SONG OF LIFE

by Elaine Anderson 1984

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CHARACTERS

Semonee Feyehchee..... A young Indian woman

Leslie Barnes . . . . . A white reporter

Mrs. Whitemagpie . . . . . , A teacher

Jessica, Fanny, Naomi . . . . . Young Indian girls

ACT I

SCENE 1

Time, 1960 or so. A young Indian woman sits in a comfortable chair reading in her living room. It is tastefully furnished.

(Knock at the door and she opens it to a young white woman holding a notebook)

Young Woman: Miss Fayehchee? I hope I am pronouncing that right. I'm Leslie Barnes from the Times. I called about an interview.

Young Indian woman: Just call me Semonee. I've never been interviewed before. Hope I don't come out sounding too dull. Please sit down.

Leslie: My paper would like to print a piece about you for the Sunday edition. I'd like some background on your childhood, your motivation for your book. Did your parents encourage you to write as a child?

Semonee: My parents died when I was quite young and I lived most of my childhood in boarding schools. It was my eigth grade teacher, Mrs. Magpie, who made me interested in writing, though I didn't know it at the time. She was my English teacher.

Leslie: Mrs. Magpie taught the classics in literature and poetry ?

Semonee: She taught the basics and whatever was required. She gave us insights into the classics sort of on the side.

Leslie: What kind of stories did you read?

Semonee: I'd read cereal boxes if there was nothing else. Just any thing. Books opened avenues for me that I never would have had otherwise.

Leslie: Where did you get your ideas for your novel.

Semonee: (Gets up to pour coffee from a silver coffee pot into fragile cups) My parents died as I said when I was too young to remember them. My grandmother raised me as long as she could, then I was sent to boarding school. I went to every boarding school there was from the age of six to eighteen. I don't regret that, but I did not have an opportunity to mingle with too many non-Indian children. I learned their culture from books. Much as they might have learned of mine. My ideas come from what I read. Even after I was out of school, I kept mainly to an Indian society. I went to commercial school, or Junior college, to study nursing and then to a job with the Indian service hospital.

Semonee: Mrs. Magpie was the one who taught me there was a different world from the one I lived in and the difference in just being, to being something.

Leslie: In what way were the differences ?

Semonee: The taking of the best of each culture and being able to know the difference. I could have my heroes where none existed in reality and hold my ideals until I could obtain them. If they never came to fulfillment, I could still use them as goals and to keep searching. The search is fulfilling in itself.

Leslie: Tell me about Mrs. Magpie.

Semonee: She was a young woman full of enthusiasm for her students. If the lightbulb finally went on in our heads when we learned something, it would brighten her face too. She was dedicated and wanted us to learn the best even if we never used it. We'd at least have been exposed to a richer knowledge.

She was of my tribe, married to a Sioux Indian and she would tell us stories of the Sioux. My first hero was Crazy Horse. No one ever saw a picture of him, descriptions are that he was handsome and aloof. An individual with a will of his own. Later heroes were Lord Byron and Mr. Darcy. I tend to admire those characteristics of aloofness and strong pride.

Those were the the qualities I wanted for myself. Not a superior attitude, but to retain a degree of privacy. It is not attractive to me to be too open exposing every feeling I have. Except in writing. Then I am not me, but an entity observing and reporting what I see and feel. You know the feeling ?

Mrs. Magpie brought enlightenment to me. She'd have us write poetry. Poetry is so hard if we can't feel it inside. If done through force, it is so stilted and rambling. I told her jokingly that all I could rhyme was cat, that, and what. She said what that, cat? I never did understand her way of teasing. She might have been a little fey. I chose the pseudonym of Feyehchee. In Creek it might mean something, I don't know exactly.

Leslie: When did you begin to think about your book ?

ACT I

SCENE 1

Semonee: After my parents died I lived with my grandmother way out in the woods, it seemed as if we were the only people alive on earth at times. My grandmother would rise early in the morning and go tend her garden. She would come in later and fix breakfast of biscuits, gravy, fried potatoes scrambled eggs and bacon if we could get it. I'll never forget the smell of coffee boiling on the old black wood stove. Coffee is food to me and I am addicted to it. I don't eat like that any more, but I'm nostalgic for it.

I was a dreamy sort of child. There was no one to entertain me, but me. I would sit on the porch and sing to myself. Invent stories. Hazy hot days of just sitting and singing, looking toward the horizon and seeing castles in the clouds.

Every spring I try to find trees in bloom now, to smell again the scents of my childhood. Hear the buzzing of insects. Early years of sound and scent and no communication. My grandmother spoke to me only in Creek and it was to give orders. Eat!hompebusk! I must have learned English at church.

One of my cousins taught me my A,B,C's, you know how some kids like to do that and the words began to fall into place. A miracle, I could read. People gave me books and I read everything from true romances to Shakespeare and never knew the difference until I met Mrs. Magpie.

Mrs. M. must have felt we deserved an opportunity to experience excellence and for Indian children that is rare. It meant we could go outside the sphere of just waking up, idling away the hours, and going to bed with not much in between to fill our minds. It is not something we do ordinarily in the Indian world.

People ask what is the Indian world. I read a description once, that it is an essence. We aren't animals of the forest, but we understand them and their reason for being. We admire animals, but do not worship them as is commonly believed. We acknowledge they have a purpose to supply us with an awareness of nature.

Indians were often quoted as saying, the Earth is our Mother. We mean that we are nurtured and fed by Earth as a mother feeds her children. We respect her for that as we would our mothers.

I didn't try to explain in the book. Just put down words of thought. Just the essence of being an Indian. That we live in other realms and can see what lies beyond. Some call it superstition. It is real to us. That is a basic difference. So easy for us, so hard for others to understand.

ACT I

SCENE 1

Semonee: I was a dreamer not a visionary. My goals were earthbound to live each day as a new beginning. Mrs. Magpie taught me that and it has been a way of life since. She told me to rise at dawn as often as I could and see the new day come.

The dawn of day, veiled in mist, sparkles jeweled dew
enhancing Earth, displays her wealth.
Quiet it is with no human eye to see, no ear to hear
when the first bird sings.
This is the time to be awake. Awake you of flesh and
mind, awake and meet your soul.
The bird sings its song, it alone knows this is the beginning.
Look to the day for each day is a lifetime
live, live your space in time, for in Eternity
each life is as long as the bird's song.

I have made it my routine to rise before dawn every day that I can and through osmosis become one with the morning. That is when my thoughts are the freshest and I could write.

There never was an idea of writing poetry or especially a book, but when I had some extra time I would just compose little nothings and from that came the book. It is a surprise to me that it got any where, the novelty of a full-blood Indian writing a book may have something to do with it. My subject matter had been written time and again, yet it never caught the essence, I felt, of my people. It would take one who was an Indian to say what we feel. I would like to write powerfully as the oratory of our old great leaders, reading their words, perhaps not really their own words, the essence was there.

My variation on an old theme is not all that new. It was from others that I got inspiration. Mrs. Magpie would encourage us, why not ? if any one else can, so can you. That was the basis for me to write after all I had read. Something was missing. That something was a need to say it ourselves instead of some one who doesn't know, saying it for us. I'm going back in time to my boarding school days to try to give you an idea of Mrs. Magpie and the girls I met there and how those days created the person I am today.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE 1

The scene is a classroom. Mrs. Magpie is a young Indian woman standing ; four girls seated in a circle in front of her.

Mrs. M: You were assigned to write a poem. Muse does not come easy I know. We are just learners and we do not have to be expert or professional today. Who will be brave and read her poem first?

Jessica; I just want to get it over.

RAIN

Rain pouring, blinding out the sun,
Rain making rivers, where there was
none.
Rain crying, for people dying.
Rain greening earth.
Rain for the growing, rain for the sowing
gentle rain, hard rain
Rain. Go. go away!

(Giggles and sits down)

Mrs. M: I have a feeling you do not appreciate all our storms, rain does have its place in the sun.

Naomi: You said we could write about anything we felt like. I had a boyfriend, or thought I did. He was one I really wanted, then I lost him.

BRAVE WARRIOR

He is like no one I have ever seen
He is strong, he is beautiful.
He thrills me to my innermost being
and my heart fills with pride.
He looks at me and I die
from the joy that overwhelms me.
He cannot be mine, this we know
yet we share this brief moment
of love intangible.
He will go---I will let him go
Love is---letting go.
Love does not bind.
I'll not ever forget him
or the love that binds me to him.

And I'll let him go.
He belongs to no one, not even himself
he has a destiny beyond just duty
that calls for him.
There may be other warriors
my eyes will never see them.
There is only one and that one--
is not mine.
Go, then, brave warrior
leave me.
But why ? oh why?

Mrs. M. You certainly have expressed your feelings. Does any one have a humorous poem?

Fanny: You can depend on me not to be serious. I can't write poems so I just wrote any thing.

Going to the dance we gas up the ole Indian car
trusting luck we hope to get far
before it breaks down.
Loaded with food, water, and kids
looks like we are really on the skids
but it's Green Corn and we got to get there.
Going to the dance, happy thoughts and smiles
on we go, miles and miles
over bumpy stomp dance roads.
Dark it is and the woods are scary
what's that over there big and hairy!
oh, only a cow.
I hear the singing, voices ringing
hurry I see the fire.
Hey yey, hey yey I hear them calling
hop out, run,over things falling.
I'm here! here I come!

Mrs. M.: I know where you will be this summer and what a wonderful place to be. Semonee, come forth and reveal.

Semonee: I got carried away and wrote an epic. The book you gave me about Wounded Knee inspired me and it just poured out . No comparison, but I borrowed a title in a way from Lord Byron.

ACT II

SCENE I

THOUGHTS ON VISITING WOUNDED KNEE

The silence of that grassy burial ground is akin
to all such cemetary quietness.
Not even a bird sings, nor does breeze stir
where massacred death restlessly sleeps.
Listen to the stillness and you will hear
the murmurs of a past people.
They have a story to tell if they could
of what happened that day.
Forlorn Hope the beginning of a New Dance,
New Religion, New Indian.
Ceremony, four days long
frenzied dancing, trances, visions of
a New World for our people.
Yet draining our spirit was the fear
fear of Them
They who watched us with dismay
afraid of renewed warrior power
They decided Indian Fate.
What thoughts prevailed, my people, on
that day as blue-coated eney surrounded you
as you ran. Frightened as animals, pursued by
hunters ?
Indian mothers protecting black-eyed babes
what horror gripped you as child of your womb
died mutilated in the cold?
Indian warriors, fighting resurgent, not for
New Hope, but Old Death
as you saw blood of our people
steeping snow with stains never to melt.
Old man Big Foot, ill near to death,
were bullets blessed relief for suffering past
endurance ?
Do they suffer remembrance of your last words
which they heeded not, yet are embedded in wretched
history?

Do they know what it meant for you to gasp
through pierced lungs--
'We would have surrendered had we known where
to find you. '
Defended to death that which was yours
died in the snow, carcass piles of
old men, women, and children.
I stand here far removed from frozen past
sighing comes from the grassy plain
the wind rises strong, sky darkens, lighting
flashes
voices in the wind moan as rain pelts earth
like steel bullets.
Thunder, powerful as human pain rents the air
with urgent message.
I scream to heaven and to hell--
voice on the wind, over thunder,through the rain
I hear you! I hear!
Softly now rain cries, moaning wind gently stops
all is still again.
I cry, tears mingling with my people's
as far away voices call.
Remember. Remember Now.
I gaze at the earth covering my people
pain lessens in my heart, I can leave.
Turning, with one backward look, I vow
you ask me to remember and I will
for your sake and my own.
But hear me now, o whiteman
I tell you now and hear me good
I shall Never FORGET!
and neither shall you.

Mrs. M.: That is quite an epic. It is amazing what can inspire one to write. I am very pleased with your attempts and I hope whenever you feel the need to express yourselves, thoughts you do not want any one else to know, that you will write them down. Later you will read them and will not believe that you actually thought that at one time. You will see how your attitudes change as you mature.

Mrs. Magpie: We will now progress to story writing. Don't be dismayed by it. Story writing is just telling of an experience, your own, or some one else's. You can write a fictional account, or a personal episode. Whatever you want. Just let it flow as it springs forth. It won't seem so hard.

There are many stories to one's life, nothing stays the same. It helps to remember a sad time and of course the happy times relives the joy when read. Save all your writings and read them a year, or two, from now. You'll groan over some of them and wonder at the others. Did I really feel like that? Youth is such a wonderful time. Hold it as a precious gift.

Now to the reason we are here. Open your books to the lesson.

CURTAIN

ACT II SCENE 2

Later that night the girls are in the dorm in various forms of relaxation sitting, lying on the cots.

Naomi: I can't write a story. It was hard enough just to do that poem.

Fanny: Let's copy something out of a book and put it in our own words.

Semonee: You can't fool Mrs. Magpie. It might be easier if we just tell each other about something that happened to us and then maybe we can write a story after we do that.

Jessica: I have a sad story. Whenever it rains I think of the day I had a funeral for my dog. He was such a cute little fat puppy, so soft and playful. His coat was real thick and brown so I called him Efa Nokosee, for Bear Dog. We'd go into the woods where he'd chase birds and anything that moved. I'd watch him and he'd come running back to me to check if I were still there. I'd tell him, don't worry Bear, I won't ever leave you. He grew to be very big and strong. He was real protective of me and my family. When he barked real loud at night, we knew there had to be something out there and it was a stranger. He didn't like strangers. He got kind of mean and wouldn't let any one he didn't know near me.

I could handle him pretty good and make him mind. Until one day. Some ole man came by to sell something I guess and I was outside with Bear. The ole man came toward me and asked where the folks were. In the house, I said. Bear started to growl by then so the ole man stopped. Then he started coming toward me again and reached out his hand toward me, come and show me where they are he said. Bear's hair stood up on end and his lip curled up and he looked vicious.
The ole man picked up a stick and said I'm gonna hit that dog if you don't keep him back. I started yelling, you ain't gonna hit my dog! That was all Bear needed, he jumped the ole man.
The ole man went down and started screaming. My folks ran out and hit Bear and kicked him. I grabbed Bear by the back of the neck and pulled him away. The ole man said he'd get the law and he did.
They came and said Bear would have to be destroyed. So I ran with Bear to the woods. My folks called me, but I wouldn't come out. Finally They found me asleep by Bear near the creek.
I thought every thing was alright and the law was gone. They were, but when I came out the ole man was there with a gun. He shot Bear.

ACT II

SCENE 2

Jessica: I can still see the wild leap of Bear. Hear the thud as he hit the ground. See him lying so still. The blood gushing from his forehead.

I held his head and sat in shock. I heard the ole man say, No dog bites me and gets away with it. I looked at him in disbelief and whispered, But this was Bear! He left still muttering and I stared after him as if he were a monster who had ended my life too. My folks made me get up and dad carried Bear to the creek and dug a hole. They must have known I wanted to be alone so they left without saying anything.

I sat there for hours it seems and I did not cry. Instead I kept patting Bear and saying if you just come back alive I will be so good to you. I'll never scold you and you can have all the squirrels you want to chase. We'll spend the rest of our lives just running through the woods and playing. I said I'd never leave you, I did not know you would go instead. I am so sorry I did not take better care of you and protect you the way you have always protected me.

Yet as I watched he grew stiffer and I knew the breathing I thought I saw was only my hope and imagination.

I buried him and sang the saddest Creek hymns I knew so I could cry. But I did not. Not until it began to rain. Plop, plop, on leaves it made the most dismal sound. Falling on my face it made me feel as if they were my tears.

My folks came and it was as I was leaving Bear, leaving him alone, that I cried.

I was sick for a long time until I came away to boarding school. The pain is gone, it wasn't too long ago, but I still feel that hard lump in my throat when I talk about him squeezing me so I can't speak too good. I hate rain.

(Girls are silent looking thoughtful)

Naomi: (Clears throat) I guess it is dumb to mourn over a boy. I had known him from another boarding school, didn't talk to him much as he was so popular. He was from another tribe and was a pow-wow dancer. I used to see him in the summer dancing. He looked great in his costume. So you know how I must have felt when last summer he came up to talk to me at a pow-wow and asked me to walk around with him. A lot of people knew us and they really looked at me and I felt real special. He said maybe after the dance we would go to the forty-nine.

Naomi: He said his mother was real strict so he couldn't wander around for long. He said let's go to the tent and I'll introduce you. We went there and his mother came out and looked mean at me. She told him to get ready for the dance. He tried to introduce me, but she just ignored me and ordered him inside. I stood there wondering what to do next, wait or flee. She finally looked at me.

She asked what tribe I was and I told her, Creek. She said it meant a lot to their tribe for the son to win contests. That it was an honor to the family. She said you don't belong to our tribe so you don't understand such things. I don't want my son to see you, or be with you. We have girls in our tribe who he can associate with. Go to your own people, get a boyfriend there. I was so embarrassed.

He came out and she started fussing at him in their language. He looked shamed out. She yelled some more and went into the tent.

He looked like he didn't know what to say. I do what my family says, he finally told me. He said he was sorry she yelled at me. Guess he wouldn't see me at the forty-nine. Then he went inside the tent.

I stood there, an outsider. I wondered how any thing could be so important that a person would shame a stranger. She didn't know me well enough to treat me like that. What did they think they were, some kind of royalty? I wondered how I would act when I saw him again.

Afterwards I saw him dance and he won the fancy dance. Guess your family is proud of you, I thought. My family is proud of me too. They were honoring him with blankets and money. Guess it is worth a lot to you.

I saw him later in a group of his people, they were laughing and you could tell they all belonged to something great for them. He glanced at me and looked away as if I were just another stranger. I was by then as far as he was concerned.

I didn't go to the forty-nine, just sat in the car and thought about being fifteen years old with a heartbreak. There'll be other days and nights, but I'll always remember I almost caught a sunbeam.

Fanny: Well, I don't have any experiences like that. My family is large and we all have fun together. We go everywhere any thing is happening if the car will go there. It's lucky there are so many of us when it breaks down so we can all push it to the gas station. It's held together with wire and coat hangers. It's still fun just hoping we'll make it to where we are going.

Fanny: I don't have a chance to be lonely, there's always a brother or sister around making noise. I can't see a story about them!
We don't have a lot of money, but my dad works hard and he will bring home bags of groceries, Got Indian Steak for you today, it'll be bologna and we'll laugh and enjoy it as if were steak. My mom takes things calmly, when we fight and fuss, she hands us a broom, Sweep the floor if you got all that energy, she'll say. She will make us work it out of our systems. I miss those kids for all their noise.
In the summer we'll go to the stomp dance and that is what I like the most. My dad is a leader and he is real good, every one dances when he leads. Mom used to shake shells, but not any more. Instead I do. That is when I feel different and not the crazy kid I usually am. I understand why those other tribes think so much of dancing. The most important thing an Indian can do is dance.
I don't know what I'll do when I get old, but I know one thing I'll camp every summer and shake shells. I won't be a person who writes stories.
Maybe I can write something spooky, tell one of those stories my grandma used to tell us to make us behave. The first word an Indian kid learns is 'Huhma, Hon-ka!
You know about stilabatchkas, those little people who call kids and gets them lost. I could tell a story about how that happened to my grandma's nephew. There are alot more scary stories, but it's best not to talk about them.

Semonee: Don't tell us any at night, we'd never go to sleep. I know some of those stories too.
I read so many things that I have learned many things, but I don't know my own mind. I don't know if I make up poems myself or if it is just memories of what I have read. A lot of times I think I have made them up then I'll find it was something I read.
I'd like to say in my own words, but what are my own words?
I love Lord Byron, but am I just trying to copy his poems? I don't want to do that. I want to create my own ideas.

Semonee: There are so many words to use, putting them together to mean something is so hard. Onomatopoeia is such a pretty word, it means sounds, I can't put the sounds in my head on paper. Bzzz of the bees, hiss of the tires. What can be made poetic out of that?
I've read of one hand clapping. It boggles my brain, who could hear that? My imagination cannot stretch that far.
Mrs. Magpie told me of some people who are not mentally equipped to do what others can do. Yet they can create art, music or have great mathamatical ability. It is as if they were gifted with one special part in their brains. They can see it in their heads and act upon it. I wonder if they were deprived in one way and gifted in another to be born to show the world that nothing is impossible.
We only use a part of our brains, Mrs. Magpie says, if we used all of it, what wonders we could perform! Instead we fill it up with trivia. I don't believe I'll ever have material things, but I can have books. Through my books I can see Paris and Rome. I can ride in a sleigh on crisp cold nights wrapped in furs. I can attend a ball dressed in velvet, rubies and emeralds on my throat and fingers, my hair piled high in glossy curls. I can meet Mr. Darcy time and time again and be Elizabeth.
My house can be Tara. It can be filled with antiques, winding staircases, nooks and crannies, attics under the eaves. Trees lining the driveway. What dreams can be for a girl who has nothing.

Fanny: I can't live in dreams. It's real or it ain't.

Naomie: For one who believes in the hon-kas that doesn't seem true.

Fanny: Those are nightmares. My grandma believes and I believe the old people. They know what's true.

Semonee: And so are my dreams.

Jessica: I have lived real times and believe they are too real. I suppose if you have nothing and wanted something better than nothing, then dreams and books can give you a feeling you possess a reality of sorts.

Semonee: I can possess my mind and with that have a gain. Be on the path to a future. All of us are different, we are alike only in our age. The teen years. Which we will never have again. It is a time for dreams, we'll never have that again . When we are old it will be just memories.

Semonee: I don't plan on being a writer though right now it is such fun to try. I'd rather be a nurse and heal. For my own health I will read and relax away from the problems. It's going to be work and toil from here or out, we'd better enjoy while we can.

Fanny: I don't worry about a job. I'll get married.

Naomi: We probably all will. Mrs. Magpie talked about social work and the need for Indians to have a worker who will listen to them and understand them. That might be a good idea for me. I can't figure out people as it is, guess you have to walk in their moccasins as they say. I don't understand meanness, but it exists and we will have to deal with it.

Jessica: (bitterly) I know about meanness. Mrs. Magpie says don't look back, keep your eyes ahead to the light. It's better to come out of darkness strong, then to wallow in it and be weak.

Semonee: If I were still in the country just sitting staring at the horizon, what would I be thinking? as a kid I would wonder. Where does the sun go? what keeps that airplane up there ? Wonder must creat desire for knowledge. I know I checked out what ever I was wondering about and found answers to my questions. Once I knew then the world did not seem such a strange place.

Well, it is getting late. You know what? I still don't know what I am going to write.

CURTAIN

ACT II SCENE 3

(Next day in the schoolroom, the girls have read their stories except for Semonee)

Semonee: It took me all night and it looks like a bunch of junk. It was so hard to think on one subject. I wish I could write prose or do an alliteration poem. Like Longfellow's Hiawatha, dum te dum te dum te dum. But I can't. It's all free verse. Not even a story at that.

Once there was a child who grew in the
woods who knew only the smell of plowed
earth and the sweet blossoming of fruit
trees.
The child ran through the days delighting
in the fresh morning dew and the sun rising.
The days were full of dreams
nothing to hinder her freedom of spirit.
Waiting for grandmother to come in from
the garden, waiting for the sumptious feast
of supper.
Waiting for company from the silent companion.
Watching grandmother prepare for the night
facing the East, bathing her face.
Undoing her long grey hair from the braid
that wound her head.
Hoping she would speak of other things than
orders
wanting to know who this person is.
Speak to me and tell me all you know,
you have lived so long.
Tell me how you were young, were you like me
am I like you ?
No, it was different then. You said it was
when you do speak of other times
going to town in a wagon drawn by mules.
Dressed in your best, long flowered gown,
kerchief on your head.
You wear them still.

You speak of muddied roads
where streets are today
and wooden stores.
You tell of hard times, nothing to eat
that is why you grow your garden.
You tell of our people, how they lost
their way over the Trail to here.
You say it was better in the old homeland,
yet you cannot know, you were never there.
I do not know what is better, I do not know
what is worse
tell me so I can understand.
Tell me of my mother, my father. Why did
they die?
I want to know, are you glad you kept me ?
We travel this road together, our feet tred
separate ways
My steps are quick, yours are slow
we do not go the same direction.
Grandmother, in the dark and fearsome night
the sounds are stranger than the days'
won't you comfort me in my lonliness?
Do you need me as I need you, to fill
those lonely hours.
Or don't you feel the emptiness as I do.
My grandma, walk the lonely way with me
stay by my side. Without you I am a
child of the woods, frightened and sad.
My grandmother, I love you for being there,
grandmother, wait, wait til I have grown
Stay until I can be alone with myself and not
be afraid.

Semonee: I started out just to talk about grandma. When it is late and every one is asleep and you are the only one awake in the whole world, thoughts crowd in and become distorted or disturbed. I deviated from my course and meandered as it came.

I felt so lonely though the girls were there . They were asleep and I was awake. I was alive and they were out of my world at that time. I kept thinking and writing. I kept thinking, 'Who is there to mourn Logan?' I could picture this lonely man who had lost his family and he thought of when he died who would there be to mourn his passing. I thought of me alive with no one alive with me late at night and I thought who cares about Semonee ? No one. Just my grandma. I am so grateful to her.

Mrs. M: I am reminded of a phrase from the Bible. For our vines have tender grapes and I think of this with each new group of students. The young are so tender and we who are older are entrusted with so much responsibility. It is a duty, not my job, to guide you.

I hope I can give you substance to carry you . To say, I learned this in Mrs. M's class, not to remember me, but to be aware that you did learn it.

There are many wonderful words of solace in the Bible, read the psalms and hear David cry out in him torment. They are words worth remembering. I always remember the times for growing, a season for everything. This is the season for the tender young to grow. As you mature there is another quote. 'You have a right to be here.' Every human is a person, and a part of humanity. You have a right to dignity. Never let any one tell you you are not worthy to have been born.

Be proud. The finest quality is dignity. With dignity you have pride. I was told once by a teacher, perhaps mockingly, that I was a thourough bred because I was a full-blood Indian. I chose to take it as a compliment and held it as that ever since. I feel that way about myself. Not for myself, but for the heritage I have . There is a question which counts most, heritage or environment. It is hard to answer. Our heritage is rich, our environment has been poor at times. We can overcome enviroment, but our heritage remains with us forever.

Semonee: We are a part of all we have met, the poets have a way of saying it. My grandma is my roots and my heritage. My environment will be what I make of it.

Mrs. M: That is true. I have digressed long enough. Time to plunge into the reason we are here, turn to compounds and complexes.

Semonee: (thinking aloud to herself) Today I will study, tomorrow I will learn. I'll leave the schoolroom and homework to go into the future. Whatever is ahead I'll remember this day and tell some one about it. How strange it seems now to think I will be old remembering when I was young.

It is like the day of the sensation of another being inside of me. Lying on the porch my mind dreaming looking at the clouds and I felt this tingling in me. I was lifted above myself and I was looking down at me. Then I knew I was not just me, but another living being. I let the feeling overtake me and felt the life of another being, the most wondrous feeling came as my mind realized and accepted the knowledge, my soul had awakened and was coming alive.

CURTAIN

ACT II SCENE 3

It is now the end of the school year and the girls are having their last class. Mrs. Magpie's room.

Mrs. M.: This is the hard part, saying goodbye to you girls. Every year it is the same. I get to meet you and know you for such a short time. I'll say this, it certainly has been a pleasure having you in my class.

Fanny: We sure did enjoy being here. I guess I am one of your failures though. I never did learn to speak good English. Not your fault, just me. I talk the way I think.

Mrs. M.: You have other qualities that make up the lack of mastering the English language, Fanny. Most importantly your joie de vivre. No, that is not English, Fanny, so don't look so startled. It is French for enjoyment of life and it applies so well to you. I don't know any one who gets so much out of just living than you. You are very fortunate to have that capability. Count that as luck and a blessing that you have such a good family to back you and be beside you through all the adversities around you.

Naomi: I'm glad we are getting on in high school, it'll be that much quicker to get out of school.

Mrs. M: You may not believe it, but as people get older they always say they wish they were back in school and make every effort to go back. This is what is so great about this time, a person can have continuing education no matter what his or her age. There is always something to learn and you never stop learning even without going back.

Jessica: Hard to believe. I liked school in a way. I learned a lot from you. Don't know if I'll use much of it.

Mrs. M: You will, you won't be isolated and you will have to go out in the world. In a way I envy you still having discovery ahead of you. Seeing things I have already seen. All new and exciting. Oh, to be young again!

Fanny: You ain't that old, Mrs. Magpie. You got a lot of years left.

Mrs. M.: It'll be based on what I already know. It isn't expectation any more. I would not dream of telling you all that is in store for you, such as love, marriage, children. This is one experience that is very personal. Each of us will have this in our own way, in our own time.

Mrs.M: This is the last time I will have you as students we'll just take the time to talk about any thing you want.

Semonee: I have never said so much in my life as I do at school. When I go home, it'll be grandma and me again. I'll probably lay on the porch except when I am helping her in the garden and doing the housework. If I could paint, I would paint that. Grandma bending over in the early morning. Her back permanently curved as she picks the weeds and bugs off the plants. I would paint corn in rows, green plants every where. There would be pink flowers on the trees so real you could smell the fragance of the fruit to come. There would be birds flying, clouds forming and it would be all blurry with the heat of the sun.

There would be me laying on my back eyes looking to the sky. Looking for my castles in the air. I would paint that picture to hold forever. It would go with me wherever I went and I would show it to people and say this is from where I came. This is my home. I would look at the picture and hear the music of insects, birds singing and the plants growing, though no human ear has heard grass growing. The song would be my grandma singing the songs of her ancestors and mine. Hal-ah=lay, Hal=ah=lay Lu-yah! an anthem to the Creator of us all. Mekko sah ba . I would hold that dear to me My song of the ages of my life. The seven valleys we traverse. I will write of my dreams and they will be as fairy tales, gossamer weavings of Monet colors.

Pale pinks, soft blues, emerald greens
those are the colors of my dreams.
Azure, transluscent, how lovely that
seems, clear yet not enough to see.
This is what I have in my mind.

Mrs. M: I wish I had had the ability to paint, for me it would have been vivid colors of Renaissance. I am inclined to beginnigs, it is endings that are difficult. You will find that when an era ends for you, it will seem the end of everything. It isn't. As long as you breathe there is still more time for you.

We dwelt in the past in our English literature, nothing could be more ancient than the Canterbury tales. Who could ever have spoken like that? we had our amusement over that. But then how many could ever speak our language ?

Jessica: I'd rather speak French than those English Lit poems again. When I go home this summer I guess I'll get another puppy. He won't replace Bear, he'll be an addition to my affection, to see how much love I can feel. I thought I had given it all to Bear but I still have a need to love another pet. My dog was not just a pet. He was a person to me and he really loved me, you can tell that. An animal loves people more than people can ever love. You can be as mean a person there is and your dog will love you. I did not just take I gave in return to Bear. We shared. If I could meet a person I can do that with, then I would be happy. He'd have to love my dog though.

Naomi: I feel so much older. I had a romance. (laughs) Romeo and Juliet in modern times. For he was like the sunbeam, glancing lightly over the trees. He was too high for me to reach. I tried to touch and tried to catch the sunbeam,as it danced away.

I can hardly wait for the next chance I get to see how I handle it. Live and learn. Thank goodness I am only sixteen now. That gives me a lot of chances.

Fanny: Nothing for me but the day. Tomorrow is tomorrow, yesterday's gone, today is here and now. I'm just glad I can escape from four walls and bunk beds. Not that I won't miss you girls, you are my friends, it's nice knowing you. I'll see you in the fall. I see you more than I do my kid brothers and sisters so you know I will be glad to be with them. Those little round mugs smiling and those little wide mouths yowling. I can hardly wait. My mom will be the same as always, telling me, now that you are back, here's all the work I saved just for you. Dad will say bet you didn't get good food like moma's home cooking did you.? time to fatten you up again. And we'll pile into the car and go into town for some ice cream.
A family is so good, the more the better. I got lots of uncles, aunts, cousins and they surround me and keep me warm. People see us and say we are a tribe of our own. To belong is to be safe, I'd hate to be alone.

Semonee: There's consolation in being alone. That's all I've ever been except for here at school. Being alone a person has to depend only on ones self. It makes me self-reliant. Who is there to help me? I am alone not lonely. Not any more. I can feel good with myself and know me.

Semonee: It can be a good insight. Of course at night those terrors of the unknown grab at you. The thought of death comes and if you can't pray, it's not easy to make it through the night. That's when I go to writing. I'm talking to some one else, unseen people, trying to tell them about me. Why should they want to know ? we want recognition that we are here at least. Even being alone I feel as if I should tell some one, hey out there, I'm here. I exist! I have feelings.

There have been many times when I felt helpless, a situation comes up. Down and out. When I needed money to buy new shoes and we did not have it, no way to get it. I felt angry and depressed. I'm never going to have any thing when I need it! No one cares about me. I can't burden grandma when I know she can't afford it. I sat on the porch a little rain cloud over my head, chin drooping into my fists. Cinderella without a glass slipper. Then over the horizon came a cousin, no one ever came to see us except on rare occasion. Now what news of doom ? Instead she said her mother was clearing out her things and found some shoes I might be able to use. USE! wear them til they were thin and bare is what I was going to do. Into each life some rain must fall, but I had my share of storms and wind. Once in a while the sun does shine. That is Hope. Maybe its Faith too. I know that if I don't give in and stand up to face it, meet it I can head off despair.

Mrs. M: I feel you will be able to confront and defeat any hopeless situation. Semonee. All of you have it in you to keep the Faith.
Always keep your spirit of hope and you'll be alright. My husband talks of his tribe and the old ways of seeking a vision. When the boy must reach manhood by testing himself. He goes to a high place and fasts for four days, with no equipment except his goal in mind. He must withstand all the demons waiting. When he has conquered his fears, he sees his vision and that guides him for the rest of his life. We do much the same with every day problems.
The vines have tender grapes and must not turn bitter. Our roots are deep and strong. You will grow again another season through your own young. Remember the prophet said, Children come through you not to you. I have had many children. I have seen them grow and go on their way.

Mrs. M: I remember them all. Just as I'll think of all of you. Take care of yourselves and be as happy as you can.

Naomi: Thank you, Mrs. Magpie. I appreciate all your attention to me and for helping me learn what I would never have learned.

Jessica: Me too, Mrs. Magpie. I am going to miss your class, first time I didn't fall asleep in English.

Fanny: Well, I did, I have to admit, some of those plays were pretty boring. I did kind of good, or is it well? any way for me, it wasn't bad.

Semonee: I feel I got so much from this class. The poetry made me see things I'd never have seen until I read those words. I would never have known Lord Byron. I want to be Childe Harold on his way to seeking his vision.

Is Poor LO in that book? No one ever remembers the rest of it which gives a different meaning to that saying. I believe it was more like, Lo, the Poor Indian who sees beauty in everything. You know like nature. And in the end he was not poor at all, but richer than those who could not see. Byron knew that about us. Or he wrote it as if he knew about us. He really didn't I suppose, but he did know we are different.

Lo, the poor Indian. So many connotations to that. I never have thought we were poor except materially. We can live with that. We are not poor because we lost our land, we are poor because we lost our spirit. We can't live without that. Lo, the poor Indian who lost his soul should be more like it. We'll get it back, something so wonderful was meant to be, it's not lost, it just hasn't been found.

I might attempt to restore belief in heritage some day. On a small scale. It'd have to be for me. I'd like to join a group who does something about uniting Indians. I can't do that alone. I don't always want to be alone.

Mrs. Magpie, I can't add any more to what the others have said. What more could we say:?: From my heart I do thank you.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE 1

Back in the home of Semonee as she talks to the reporter.

Semonee: That was the last time I saw any of them... My freshman year grandmother died and I was taken to California to live with my father's relatives. I didn't even know them very well, so I withdrew more or less. I began writing then to remember and keep fresh my memories of my old home. I wondered is that what grandmother meant, when she spoke of the home land she had never seen, but had been told by her mother until it seemed as if she had been there? I had been there though in the only home I had ever known.

Growing up in the city made me retreat to my country which I could only have in my mind. Now I knew the difference in what was best. Never again would I want to see cement and smoke. No one seems free in the city and we scurry here and there looking for a refuge. All of us strangers to each other. I thought I had known lonliness before. This was almost unbearable. Then I began a diary, remembering Mrs. Magpie's words to write whatever we feel. It must have been full of tears and woe. I never read it except once after I was eighteen and ready to go on.

I went to nursing school and devoted most of my time caring for others more helpless than I. In seeing the vulnerability of ill people, I was glad to use my strength in caring for them. I went to a reservation hospital so I could feel the freedom of open space again.

Leslie: Do you always want to be alone? you never married?

Semonee: There's a time for everything. I will when I meet Mr. Darcy.

Leslie: You won't find him I'm afraid. Wouldn't an ordinary man do?

Semonee: (Withdrawing some what) I don't believe that is important for any one to know about me as of now. It is my writing that I want to talk about.

Leslie: In other words it's no one's business?

Semonee: No, it's not that so much, but it is hard for me to speak of personal matters of that nature. It is the Indian way. We don't go rhapsodizing over our lovelife. It is such a deep feeling that it is for our selves to know and share only with the person we love. You won't hear of hearts and flowers in Indian communications. We'd rather laugh and joke about any thing else and not show our serious side except with each other.

Leslie: You did say that in your book. I have an idea you don't reveal all you

Leslie; feel. Why this reserve ? does it make you embarrassed ?

Semonee: We don't want to be laughed at and we'd feel foolish if we said something serious and were laughed at. It would hurt and we hurt so much a lot of times. We don't want hurt piled on hurt.

Leslie: Are your people more sensitive than most?

Semonee: We are. We didn't realize it. I didn't that is until I was exposed to the raw side of life in California. I saw people who did not have any dignity. They didn't care about themselves or the society they live in. They had no respect for the simplest facts of life. Indians are offended by grossness so I suppose we are more sensitive.

That is what I wanted to say, that we were not wild, savages who lived as animals. We have a deep sense of nature, but that is not being wild. We are naturalist. This is what bothers non-Indians that we want nature to remain the same. The progress they want is not what we believe to be good for them or us. I've seen progress is not natural to me. It seems it is a tearing down to replacing with a facade. Cardboard instead of wood. A whole different spectrum. Why can't people let things remain beautiful in its natural element instead of thinking progress is better in falseness? I hope I am not lecturing you. This is the prime reason our two cultures will never agree. Some one has to give, we are few but we are stubborn. Time will tell who was right. We Indians feel we know who is right. We feel you know it too, but it can't be admitted. Then what happened was not justified. I don't want to fight the old war, that has not been my intention even with the book, which did get bitter at times.

Leslie: Yes, it did. This is why I had a misconceived impression that you would be a rather tough lady with fire in her eye.

Semonee: The girl who loved poetry still exists, only she has seen reality and got a little bitter. Mrs. Magpie's tender child got a little hard. My next attempt will be back to what I truly feel and that will be my love of nature.

Leslie: (Rising) I wish you luck and it was very nice talking to you. (Leaves)

Semonee: (Goes to the window and looks out, turns back) Who would have believed I would spend an hour talking to a person I would not have ever met on my own accord? It wasn't too hard.

ACT III

SCENE 1

SEMONEE: I hope that is all I have to do for now. I don't want to become a novelty.

TIME

It's time to regain my soul again. It's been submerged too long.
Time to reflect, to be still again.
To listen for the bird's song.
Come's the morning, comes the dawn, I can awake.

Awake now, soul, bring forth me.

A very tired one is waiting, bring strength to my mind.
Give me this day and another day
til the song is Sung.

END