

"VOICES ON THE WIND"

an original screenplay

by

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<EXCERPT #1>

EXT. RESERVATION - VARIOUS - NEXT DAY

Scouting film locations on the rez, Alex admirably tolerates Meaghan's barrage of questions. Though he can be "tight-lipped", he can be as argumentative as she is.

EXT. RESERVATION - WOUNDED KNEE - DUSK

They pull up to a red brick building. Getting out, Meaghan takes in the site of the 1890 Massacre and stuffs her keys in her jeans' pocket. She resumes the discussion she single-handedly sustained on the way over.

MEAGHAN

The Christmas tree and the Easter egg were indigenous European traditions stolen by the missionaries.

ALEX

Hey, why don't you go film in *Europe*?

MEAGHAN

Because no one's paid me to!

ALEX

But aren't you rich? You've got money from somewhere to afford this car.

MEAGHAN

No, my *parents* are rich. When they die, *then* I'll be rich—assuming they don't leave it all to their stupid cocker spaniel who pisses himself silly every time he hears a loud noise. Until then, I have to find work and get grants where I can. And right now, my work has brought me here—You know, you should be *grateful* I was the one chosen to make this film and not someone else.

ALEX

(*feigning contemplation*)

Someone *else*? You mean, like, an *Indian*? Like someone who *grew up* on a

rez, who knows what it's like to be Indian? Yeah, I'm real grateful they chose a white woman to tell the red man's story.

MEAGHAN

Fine. I'll go scouting by myself...

ALEX

Look...I'm not trying to piss you off, but I won't apologize for what I think or feel. If you're here to film us as we are, then you need to see us for who we are, not what TV and movies have made us out to be. *And* you'll need to get used to hearing what we have to say, whether it's our legends, or our anger.

Meaghan walks around the car to stand before him.

MEAGHAN

Our ancestors weren't that different.

Meaghan kneels down, drawing a Celtic cross in the dirt.

(GROUND)



MEAGHAN (CONT.)

The Scotch-Irish Gaels saw themselves as spiritual beings here only for a short time before they returned to the Creator.

Alex recognizes the symbol, smiling to himself. He relaxes slightly and kneels beside her.

ALEX

I displayed a painting in Chicago last year... Next to me was a sculpture of a Celtic war-queen. The sculptor had designed her with jewelry and markings on her body like this symbol for Spirit.

MEAGHAN

You know, not all Europeans came here of their own free will. Many were shipped here with no way to get back home...And the main thing I've learned is that people are more similar than different.

ALEX

I wish more whites saw it like that.

MEAGHAN

Maybe they're not always given a chance to show it.

ALEX

They can give us back our land.

MEAGHAN

You know that won't happen.

ALEX

Yeah...I know.

MEAGHAN

But you still fight...

ALEX

To keep the land we've been able to hold to, but the government wants to take even that away from us.

MEAGHAN

For oil in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge, coal on the Navajos' reservation, and all the resources in the Black Hills...

ALEX

(pauses, then stands)

Wounded Knee is this way.

Alex slips his feet out of his tennis shoes and socks and stands barefoot on the ground, seeing her doing the same. He ascends the path uphill with her a couple of paces behind. The short walk transforms the mood between them.

The brick and iron arch announces the entrance to the Massacre site. Alex pulls out his medicine bag hanging from his neck. Pinching a bit of the enclosed herb, he offers it along with a silent prayer to the four directions, beginning in the West.

ALEX (CONT.)

*Wakantanka, Tunkashila, Unci Maka.
Ake iyuskinyan wancinyankelo.
Wakantanka yuwakan nis na nitaya.
Kici ota yuonihan.*

Alex turns to her and motions for her to join him. Alex's eyes are non-accusing, his manner non-judgmental...

ALEX (CONT.)

Now, you pray in your Celtic way.

She pinches some of the herb from his medicine bag, holding it up to the North, then the West.

MEAGHAN

*Dia daoibh. Beannacht Dé leat.
Go raibh míle maith agat.*

Meaghan rubs her fingers, offering the herbs to the wind.

MEAGHAN (CONT.)

That's...all I know...

ALEX

It's enough.

Paper plate offerings and simple prayer ties dot the land of this sacred cemetery. Tears well up in Meaghan's eyes.

ALEX (CONT.)

You...okay?

MEAGHAN

I feel...a connection...

ALEX

(rolls his eyes)
Maybe you're internalizing what you've read in books and seen in movies.

MEAGHAN

What, are you a psychiatrist, now?

ALEX

No, but...you probably don't realize how you've been affected by the New Age backlash of overly sensitive, romantic portrayals of Native Americans in epic films and television in an effort to combat the earlier film portrayals in which Indians are either brutal savages raping virginal, white women or the unintelligent, monosyllabic sidekick but never the star.

MEAGHAN

(cocks her head to one side)

How long have you been waiting to use that on a white person?

ALEX

(a huge smile spreads across his face)

Years.

Meaghan laughs, but her director's instincts kick in. She grabs the mini viewfinder hanging around her neck. The sky smolders with burnt oranges from the setting sun, burnished colors that render his skin with the luster of copper. His smile has transformed him.

Meaghan pulls her light meter out of her back pocket and walks up to Alex shoving it in his face. He reflexively jerks back.

ALEX (CONT.)

What's that for?

MEAGHAN

Why don't you ask an Indian director?

Meaghan begins the descent toward her car. Alex rolls his eyes again and follows her.

INT. BED-N-BREAKFAST - MEAGHAN'S ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Sitting in the windowseat of her room, Meaghan rubs her eyes again.

(LAPTOP COMPUTER SCREEN)
domestic violence, gangs, drugs,
racial profiling, unsolved murders

Meaghan gazes out at the grassy plains awash with the full Moon's light and wonders if the events of the day will wind their way into her dreams.

INT. ALEX'S HOUSE - ALEX'S ROOM - SAME NIGHT - DREAM BEGIN

The dream begins as it always does. Distorted sounds of knuckles punching bone, incoherent yelling, intoxicated anger punctuated by the tinkling of shattering beer bottles. The voices creep closer. A door slams shut—bedsprings creak with each grunt, out of rhythm with his mother's muffled screams.

INT. ALEX'S HOUSE - ALEX'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DREAM END

Alex bolts up in his bed. His arms flail out. He throws his head between his knees. Silence. His head comes up slowly. He is in his house, not his father's. He is a man, not a child. His breath rushes in and out of his panting lungs.

The Full Moon illuminates the tiny bedroom. The sweat-soaked sheets lie in a jumbled heap around him. Slowly, he lowers himself back down, staring into the darkness. Motionless, he digests the pain, waiting for the overwhelming rage to evolve into streams of unstoppable tears, as it always does.

<END EXCERPT #1>

<EXCERPT #2>

INT. CULTURAL CENTER - MEAGHAN'S OFFICE - THAT EVENING

Meaghan opens a package from her contact at a human rights watchdog group. Out spills information on Coop, his businesses, photos of Indian children, BIA documents, bank records, and IRS tax forms. She hurries to Alex's studio.

INT. CULTURAL CENTER - ALEX'S STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

Meaghan enters, holding the papers behind her. Alex has changed into his street clothes and is preparing to leave.

MEAGHAN

Coop has had contracts with the BIA to drill on other reservations. He even had a bid to mine for gold and coal around the Navajo and Hopi reservations.

ALEX

I bet the deal was signed right *before* the federal government started its campaign to *move* the Navajo reservation.

MEAGHAN

He uses the coalbed methane process. And a new method for mining uranium that involves saturating the ground with cyanide...It's supposedly safer.

ALEX

Methane, cyanide...Safer?!

MEAGHAN

There's more...Coop underwrites "reform institutions" that use drugs, solitary confinement, and electro-shock therapy on Indian kids, like at Hartlin Behavioral.

ALEX

(reading over the papers)
He owns adoption agencies in four

states that have contracts with
state agencies to put Indian kids
into white homes.

Alex paces a moment then charges toward the door.

MEAGHAN

We don't know where he is right now.

ALEX

He *sells* our kids...

MEAGHAN

I...Let's go.

EXT. TEXACO - MOMENTS LATER

Meaghan and Alex are told that COOP might be at Smiley's.

INT. SMILEY'S BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Coop and his cohorts lounge leisurely at a booth, drinking,
and laughing. Larry serves drinks and jokes at the bar.

Alex barges into Smiley's. He spots Coop's booth, heads
over, and slams the papers onto the table.

COOP

Something I can do for you, boy?

ALEX

My *name* is Alex Two Horses Running.
And I know what you're here to do.

COOP

Didn't know havin' a drink was
cause for alarm.

(laughs as JOE and JACK snicker)

ALEX

I know you want to drill on our land.
And I know you'll take our children—

Coop begins to deny the accusation, but Alex picks up the
papers, throwing them at Coop one at a time.

ALEX (CONT.)

Here's the request to drill for uranium and oil, coal and gold, and here's the construction permit you applied for to build *nowhere near* your proposed casino!

COOP

(*stands*)

I don't know what you're trying to imply with this display, but I am a businessman trying to increase the economy here.

ALEX

You don't care about our economy—just the money you'll make from *our* resources!

COOP

In this country, over 70% of uranium, over 50% of low-sulphur coal, and 30% of our natural gas supply all lie beneath Indian land and contested treaty areas. Why *should* we be dependent on *foreign* supplies when we have what we need right here?

ALEX

This land and its resources are *ours*.

COOP

The *federal government* decides who does what with "your" land—Gold, coal, uranium, oil, copper, and granite are all sittin' right here, waitin' to be processed into something useful.

ALEX

Uranium? The Cold War is over. And the granite comes from our *sacred* Black Hills--YOU'LL DESECRATE OUR HOLY PLACES SO RICH PEOPLE CAN HAVE FANCY COUNTERTOPS IN THEIR KITCHENS?! How would white people feel if we marched into your churches with bulldozers,

TORE UP YOUR ALTARS, AND BLEW UP YOUR
CRUCIFIXES!

COOP

SON, I'M THE BEST DAMN THING THAT'S
HAPPENED TO THIS GOD-FORSAKEN PLACE
SINCE DEAD DINOSAURS BECAME FOSSIL-
FUEL! And I'll get that fuel and
whatever else grew in the rocks
around here!

ALEX

You'll rip up *our* land the same way
you rip these children from their
families.

COOP

So you're saying if the State didn't
step in, there'd be no problems?

ALEX

If we can get corrupt men like you
off our land, we could change things!

COOP

Things *won't* change around here
WITHOUT men like me! You Indians
just sit around on the land you could
use to make a life for yourselves,
then *whine* about being poor. The kids
are dirty and uneducated—How're they
gonna fit into society if they have
no skills and can't speak English?!

ALEX

Lakota is their native language.

COOP

Kids're raised by the grandparents.

ALEX

That's Lakota *tradition*.

COOP

You better watch your step, boy,
'cause you're damn close to being
arrested!

ALEX

Do you sleep at night?!

COOP

Why, yes. Yes, I do.

ALEX

*(holds photos up
in Coop's face)*

I hope you see their faces in your dreams.

COOP

I SERVED TWO TOURS IN VIET NAM,
BOY!... The things I saw there, the
things we were ordered to do, the
innocent children caught in the
middle of world politics, *those* are
the faces I see in my dreams! And if
I can help one kid here in *America*
get out of a pathetic life of
poverty and ignorance, I'll do it.

ALEX

We are a sovereign nation—

COOP

And you *live* like rats! Rats who
are happy to live off the shit
scraps you scrounge around for.

Yelling, Alex leans into Coop's face. Joe and Jack grab Alex and pull him off Coop. Larry steps in and faces Alex.

COOP (CONT.)

Do that again, boy, and you'll
regret it.

ALEX

I regret nothing I do to defend
those who can't fight for themselves.

COOP

Neither do I.

<END EXCERPT #2>