal with the sweet and the insane.

PAM
Hey, that's pretty good.

MIKE
Luke the Evangelist Luke. And Mike the Indian. They're deep.

STUART
What the hell is this about? There's still leaves all up in the--

MIKE
Don't speak. We're talking some deep Machiotta slash Christian theology here.

PAM
Now, there it is again. Machiotta. What is Machiotta?

MIKE
Oh, it's our tribe's name.

PAM
Your from a tribe? That's where our son is! On the Machiotta reservation.

ROD
Well, our real name is Viper Teeth, King of All Serpents. But Machiotta is the name given to us by our enemies, the Omaha. It means garter snake.

STUART

We were your enemies? Omaha doesn't have enemies. Well, maybe Iowa City, because they get bands like the Rolling Stones and we can only get Blind Lemon.

PAM

Melon. It's Blind Melon.

ROD

I mean the tribe. The Omaha tribe.

STUART

Machiotta. Isn't that the name of a coffee. Some real fancy coffee?

MIKE

Yeah, well they probably named it after us. We invented most things that exist. Did you say you were dying?

PAM

Yeah.

MIKE

That's cool. Make you a better person.

STUART

Why are you guys here?

ROD

A medicine man sent us out to Omaha. Said it might help.

STUART

Help what?

MIKE

Not sure. Maybe because we haven't had much luck with not being on the wrong side of death.

PAM

That's a highly unclear sentence structure.

BLACK

SCENE 7- CONOR meets SOPHIE, another white "helper" on the reservation.

CONOR

So, you're volunteering out here, huh, over on the north side? That's nice. Pretty new, huh?

SOPHIE

No, I have been here like forever.

CONOR

How long?

SOPHIE

Two months.

CONOR

Okay. That's cool. Just getting started. You'll get the hang of it eventually. Once you been here as long as I have.

SOPHIE

How long have you been here?

CONOR

Three months.

SOPHIE

Oh. Wow. Okay. Much respect. Yeah, I heard about you. I was just wondering. What are these people called again?

CONOR

What people?

SOPHIE

You know, the ones we're working with.

CONOR

The Machiotta?

SOPHIE

No, the general term for them...the, uh...I keep forgetting it...

(looks her over as if sizing her up)

CONOR

Oh. You mean, the...Native Americans.

SOPHIE

No.

CONOR
The Indians.

SOPHIE
No!

CONOR
First Nations?

SOPHIE
In...

CONOR
What.

SOPHIE
Indi--

CONOR
I don't--

SOPHIE
Indig--

CONOR
What the hell is going on here--

SOPHIE
Indigenous! Say it!

CONOR
I don't have to say it!

SOPHIE
Why not?

CONOR
Because, I don't have to is all.

SOPHIE
Indigenous! Indigenous! Why don't you say it! If you say Indigenous, incredible things happen! With women! For a decent interval of time! I mean God do you know how long it's been since I've...it's okay. Settle down Sophie settle down!

CONOR

(pause)

So, how's it going so far?

SOPHIE

(defensive)

It's fine. I'm working out in the community, with the people. Organizing community people things. Why? What are you doing?

CONOR

I'm fundraising for the Kiwanis Machiotta Life Center.

SOPHIA

Fundraising. Right. I heard that. But so, you're like in an office, with mostly white staff. Okay. Hmmm.

CONOR

What's hmmm? What kind of community things do you organize?

SOPHIA

Like whatever needs to be organized with the Mochiatto. What kind of question is that? Do you think you know what people need out here? Do you? You don't. I'm sorry. I'm just a little nervous. I haven't really been around a guy in a while. I mean a guy who looks like me. Not that you look like me. I just mean someone of my general schemata.

CONOR

Right. By the way, it's Machiotta. They're not a coffee.

SOPHIA

Dammit! I knew that. I keep saying that wrong.

CONOR

It's okay. Once you're really connected to the tribe, you'll get it right.

SOPHIA

I am so connected to the tribe. You're the one whose not connected. How many wakes have you been to this week?

CONOR

One. You?

SOPHIE

Four.

CONOR

Four! In one week!

SOPHIE

Yeah, but that's cool if you've only been to one. You're probably not meeting a lot of people being up in that office. How many backyard barbecues you been invited to?

CONOR

Three.

SOPHIE

Six.

CONOR

Dammit! Sega tournaments?

SOPHIE

One.

CONOR

Five.

SOPHIE

No way!

CONOR

Cattle brandings?

SOPHIE

Nine.

CONOR

Two.

SOPHIE

Road trips to WalMart.

CONOR

Four

SOPHIE

Fourteen.

CONOR

FUCK!

(pause)

Okay. You wanna play this game? Were you invited to sundance?

SOPHIA

No. White people don't get invited to sundance.

CONOR

I was.

SOPHIA

You were not.

CONOR

Yes. I was. I was invited to sundance.

SOPHIA

Really?

CONOR

Yep.

SOPHIA

By who?

CONOR

Wesley Chambleaux.

SOPHIA

Wesley Chambleaux? Really? Wesley Chambleaux? Wow. He's one of the --

CONOR

Most respected medicine men on the rez. I know. His Sundance is so powerful, people who dance in it, their faces fall off. And they're happy about it. They don't mind their face falling off. At the end he puts them back on, but they almost wish he didn't.

SOPHIA

I wouldn't mind my face falling off at his sundance.

CONOR

No one even knows where it is, the sundance. It's so powerful, so mystical, no outsider has even seen it. He says he wants to show a sign of appreciation for all the money I've raised here.

SOPHIE

Wow, that's amazing. Well, I'm glad for you. How much have you raised for the tribe?

CONOR
Seventeen million dollars.

SOPHIA
Seventeen million? Really? In three months!

CONOR
Yep.

SOPHIE
Wow. Wow! That's awesome! But hold on. You write those letters don't you. You write those letters that just exploit their pain and suffering.

CONOR
I do what it takes to bring the money in. Here's my latest masterpiece.

(He gives her the letter.)

SOPHIA
"What if a bunch of rich Indians stood by and watched you starve to death and didn't do anything about it? How would you feel about that? We accept paypal."
That's terrible! People aren't starving out here!

CONOR
What matters is that we raise capital?

SOPHIA
But you're just telling them the sad parts! There's so much more! I was at a basketball game, and there's this kid eating a candy bar, and I'm like, that looks good. And he offers it to me. Want a bite? And I thought he was kidding, because why would I want a bite of a candy bar someone else had eaten half of. But then I realized he wasn't kidding. He just offered me his candy bar, his Milky Way, without even thinking about it. That happens all the time out here. That's the whole place in a nutshell. It's a sharing economy. These are the most laid back, unpretentious, family-oriented people I've ever met. They are rich Indians, in a way. Richer than the world out there.

CONOR
If I just tell people that stuff, if I just say the good parts, who's gonna listen? Go to an emergency room and tell the doctor, Hey, My bones aren't broken! My brain's not swelling up! My heart is clipping along fine! but don't tell him about the small intestine that's about to burst out of your body? You're never gonna get it fixed! Right? You have to say what's real. And sometimes what's real out on the rez here is shitty.

SOPHIE
No its not!

CONOR
That's what I see. And I say it. And I get results. And they appreciate me for doing it. And so I'm going to a sundance.

(Pause He looks her over again)

With the indigenous.

SOPHIA
(moaning, etc the usual response)
Oh thank you Jesus.

(looks over at Conor)
Could you help out gal...

CONOR
Oh, sure. Sure. Glad to oblige.

(He moves toward her. Lights down)

SCENE 8—PAM's home.

PAM
He said he's going to sundance. My kid, Conor.

ROD
He did?

PAM
Yes.

ROD
That's who Wesley's talking about.

PAM
Wesley? Who's Wesley?

ROD
Guy who sent us here--the medicine man.

PAM
Wesley doesn't sound very Indian.

ROD

I know! It should be "Wes."

PAM

Yeah. That's more like it. "Wes."

ROD

He called and said he's letting a kid sundance. That's your kid. Wow. I guess he doesn't believe you're kicking off, huh, your kid doesn't. According to Wesley-

PAM

Wes.

ROD

Wes.

PAM

No, he doesn't. Now, this is very interesting. Coincidence? That your friend met my kid? I think not. There's some shady Indian magic going on here.

ROD

Yeah. That sounds right. I actually know a rapper by that name. Shady Indian Magic. He puts a spell on people and then scalps them.

PAM

Don't mess with me! I'm dying! Why is your medicine man indoctrinating my boy?

ROD

I don't know. Maybe there is something bigger at work.

PAM

Yeah. I don't think so. Sundances. I saw a sundance on a show once. Someone filmed it.

ROD

No one's supposed to--

PAM

I know, but they did! They did secretly. I felt kind of dirty watching it, but not dirty enough that I stopped. These men were standing in a circle on hot brown grass moving around, screaming out every now and then, doing the kind of things you'd expected Indians to do in a Sundance. And one of them lay down on the ground under the dead cottonwood tree in the middle of the circle and two others did this kind of surgery on him with alcohol packs and everything. Wiping a sponge on his chest right above the breasts, and then inserting a needle through the skin

and poking out on the other side, and then bone or plastic rod or something through that.

MIKE

You do know we know this already. We're sundancers.

PAM

(ignoring him)

Then they tied a rope to the bone and tied it to the tree. And then in the blazing sun dancing with the rope tied to the tree, and after four times walking up to the tree and back to the edge of the circle and then the last time running backwards with tiny little steps, little nervous steps and reaching the end of the rope and the rope holding and the skin breaking, breaking through the skin, the little plastic bone! Breaking the skin and the blood spurting out and the tense brave cry suck in and hot sun and the drums going and this was supposed to be prayer. It's a sacrifice for his people. And I'm thinking, and I know I shouldn't be thinking this but I'm thinking: Wow. This is DUMB. We don't need to do this anymore. These people are going around like this in the BLAZING SUN dancing like God WANTS them to do this. When they could go to a church and just *remember* what Jesus did. He already did all this suffering. Sit on a pew and just recall it. Hear the priest talk about it. Drink the blood! Not shed your own! Have some crappy donuts afterward. Jesus already did it! We don't need to keep doing it ourselves over and over again. I mean, that was the whole point! Why are they living as if Jesus was never even crucified?

(pause)

And what was really unbelievable was that one of the local priests actually went to this thing. Sat there and watched. Not only was he not trying to stop them from doing it, he was giving his blessing on it! It made no sense! If anyone knew better than that it was the priest! He could deliver everything those Sundancers were looking for over four days out in the hot sun with all that blood and surgery--he could deliver that in a 25 MINUTE MASS. With air conditioning! But here they are sacrificing themselves in the ridiculous heat! I mean, if you've got PENICILLIN, are you really going to keep using TREE SAP to save yourself?

MIKE

So I'm hearing you're not into sundances.

PAM

No, genius. I don't think I am. And now my kid's gonna pray to the Great Pumpkin on my behalf--

MIKE

Spirit--

PAM

I know. He's gonna pray to that instead of the Queen of All Saint which means I'll probably end up in FUCKING LIMBO. Until someone powerful intercedes for me. Like Paul Newman.

MIKE

Paul Newman?

PAM

Yes, he's apparently quite powerful.

BLACK.

SCENE 9--CONOR and SALLY lying in bed.

SALLY

You know when you called you didn't have to keep saying the word. I would have come anyway. My boyfriend likes you. He told me to say hi.

CONOR

I'm confused by that.

SALLY

So, let me read one of your letters.

CONOR

Oh, sure. This is the newest one.

(grabs letter from nightstand)

SALLY

(reading)

"Give us your money and nobody gets hurt."

(pause)

That's it?

CONOR

Yeah.

SALLY

Okay.

CONOR

You know, how like how people out here, they're all poor and there's no jobs and they eat all crappy and have heart attacks and diabetes i.e. *keep getting hurt*.

SALLY

Well, they're more than that, right? They're not just a collection of social disasters.

CONOR

That's all I see.

SALLY

Okay.

CONOR

But if we get money to help combat these systemic wrongs they have, then nobody....

SALLY

Gets hurt. Very clever!

CONOR

It'll probably raise two a million in a couple weeks. And we won't even have to include a miniature dreamcatcher. I don't know how I do it, I just have this touch.

SALLY

You're doing so great! I'm so proud of you!

CONOR

Oh, wow. Thanks. You're such a great support. Yeah, well, since you mentioned your boyfriend, uh...

SALLY

Yes?

CONOR

All these women out here, the volunteers.

SALLY

(playful)

Yes?

CONOR

They sort of swarm all over me. Every time I say, well, you know. So I kind of say it a lot. I go around saying Indigenous, Indigenous, Indigenous and the women come running. Even the guys! I have to fight them off too sometimes. Everyone loves that word. It has such power! It drives people wild! And I love that they love it. Before I started using the word I had never even--well, as you know, I was not familiar with how things went in that department.

SALLY

You caught on pretty good boy.

CONOR

Yeah, well now they can't get enough of me. And I can't get enough of them. I tried to hold off with this one girl and not say it. But I couldn't. just want more and more and more.

SALLY

That's because you have an abundance mentality now. This is good. You've left your scarcity mentality, and now it's an abundance mentality.

CONOR

Really? Is that what it is?

SALLY

Yes.

CONOR

Wow, because sometimes I feel like it's never enough, which maybe would be kind of a scarcity mentality?

SALLY

Conor, you're reaping what you sow. You're putting good things out there and it is coming back to you in spades.

CONOR

Oh, I see.

SALLY

So, why did you call me?

(patting bed)

Besides this of course.

CONOR

Yeah. Well, you're a cop right?

SALLY

No. Not at all. I work in a framing shop.

CONOR

Right framing. Cops frame people. So, anyway.

SALLY

I'm not a cop. And not all cops--

CONOR

So, I just need your police-person insight. I was just wondering why this center hasn't gotten built yet is all. It just seems weird. Like, where is the money going! And Wesley, he's the most powerful pharmacist--

SALLY

Medicine man.

CONOR

I'm just kidding. He's the most powerful one on the reservation, and he's in charge of the project. And he is an awesome guy. But he keeps asking me when more donations will be coming in. And he asked me to sundance, but he won't tell me where his sundance is or invite me to any of the preliminary heats or anything. And sometimes I'm not even sure if he asked me because he looks at me all weird when I remind him about it, and I can't get a read on how he feels about me. I mean, what the hell man. I've been practicing! Sometimes I'm just like, What is with these people? Honestly? I mean, I'm not judging anyone, I just wonder why these people are so...I mean, they can't even get a building built when they have raised--*I have raised*, let's be clear--22 million dollars! I have raised 22 million dollars! Singlehandedly! In three and a half months! I mean, c'mon! We have to get this goddam thing built or people are gonna be like--

SALLY

What are you building?

CONOR

The Kiwanis Machiotta Native Life Center.

SALLY

What is that?

CONOR

It's a center for Native Life. It's gonna have all sorts of...Native things for helping the Native Life here. I don't really know what it's for.

SALLY

Oh. Okay. Maybe that will be a good thing to find out. By the way, how's your mom?

CONOR

Fine. I don't know.

SALLY

Is she still pretending to die?

CONOR

Yes.

SALLY

Are you going to go visit her anyway? Not that I think you should. Or not that I think you shouldn't. I'm just asking.

CONOR

No. I'm not. And I'm not going to be there when she does die some day, and I'm not going to her funeral.

SALLY

Yeah. Why? Not that it matters. Or not that it doesn't matter.

CONOR

I don't believe in kinship structures. I don't believe they need to organize your life. I think that's a pre-modern thing that we're still clinging to. Your family doesn't have to be your family.

SALLY

Okay.

CONOR

I have no connection to this woman whatsoever and that's just the way it is. And her religion is just like this bizarre outward scaffolding, this tiltawhirl for her natural born hysteria to ride on. I have a large and generous heart for the hurting people of the world and hers is small and provincial and maybe that sounds arrogant but it's just the simple truth. So I am not gonna be there for her because I don't think it would be honest. I want to have intergiry. And besides she is really and truly not dying. She just loves death and suffering. She's been praying for the stigmata for ever. She wants blood on her hands. Literally. It's repulsive.

(SHE kisses him tenderly)

SALLY

Why did you call me here?

CONOR

Because I just wanted to be around someone who would love me for who I am. Who would listen to me and wouldn't judge me but just be there for me.

SALLY

I know Conor, I know. I don't love you but I will listen to you and not judge you and just be there for you when I'm not busy with other stuff or engaged to my

boyfriend. Maybe I'll be there for you when I'm engaged, but not when I'm married.

CONOR

That's what I want.

SALLY

And all this mom stuff? If you don't want to go see if she's dying, don't go. There's a sacred energy out here -- this is where your life is. Here. Not there. Let the energy out here settle in you. You don't have to put all these harsh expectations on yourself. Just let all that rage and pain and sorrow--because I can feel it in you--just let it go into your cells and don't think about it. And it will all evaporate. If you don't obsess over your past it will go away, like a dog you stop feeding. Just tamp it deep down inside you so it can't come out. If you don't deal with your pain, it won't deal with you.

CONOR

Who are you?

SALLY

The best thing that's ever happened to you.

(They kiss, lights down.)

SCENE 10--PAM's house.

MIKE

So, you're really dying, huh.

PAM

I'm dying.

MIKE

What of?

PAM

Oh God. Does it really matter?

STUART

I can't even pronounce it. I gotta hand it to her. Once we realized the extent of it she didn't try to combat it with all kinds of treatment that would make her life miserable. She just accepted it with peace.

MIKE

Yeah. She's the picture of peaceful.

PAM

Dying's really the best thing that's ever happened to me. You see who your real friends are, you know? I mean, don't get me wrong, everyone is *so* sympathetic.

STUART

Honey.

PAM

It's true. But I like the ones that get angry! They get angry! The ones that get all weepy? They're not your real friends. The more someone cries over you the less they're your friend. Your friends get angry. They get angry for themselves. Because you're awesome and they know it. They're like, *FUCK! I needed you! I needed you to read my poetry and tell me if it's any good. Because everyone says its beautiful! Oh, for chrissake.* Like they just found out their car needed a new transmission. *Oh, for chrissake. Are you kidding me. What a bunch a bullshit. Let me look at your tests.* You're not a doctor. *I know things. Let me see the charts. I'll come right over there.* You're in California. *I'll fly over and put a stop to this nonsense. Goddammit. All right, The Mandrake flew over my house today/I considered shooting it/Up the chimney went the smoke from the fireplace/ Just like my heart/Just like my flying soul. Whaddya think. I need your opinion before you go.* I'm not dying now. *Oh, right. Okay. Well, shit. Just dammit. All right, I gotta go. I'll call you in an hour.* They don't get all fussy, they don't say Ooooh, they just call you and say what's up. Their tone is flat, even. They don't get all ooogy. That's your real friends. Conor I guess is my real friend. He doesn't get that way. He doesn't get anything.

MIKE

Death keeps you on your toes. When my relative died we had a really good wake. Good times. There's about a wake every other day out on the rez. Catholics do them--they do it up good, I'll say that much.

What relative died? Your aunt or something?

(pause)

MIKE

My daughter.

PAM

Oh. Really?

MIKE

Yeah.

PAM

When you said your relative I thought.

MIKE
Easier to say that.

PAM
Yeah.

(Pause)

MIKE
Got any beers?

STUART
Uh, yeah. But, uh, should you guys...

ROD
Should we what?

STUART
You know, should you guys...be....I thought, you know. Genetics? Predisposed to, you know..? Would I be enabling a--

MIKE
You got any beers?

STUART
Coming right up.

MIKE
I'll decide what to do with my genes.

STUART
Sure. Sure. I get it.

MIKE
And I am an alcoholic. A very good one. Josh.

SCENE 11--CONOR practicing dancing outside of WESLEY'S home. ENTER WESLEY.

WESLEY
Oh hey Conor. What are you doing here?

CONOR

Oh, this is where you live? I didn't know that. Been practicing for the sundance. Now that I bumped into you though, I was gonna ask you. I heard there was a sweat for all the guys who would be sundancing.

WESLEY

Yeah. There was.

CONOR

Oh. Okay. I must have missed it.

WESLEY

I guess so.

CONOR

What would have been the best way for me to hear about it?

WESLEY

You have to be around.

CONOR

Where?

WESLEY

When we're about to sweat.

CONOR

But how would I...never mind. So, when's the next sweat?

WESLEY

I don't know

CONOR

How will I find out?

WESLEY

Just show up.

CONOR

But how will I know when to show up? Maybe one of you guys can call me?

WESLEY

Sure.

CONOR

Are you going to call me?

WESLEY

Init.

CONOR

I don't know what that means.

WESLEY

Init.

SCENE 12--Pam and Mike

PAM

So, you're a smart guy. Why do you sundance? It's not bringing your daughter back.

MIKE

It's a way to make flesh offering for your people. You give thanks for being clean and dry or for the reservation to be safe. You pray for your people. You atone for what you done wrong. Or you pray for someone's soul.

PAM

Yeah, but why does it have to be so hard and painful?

MIKE

I don't know. I guess because life's hard and it's gonna kick the crap out of you. Especially on the rez. And everyone knows it. So, you go out and kick the crap out of yourself before it gets you. You got all this pain in your life, but you keep piling on more, around the cottonwood.

PAM

I still don't get it.

MIKE

It's like someone built you a home, a home called suffering, and you didn't ask for it but you had no place else to live. You had no choice but to take this home of suffering, and carve out your own rooms in it. Make your room in the house the way you want it. Put you own brand on it. To say, sure, I can't do anything about the fact that I have to live in this house, but I can control the way in which I will live in it. I can take charge of some parts of the house. I can put my own furnishing into this house of suffering. I will go into it willfully, walk into this house as if it is mine, instead of pretending it is not there and fighting it or disowning it or taking the keys they gave me and throwing them down the sewer. I will live here. This is my home. And I will bring glory to my home.

PAM

So, that's what my kid is doing, huh? He's never suffered a day in his life.

MIKE
Init.

PAM
Init.

Scene 13--CONOR and WESLEY

CONOR
You know, can I just ask you, Wesley. Where is the money going? Why isn't it even being built? What is the Machiotta Native Life Center? Honestly. I feel like I'm doing something wrong. Like I'm taking all this money that's not going anywhere and I don't know if I can keep doing that in good conscience! What is this place? What are we building?

WESLEY
It's an animal shelter.

(pause)

CONOR
An animal...the Machiotta Native Life Center is an animal shelter?

WESLEY
Yes, because the tribal council decreed that any money raised from private sources over the past fiscal year would have to go to the animal shelter, to keep it from happening again. Even though an animal shelter won't keep it from happening again. Because a) Indians don't put animals in shelters and b) what we need to do is just shoot the things, but the donors who live in Connecticut wouldn't like the idea of us killing animals and wouldn't give us money for that but they will give us money for an animal shelter because that fits their ideas of how we should take care of this situation so we're raising money for an animal shelter we'll never use.

CONOR
What situation? To keep what from happening again?

WESLEY
(ignoring the question)
And the BIA says before they give us our fiscal year grant we have to raise half the money from private sources to build the rehab center and business incubator and upgrade the high school's technology from Wordperfect to Quark. But if we use that private money to build the shelter the BIA won't give us the money because they'll say why did you spend all that money on an animal shelter and not things that will help the tribe long term and we'll say because tribal council

wouldn't let us do anything else with it because the Connecticut donors wouldn't let them do anything else with it, and they'll say, the BIA, what they always say which is, basically: well, we'll take it up at the Pow-wow. Which they think they're being funny when they say that and they think they can get away with it because they're Indians but saying we'll take it up at the pow-wow is like saying, we'll give it to Mr. Hawking and see if he can find an appropriately deep black hole to throw it into. So, we're raising all this money that we shouldn't spend to build something that wouldn't work anyway so we can get more money that we'll never actually get.

CONOR

Oh.

(pause)

WESLEY

So, how's your mom?

CONOR

She's fine. Why? She's fine.

WESLEY

I heard she's pretty sick.

CONOR

You're changing the subject. What about the shelter. How are we going to fix this.

WESLEY

There's nothing more to say on that subject.

CONOR

How did you hear about my mom?

WESLEY

Smoke signals. A guy I know met her and sent smoke signals.

CONOR

Really? Wow. I didn't know he could do that. I really and truly did not know that was a way you guys still communicated.

WESLEY

No, I said he called.

CONOR

You said smoke signals.

WESLEY

Sure.

CONOR

Sure as in you agree with me that you said smoke signals or sure as in you're humoring me by pretending to agree with me.

WESLEY

Init.

CONOR

I don't know what Init means!

WESLEY

Init.

CONOR

Dammit! And she's not dying! She's such a drama queen! She's been "dying" ever since I was born. God.

WESLEY

Your mom's on her way Conor. She's heading out. By peculiar mystical Machiotta chance my friend met her and she's dying. There's no two ways about it. You're in a state of denial. It's none of my business why you won't go over there. But maybe you want to go over there.

CONOR

It's not my priority. I have an ordered hierarchy of who I care about. I don't believe in kinship structures. I'm like you guys.

WESLEY

Kinship structures are everything out here. Everyone is related.

CONOR

Right. In this general way, this like world family way. Like we're all 88th relatives or something.

But I'm talking about the kinship structures of my people. They're a different template--white people in the north central slash Big Ten region of the country. They have more toxins in them.

Scene 14--Pam's House.

PAM
Has Conor called?

STUART
No. Don't worry about him.

PAM
I want him to be happy. If him not being here makes him happy then I'm happy.

ROD
That's some fucked up codependent shit. Here. Warm your hands here. By the fire.

PAM
You made a fire? In my living room?

ROD
Yeah. Is that a problem?

(Pause)

PAM
Oh, what the hell, we're all gonna burn. What is that smell?

MIKE
Sage.

PAM
Oh, God. That is so wonderful. My yoga teacher puts sage on sometimes.

MIKE
It's a cross-religious smell.

PAM
I only went once. Bunch of scrawny little bitches. I wanted to claw their eyes out.

ROD
Yeah. Sounds like it wasn't a healthy experience for you.

PAM
I've said some mean things about Conor. You do realize that don't you? You get a little weird when you're about to disappear.

MIKE
You're not disappearing. It's just that no one's going to be able to see you. That's all. You'll still be around.

PAM

I don't want to be around. Let's get some closure here. If I'm gone I'm gone. I want to go someplace new.

ROD

We believe in the spirit world.

PAM

Well, isn't that just so trendy. The spirit world. Oh. My. God. Give me a break. We call it purgatory. That's got some teeth in it. The spirit world. Sounds like a wine store in a strip mall.

STUART

Which reminds me. I'll be back honey. You guys...

ROD

Don't enable us.

STUART

First you want me to get the booze, and now you--

ROD

Josh.

STUART

Which part is that "josh" for--that I shouldn't get the alcohol or that getting it enables you?

ROD

Init.

(ROD and STUART start to leave)

STUART

I don't know what that means.

(ROD and STUART Exit)

SCENE 16--CONOR and WESLEY

WESLEY

We're all part of the body of Christ Conor. Each of the parts is a member. Can the heart function without the eye? If the arm says to the leg, I don't need you, I cast you off, can the body live?

CONOR

Scripture? You're quoting...You're not supposed to do that. That's the white religion.

WESLEY

I went to Catholic schools bro. St. Bedlam of Norway.

CONOR

You went to school Norway?

WESLEY

No, here. It was named after St. Bedlam of Norway. She was a queen or werewolf or something then converted. I was there twelve years. I know my bible.

CONOR

But you're a medicine man! You're supposed to leave all that behind. Your brain should have expelled all that European--

WESLEY

European? Jesus was an Arab. He was brown like me.

CONOR

What are you, an apologist?

WESLEY

Don't box me into your categories I can live in both worlds.

CONOR

This is bullshit! You guys got rid of all that! You threw off the yoke!

WESLEY

Christ is liberating! You gotta apply the gospels to reality! The truth to what's true. Cast down the mighty from their thrones, lift up the lowly, fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty.

CONOR

That's all just symbolic! They're talking about they afterlife! That won't help you guys now!

WESLEY

Yeah, but dreaming of this foreshadowing of the kingdom kinda puts an itch in you to see if you can make it happen now a little. To fight the powers that be and make things just a bit more just. With a revolution of love.

CONOR

You're just mouthing all these liberal Christian pieties!

WESLEY
Aren't you liberal?

CONOR
No.

WESLEY
What are you?

CONOR
I'm an asshole! I mean I am lib--...I mean...I seek the truth. I have come to testify to the truth and the truth shall set you free!

WESLEY
Sounds like you're tipping your hand.

CONOR
And the truth is you're who you are--you're Machiotta and you don't want to jumble it up with a lot of other crap, because then if you don't know who you are you'll end up lonely and angry and frustrated and desperate and screwing everything in sight. Okay?

WESLEY
I know it's bullshit. All that Christian happy crap I've been saying. Because the deal is, they taught me Jesus is in everyone, he's in all the Christians. They are all made in the form of Christ. Which means Jesus Christ took our land and slaughtered our people and put diseases on us. Jesus Christ did all that Conor.

CONOR
Well, hold on--

WESLEY
Jesus Christ climbed down from heaven with the four wounds and gave us all the stigmata. Jesus Christ took the thundering heart of our people and shot 'em all just for sport. The Word was with God and the word was God and the Word took away our sundance and cut our hair and killed our language.

CONOR
I know that, but can you really blame Jesus for--

WESLEY
--and all in all summarized his intentions in a governor out west in 1851 who said there ought to be, quote, a "war of extermination" to continue "until the Indian

race becomes extinct." Which if you're an Indian isn't a big boost to your self-esteem.

(Pause)

And now the Word feels so bad about it that he gives us shitloads of money and builds us a great looking hospital but sends the crappiest doctors you can find from Greenland or somewhere and takes trucks of second-hand clothes from Omaha and dumps them on a field for people to scrounge through and mows our lawns and paints our fences and gives us fish every day and tries to get all these kids into fancy east coast school and for everyone that gets in, there's 500 more that don't get shit and I know this may sound a little extreme and yeah there's some genuine care and empathy even from outsiders, and yeah I can point to some places where the Son of Man isn't a complete monster as in he really knows how to throw a decent wake and yeah there's all kinds of good stuff out here like rodeos and strong families and people not needing tons of crap to be happy and we laugh a lot and life isn't as bad as people make it in news reports and I know in some ways we self-sabotage and perpetuate our own chaos and ultimately you can't blame anyone else for your personal self-inflicted disaster, not even long-dead cowboys or Calvarymen or treaties because to blame them entirely would give them actually more power than they ought to have and feed your personal oppression because claiming your failings is a way of claiming your power and when you get your life wrecked something new and even better can rise up so that's all true and wise but in the end you gotta admit that the mysterious *agape* love of Jesus Christ as manifested in some of his more devoted followers not only did a pretty little number on us back then it created the context for all these current disasters such as to take one example this little girl in a field outside of a wake and this pack of dogs was, I guess starved or just bored and they took her into their care, which is a euphemism, which is why we need the animal shelter which we won't get and which wouldn't help anyway as mentioned heretofore because we just need dog hunters.

(pause)

So, the manifestation of Jesus in these lands created a rather large and deep hole where everyone starts from today and from whence are brewed, well, the basic content of your fundraising letters. And so no in spite of my knowledge of certain Christian ideals I'm not a massively convicted slain in the Spirit pre or post or in between Vatican II fan of the Prince of Peace. Because his words don't match his deeds. But I have to say, I do like their poetry and I like incense at mass.

(pause)

And so I'm a medicine man. Who kind of wished Jesus was better than he is made out to be. I think he needs to go to rehab or something and get his life in order and maybe he could do some good.

CONOR

But maybe the followers who embody Jesus were not accessing the Jesus part of themselves when they slaughtered...

(Wesley stares at him.)

That's not a good excuse is it.

SCENE 17--PAM and MIKE. PAM is coughing more and getting visibly weaker.

PAM

So, tell me about your daughter..

(Pause)

What was her name?

MIKE

Mae.

PAM

Mae? Is that Machiotta? What does that mean?

MIKE

It means a month in Spring.

PAM

Oh. How old was she when she--?

MIKE

Six.

PAM

Oh. Six. Wow. How did she die?

MIKE

Wild dogs.

(pause)

PAM

Excuse me?

MIKE

She was torn apart by wild dogs.

PAM
Are you serious?

MIKE
Yes.

(long pause)

PAM
Well thanks a lot! Don't you just have to ruin my whole special tragedy moment with your god-awful worse special tragedy moment. Wild dogs. For the love of God, could you top me any better with my sister got eaten by a pack of wild dogs?

MIKE
Nope. Guess not.

PAM
Oh, for Pete's sake. Mae--was she cute?

MIKE
Yeah. She had a little press tattoo on. Glittery.

PAM
Cute sister Mae with glitter eaten by wild dogs. God, why'd you have to trot that one out. You deploy that one like a nuclear bomb, don't you.

MIKE
Kind of. Although you asked.

PAM
Is that why you're out here, helping people? Ole Wes told you to clean some gutters and get your mind off it? Take the insane energy and put it somewhere good or something? Help people out of the fruits of your grief. Turn the raw material of your suffering and shape it into a tent of sanctuary for others?

MIKE
I dunno.

PAM
'Cause it's bullshit--taking your pain and feeding the energy serving other people. You gotta really feel your hurt. Focus on yourself and feel it! Don't run it out all on someone else! Haven't even cried. One tear. Pathetic!

MIKE

Why am I being yelled at?

PAM

Oh, sorry. Sorry. Wild dogs huh. Yeah. I'm sorry. What happened?

MIKE

We were at a wake. She was outside. Playing. You know, maybe it's not the worst thing in the world to take your grief and--

PAM

It's no good! Wallow in it! Feel sorry for yourself! Bathe in it! Calgon take me away from thinking about anyone else but me! My kid won't visit me.

MIKE

Back to you.

PAM

Well, yes. It's a harmless addiction. I'm going to die with heartache and regret and despair over my boy.

MIKE

Yeah, okay. Well, that'll make you tougher.

PAM

I'll be dead.

MIKE

Yeah, well you'll be a tough dead person.

PAM

You'll be too someday. Tough and dead, with Mae.

MIKE

Yeah, I'll be too.

Scene 18--CONOR AND WESLEY

CONOR

And that 21 million?

(Silence)

It's gone isn't it. It got swallowed up in the chaos out here.

WESLEY

Conor, what matters is you did it. You proved yourself. Where the money goes is beyond our control--

CONOR
Not entirely--

WESLEY
We can't control it. We just have to live with what we can do. And you did a lot for us. And we're grateful. So I want you to go to the sundance grounds.

CONOR
Oh. No kidding? This is really gonna happen? You're not messing with me?

WESLEY
No, we mess with you means we accept you.

CONOR
Really?

WESLEY
Or sometimes we just like to mess with people.

CONOR
So you're actually gonna follow through with this?

WESLEY
Yes. You go out there--

CONOR
Go out where? It's secret.

WESLEY
Here. Right here. Everywhere is a sundance ground. Everywhere is a chance for us to dance for the Great Spirit and atone.

CONOR
You just made that up didn't you.

WESLEY
Yes I did. But it sounds good doesn't it? You start dancing. It's a way to prep the ground for the rest of us.

CONOR
Don't I have to do all kinds of sweats and preparations and get ready for my face to fall off and everything? What about the cottonwood and the flesh offering?

WESLEY

No. No. I do it different than that.

CONOR

Oh, okay. Great. So what do I do. Just dance?

WESLEY

Just dance. I'll be back in a minute. Just do the sundance.

SCENE 19--PAM AND MIKE

PAM

(coughing, growing weaker)

Let me see it. A sundance. Real live one.

MIKE

Are you okay?

PAM

I have a no resuscitation order. So don't resuscitate me. No mouth to mouth. I don't want your alcoholic breath on my--

MIKE

I don't even--

PAM

Josh. When I mess with you it means I--

MIKE

Accept me. Hahaha.

PAM

My people like to mess with people.

MIKE

Yeah, we think white people are a barrel of laughs.

PAM

Go ahead. Sundance.

MIKE

You can't just sundance in someone's house.

PAM

Do it! I gotta see the particular manner in which my son's gonna destroy his life.
Give me a tent of sanctuary for my suffering.

(SHE starts coughing)

MIKE

Pam, this isn't sounding good.

PAM

No, it's not, isn't it.

MIKE

You want me to get you a priest or something.

PAM

No time. No time. You'll do.

MIKE

What do I--

PAM

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Bless me Indian for I have sinned. It has been four moons since my last confession. These are my sins. Do I really have to do this?

MIKE

You're the one who started--

PAM

All right!! So, my first sin is I'm confessing my sins to an Indian. Or is it more appropriate to say indigenou--

MIKE

No! We've been having problems with that word back home.

PAM

Fine. Sin Number Two. I really don't like anyone but God, which may be problematic because that in and of itself is self-interested. I do like you guys all right. And Stuart's not bad. So I guess I could learn to like more people in the last 37 seconds of my life. Not love! That's more than I can handle! Baby steps.

MIKE

Okay.

PAM

Sin Number Three. Well, hell why do I have to get all down on myself when I'm exiting stage whatever. I should think of nice thoughts!

(Pause)

Did I tell you about that time with the milkman? Dropping off bottles. It was...nothing was better.

(pause)

He took us all over the neighborhood. We rode on the back of the truck.

(pause)

I rang that windchime on the porch...

(SHE closes her eyes. WESLEY looks down at her, knows she is gone. Slowly he gets up, walks to center of room and stands still.)

SCENE 20--Conor in middle of field dancing. Wesley watching from a distance. He speaks to himself:

WESLEY

She's gone Conor. But I'll let you dance for a while. You're more doing a pow-wow thing, but whatever. Let you have your fun, let you atone, before I tell you. Because you're about to get destroyed.

(pause)

Which may be the best thing that ever happened to you. Guess it's what you wanted. To be one of us.

(Lights up on Wesley, who has started to dance. Drums begin to sound, Conor and Wesley dancing on either side of the stage. Wesley starting to weep, quietly, more than a single tear, Conor dancing and singing with joy, the drums go on.)

(Lights down.)

End of Play

