

"What if I miss?" he asked.

She closed the coat tightly around her body.

"Then," she said, "you'll have to dream about me all day."

He had dreamed about her often, had dreamed of lovemaking in rivers, in movie theaters, in sale beds in department stores, in powwow tents, but had never actually had the courage to make real love to her anywhere but a few hundred beds and the backseats of twelve different cars.

"Hey," he said, his throat suddenly dry, his stomach suddenly nervous. "We've got to be to work in fifteen minutes."

"Hey," she said. "It's never taken you that long before. I figure we can do it twice and you'll still be early."

Grace and Roman smiled.

"This is a good life," she said.

He stared at her, at the basket, at the ball in his hands. Then he lifted the ball over his head, the leather softly brushing against his fingers, and pushed it toward the rim.

The ball floated through the air, then, magically, it caught fire. The ball burned as it floated through the air.

Roman and Grace watched it burn and were not surprised.

Then the burning ball hit the backboard, rolled around the rim, and fell through. Grace stepped toward her husband. Still burning, the ball rolled to a stop on the frozen ground. Roman stepped toward his wife.

Ceremony.

## DEAR JOHN WAYNE



The following transcript is adapted from an interview that took place in the visitor's lounge at the St. Tekawitha Retirement Community in Spokane, Washington, on February 28, 2052:

Q: Hello, I'm going to record this, that is, if that's okay with you? Is that okay?

A: Yes.

Q: Good, good. So, would you, could we begin, could you please begin by stating your name, your birth date, your age, where you were born, and that's it.

A: You first.

Q: Excuse me?

A: You should tell me who you are first. That's the polite way.

Q: Oh, okay, I suppose you're correct. I'm Spencer Cox, born July 7, 2007, in Old Los Angeles. I'm forty-five years old. Okay? Is that okay?

A: Yes, that's good. It's nice to meet you.

Q: Yes, it's my pleasure.

(ten seconds of silence)

Q: And?

A: And?

Q: Would you like to introduce yourself?

A: Yes.

(fifteen seconds of silence)

Q: Well, possibly you could do it now? If you please?

A: My name is Etta Joseph. I was born in Wellpinit, Washington, on the Spokane Indian Reservation on Christmas Day, 1934. I am one hundred and eighteen years old and I am the Last of the Spokane Indians.

Q: Really? I had no idea you were the last.

A: Well, actually, I'm not. There are thousands of us. But it sounds more romantic, enit?

Q: Yes, very amusing. Irony, a hallmark of the contemporary indigenous American. Good, good. Yes. So, perhaps we could officially begin by . . .

A: Spencer, what exactly is it you do?

Q: I'm a cultural anthropologist. An anthropologist is . . .

A: I know what an anthropologist is.

Q: Yes, yes, of course you do. As I was saying, I am a cultural anthropologist and the Owens Lecturer in Applied Indigenous Studies at Harvard University. I'm also the author of seventeen books, texts, focusing on mid- to late-twentieth-century Native American culture, most specifically the Interior Salish tribes of Washington State.

(twenty seconds of silence)

Q: So, Miss Joseph, can I call you Etta?

A: No.

Q: Oh, I see, okay. Formality. Yes, quite another hallmark of the indigenous. Ceremony and all. I understand. I'm honored to be included. So, Miss Joseph, perhaps we could begin, I mean, could I ask an introductory question? Yes. Well, let's see, you have been a tradi-

tional powwow dancer for the last eighty years. In that time, how has the powwow changed? Of course, the contemporary powwow is not a sacred ceremony, not as we have come to understand it, but rather a series of pan-Indian ceremonies whose influences include many tribal cultures and popular American culture as well, but I was wondering how you . . .

A: Why are you really here?

Q: Well, I was trying to get into that. I wanted to talk about dance and the Indian . . .

A: You're here about John Wayne, enit?

Q: Excuse me?

A: You came here to talk about John Wayne.

Q: Well, no, but the John Wayne mythology certainly plays an important role in the shaping of twentieth-century American and Native American culture, but . . .

A: Have you ever seen a John Wayne movie?

Q: Yes, yes, I have. Most of them, in fact. I was quite the little cowboy when I was a child. Had two Red Ryder six-shooter pistols. They shot these little silver pellets. I recall that I killed a squirrel. I was quite shocked. I had no idea the pellets were dangerous, but I suppose that's beside the point. Now, back to dance . . .

A: I used to be an actress.

Q: Really? Well, let's see here, I don't recall reading about that in your file.

A: What are you doing?

Q: Well, I'm reading through the file, your profile here, the pre-interview, some excellent books regarding your tribe, and a few texts transcribed directly from the Spokane Tribe oral tradition, which I must say, are quite . . .

A: Just put those papers away. And those books. What is it with you white people and your books?

Q: I'm afraid I don't understand.

A: How come you love books so much?

Q: As my mother used to say, they're the keys to the locked doors of the house of wisdom.

A: Did your mother really say that?

Q: Well, no.

A: So, then, it's a lie? You just told me a lie?

Q: Yes, yes, I suppose I did.

A: It's a good lie. Charming even. Attributing one of your faintly amusing and fairly poetic lines to your own mother. You must love her quite a bit.

Q: Oh. Well, I don't know how to respond to that.

A: Are you a liar?

Q: What do you mean?

A: Do you tell lies?

Q: Everybody tells lies. I mean, occasionally.

A: That's not what I asked you.

Q: Yes, I tell lies. But I hardly think of myself as a liar.

(twenty-seven seconds of silence)

Q: Okay, so perhaps I am a liar, but not all the time.

(thirty-two seconds of silence)

Q: Why exactly are you calling me a liar?

A: I haven't called you anything.

Q: But you've accused me of lying.

A: No, I asked you if you were lying and you said yes. So I think that means you accused yourself of being a liar. Good observation, by the way.

Q: What's the point of all this?

A: I'm having fun with you.

Q: Well, if you're not going to take this seriously, I'm afraid I might have to move on. My time is valuable.

A: Having fun is very serious.

Q: I hardly think a few jokes are serious. I am currently working on a serious and profound study on the effect of classical European ballroom dancing on the indigenous powwow—a revolutionary text, by the way—so I don't have time for a lonely woman's jests and insults.

A: You have a lot to learn. You should listen more and talk less.

Q: Pardon me. I think I'll leave now.

A: I'm not lonely. Have a good day.

(ten seconds of silence)

Q: Okay, wait, I think I understand. We were participating in a tribal dialogue, weren't we? That sort of confrontational banter which solidifies familial and tribal ties, weren't we? Oh, how fascinating, and I failed to recognize it.

A: What are you talking about?

Q: Well, confrontational banter has always been a cultural mainstay of indigenous cultures. In its African form, it becomes the tribal rite they call "doing the dozens." You know, *momma jokes*? Like, your mother is so fat, when she broke her leg gravy poured out. It's all part of the oral tradition. And here I was being insulted by you, and I didn't recognize it as an integral and quite lovely component of the oral tradition. Of course you had to insult me. It's your tradition.

A: Oh, stop it, just stop it. Don't give me that oral tradition garbage. It's so primitive. It makes it sound like Indians sit around naked and grunt stories at each other. Those books about Indians, those texts you love so much, where do you think they come from?

Q: Well, certainly, all written language has its roots in the oral tradition, but I fail . . .

A: No, no, no, those books started with somebody's lie. Then some more lies were piled on top of that, until you had a whole book filled with lies, and then somebody slapped an Edward Curtis photograph on the cover, and called it good.



Q: These books of lies, as you call them, are the definitive texts on the Interior Salish.

A: No, there's nothing definitive about them. They're just your oral tradition. And they're filled with the same lies, exaggerations, mistakes, and ignorance as our oral traditions.

Q: Have you even read these books?

A: I've read all of your books. You show me a book written by a white man about Indians and I've read it. You show me almost any book, any of your so-called Great Books, and I've read them. Hemingway, Faulkner, Conrad. Read them. Austen, Kafka, James, read them. Whitman, Dickinson, Donne. Read them. We head over to this university or that college, to your Harvard, and grab their list of required reads, and I've read them. Hundreds of your books, your white-man books, thousands of them. I've read them all.

Q: And what is your point in telling me this?

A: I know so much more about you than you will ever know about me.

Q: Miss Joseph, I am a leading authority, no, I am the, the, the leading authority in the field . . .

A: Mr. Cox, Spencer. For the last one hundred and eighteen years, I have lived in your world, your white world. In order to survive, to thrive, I have to be white for fifty-seven minutes of every hour.

Q: How about the other three minutes?

A: That, sir, is when I get to be Indian, and you have no idea, no concept, no possible way of knowing what happens in those three minutes.

Q: Then tell me. That's what I'm here for.

A: Oh, no, no, no. Those three minutes belong to us. They are very secret. You've colonized Indian land but I am not about to let you colonize my heart and mind.

Q: Tell me then. Why are you here? Why did you consent to this interview? What do you have to tell me that could possibly help me with my work? You, you are speaking political nonsense. Colonialism. That's the tired mantra of liberals who've run out of intellectual imagination. I am here to engage in a free exchange of ideas, and you're here, you want to inject politics into this. I will have no part of it.

A: I lost my virginity to John Wayne.

(forty-nine seconds of silence)

Q: You're speaking metaphorically, of course.

A: Spencer, I am speaking of the vagina and the penis.

Q: As metaphors?

A: Do you know the movie *The Searchers*?

Q: The western? Directed by John Ford? Yes, yes, quite well, actually. Released in 1956, I believe.

A: 1952.

Q: No, no, I'm quite sure it was 1956.

A: You're quite sure of a lot of things and you're quite wrong about a lot of them, too.

(five seconds of silence)

Q: Well, I do know *The Searchers*. Wayne plays Ethan Edwards, the ex-Confederate soldier who sets out to find his niece, played by Natalie Wood. She's been captured by the Comanches who massacred Ethan's family. Along with Jeffrey Hunter, who plays a half-breed Cherokee, of all things! Wayne will not surrender to hunger, thirst, snow, heat, or loneliness in his quest, his search. A quite brilliant film.

A: Enough with that academic crap. Listen to me. Listen carefully. In 1952, in Kayenta, Arizona, while John Wayne was playing Ethan Edwards, and I was playing a Navajo extra, we fell in love. I him, for the first and only time with an Indian. Me, for the first time with anybody.



“My real name is Marion,” said John Wayne as he slid the condom over his erect penis. His hands were shaking, making it nearly impossible for him to properly fit the condom, so Etta Joseph reached down, smoothed the rubber with the palm of her left hand—she was touching John Wayne—and then guided him inside of her. He made love carefully, with an unintentional tantric rhythm: three shallow thrusts followed by one deep thrust, repeat as necessary.

“Does it hurt?” asked John Wayne, with genuine concern, and not because he was arrogant about being her first lover.

“It’s okay,” said Etta, but it did hurt. It hurt a lot. She wondered why people were so crazy about this act. But still, she was making love to John Wayne.

“Oh, oh, John Wayne,” she moaned. She felt uncomfortable, silly, like a bad actress in a bad love scene.

“Call me Marion,” he said between thrusts. “My real name is Marion. Call me Marion.”

“Marion, Marion, Marion,” she whispered.

They laid together on a Pendleton blanket on the red sand of Navajo Monument Valley. All around them, the impossible mesas. Above them, the most stars either of them had ever seen.

“I love you, I love you,” he said as he kissed her face, neck, breasts. His lips were thin, his face rough with three days of beard.

“Oh,” she said, surprised by his words, even frightened. How could he be in love with her? He didn’t even know her. She was just an eighteen-year-old Spokane Indian woman—a girl—a thousand miles away from home, from her reservation. She was not in Navajo land by accident—she was an actress, after all—but she hadn’t planned on lying beneath John Wayne—Marion!—as he confessed his love, his impossible love for her.

Three days earlier, she’d been an extra in the Navajo camp when John Wayne and Jeffrey Hunter traded blankets, hats, and secrets with the Navajo chief. Etta hadn’t had any lines. She’d only been set dressing, a pretty girl in a purple dress. But she’d been proud and she was sure to be on camera because John Ford told her so.

“Girl,” Ford had said. “You are as pretty as the mesa.”

For just a moment, Etta had wondered if Ford might cast her then and there for a speaking role, perhaps even give her the role of Look, the chubby daughter of the Navajo chief, and send that other Indian woman packing. Of course not! But Etta had wished for it, however briefly, and had chided herself for her ambition. She’d wished ill will on another Indian woman just because a white man had called her pretty. Desperate and shallow, of course, but Etta had not been able to help herself.

This was John Ford! He was not handsome, no, but he was a Hollywood director. He made dreams come true. He was the one who filled the movie screens with the movies! He was a magician! He was a feature-film director and she knew they were the kindest and most decent men in the world.

“Stand here,” Ford had directed Etta. “Right here, so the audience can see your lovely face in the background here. Right between Jeffrey and the Duke.” She had not been able to contain her excitement. Five feet away, John Wayne was smoking a cigarette. John Wayne! But more than that, it had been Jeffrey Hunter who’d captured her imagination. He was a beautiful boy, with dark hair, brown skin, and those blue, blue eyes. John Wayne might have been a movie star—and a relatively homely one at that—but Jeffrey Hunter was simply the most gorgeous white man on the planet. But here he was playing an Indian, a half-breed Cherokee, so perhaps Jeffrey himself was part Indian. After all, Etta had thought, why would they cast a white man as an Indian if he didn’t have some Indian blood himself? Otherwise,



the movie would have been a lie, and John Wayne didn't lie. And judging by the kindness in his eyes, by the graceful turn of his spine, by the way he waved his sensuous hands when he talked, Jeffrey Hunter was no liar either.

Anyway, they'd filmed the scene, a funny one where Jeffrey Hunter had inadvertently traded a hat for a Navajo wife, for Look—how positively amusing!—and all the while, Etta had looked on and wished that Jeffrey Hunter had traded for her. Not Jeffrey Hunter the actor in the scene, but Jeffrey Hunter the blue-eyed man.

"Mr. Hunter, you were wonderful," she'd said when she'd approached him after the scene.

Without a word to her, he'd turned and walked away. She'd admired his silence, his commitment to his craft. He hadn't wanted to be distracted by the shallow attentions of some Indian girl other than Look. Still. Her feelings had been hurt and there might have been a tear in her eye when John Wayne sidled up close to her—yes, sidled—and shook his head.

"I don't understand actors," the Duke had said. "It's the audience that matters, and yet, so often, we shun them."

"What does shun mean?" she asked.

"Exactly. I mean, how can we, as actors, get close to the soul, to our hearts, if we don't look deeply into the souls and hearts of others? In the end, how can we fragile human beings possibly be sympathetic actors if we don't refuse to show sympathy for other people's emotions? How can we realistically project love, hope, and faith if we are not loving, hopeful, and faithful ourselves?"

"That's beautiful."

"Yes, yes. If we don't feel it in here, in our chest, then the audience will never feel it in their hearts."

"That's why I act," she said.

"Hello, my name is John Wayne."

"I'm Etta Joseph."

Now, three days after Jeffrey Hunter had walked away from her, Etta was naked with John Wayne.

"I love you, I love you," he whispered to her. He was gentle with her, of course, but he was strong as well. He rolled onto his back and lifted her, then lowered her down onto him. His penis was huge! It was a movie star's penis, for sure. Etta had never really thought about John Wayne's penis before. She'd never really thought about any man's or actor's penis before. Sure, she'd felt strong desires for men, sexual desires, but they'd always taken the form of vague shapes and sizes inside of her body. She'd never imagined what John Wayne would look like naked, but there he was! Strong arms, long legs, a pot belly. As he lay beneath her, as he closed his eyes, Etta wondered what she should do with her hands. Nobody had ever taught her how to do this, how to make love to a man. And it was John Wayne, so he must have made love to a thousand different women in his life. Other movie stars! He must have made love to Bette Davis, Vivien Leigh, Greta Garbo, Grace Kelly, maybe even Judy Garland. All those perfect women. Etta felt small and terrified in the presence of John Wayne.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"I'm afraid."

"If you get pregnant, I'll take care of it."

In the rush, she'd never even thought about pregnancy. How stupid! She was only eighteen years old, unmarried, a thousand miles away from home. What would she do with a baby? And what did he mean by taking care of it? Did he want to marry her, be the husband of an Indian woman and the father of an Indian child, or did he want her to have an abortion? God, she'd heard about abortions, how they reached inside of you with a metal hook and scraped out all of your woman parts. In terror, she rolled away from John Wayne and ran naked through the desert, toward the lights of the distant set, where

John Ford and Jeffrey Hunter were sure to have the answers to all of her questions.

"Wait, wait, wait," cried John Wayne as he chased after her. He was not a young man. He wondered if he could possibly catch her. But she was a child of the river and pine tree, of wild grass and mountain. She understood gravity in a different way and, therefore, tripped in the rough sands of the desert. She fell face first into the red dirt and waited for John Wayne to catch and hurt her. Isn't that what he had always done? Wasn't he the man who killed Indians?

"Etta, Etta." He kneeled beside her. He stroked her long black hair. She flinched and pushed him away.

"Go away, go away, John Wayne," she cried out.

"Oh, Etta, I'm not going to hurt you," he said. "I couldn't hurt you. I love you."

"But you can't love me. You don't even know me."

John Wayne wept.

There, in Navajo Monument Valley, John Wayne wept. His tears fell to the sand and flooded the desert.

"Nobody knows me," he cried. "Nobody knows me."

He was so afraid! Etta was shocked into silence. This was the great John Wayne and he was afraid.

"But, but, but," Etta stammered. "But you're a star."

"John Wayne is the star. I'm Marion, I'm just Marion Morrison."

She held him for a good long time.



Q: I can't believe this. Are you telling me the truth?

A: Yes, as far as I can remember it.

Q: This is not a lie, one of those good lies you were talking about?

A: Spencer, I was fooling you. There's no such thing as a good lie.

Q: Bad lies, good lies, whatever. Just tell me the truth. Did you really lose your virginity to John Wayne?

(seven seconds of silence)

A: He was afraid of horses, did you know that?

Q: John Wayne was afraid of horses? That's completely implausible. I mean, I'd sooner believe that you slept with him. We're talking about John Wayne here.

A: When he was seven years old, a horse kicked him in the head. He was in a coma for nearly three months. Everybody thought he was going to die. In the hospital, his mother brought in a Catholic priest to baptize him. His father brought in a Presbyterian priest for last rites. They thought he was going to die. They were sure he was going to die.

Q: I don't recall reading any of this about John Wayne. Kicked in the head by a horse? That must be urban legend.

A: He showed me the scar. Just behind his right ear. About five inches long. They hid it with makeup. The horse's name was Rooster. He liked me to kiss it whenever we made love.

Q: Wait, wait, wait, he liked you to kiss the horse?

A: Oh, no, no, no, silly. He liked me to kiss his scar. He said it was really sensitive, still, after all those years. He was really a sensitive man, you know? He knew how to cry. He cried every time we made love. Well, this is really embarrassing, but he cried every time he had, every time, he, well, you know, had an orgasm.

Q: Wait, wait, wait, what are you telling me? How many times did you make love?

A: Most every night during the filming of the movie. Except for those nights when his wife and kids came to visit.

Q: So, hold on here, let me get my head around this. Not only were you having sex with John Wayne, you were also having an affair with him?



A: I'm not proud of that particular nature of our relationship, but yes, John Wayne was a married man.



In Navajo Monument Valley, during a long day of filming, John Wayne stepped into the makeup trailer for a touch-up and discovered his sons happily covering their faces with lipstick and mascara.

"Well, hello there," John Wayne said to his sons.

They were petrified, afraid of this large man, this male.

"Are you having fun?" the Duke asked his sons.

They didn't know how to answer. If they said no, they'd be lying, and their father always knew when they were lying. If they said yes, well, then, that could mean all sorts of things, and all of them were bad.

"Are you having fun?" he asked again. His face revealed nothing, his thin mouth was closed tight, his teeth were hidden behind that weathered face.

The eldest son cried, so the youngest son decided to join him.

"Wait, wait, wait," said John Wayne. "What's with all of the tears?"

"You hate us," cried the oldest boy.

"Don't hate me, don't hate me," cried the youngest boy.

John Wayne scooped up his boys. He set his big cowboy hat on the youngest boy's head.

"I don't hate you, I could never hate you," said John Wayne. "What makes you think I hate you?"

"Because we're girls," wailed the boys.

John Wayne held his sons and stroked their hair.

"Oh, there, there, you're not girls, you're not girls," said the father.

"What makes you think you're girls?"

"Because we're putting on lipstick," said the youngest.

John Wayne laughed.

"Oh, sons, you're just engaging in some harmless gender play. Some sexual experimentation. Every boy does this kind of thing. Every man likes to pretend he's a woman now and again. It's very healthy."

"Daddy," said the oldest. "Do you dress up like a woman?"

"Well, I don't put on a dress or anything. But I often close my eyes and try to put myself into a woman's shoes. I try to think like a woman. I try to embrace the feminine in myself. Do you know what I mean?"

"No," said the boys.

"Well, sons, let me tell you the honest truth. There's really not that much difference between men and women. In all things, intelligence, passion, hope, dreams, strength, men and women are pretty much equals. I mean, gender is mostly a social construction. After all, males and females share about ninety-nine percent of the same genetic material. So, given that, how could we really be that much different? In fact, we're all so much alike that every woman must have some masculine inside of her and every man must have feminine inside of him. You just ain't a whole person otherwise."

"Daddy!" shouted the boys. They were shocked. "That's not what you said before when you were on the radio and television."

"Boys, I know. I know. I have a public image to maintain. But that's not who I really am. I may act like a cowboy, I might pretend to be a cowboy, but I am not a cowboy in real life, do you understand?"

"I think so," said the oldest son. "Is it like in school, when you're supposed to be listening to the teacher, but you're only pretending to listen so you don't get in trouble?"

John Wayne smiled.

"Yes, yes, it's something like that," he said to his sons. "Now, let me teach you a little something about the birds and bees. If you want to make a woman happy, really happy, there's only one thing you got to do."



“What, Daddy, what?”

“Listen to her stories.”



Q: So, what happened, I mean, what did you do when his wife and sons came to visit?

A: I felt bad, bad, bad. That John Wayne, he was a good father and a good husband, too. I mean, he was cheating on them, that's for sure, but he wasn't going to leave them. No way. All the time he and I were together, he just kept telling me the same thing. “I ain't leaving them,” he'd say. “I ain't leaving them. I am a good man, and a good man ain't a good man without a good family.”

Q: But how do you reconcile that? How did he reconcile that? How can a man claim to love his wife and children if he's sleeping, if he's in love with another woman?

A: Are you married, Spencer?

Q: No.

A: Kids?

Q: No.

A: Then you don't really understand why John Wayne fell in love with me or why he left me, do you?



“We can't do this anymore,” John Wayne said to Etta Joseph.

It was the last day of shooting. Natalie Wood had already gone home; John Wayne had already saved her from the Indians.

“I'm going back to Hollywood,” he said.

Etta wept.

“I knew this day would come,” she said. “And I understand. You're a family man.”

“Yes, my family needs me,” he said. “But more than that, my country needs me. They need me to be John Wayne.”

He kissed her then, one last kiss, and gave her his cowboy hat. She never wore it, not once, and gave it to her next lover, a rodeo Indian who lost it somewhere at a powwow in Arlee, Montana.



Q: I don't want to insult an elder. I know, within the indigenous cultures, that we're supposed to respect our elders . . .

A: Oh, no, no, you've got that all wrong. You're not required to respect elders. After all, most people are idiots, regardless of age. In tribal cultures, we just make sure that elders remain an active part of the culture, even if they're idiots. Especially if they're idiots. You can't just abandon your old people, even if they have nothing intelligent to say. Even if they're crazy.

Q: Are you crazy?



On his deathbed in a Santa Monica hospital, over twenty years after he'd played Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers*, John Wayne picked up the telephone and dialed a number that had not changed since 1952.

“Hello,” said Etta when she answered. “Hello, hello, hello.”

John Wayne listened to her voice. He didn't know what to say. He hadn't talked to her since that last night in Monument Valley, when he'd climbed into the bed of a traveling pickup, and stood tall and proud—with the sun rising, of all things—and watched Etta get smaller and smaller on the horizon.

What was the last thing he'd said to her before he left her forever? He couldn't remember now—the painkiller, chemotherapy, and

exhaustion all played tricks with his memory—but he knew it was something he should not have said. And what was he supposed to say to her now, all these years later, as he lay dying? Should he apologize, confess, repent? He had lived a large and brilliant life with his wife and sons—he'd loved them and been loved with tenderness—but he had often thought of that tiny and lovely Spokane Indian woman who was all alone and lost in the Navajo desert. He knew he was going to die soon—and would, in fact, die later that night with his wife and sons at his bedside—but he wanted to leave the world without his earthly doubts and fears. But how could he tell Etta that? How could he tell her the story of his last twenty years, how could he listen to her story of the last twenty years, and how could either of them find enough time and forgiveness for each other?

John Wayne held the telephone close to his mouth and eyes and wept his way across all of the miles and years.

"Marion?" asked Etta. "Marion, is that you?"



Q: Is that everything?

A: It's all I can remember. Quite an example of the oral tradition, enit?

Q: Lovely. But I wonder, how much of it is true and how much of it is lies?

A: Well, now, an Indian has to keep her secrets, or she's just not Indian. But an Indian a lot smarter than me once said this: If it's fiction, then it better be true.

Q: How oxymoronic.

A: Yeah, kind of like saying Native American. There's an oxymoron for you.

Q: Well, I better get going. I got to find a flight to California.

A: Good for you. But don't you want to talk about powwow dancing?

Q: Well, sure, what would you like to say?

A: I was the worst powwow dancer in the world. I'd start dancing at some powwow, and the Master of Ceremonies would shout out, "Hey, stop the powwow, stop the powwow, Etta is dancing, she's ruining ten thousand years of tribal traditions. If we don't stop the powwow now, she might start singing, and then we're really going to be in trouble."

Q: Well, I suppose that's not going to help my thesis.

A: No, I suppose not. But my sons were really good powwow dancers. They still like to dance now and again.

Q: Your sons? My God, how old are they?

A: One hundred years old today. They're twins. I have nine children, thirty-two grandchildren, sixty-seven great-grandchildren, one hundred and three great-great-grandchildren, and one great-great-great-grandchild. I've made my own damn tribe.

Q: I'd love to talk to your sons. Where are they, on the reservation?

A: Oh, no, they live up on the men's floor here. I baked them a cake. My whole family is coming.

Q: Your sons, what are their names?

A: Oh, look, here they come now. They're early. Boys, I'd like you to meet Dr. Spencer Cox, he's a good friend of the Indians. Dr. Cox, I'd like you to meet my sons, Marion and John.



Sitting alone in his car outside of the retirement home, Spencer ejected the cassette tape from his recorder. He could destroy the tape or keep it; he could erase Etta's voice or transcribe it. It didn't matter what he chose to do with her story because the story would con-



tinue to exist with or without him. Was the story true or false? Was that the question Spencer needed to ask?

Inside, an old woman kneeled in a circle with her loved ones and led them in prayer.

Outside, a white man closed his eyes and prayed to the ghosts of John Wayne, Ethan Edwards, and Marion Morrison, that Holy Trinity.

Somebody said nothing and somebody said amen, amen, amen.

## ONE GOOD MAN



Outside the house, Sweetwater and Wonder Horse were building a wheelchair ramp for my father. They didn't need a blueprint, having built twenty-seven ramps on the Spokane Indian Reservation over the years, including five ramps that summer alone. They knew how to fix such things, and they knew how to work quietly, without needless conversation or interaction with their employers. Sweetwater was known to go whole weeks without uttering a single word, opting instead to communicate through monosyllabic grunts and hand gestures, as if he were a very bright infant. Consequently, on that day when my father's wheelchair ramp needed only a few more nails, a coat of paint, and a closing prayer, Wonder Horse was deeply surprised when Sweetwater broke his unofficial vow of silence.

"Jesus was a carpenter," said Sweetwater, trying to make it sound casual, as if he'd merely commented on the weather or the game (What game? Any game!) and then he said it again: "Jesus was a carpenter."

Wonder Horse heard it both times, looked up from his nail and hammer, and stared into Sweetwater's eyes. Though the two men had worked together for thirty years, building three or four generations