

"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 power 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 Erta 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 Erta?

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. Him, for the first and only time with an Indian. Me, for the first time with anybody.