

Scene Two

It is approximately an hour later and a bit darker. The door opens and TONTO enters, supporting JANICE, who is extremely drunk.

TONTO:
Easy going. Right in here.

JANICE:
Hey, I've been here before. Thirty-six years ago.
She bursts out laughing drunkenly.

TONTO:
Yeah, yeah, you're hilarious.

RODNEY and BARB enter in the same manner.

BARB:
I love you, Rodney.

RODNEY:
So do I.

The two men dump them at their chairs.

TONTO:
What now?

JANICE:
Barb, wine.

BARB:
(whining) Okay.
They both burst out laughing.

TONTO:
You realize this was one of the reasons I gave up drinking.

BARB looks up at the boys.

BARB:

Are you two still here?

RODNEY:

Yeah.

BARB:

Why?

JANICE:

Why not?

JANICE laughs at her own joke.

BARB:

Girls night out. Out! (to TONTO) You, too.

TONTO:

Maybe, like, you two should cut down a bit.

JANICE:

It's Barb's idea. We're celebrating Anne.

TONTO:

Yeah, well, I don't think it's right.

BARB:

Just like a man. Just when you're having a good time, they go and pull out.

Confused, TONTO looks at RODNEY.

RODNEY:

Hey, she's not talking about me. You think maybe they're bonding a little too much?

TONTO:

Was that your idea?

RODNEY:

My idea was to get them together alone, by themselves somewhere.

TONTO:

Maybe they can share a room at the detox centre.

BARB:

Out!

They exit quickly.

BARB:

Okay, straighten up. It's time to get serious.

JANICE:

Well, for two people who don't drink much, we're sure doing okay.

BARB:

Rodney is so cute, isn't he?

JANICE:

Yep, "cute," that's the word I was thinking. Cute. Cute Rodney. Rodney the cute. Sir Rodney the Cute. Barb, what's he like in bed? Is he any good?

BARB:

Let's find out. (yelling) Hey, Rodney, come here.

RODNEY sticks his head in the doorway.

BARB:

Grace wants to know if you're any good in bed.

Beat.

RODNEY:

Um ... Uh ...

For once RODNEY has no snappy retort. He quietly disappears back outside. They burst out laughing again.

JANICE:

He is cute. Want another one?

BARB:

You betcha. I thought you didn't drink beer.

JANICE:

Like you said, "beggars can't be choosers."

BARB:

I haven't done this in years.

JANICE:

Barb, do you think it was proper for us to go over to Amy's like this? In this condition I mean?

BARB:

Oh, Amy could throw them back with the best of them. If anything, I think she found us funny. I wonder why? So what did you think of our little Amy Hart?

JANICE:

My Lord Christ, you were right. That is her. I can't believe it!

BARB:

Believe it. And I can't believe you offered to represent her as her lawyer! That is so tacky.

JANICE:

I know, I know. It just sort of popped out. The lawyer runs deep, I guess. What was that she said to me in that language?

BARB:

It's called Anishinabe Ojibway, for Christ's sake. Will you get these things straight? This isn't kindergarten.

JANICE:

Amelia Earhart speaks fluent Anishinabe Ojibway. It gets stranger and stranger.

BARB:

Why wouldn't she? She's been here over fifty years. Her and Mom used to rattle on for hours.

JANICE:

So what did she call me again?

BARB:

Wawasquaneh sim.

JANICE:

What does it mean?

BARB:

My little flower.

JANICE:

Amelia Earhart called me her little flower?

BARB:

No. That's what Mom used to call you when you were a little baby. My little flower. Times were poor, so your first bed was made from old pillowcases patterned with flowers. So Mom started calling you her little flower. *Wawasquaneh sim.*

JANICE:

That's sweet.

BARB:

Isn't it.

JANICE:

I like Amy.

BARB:

I'm so happy.

JANICE:

This has got to be the greatest story of the decade.

BARB:

What is? That Mom called you her little flower? Talk about a slow news day.

JANICE:

No. Amelia. Here, in Otter Lake.

BARB:

Oh, but that's our story, the village's.

JANICE:

I can't believe you won't let me tell anybody this. It's not fair.

BARB:

She's a part of this community. This whole reserve is like a family. You don't go telling secrets on family.

JANICE:

And you consider her family?

BARB:

She was one of Mom's best friends. And, remember, she's your godmother.

JANICE:

I know! My godmother! Amelia Earhart is my godmother. I gotta tell somebody. That is so cool.

JANICE knocks over her bottle of beer, spilling it.

BARB:

That wasn't.

JANICE:

Barb, this is unbelievable.

BARB:

What's so hard to believe?

JANICE:

Barb, think about it. I was born here, but I don't feel at home here and Amelia Earhart does. She's family and I'm not

because the Children's Aid Society took me away. Doesn't all this seem a little weird to you?

BARB:

After this many beers everything seems weird. (*testing JANICE*) Are you gonna tell on Amy?

JANICE:

I don't think anyone would believe me.

BARB:

Then, Grace, you gotta problem.

JANICE:

I really wish you wouldn't call me Grace.

BARB:

Why not? It's your name.

JANICE:

No, it's not. My name is Janice. I didn't know about "Grace" until six months ago. I don't feel comfortable being addressed that way. It's like somebody calling you Susan or Victoria all of a sudden. It doesn't feel right.

BARB:

Fine, *Janice*.

JANICE:

I've made you mad again, haven't I?

BARB:

You're just so white.

JANICE:

You make that sound so bad.

BARB:

It is. You're not white. You're Indian, Ojibway. Go look in a mirror.

JANICE:

I know what I am. I've spent most of my life trying to figure that out. I don't need you telling me what I am and am not.

BARB:

I don't have to tell you anything. Like I said, looking in the mirror will tell you everything.

JANICE:

I've been looking in the mirror for thirty-five years. Tell me what makes an Indian then, Barb? Come on tell me. What is an Indian? Is an Indian someone who drinks? Look, Barb, I'm drinking.

JANICE takes a swig of her beer.

BARB:

That's bullshit and you know it.

JANICE:

Do you speak this Ojibway language?

BARB:

Yeah, kinda.

JANICE:

Then if it's so important to you, teach it to me.

BARB:

When?

JANICE:

Right now. I'm pretty good with languages. What do you call this?

JANICE holds up a bottle of beer.

BARB:

You're crazy.

JANICE:

No, I want to know. What do you call a bottle of beer?

BARB:

It isn't that easy ...

JANICE:

If you try hard enough, anything can be easy. Beer!

BARB:

Beer. Let's see. (*thinking*) *Shinkoppiwaabo*. That sounds like it.

JANICE:

Shinki ... Shinki ...

BARB:

Shinkoppiwaabo.

JANICE:

Shinkoppiwaabo. Wine.

BARB:

Um, "wine" is *zhoominaabo*.

JANICE:

Zhoominaabo. *Shinkoppiwaabo* and *zhoominaabo*. Window.

BARB:

Waasechikan.

JANICE:

Waasechikan. How about that lake out there?

BARB:

Saakaikan. Is any of this sinking in?

JANICE:

Don't rush me. *Saakaikan*. So far so good. What's next?

BARB:

Ahneen, "hello." *Co-waabmen*, "I'll be seeing you."

JANICE:

Ahneen, co-waabmen. Next.

BARB:
Numbers. Want your numbers?
JANICE:
Shoot.
BARB:
Okay, repeat after me.
JANICE tries very hard to mimic each word.
BARB: JANICE:
One ... *Pashig*
Two ... *Niish*
Three ... *Nswi*
Four ... *Niiwin*
Five ... *Naanan*
Six ... *Koodswaswi*
Seven ... *Niizhwaaswi*
Eight ... *Niizhwaaswa*
JANICE stumbles over the Ojibway number eight.

JANICE:
Nishwash.
BARB bursts out laughing.
JANICE:
What? What did I say?
BARB:
(through the laughter) *Nishwash!*
JANICE:
What?
BARB:
You said "*nishwash*." That means a guy's crotch.
JANICE:
Nishwash?!

JANICE bursts out laughing, too.

JANICE:
Maybe I should wait till I'm sober.
BARB:
Oh, I wish the boys were here for that one. That was funny.
JANICE:
Hey, maybe I can teach you something. I can speak French fluently, some Italian, and I'm still pretty good with Latin. A hold-over from my school days.
BARB:
An Indian who speaks Italian and Latin. How do you say, "Want another beer?" in Italian?
JANICE:
That would be, "*Vuole un'altra birra?*"
BARB:
Forget it. I won't even try that.
JANICE:
And the correct answer would be "*Si, Certamente*," certainly. Wanna learn some French?
BARB:
No thanks. Four years of high school French taught me all I'd need to know. *Où est la salle de bain?* I figure with that under my belt, I can survive just about anything.
JANICE:
Then I guess I have nothing to teach you.
BARB is silent for a moment.
BARB:
You could do me a favour.
JANICE:
Me? What?

BARB:
You know about money, right? I mean you obviously aren't hurting ...

JANICE:
Barb, are you hitting me up for a loan?

BARB:
Don't flatter yourself. It's all that money we got from the lottery Mom won.

JANICE:
If you want, I can set you up with some good investment consultants.

BARB:
You. Why don't you look after it for us?

JANICE:
It would be better if you had a professional ...

BARB:
It would be better if we had family looking after family.

JANICE:
It would make me feel uncomfortable.

BARB:
And giving all our money to some white stranger will make me feel comfortable.

JANICE:
You asked for my opinion; I gave it.

BARB:
Never mind. I'm sorry I asked. This is not the kind of conversation you would hear on your typical Indian reserve. Maybe we could start a whole new reserve for people like you, where you could talk about investment counsellors and jazz guitarists and Saabs and stuff.

JANICE:
Are you trying to hurt me?

BARB:
I can get a car out of a snow-covered ditch. I can chop wood, clean a fish. Not much call for those talents in the big city, huh?

JANICE:
I guess Tonto would have to join me on that reserve.

BARB:
No, Tonto's as Indian as they come. It has nothing to do with being adopted. It has to do with being taken away. Some are taken away but never leave. You had a whole family waiting to accept you and you ran. You took yourself away. That's the difference. And unfortunately, that's the truth of the matter.

JANICE:
For you. I have my own truth.

BARB:
Truth is truth. You're just playing lawyer again.

JANICE:
You wanna play lawyer? You wanna play fucking lawyer? Your Honour, my client, one Janice Wirth was taken into custody by the Children's Aid Society in 1955 under the false belief that her mother, Anne Wabung, was not maintaining a proper and adequate home environment for the infant. It appeared the father had abandoned the family when, in fact, the father had secretly enlisted in the army as a means of providing financial assistance for his family. Flash forward thirty-five years. After many years of soul-searching and trepidation, my client seeks out her birth family, to put the final piece in the puzzle of her life together. Satisfied with what she's learned, she returns to the world in which she was raised. However, finding herself under severe emotional

She decides to take two months off, to deal with the bouncing around in her head. She finally gets herself back together when she finds herself right back where she began. In the same kitchen, with the same people, with the same problems. That, your Honour, is our case.

Silence.

BARB:

Wow, you're good at that.

JANICE:

It's the truth.

BARB:

I guess this is what Mom meant when she said only drunks and children tell the truth.

JANICE:

Maybe.

BARB:

Mom had a lot of sayings like that.

JANICE:

My mother didn't.

BARB:

No?

JANICE:

She was quite practical, serious. She didn't have much use for cute little sayings. I wonder what I would be like if I had grown up here.

BARB:

Probably fatter.

JANICE:

Wonderful. When I was a little girl, I always dreamt my mother was somebody like Pocahontas or Sacagawea. I used

to read all about them. Did you know Sacagawea was a Shoshoni word meaning "bird woman"?

BARB:

Binshii-kweh. That means "bird woman" in Anishinabe Ojibway.

JANICE:

Binshii-kweh. I must remember that. I also used to dream I had a sister.

BARB:

But probably not like me.

JANICE:

I seem to remember canoes and buckskin. I don't remember why though.

BARB:

Couldn't have been me then. Never had a buckskin dress in my life. And I hate canoeing; my legs cramp.

JANICE:

I wonder if that's why I bought that white fur coat of mine, my heritage coming through.

BARB:

Doubt it. You're the only Indian I know who has one.

JANICE:

I wanted to belong here so bad. When I drove up that driveway, it seemed like I had prepared my whole life for that meeting. But from the moment I arrived, I knew I didn't belong. You didn't even like me.

BARB:

I didn't like you because I knew you were going to hurt Mom.

JANICE:

How could you know that?

BARB:

Easy. You weren't real to her. You couldn't possibly be everything she dreamed. Somewhere down the line, she would realize you weren't a dream, weren't perfect, and her world would come crashing down. And as usual, I would be there to cry with her. It wasn't you I didn't like, it was the bomb I knew was waiting to go off. I didn't personally start to dislike you until you walked out. The minute that door closed behind you, I knew it was over. *(beat)* You killed her, you know? As sure as you put a gun against her head. She died because of you.

JANICE:

That's not fair.

BARB:

No, it's not, is it? I loved Mom, she loved you, and you killed her.

JANICE:

Quit saying that.

BARB:

When you left, you took her spirit, her will to live, with you. She was dead long before last Tuesday. It just took a while for her body to catch up. Drink up, Janice.

JANICE punches BARB. She goes flying across the room, creating a loud crash.

JANICE:

Don't you dare hang all of that on my head. If you want to hate me, then hate me. But you have no goddamn right to blame me for Anne's death. I'm part of this whole fucking picture, too.

TONTO and RODNEY come running in, alerted by the noise.

JANICE:

(yelling) Get out!

Startled, the boys quickly do as they're told. BARB picks herself up slowly.

JANICE:

I am so sorry for Anne's death, but I am not responsible for what happened to her. I can't be. I can't handle more guilt. Why do you think I didn't want to come here? I've got scars of my own. I know I walked out of here, and I have to live with that fact. You don't think I realize that she's gone and that I'll never know what kind of woman she was or what could have happened between us? I grew up wanting to hate this woman, thinking my whole life was her fault. That's why I ran out of this house. I was all prepared to dislike and pity some old Indian woman who lost me because of alcohol. Instead I find this wonderful, sweet, caring woman who had her baby taken away by the system for no good reason. A baby she loved and fought to get back. I began to feel it all. I started to care, Barb, but I didn't want to care. If I care, I'll realize what I've lost.

BARB:

Mom always said you couldn't miss something you never had.

JANICE:

She was wrong.

BARB:

I guess. Grace, you're all I've got left.

JANICE:

I thought you didn't like me.

BARB:

My brother's dead, my father, my mother. I'm an orphan. I don't wanna be alone.

JANICE:

You've got Rodney.

BARB:

It's not the same.

JANICE:

No, I guess it isn't. I don't feel well.

BARB:

Neither do I.

JANICE:

Oh, your poor face. What did I do?

BARB:

Not my face. My stomach.

JANICE:

I thought I hit you in the face.

BARB:

You did. I think. But my stomach ... Can you help me sit down?

JANICE:

Okay.

JANICE puts her arm around BARB and helps her over to a chair. Once BARB is sitting, JANICE takes her arm away, but BARB grabs it.

BARB:

Thank you.

BARB passes out, her arm knocking the birthday present onto the floor. JANICE goes to make her more comfortable.

JANICE:

Poor Barb. I'm so sorry for your face, Anne, everything.

JANICE trips over the present on the floor. Drunkenly she picks it up. Fighting tears, she opens the present, revealing a large dream catcher.

JANICE:

What the hell is this?

She notices a tag attached. She struggles to read it.

JANICE:

"Good dreams pass through the webbing, bad dreams are caught and dissolved by the early morning light. Usually given to newlyweds to hang over the window in their bedrooms or to the mother of a newborn baby, to ensure her baby will have only pleasant dreams ..." Newborn baby ...

JANICE starts to cry. Slowly she lays her head down on the table and passes out. The men enter tentatively, checking out the territory. TONTO lifts JANICE's head, but it falls with a thud.

TONTO:

Normally that should hurt.

TONTO examines the present.

TONTO:

What's all this stuff? Nice dream catcher. Do you mind telling me what's going on here?

RODNEY:

It worked.

TONTO:

What worked?

RODNEY:

The plan. Barb's plan. With a little coaching from yours truly.

TONTO:

Oh God, what have you two done this time?

RODNEY:
They needed to bond. And nobody bonds like a couple of drunks.

TONTO:
But it's a false bonding. Drunks will kill each other over the last mouthful of booze. You're playing with fire.

RODNEY:
Firewater?!

TONTO:
Damn it, Rodney, this is serious. Alcohol doesn't solve problems; it creates them.

RODNEY:
I know, I know, but the system fucked them up royally. Something equally screwy had to fuck them back down. Fight fire with fire.

TONTO:
I used to work in a detox centre - you didn't. Two wrongs don't make a right.

RODNEY approaches BARB.

RODNEY:
Look at her. Sleeping peacefully. She just got drunk with her adopted sister for the first time. I'm sure there's a country song in there somewhere.

TONTO:
Rodney, why did you do this?

RODNEY:
I told you ...

TONTO:
Uh-uh. You told me what you did, but not why. There's something going on in that book-clogged head of yours. Let me have a peek.

RODNEY:
Anne.

TONTO:
Yes?

RODNEY:
The car accident, when Paul died. She never blamed me for that.

TONTO:
Why should she? Wasn't your fault.

RODNEY:
He was coming to pick me up at the bar. I phoned him, remember? He wouldn't have been on that road if it hadn't been for me. Half the village was giving me dirty looks but, God bless her, she never thought a single bad thing about me. What a woman.

TONTO:
And all this ...?

RODNEY:
I took part of her family away. I had to return another part. Barb planted the idea, but I cultivated it. Remember the stuff with the night blindness?

TONTO:
Oh, Rodney, man ...

RODNEY:
It's okay now. Really.

BARB *moans and wakers.*

BARB:
Rodney?

RODNEY:
Right here, Barb.

BARB:

I love my mother.

RODNEY:

I know you do, sweetie. And she loves you.

BARB:

Put me in her bed. I want to sleep there.

RODNEY:

Sure thing.

RODNEY helps the almost-unconscious BARB toward the bedroom.

TONTO:

Okay, genius, what do I do with this one?

RODNEY:

Put her in Barb's room. And, Tonto, better get some buckets out of the back room.

TONTO:

Good idea. Oooh, are you gonna be in pain tomorrow, Kemosabe.

Scene Three

The scene opens on a graveyard. All four enter the grounds. Again the women are leaning quite heavily on the men. BARB and JANICE are in pain.

BARB:

(squeaking) Rodney, do something about that sun, please?

JANICE:

(to TONTO) Not so fast. Easy. Slow down. Never again.

BARB:

Rodney, Rodney, if you love me, you'll kill me right now.

JANICE:

I may never eat again.

RODNEY:

Boy, I wish we had a camera.

They arrive at Anne's grave.

TONTO:

Here we are.

JANICE:

So this is it.

TONTO:

You sure you're up to this?

JANICE:

No time like the present.

TONTO:

Still, it is kinda tacky visiting your mother's grave hungover.

RODNEY:

That's my Barb, tacky all the way.

BARB:

Okay, you guys, get away. Go wait at the car. This is daughter stuff.

RODNEY:

You sure? You look a little unsteady.

BARB:

It's okay. We'll be fine.

RODNEY:

We'll be over here, if you need help.

The men exit.

JANICE:

God, I feel awful. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

BARB:

Mom used to say, "Self-inflicted wounds don't count." Janice, hold me up.

JANICE:

I can barely hold myself up.

BARB:

Okay. I'm okay.

BARB walks to the tombstone.

BARB:

Mom, look who I brought. It's Gra ... It's Janice, Mom. You were right. She did come home again.

JANICE:

I don't know what to say, Barb.

BARB:

You'll think of something. I got to go. I'm not feeling well.

BARB hobbles away in obvious pain.

BARB:

(calling plaintively) Rodney!

JANICE is left alone at Anne's grave.

JANICE:

Hello, Anne. Wherever you are, I hope you're feeling better than I am. The last time you saw me, I was a mess. Confused. In great emotional pain. Now it's physical pain. I don't know which one is better. *(pause)* Yes I do. The physical pain will go away. The emotional pain will take longer. If at all. I'm sorry I left the way I did. It must have been a horrible Christmas for you. But you must understand I didn't walk out on you. I walked out on me. To everybody I was Grace, but to me I'm Janice. I don't know if I can ever be the Grace you wanted, or the Grace Barb wants. I don't know anything anymore. I'm hungover. I've met Amelia Earhart. And I'm standing at your grave, a woman I barely got to know. What a town, this Otter Lake of yours. I guess the reason I'm here is to seek forgiveness for the bad thoughts I had about you. I couldn't help it. I needed a reason, some excuse for what happened to me, what I went through. You were all I had. Growing up in the home I did, looking the way I do, the schools I went to, the jokes I heard. I had to blame somebody. I feel so ashamed. You were so kind to me, so nice. And all I wanted was evidence, proof to justify my anger. And there you were, so sweet and accepting. My whole life fell away. Everything I had wanted to believe was gone because of you. That made me even more angry. I hate myself now. I'm tired of being angry. I'm tired of mistrusting you. I'm tired of everything. I just don't want to fight it anymore. I'm sorry. You deserve better ...

JANICE collapses. TONTO comes running up to her side.

TONTO:

Yo, Janice, are you okay?

JANICE:

I don't know anymore.

TONTO:

Know what?

JANICE:

Anything.

TONTO:

That's an awful lot to forget after one night of drinking. Trust me, you know everything you need to know. People may learn a few facts or stories over the years, but all the real important things in life we know at birth.

JANICE:

I don't need graveside therapy right now. You had it easy; you grew up here. You knew everything.

TONTO:

That has nothing to do with it. Janice, have you ever heard of a bird called a cowbird? (*JANICE shakes her head*) Interesting bird, the cowbird. They lay their eggs in other birds' nests, then fly off.

JANICE:

(*sniffing*) Cuckoos.

TONTO:

What?

JANICE:

Cuckoos. The English have a similar bird called a cuckoo.

TONTO:

Whatever. Anyway, the robins or starlings, whichever the nest belongs to, they raise the baby cowbird as a robin or a starling or whatever. But when it grows up, the cowbird is still a cowbird. It lays its eggs in another bird's nest just like any other cowbird. Somewhere, deep inside, it knew it was a

cowbird. No matter how it was raised or what it was taught. What are you, robin or cowbird?

JANICE:

I don't know.

TONTO:

Well, let's go find out.

JANICE:

What do you think I've been trying to do all these years?

TONTO:

Yeah, but you've been doing it alone. Two, three, four, eight, ten heads are better than one.

JANICE:

But it's not your problem.

TONTO:

I'm a cowbird, too, remember. Let me help, okay?

Beat.

JANICE:

Why not?

TONTO:

Are you done here?

JANICE:

Not yet. Go ahead, I'll be down in a moment.

TONTO exits. JANICE turns around and looks at the grave one last time. She sees a daisy growing off to the side. She picks it and gently places it against the headstone.

JANICE:

Co-waabmen, Mom, from your daughter, Grace.

JANICE walks toward the car. She exits.

The lights go down.

THE END