

REDBONE

A full-length, dramatic play

By

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Act 1

SCENE 1

It's a cool morning in late spring in Northern Minnesota.

A rundown front porch with three chairs and a door in the center.

A **Video Screen** activates and reveals film of a drone flying over the Fond Du Lac Ojibwe Reservation. The beauty of the landscape is breathtaking. Superimposed over the video are the words.

**Fond Du Lac
Ojibwe Reservation
Northern MN
2002**

The **Video Screen** slowly goes dark.

Lights come up.

ROBERT BIRDSONG (40), a robust, full-blooded Ojibwe, enters. He is tipsy and walking toward the porch. EMMA BIRDSONG (38), his slim, shy Caucasian wife, is sitting on the porch beading a headband.

Guitar music is coming from behind the door. It is original country-blues style music.

ROBERT

He playing that damn music again? Instead of going to school?

EMMA

Let him alone. It's the only thing he cares about.

ROBERT

It's your fault. Putting crazy ideas in his head.

EMMA

Why don't you go in there and sing with him?

ROBERT

Maybe later.....

Robert steps onto the porch, sits, and starts to sing a droning Ojibwe song. He has a strong, pleasing voice.

ROBERT

“Gegwa gwiinanendige n’bazigim
kina gwo gego da nishin n’bazigim”

(Don't you worry my sweetheart
Everything will be all right my sweetheart)

Inside, the guitar playing adjusts to the father's song, and the two harmonize singing the song in Ojibwe. After a few moments, the door opens and JAMES BIRDSONG (18), an introspective and confused teenager, comes out with his guitar and a bottle of beer.

JAMES

Guess we're both going to be drunk today.

ROBERT

How are you going to get anywhere spending all your time playing music?

JAMES

You don't have to deal with the hate I get everyday at school. Nobody likes half bloods. Thanks for that..... Here's a song I wrote for you, Mom

He sits in a chair and begins to sing a beautiful, original, country song: “Daybreak.”

Robert falls asleep but Emma listens and softly cries as the story in the song progresses.

JAMES

“Daybreak is the sweet time
Of my Emma Rose’s day
We watch the sun rise up
Before we’re on our way

The times are rough and ready
Jobs seem to come and go
Can still back down the wolf
But gettin’ ahead is slow....”

Suddenly, we hear off-stage a car skidding to a stop. Doors slam and HIGH SCHOOL BUDDY #1 (18) and HIGH SCHOOL BUDDY #2 (17), obviously high, stumble on-stage and stand away from the porch.

HIGH SCHOOL BUDDY #1

Hey! You crazy Redbone. You have to drive. We’re wasted..

EMMA

Please don’t go. Finish your song.

JAMES

Later, mom. I’ll finish it tonight.

JAMES leaves his guitar, kisses his mom, then kicks his father’s chair leg. Robert snorts awake as James laughs and runs to his friends. The three run off-stage. We hear the car start and peel out with lots of shouting.

ROBERT

He’s riding for a fall. Just like his grandfather.

He picks up the guitar and begins to noodle and play the tune James was singing.

EMMA

You mean, just like his *father*..... Maybe music can save him....

Robert continues to play the guitar as the lights slowly go to dark.

SCENE 2

The **Video Screen** activates. A home movie plays.

We see FRANCINE OLSEN (8) and NANCY OLSEN (12) laughing and taking turns filming each other with a home video camera as they walk toward their school bus stop.

They arrive at the bus stop with Francine shooting a teasing Nan.

Suddenly, the camera pans off of Nan. An out of control car careens into view. It goes into a skid on the ice and heads straight for Nan and the camera. The camera sees Nan hit by the car, then flips upside down and goes black.

We hear sounds of the accident scene.

The camera comes back on. The camera looks at a dead Nan lying on the ground, a wrecked car on its side, and the three teenage boys who were in the car shaking and crying beside the road. JAMES BIRDSONG was the driver. The camera zooms in on his face and goes black.

The **Video Screen** goes dark.

The sounds of the accident scene fade and are replaced by the sounds of war.

SCENE 3

A small military base storage room with a cot, a small table and chair. A computer is set up on the table.

The **Video Screen** activates and shows the words

15 Years Later.
Kabal, Iraq

The sounds of war continue in the distance.

The **Video Screen** goes dark as the lights come up.

FRANCINE OLSEN, (now 23), an intense and driven soldier, is standing by the cot taking off her sidearm, a 9mm gun. She is in military shorts and a T-shirt and has a blood-stained bandage on her leg.

There are cameras, cables, and microphones scattered on the cot, along with her combat gear and her helmet, which has a small Go-Pro camera mounted on it.

She detaches the Go-Pro camera from her helmet, sits down at the table, and hooks it up to her computer.

FRANCINE

So.....Let's see The Movie of the Day

The **Video Screen** activates and on it we see what Francine is seeing on her computer. She starts the video.

There is a jerky, POV helmet cam replay of action she recorded earlier in the day.

We see a squad of soldiers under fire. Suddenly, ONE SOLDIER (18) is wounded badly and falls in the street. Instinctively, Francine rushes to help. She and ANOTHER SOLDIER (20) pull the wounded man to safety. A round grazes her leg and the helmet cam looks down at her bloody leg, then up at the wounded soldier.

The picture freezes.

FRANCINE

Good luck, soldier. Punched your ticket out of here the hard way.... Just another day at the office in the 55th Signal Corps... unless you count getting shot....

She disconnects the Go-Pro camera from the computer and the **Video Screen** goes dark.

FRANCINE

Now for the good stuff.

The **Video Screen** activates again and shows Francine searching her computer. Suddenly, a newscast on WDIO-TV in Duluth, MN appears.

We see reporter CHRISTA MAITLAND (25) standing in front of a prison holding a microphone.

CHRISTA MAITLAND

Fifteen years ago James Birdsong was driving drunk and killed twelve-year old Nancy Olsen as she was waiting for her school bus. Today he was released from prison.

As Christa continues to talk, we see JAMES BIRDSONG (now 33) slowly walking away from the prison. He is gaunt with a shaved head and carrying his belongings in a plastic bag. A beat-up guitar is slung over his shoulder.

CHRISTA MAITLAND (V.O.)

According to the Warden he was a model prisoner and often entertained the inmates with his music. He refused to talk to me.

Christa Maitland re-appears in front of the prison.

CHRISTA MAITLAND

Nancy Olsen's only living relative is her younger sister, Francine, who is currently serving a second tour in the US Army in Iraq. Reporting from St. Cloud State Prison, outside Duluth, Minnesota, this is Christa Maitland.

The video freezes.

FRANCINE

You didn't think I'd forget, did you?....

Francine stares at her small screen and slams her computer shut.

The **Video Screen** goes instantly dark.

She stands up and shakes her head. She is in agony remembering the tragic accident that killed her sister.

The **Video Screen** activates and a jerky, frenzied replay of the Accident footage ends in a freeze frame of Nan's dead body.

Francine lets out a silent scream as the **Video Screen** and stage lights fade to dark.

SCENE 4

After a few seconds the **Video Screen** activates with footage of a loud, wild Rave Club in NYC in full party mode. People are dancing and screaming. The music thumps. Words appears over the footage.

Later That Night in New York City

After a few seconds the text fades off and the Rave Club footage continues with music.

Near the **Video Screen** is a table and chairs.

Lights come up.

Seated at the table are ROSS SEBAL (36), a manic, punk-looking, sexual predator with green, spiked hair and obviously under the influence of drugs. He is sitting next to his girlfriend, ILONA (18,) a stoned party girl in a revealing steam punk outfit.

ROSS

Ditch it. This scene is getting old. Let's go to your place.

Ross fondles her and tries to kiss her.

ILONA

Nooooo.....Ross.....Let's dance!

ROSS

Here's some E. Now, we don't need to dance

He gives her an Ecstasy pill and takes one himself.

ILONA

Whooooo..... The night is exploding..... So tope..... It's Gucci..... Dance!.....

Ilona grooves to the music, then jumps up and tries to pull Ross toward the **Video Screen** and the Rave party. Ross gets up and grabs her roughly.

ROSS

You're not listening.

He starts to pull her away from the **Video Screen**. Ilona does an ear-splitting shriek and Ross slaps her hard. A **BOUNCER (30)** enters.

BOUNCER

Leave the lady alone. It's time to go.

He grabs Ross by the arm. Ilona protests. Ross quickly knees him in the groin then punches him hard. The Bouncer collapses on the floor. Ilona starts laughing.

ROSS

(to the Bouncer)

Maybe you should mind your own business.

ILONA

(to the Bouncer)

Gotta sip more tea, Bruh, or you won't be bouncing anymore.....

She puts her arm around Ross.

ROSS

It's gonna be a long and kinky night, Ilona. Are you ready.....?

ILONA

Whooooo.....Bring on the straight fire.....!

Ross stomps on the groaning Bouncer and the two exit off-stage laughing, as the lights and music go down and the **Video Screen** goes dark.

SCENE 5

A conference table at Global Media, with a door upstage.

The **Video Screen** activates and the words say:

3 Years Later.
Today

After a few seconds the words are replaced by a

“Global Media” logo.

Lights come up.

RENATA MARENCO (42), an attractive, driven Latina, ABE SEBAL (65), the distinguished, no-nonsense owner of Global Media, ROSS SEBAL (now 39), Abe's son, and ILONA (now 21) are having a meeting.

Ilona seems to be in a daze and is dressed in a stylized, WW1 pilot's outfit.

ABE

Ilona, why don't you wait for Ross out in the lounge area?

ILONA

.... Lounge area?....

Ross points to the door. Ilona jumps up, loses her balance, and falls into Abe's lap.

He pushes her back up. She turns, gives Ross a kiss in his ear, and stumbles to the door.

ILONA

See you later, Rossie....

Ross blows her a kiss. Abe and Renata exchange disapproving looks. Ilona exits.

ABE

How many times do I have to tell you not to bring your freak show to work?

ROSS

Just having some fun, dad.

ABE

Fun has always been your problem.

ROSS

(to Renata)

So, who cares about Americana music?

Renata stands up with a remote clicker and the logo on the **Video Screen** changes to fit her presentation.

RENATA

(Pitching)

It's the next big thing. It's ready to be discovered by mainstream Americans. The Grammys recognized Americana Music in 2010 by giving it its own category. Young audiences have a built in hunger to discover new music. Bob Dylan, Wilco, Bruce Springsteen, and Emmylou Harris all love and sing Americana. Now there is a new generation of Americana singers who will be discovered on *Backroads*. The hot, new, music-documentary show.

ROSS

That's crazy. Way, way too niche. How could we promote these nobody singers?

RENATA

That's the hook. Lots of today's biggest stars recognize Americana music as the roots to their music. Bono, Mick Jagger, James Taylor, George Straight, Dolly Parton. We get these legends to be in the documentaries and promote the show.

Their fans will have a reason to watch *Backroads*, and the show becomes the next-big-thing showcase. It's *Behind the Music* meets *Crazy Heart*.

ROSS

You're out of your mind.

RENATA

You know, Ross, that's what industry folks said about rap and hip-hop twenty-five years ago. Now you make your living there.

ABE

Interesting. I think you might be on to something. *CMT Crossroads* does something similar and its been a hit for DirectTV since 2002. I like connecting current stars with new talent. *The Voice* has been doing it forever. I read your proposal and it makes sense. You've made successful programs for us before. Let's do this. We'll give you some money to shoot a pilot episode. We'll evaluate it, then make the decision on the series.

RENATA

Thank you, Abe.

ABE

I'll have Ross shepherd things from our end. Who is the pilot artist going to be?

RENATA

A new, talented, diamond in the rough. He's got a background right out of a novel. He's a mixed race Native American who sings like Prine and Straight. He's served time in prison and been out for a few years. He's been playing small venues and his hard core fans are dying for him. He's ready to explode. His name is Ben Nighthawk.

She brings up on the **Video Screen** a quick series of homemade You Tube video clips featuring Ben Nighthawk.

BEN NIGHTHAWK, (the former James Birdsong), is now heavier and has long hair and a full beard.

He sings with a soulful, emotional, blues-country-roots style.

Renata stops the quick clips and plays a homemade video of Ben singing "**Slippery Spark**" in a cafe setting.

BEN
(On the **Video Screen**)

“Too many nights we meet
When the whiskey spins my mind.
Down a long, dark hall of hurt.
She helps me to unwind.

We were always rebel lovers,
Out of bounds in our trailer park.
Was she ever mine, I wonder,
How’d we lose that slippery spark?

We cruised the roads all night.
Two crazy outlaw kids.
Then lay in the sand and grass
And pinched the Katydid

Her eyes saw life on fire.
Her smiles were my last hope.
..... Slipping away in the Jack.
Lost in a drifting smoke...”

The **Video Screen** freezes.

ROSS

Are you kidding me? You think a young audience is ready for sad songs from a half-breed that make you want to get drunk and kill yourself? I’ll look around for a group with real appeal. I’ll send you their music and bios.

RENATA

No way. I’ve been an Americana fan my whole life. *Backroads* isn’t about urban or pop or metal. It’s roots. And the mainstream audience is ready for it.

ABE

Work with her, Ross. That’s an order. We’ve been too narrow for too long with our contract artists and music programming. It’s time for a change.

ROSS

Guess what? I live this stuff everyday. I know all the agents, artists, and producers. If this crazy idea is going to work, we need someone or some group with a wider, younger appeal.

ABE

Looks like you two will have to work this out.

Abe gets up.

ABE

I need to have Ben Nighthawk under contract by the end of next week. You have six weeks to shoot and edit a one-hour pilot. I'll give you a budget of \$40,000. Good luck, Renata.

He moves toward the door. When he opens the door Ilona can be heard singing Nicki Minaj's "Turn Me On." Abe is startled, then leaves.

ROSS

My father has never understood how the music industry works. And it looks like you don't either.

He points to the **Video Screen**.

ROSS

How many slow songs from pissed-off red-necks, or in this case red-*man*, can the audience take?

RENATA

Get over it. Americana music is here to stay. If you screw this pilot up in any way, I'll make sure your father knows all the sick details.

ROSS

Oh, really. Well, I'm in charge of the music division, whether you like it or not, so everything goes through me. Back off on the threats. My problem is finding a name artist who would be willing to perform with your Indian Johnny Cash.

Renata gives Ross a look of disgust as the lights and **Video Screen** fade down.

SCENE 6

A small church. A few rows of chairs facing a performance area that consists of a chair, mic, amp, and guitar stand.

Lights up.

TOM ANDERSON (52), a world-weary production lifer; CLIFF ADAMS (38), a lanky, easy-going, hippy-type cameraman;

BETH STANIK (32), a fit, quiet, attractive sound person; and Francine are setting up to record a performance by Ben Nighthawk.

Down stage right Tom is setting up his control center: a small table with four monitors on it, and a wireless intercom system with a headset.

Cliff is taking his camera out of a case and setting it up on a tri-pod. Beth is putting together her audio gear and shotgun mic.

Francine is unpacking two Go-Pro cameras and assembling her handheld shoulder camera.

The **Video Screen** activates and reads

1 Week Later.
A Small Church
Saginaw, Michigan

After a few seconds the **Video Screen** goes dark.

TOM

Ben has checked into the motel and is on his way. Should be here soon. I told him to just show up for his concert and do what he always does. We'll take care of the rest.

CLIFF

Man, we are really out here in the sticks. It's a good thing I've got these kelp bars to keep me centered..... If more people dug kelp the world would be a better place.

TOM

Like a New Green Deal for your teeth?

CLIFF

Ha. Ha. Someday you'll beg for a kelp bar..... Anyway, my brother lives in Chicago and is a huge fan of Ben Nighthawk's.

BETH

Beautiful voice with a deep, lost kind of sound. Really different. Can't wait to see him perform live. You want me in the front with the shotgun?

TOM

Yeah. Front row. Put a wireless on him, too. Try to hide it. Cliff, set the sticks up behind the audience.

CLIFF

It's not looking like sushi will be in the mix for a late snack after the show. Man, it looks like everybody around here drives a dirty pick-up truck.

BETH

This church has great acoustics for a singer.

TOM

Francine, put the Go-Pro cameras front and back, then you'll work Ben and the audience while he's performing.

FRANCINE

Right. So who is this guy?

TOM

Interesting question. He's a mixed race Indian with a checkered past and one hell of a voice. He writes original songs that run the gamut of country Americana. We've got two weeks, six booked performances, and lots of time to capture his music and find out who he is. It's as simple and complex as that.

FRANCINE

I checked him out on YouTube. The videos are pretty low end. There's nothing on Google about him. No official fan club. No social media. No SoundCloud or spotify tracks..... Nothing. Just those shaky live performances on YouTube. He says he's based in Chicago, but I don't think that's where he's from.

TOM

Well, he's going to be here soon. You can ask him. The big thing is he can sing and his hard core fans love him. He sells CDs at his concerts and the word is spreading. Somehow Global Media found him. Lighten up and enjoy the ride.

An enthusiastic crowd begins to arrive. Tom goes to his monitor table, Cliff goes to his camera that is set up behind the audience facing the performance area, Beth sits in the front row with her shotgun mic, and Francine starts shooting the action hand held. They all have wireless head sets on.

Ben enters carrying his guitar case and walks to the performance area. The audience buzzes. He waves to Tom, makes his way to the chair, amp, and mic setup, sits, takes his guitar out of the case and begins to tune it. Beth starts to clip an FM wireless mic on him. He smiles and there is an instant spark.

The **Video Screen** activates and we see the output of 4 video cameras (Francine's, Cliff's, and the two fixed Go-Pros) in a quad screen. These match the 4 monitors in Tom's control area.

The audience settles down into the chairs. Ben finishes his prep, turns on the mic, and begins his performance.

BEN

Hello, Everyone. Many thanks for coming out tonight to hear my music. As a special treat we have a documentary crew here filming the concert for a new TV show pilot called *Backroads*.

The audience claps and cheers.

BEN

So just be yourselves and enjoy the show. And who knows, next week you might be famous.

The crowd laughs and hoots.

BEN

Here's a song that's one of my favorites. It's a Be-careful- what-you-wish-for song: "The Dance Man."

He sings with a charismatic, enigmatic smile.

“We knew the whispered stories
That warned of his strange appeal.
The Dance Man watches darkly
When you ask for a special deal

We were carefree kids and crazy
Red-eye opened up our chance
We made the fateful call
“We’re ready for your dance.”

He stole out of the twilight
Settled in with a wicked grin
Right across the dancing sweet fire
To watch our deadly sins.

The Dance Man knows the story,
Of love with no regret.
He wrote the book on lonely,
No sense trying to forget....”

His lights dim and his volume lowers. We hear
the talk on the crew’s intercom in stage
whispers.

The **Video Screen** continues to show the
performance in a quad screen.

TOM

Cliff, get in tighter. He’s got a great face. Beth, up the audio a little. Francine work the
audience more. They are lapping this up.

FRANCINE

Something is strange here...

TOM

Forget it.

CLIFF

He looks like a guy who might be into kelp.

FRANCINE

He’s giving off a strange vibe....

BETH

I wouldn't call it strange. Maybe hot....

TOM

Knock it off. Pay attention to what you're doing.

Ben's voice comes up to full volume as the lights come up on him and he finishes the song.

BEN

".... I see the Dance Man laughing
Through the smoke and misty dreams
Lost souls around the sweet fire
Ripe fruit for deadly schemes

Someday we'll all return
To the fire we can't forget
And the Dance Man will remind us
Only fools have no regrets
Only fools have no regrets...."

Lots of applause and yelling.

Francine continues to move around shooting the action.

The **Video Screen** keeps the quad cameras

Ben noodles on the guitar

BEN

Thank you very much.... My father was a full-blooded Ojibwe and my mom was white. We couldn't live on the Reservation because only full bloods were allowed. So we lived right next to the Reservation. That caused a lot of problems.

I spent fifteen years in prison for a tragic accident that ended in a death. By the time I got out both my parents were gone.... I'm still trying to cope with everything.... Part of my healing is to write songs and tell my story..... Not really looking for fame and fortune, just a small, happy life..... Here's a song I wrote about my life in prison. It's called "Stone Winds"....

BEN

“It’s a quick, hard ride, my friend
From the Res to the Stone Hotel
Lots of angry brothers
Riding the wind that blows through hell

I see the broken lives
Eyes that stare and do not see
Forgotten dreams and egos
Tough guys longing to be free...”

The lights dim on Ben and his volume lowers.
We hear the Intercom talk in stage whispers

TOM

Cliff, work a three step series.

CLIFF

You got it, Daddy-O....

BETH

This is amazing....

FRANCINE

I’m getting chills....

TOM

Watch your focus...

Ben’s voice comes up to full volume as his
lights come up and he finishes the song.

BEN

“....Can the Spirit hear me singing
On my Turtle Island stone?
My wolf howls to the sunset,
The pipes for Crane and Loon

My music carves a notch
In the endless yard patrol.

Someday I'll get the Keys
To free my angry soul

I'll check out soon, my brother.
From the cold, damp Stone Hotel.
Is there life for a lost Ojibwe
Riding the wind that blows through hell?

Lots of applause and yelling.

BEN

Thank you. As you can guess, prison was not a nice place. Especially if you're a mixed race guy like me.... A Redbone...

He noodles on his guitar.

BEN

Here's a song I've been struggling with. It tries to tell the story of a terrible experience I had when I was eighteen. Hope you like it.... It's called "Lost Morning."

He looks off into the distance and begins to sing. As he sings the audience becomes still. The song is powerful and Ben Nighthawk is lost in the emotion.

BEN

"With the white earth around me
I lost my innocence
Two miles from home
Just a jump beyond the fence....

She was no one that I knew
Just a kid out on the road
The ice and my mistake
Brought a life to an end

Can I take it back, child?
Back up those crooked wheels.
Start over that lost morning
Can I make another deal?...."

As Ben sings, Francine makes her way to in front of the **Video Screen**.

She slowly sits down on the floor with her camera in her lap and goes into shock. She realizes the song is about the accident that killed her sister, Nan, and that Ben Nighthawk is James Birdsong.

In anguish she turns to the **Video Screen**.

The **Video Screen** changes from the four camera quad effect to a replay of the Home Movie of Francine and her sister, Nan, walking to the bus stop. Only now the footage is speeded up and disjointed and ends with a freeze on James Birdsong's face.

The **Video Screen** changes back to the 4 camera quad. Francine's camera is severely out of focus.

The lights dim on Ben and his voice lowers. We hear the intercom

TOM

Francine, what happened? You're out of focus. We need faces. People are crying. This is great stuff.

FRANCINE

Can't breathe.....

TOM

What the hell is going on? Cliff, go in tighter on him. He's tearing up.... Francine. Are you OK?

Francine struggles up, shakes herself, puts the camera back on her shoulder, and resumes shooting.

FRANCINE

Sorry. Got a little woozy for a second.

She frames Ben in a close-up and her camera returns to in-focus on the **Video Screen** quad.

She slowly walks toward Ben.

TOM

OK. Cliff, take the camera off the sticks and work the audience. Hurry!

Cliff quickly detaches his camera and starts working the audience hand held.

TOM

Beth, watch your levels.

BETH

Francine looks upset.

TOM

Don't worry about it. Her shot looks fine.

The lights come up on Ben Nighthawk as he finishes the song.

BEN

“.....She died that day alone
Outside Duluth.
I died along with her.
Lost my battle with the truth

Can I take it back, child?
Back up those crooked wheels.
Start over that lost morning,
Can I make another deal?
With a song.....”

The song ends. It is received with a stunned silence, then rousing applause and cheers.

Ben gives his audience a nod and a smile, turns, and sees Francine right beside him, on one knee, shooting up at him.

The clapping fades and all lights go down except spots on Ben and Francine.

On the **Video Screen** Francine's camera expands to take over the screen. It's an extreme close-up of Ben's face.

She suddenly bolts upright and stands looking down at Ben, pointing her camera at him.

The **Video Screen** explodes into darkness.

FRANCINE

It was you!.....

Ben is startled and slowly stands up. They are face to face.

BEN

I don't understand.....

Francine stops shooting, rests her camera on her hip, and they stare at each other. Ben slowly sits back down as their lights slowly fade to black.

SCENE 7

Cliff and Tom's motel room that night.

Two beds, two chairs, and a table.

The **Video Screen** activates and shows the words

After the Concert

After a few seconds the **Video Screen** goes dark.

Lights come up.

Beth, Francine, Tom, and Cliff enter excitedly with pizza and drinks. Cliff pulls out a food bar and dramatically starts to peel the wrapper.

CLIFF

Time for some soul food. Turnip bars. Anybody want one?

TOM

Doesn't everybody hate turnips?

CLIFF

It could be the new kelp!..... Man, Ben Nighthawk was phenomenal tonight. Reminds me a little of Harry Nilsson in a weird way... from back in the day. Where is he?

TOM

In his room. Drove all the way from Chicago today in that beat up Buick. Took a pass on the party.

Tom goes to a bag on the table and starts sorting through digital camera files.

BETH

He reminds me of Steve Earl. God. What a face for sadness.

CLIFF

I think we have some sparks here, folks. Beth has always been a sucker for the lost and lonely. What do you think, Francine? You've been awfully quiet. And what happened to your camera during that song about the young kid?

FRANCINE

Got a little light headed for a minute. No problem.

BETH

And that weird stand-off with Ben after the song?

FRANCINE

Just a flashback to Iraq. I get them sometimes.

Tom has gathered up all the camera files.

TOM

Good work tonight everybody. The footage looks great. I'll be in the van editing and uploading to Renata and Ross.

He exits.

BETH

He must have a strange story to tell. He looks completely haunted. Growing up, the Indian thing must be tough.

FRANCINE

Hey. Don't get too charmed by this guy. Don't forget he killed someone.

CLIFF

That's a little harsh. He served his time, man. Chill a little.

FRANCINE

Easy for you to say. Killers don't get passes.

CLIFF

Maybe you need some green tea and a kelp scone.....

BETH

(laughing)

Well... He may be chasing demons but he's still a sexy dude. Let's go, Francine. It's been a long day.

FRANCINE

Pleasant dreams.....

They exit.

CLIFF

She is a tough mama.

He takes a bite of his turnip bar and smiles.

The lights go down.

SCENE 8

A railing outside the motel rooms, moments later.

Lights come up.

Ben Nighthawk is smoking a cigarette and staring into the night. Francine comes out of her and Beth's room. They nod to each other. **Ben does not recognize Francine as Nancy Olsen's younger sister.**

BEN

Cool tonight. Did the crew get what they wanted?

FRANCINE

I think so. Tom's happy.

BEN

It was a nice vibe. Acoustics were great..... I didn't quite get what was bugging you at the end of my "Lost Morning" song.

FRANCINE

Nothing to worry about. How's the career going?

BEN

It took me a while to get started. I'm never going to make it big. But I enjoy gigs in small places. Maybe this pilot will lead somewhere.

FRANCINE

So where does all the pain in your songs come from?

BEN

(startled)

I guess my screwed up life supplies most of it.

FRANCINE

I was in Iraq for two years. There was real pain everywhere you looked....

BEN

That must have been tough. Thanks for your service.

They look at each other in silence for a moment.

FRANCINE

Hard to believe they let you out of prison after you killed somebody.

BEN

I didn't do it on purpose. The roads were icy. My friends were yelling and screaming, I shouldn't have been drinking.....

FRANCINE

You just killed her. A beautiful person....

BEN

Like I said. I didn't mean to. Can we change the subject?

FRANCINE

What right do you have to write a song about an innocent girl you killed?

BEN

Maybe the same right you had to kill people in Iraq. It's called survival.

FRANCINE

That song makes me angry.

BEN

Sorry about that. Maybe you're just an angry person.

FRANCINE

Maybe you need some straightening out.

Francine steps toward Ben. He turns away, then turns back.

BEN

It looks like we don't like each other very much. Can we make a truce for two weeks?

Francine

Sure..... You're not from Chicago are you?

Ben

No. Upstate Minnesota. The Fond Du Lac Ojibwe Reservation to be exact. That OK with you?

FRANCINE

Duluth is one cold bitch in the winter.

BEN

You could say that. You've been there?

FRANCINE

Yeah. For awhile.

BEN

There's something about you that's off.

Francine smiles, snatches the cigarette out of his mouth, drops it on the floor, and grinds it out.

FRANCINE

These cigarettes could kill you. See you tomorrow.

She goes into her room. Ben takes a deep breath and slowly exhales as the lights go down.

SCENE 9

Conference Room at Global Media. There are three chairs and a table.

The **Video Screen** activates. The words

One Week Later

appear for a few seconds, then the screen goes dark.

Ilona is alone bobbing to unheard music. She is in full steam punk fan girl mode.

ILONA

Oooooo.....

Abe, Renata, and Ross enter in an excited state. Renata presses a clicker and activates the **Video Screen**.

A freeze frame of Ben from the Church Concert comes up. Ilona lets out a yelp. The other three sit.

RENATA

Oh, yeah! That is an Americana singer. He looks fabulous. Tortured, handsome, cool. Some of these songs could be singles.

ILONA

Nighthawk is so lit! God. I'd download everything he did. Right, Abe, baby!

She gives Abe a kiss on top of his bald head. Abe jumps, then shakes it off. Ilona stands behind Ross and puts her hands on his shoulders.

ABE

I like him. He's got an involving life story and the music is different. Lot's of emotion and the women will love him. Visually, the footage is spectacular. The drones and multiple cameras really add a sense of surprise and intensity. Looks like a winner, Renata, if Tom can bring in the next seven days.

ROSS

I'm telling you, this is a recipe for disaster. The eighteen to thirty-five audience doesn't care about a half-breed who sings sad stories to middle-aged women.

RENATA

You are so wrong. And you don't need to keep calling him a half-breed.

ILONA

His face! Dark! I'm thirsty! I just want to hug him, then rip off his clothes. I wonder if he can dance?

ROSS

I don't think he's the club type.

ABE

Ross, have you found a star yet? There's a lot of potential here.... And we're running out of time.

ROSS

I'm working on it. Not that Ben Nighthawk deserves it. I'm very close. We're talking A-list.

RENATA

But you can't tell us?

ROSS

No. My little surprise.

ILONA

He's a dime on my time!....

ABE

And why is Ilona here?

ROSS

She's a focus group of one, Dad.

ABE

Always pushing. There will come a day....

ILONA

Is that focus, like a camera....?

She suddenly swoops toward Abe and takes a flash picture with her cell phone. Abe flinches, turns away, and Ross laughs.

ROSS

Lighten up, dad. You'll be the featured photo on Ilona's Instagram page .

ILONA

Right next to Lady GaGa..... Two fire bets....Oooooo!

Abe is uncomfortable and angry.

ABE

Out. Now!

Ilona spins around, blows a kiss to the screen, trips, and ends up in Ross's lap.

RENATA

Don't screw this up, Ross.

ROSS

Who me? Never.

He gives Ilona a not-so-gentle squeeze as he gets up.

ILONA

Ouch!

ROSS

Sorry. We've got a party to get to.... Time to see what's under that little lace skirt....

Ross and Ilona exit as Renata and Abe exchange head shakes.

ABE

I'm worried Ross isn't going to come through with his part of the project.

RENATA

I think he will. There's no question Ben Nighthawk has talent. Even Ross has to admit that.

ABE

Do we need more drama? So far, the story is pretty vanilla.

RENATA

Ben's backstory has plenty of drama. People will like the happy ending.

ABE

I hope you're right.

The Lights and **Video Screen** go down.

SCENE 10

A bedroom at a party in NYC.

Lights come up.

Ross and Ilona are lying on the bed. Their clothes are disheveled. Ross is trying to get Ilona to give him sex. She is not as stoned as usual and not as cooperative.

ROSS

Come on. Just a quickie..... Of something.....

ILONA

No bits, Animaniac. Let's get back to the party.....

She jumps up and Ross grabs her roughly and spins her around. She fights him.

ROSS

You don't do the things you used to.

ILONA

Slam it! You don't treat me nice any more. Too violent and baked. This used to be fun. Ever since this new show and hot Ben Nighthawk you're different.

ROSS

You don't get the pressure I'm under.....

A RANDOM PARTY GOER (30) looks into the room.

RANDOM PARTY GOER

Hey. You got any weed? How about sharing blondie?

ROSS
Take a hike, asshole.

Ilona starts to leave the room. She flirts with Random Party Goer.

ILONA
You're sexy! Time to dance!

Ross confronts the Random Party Goer.

ROSS
What are you looking at?

He violently grabs the Random Party Goer by the throat and squeezes. The Random Party Goer chokes and makes gurgling noises until he passes out on the bed.

ILONA
See. You're on the curve now. Too much smash.

ROSS
Whatever that means. Let's go. Here's a happy pill. Pull on the high and relax.

He hands her some ecstasy, and Ilona reluctantly swallows the pill.

ILONA
I want to dance!

ROSS
That's your problem.

He pushes her out the door as the lights go down.

SCENE 11

The **Video Screen** activates and shows a quick montage of Ben having successful concerts in various small town venues. The audiences are loving him.

During this sequence Ben sings “Can’t Fly On One Wing.”

*The names of small towns in North Central USA appear over the footage: Bloomfield, IN; Bay View, MI, Galena, IL, Sandusky, OH.

*A sequence comes up where a drone camera is shooting the Documentary Crew Van as it rolls through the country side. Ben’s beat up Buick is following the van.

Suddenly, the drone heads right for the van, then swoops away at the last minute. Tom is the driver and he reaches out the window and gives the drone the finger.

The **Video Screen** goes dark, and the song fades away.

A small stage after one of Ben’s concerts.

The lights come up.

The audience is gone and Francine, Cliff, Beth, and Tom are packing up their gear.

CLIFF

Man, who knew shooting for 14 hours a day could be fun? Thank god for kelp jerky..... It jacks me up, baby.... Where’s the hero of the hour?

FRANCINE

He’s outside having a smoke.

CLIFF

That performance was phenomenal. His songs never get old.

BETH

He pours so much into each song. Don’t know how he keeps it all together.

FRANCINE

Yeah. Well, personally, I’m getting sick of the tragic hero role he’s playing. Give me a break. Every night we have to go through the same stories. Poor Ojibwe. Poor ex-con.

CLIFF

Cut him some slack, man. The guy's gone through hell to get where he is. And remember, there's probably no kelp in prison..... lots of potatoes, but no.....

BETH

He needs someone to love him.

FRANCINE

Don't we all. He doesn't know it yet, but there will be a bigger price to pay than prison.

TOM

What do you mean by that remark? I don't get it. Why does he rub you the wrong way?

FRANCINE

It's a long story.

TOM

I'm sure it is..... Just don't do anything to screw up the pilot. We're too close to the end.

Francine quickly turns on her camera and points it at each person, one at a time.

FRANCINE

Rub-a-dub-dub, four crew members in a tub.... And one....?

Cliff puts his hand over the lens. Francine laughs as the lights go down.

SCENE 12

A railing outside a motel room door. Later that night.

The **Video Screen** activates and a flashing red neon sign appears

Motel

Lights come up.

Ben is staring out into the night. Beth comes out of her room.

BETH

Another nice crowd. You really hit a chord with them. Your backstory gets them every time.

BEN

I guess it does. Nice acoustics. How was the sound?

BETH

Excellent. The mics like your voice.

BEN

Still hard to believe this is all happening. You must be used to it.

BETH

(Laughing)

I guess so. This isn't as crazy as an episode of *My Super Sweet Sixteen*. But it's close.

BEN

Sorry. Don't know that one. Guess I'm way behind the times. You're in great shape to keep up with all the running and shooting.

BETH

Not bad for a 31 year-old, single mom.

BEN

How old is your kid?

BETH

Eight. He's a hand full. Thank god for my mom. She watches Eric while I'm on gigs like this.

BEN

(Giving her a soulful look)

I admire your life. Being a parent is really important. I could have used a little more support back in the day.

(Beat)

Your eyes are really different.

BETH

(Flattered)

Oh, really? How so?

BEN

They look like they are somewhere between green and brown. Light and dark. My mom had eyes like that. Different. They must have been one of the reasons my dad fell for her. I'd like to write a song about your eyes someday.

BETH

That would be..... Wonderful. I don't think my ex-husband ever noticed them.

BEN

You have a powerful warmth about you that is really attractive.

He moves closer and kisses her. Beth kisses him back, then pulls away.

BETH

Whoa. That's a little too much, too soon.

BEN

I'm sorry.....

BETH

Don't be.....

Beth turns to leave, takes a step, then turns back and looks at Ben. They look at each other for a long moment. Then Beth turns and goes into her room.

SCENE 13

The living room of ELENA WILLY'S (40) home. A sofa and some chairs aimed at Ben, who is sitting on a high stool with his guitar, mic, and amp, noodling on the guitar.

Lights come up.

Tom is at his monitor table. Cliff, Beth, and Francine are setting up cameras and audio for the performance.

Elena walks over to Ben

ELENA

This is exciting. I'm such a fan of yours.

BEN

Thanks. It's always a pleasure to sing in someone's home. More personal.

ELENA

I love the way you blend your life into your songs. I feel your pain when you were younger. It must have left some open wounds?

BEN

My music helps ease the pain....

ELENA

I could help ease the pain.....

BEN

(Looking into her eyes)

Thank you, Elena. Let's have a cup of coffee after everyone leaves.

ELENA

That would be wonderful.

The guests arrive. They're excited, exchange hellos, and settle into the seats. Elena is in the front row next to Beth. Francine is handheld with her camera and moving around the space.

TOM

OK. When you're ready, Ben.

The **Video Screen** activates and the quad screen shows four camera shots of Ben and the performance.

BEN

Many thanks to Elena for giving up her home for this opportunity. Don't mind the cameras. Tom and his crew are shooting a pilot for a TV show called *Backroads* and you're now part of the mix. So enjoy.... And don't forget to sign the releases after the show..... But now it's time to sit back and enjoy. Elena, this ones for you: "You Can't Fly On One Wing."

He smiles his charismatic smile and begins to sing.

BEN

“You came to me one evening
When the world was dark and grey
A breath of long lost wonder
And I begged for you to stay

Like two excited birds
Whose hearts could only cling
To the fragile dream of love,
But you can’t fly on one wing....”

The lights dim and Ben’s voice fades. The **Video Screen** goes dark.

Then the lights come up. The performance is over. Ben executes a final riff on his guitar.

BEN

Well, that’s it, folks. It’s been such a blast to sing for you tonight. Being in Elena’s home reminds me of some of my happy days singing with my mother and father. Let’s have a big round of applause for Elena!

The audience claps and hoots. Elena comes forward to Ben. The audience rises and begins to exit. Some go to Tom’s table to sign releases.

Francine follows a couple off stage while Ben chats with some fans.

The lights go down.

SCENE 14

Outside Elena’s house. Moments later. Lights come up.

Francine is shooting a quick interview with PAM HUTTON (30) and TRAVIS HUTTON (35).

PAM

He was sensational. His life makes his music beautiful.

TRAVIS

Hell of a man. He brings the passion.

FRANCINE

Does his background bother you?

PAM

It only makes everything he does more real. That song about the death of a young girl says it all.

TRAVIS

He wasn't made in a music factory. He's the real deal. Being an Ojibwe and an ex-con gives everything he writes and sings the feel of truth.

PAM

What do you think? You've been traveling with him?

FRANCINE

It's hard for me to get past killing the young girl.

PAM

Don't you think he's trying to deal with it? That's what drives a lot of his song writing?

TRAVIS

Come on. He did his time. Give him a chance.

FRANCINE

Maybe all of this tortured soul stuff is a con. To suck you in.

TRAVIS

Man, you are talking like someone looking for reasons to bring him down. That's damn near un-American.

FRANCINE

Look, idiot, I was dodging IEDs in Iraq while you were stuffing yourself with Big Macs.

PAM

What's up with you?

TRAVIS

You need some serious straightening out, girl.

FRANCINE

Up yours.

Travis moves toward Francine and Pam steps between them.

Tom walks on stage and overhears the end of the exchange.

TOM

Sorry about this. It's been a long day. Thanks for coming.

TRAVIS

You better watch out or you're goin' to find a world of hurt, camera lady.

Pam and Travis exit.

TOM

Hey! We don't need this. You have a bug up your ass about Ben and these confrontations have got to stop.

FRANCINE

OK. Sorry about that. Just juicing up the bites.

TOM

Hear me. No more of this bullshit. You're good at what you do but have a bad habit of pissing people off. We're packing up and heading back to the motel. I'll see you at the van.

Tom exits. Francine's face contorts in a grimace.

The **Video Screen** activates and a wild, jerky replay of the Accident plays. Only it's out of sequence and ends on an eight-year-old Francine crying and holding the home video camera. Francine lets out a silent scream and runs off-stage as the lights go down.

SCENE 15

Moments later.

Elena's bedroom. A bed and a table.

Lights come up dimly. Francine rushes in and attaches a small surveillance camera to a curtain rod, sets the output to her cell phone, then runs out.

The **Video Screen** activates and we see the bed and table from the high angle POV of the surveillance camera.

Ben and Elena enter the bedroom. They kiss.

ELENA

What a wonderful kiss.

BEN

Yes.

ELENA

You were so intense tonight. We were just as exhausted as you were at the end.

BEN

It's like a miracle sometimes. The connection with people. Music can be really powerful.

Elena gently draws him down on the bed.

ELENA

Thank you for letting me into your life..... Even for just a little while.

BEN

I'm still running from things....

ELENA

For tonight, let's stop the running.

They kiss and lie down on the bed as the lights go down on stage and the **Video Screen**.

SCENE 16

Cliff and Tom's hotel room later that night.

Lights come up. Cliff, Tom, Beth and Francine are sitting around drinking beer and nibbling on snacks.

CLIFF

Man, Ben is rocking this crazy Heartland world. He was so on tonight. It's got to be the seaweed snacks I've been giving him.

TOM

Keep feeding him that healthy stuff. He told me today he used to be an alcoholic. Right after prison. Stopped a year ago. That's all we need.

FRANCINE

Doesn't surprise me. It's in his blood. Can't believe how the women are loving his stricken artist act.

BETH

Come on. Lighten up, Francine. His pain is real. Killing that young girl has to mess you up.

FRANCINE

I sure hope so.

CLIFF

Hey. Three more gigs and we are home free. I'm starting to really like the dark dude. He's pumping the red soul like a crazy man.

TOM

The folks at Global are loving the music and the footage. Even Ross seems to be coming around. They are putting together a surprise for us tomorrow. Don't have a clue. But there is an important Skype call tomorrow at nine AM and we are rolling on everything.

FRANCINE

What do you think the surprise is?

CLIFF

Nighthawk's going to announce his engagement to Beth.

Everyone laughs.

BETH

You are a true health nut dirt bag.

CLIFF

You two make a cool couple..... Francine can be your bridesmaid.

Francine suddenly puts Cliff in a violent headlock. Beth and Tom jump up to help separate them.

FRANCINE

Not funny, Captain Kelp.

CLIFF

OK. OK. Calm down.

TOM

So, Francine. You spent a lot of time shooting music videos with hip-hoppers, rappers, and metal heads. Aren't you used to screwed up artists? Why does Ben upset you so much?

FRANCINE

It's complicated. He hits a nerve with my past. Some stuff I can't get rid of.

TOM

Well. Our talented Ojibwe is saving the day, and we should all be grateful. He has more talent than he realizes.

BETH

The songs wring your heart out. So intense....

She stands up and starts for the door.

BETH

It's late. Big day tomorrow. Francine, you ready?

FRANCINE

Sure. When's Crew Call?

TOM

Eight o'clock in the restaurant. Be ready to roll for the nine o'clock Skype call.

BETH

OK. Good night.

Beth and Francine leave.

CLIFF

There's something weird going on between Ben and Francine. She won't give him a chance. He never talks to her. They're so uncomfortable around each other.

TOM

I don't get it. But we just have to keep them cool for the next five days.

CLIFF

Man, this is weird stuff. But fun. By the way, have you seen my aloe sticks?

TOM

I think I saw one sticking out of your butt.

CLIFF

Very funny.....

Cliff turns and looks behind him as the lights go down

SCENE 17

A railing outside the motel rooms. Moments later.

Lights come up.

Ben is smoking a cigarette and quietly singing "Look Heart, No Hands" by Randy Travis.

Beth and Francine enter.

BEN

Good evening, ladies.

BETH

Hello.

FRANCINE

The Call's for eight tomorrow in the restaurant. I'm shooting with you all day afterwards.

BEN

Lucky you.

FRANCINE

You know, from day one I've thought you were a fraud. You can sing and write songs, I'll give you that. But what a con job with the pain and suffering.

BEN

Well, from day one you've had it in for me and I can't figure out why. I've paid a lot of dues over the years but they don't seem to amount to a hill of shit with you.

BETH

Why do you two give each other such a hard time? We're on the home stretch of this project, let's try to enjoy it.

BEN

OK by me.

FRANCINE

You should write a song from the point of view of the little sister. It might wake you up.

BEN

Little sister? How do you know about her? There's something strange going on...

Francine moves to leave.

FRANCINE

(To Beth)

You coming?

BETH

I'll be in soon.

Francine looks at them for a moment, then exits.

BEN

She is one hard woman.

BETH

She can be. I think her tours in Iraq did some real damage.

BEN

Yeah. But it seems pretty personal. She just doesn't buy my story.

BETH

But I do. Your life has always needed a warm, loving woman. Someone to help you neutralize the pain. Have you ever found that woman?

BEN

Not yet. Where do you find her?... Maybe I'm talking with her right now.

Beth moves toward him. They have a long and passionate kiss.

BEN

Will you hold me?

BETH

Yes.

They put their arms around each other and exit as the lights go down.

SCENE 18

Francine and Beth's room.

Lights up.

Francine is sitting on the side of her bed. As she picks up her cell phone the **Video Screen** activates and we see what is on the cell phone.

She watches a live video from a surveillance camera she has hidden in Ben's room. Ben and Beth are passionately making love.

She throws the cell phone on the bed and puts her head in her hands.

The picture on the **Video Screen** suddenly changes to another rerun of the tragic accident. It is jerky, disjointed, and finishes with a freeze frame of Nan's face.

FRANCINE

She was so brave. My Nan.

Francine picks up her cell phone and begins to record herself.

The **Video Screen** switches to the output of her cell phone: an extreme close-up of her face.

FRANCINE

Am I losing my mind?.... Poor Beth. So desperate for love. While he's lost in his self-pity and womanizing. How long can I watch this and do nothing?....

Lights go down on Francine and the **Video Screen** goes dark.

SCENE 19

The next morning.

A Hotel Conference Room. A large computer screen on a table and a few chairs. The computer has the Skype logo in it.

Lights come up.

Tom, Cliff, and Francine are prepping for the shoot and finishing eating breakfast on the fly.

CLIFF

Vegetarian omelettes are good luck. Start the day with a non-smelly fart.

FRANCINE

You are such an animal.

CLIFF

You should try it sometime.

He flicks a piece of egg at Francine. Ben and Beth enter.

FRANCINE

The love birds have arrived.

BEN

Why don't you just back off. You would last about a day in prison.

FRANCINE

You wouldn't last ten minutes in a war, Birdy.

BEN

What did you say....?

TOM

Hey! We have a huge call coming in so let's can the bitching.

Beth wires Ben with a mic. Cliff and Francine get their cameras ready. Ben and Tom sit. The Skype call rings on the computer.

The **Video Screen** activates and we see what Tom's computer sees.

RENATA

(on the computer screen)

Hello, everybody! How is my *Backroads* Crew this morning?

TOM

We're fine, if you don't count Cliff's breath.

Everyone laughs.

BEN

Hello, Renata. Nice to meet you at last.

RENATA

Nice to talk with you. Although I feel like I've known you for years after watching all of the footage. Love your music. It pulls at my heart strings.

BEN

Many thanks. For this opportunity and *Backroads*.

RENATA

Ben, I think you're going to like a little announcement I have. Ross sent George Strait your music and he really likes it.

A silent cheer goes up from the Crew.

RENATA

He called some friends of his, and we have just confirmed a concert appearance for you at Ryman Auditorium in Nashville. You are booked for a special Saturday night performance next week. George Strait will also be there and would like to sing a song with you. It will be a great climax for the pilot. What do you think?

BEN

Ah..... It's a little overwhelming....

RENATA

It will be fine. You deserve this kind of a break. Remember, it's all because of your music.

BEN

.... I don't feel right about this.... I'm not really a show-biz person.... I'm just happy doing what I'm doing.... Small places....

RENATA

Ben, you're not thinking straight. What's the difference if you're singing for thirty in a church or three-thousand in a theater? It's still just you and your songs and an audience that loves you.

BEN

How do I know Nashville people will like me or my music?.... George Strait, he's a mega star.... I'm nobody.... I don't think I can do this.....

RENATA

The people watching *Backroads* will love you getting such a huge opportunity.

BEN

I see what you mean.... But I've been holding my life together by a thread..... You can't understand. I'm a messed up person.... I'm sorry.... You all have been great, really great.... But these little, comfortable places where I sing help me forget a lot and I can always escape into my songs..... I thought the TV pilot was a little thing.... Just an idea for a show... Nashville, big audiences, George Strait, pressure, media..... It's too much.... I'm sorry.....

He gets up to leave. Tom grabs his shoulders and sits him back down in front of the monitor.

Ross pushes Renata out of the screen and forces himself in front of the computer camera.

ROSS

Hello Ben. I'm Ross. The guy who has put this deal together. You have to understand something. We believe in your music and we know how to let you share it with the multitudes.

I've got another surprise for you. Say hello to THREE ELDERS from your home tribe. PAUL LONG ARROW (55), JIM BODWAY, (60) and DAVID ATEPA (62).

The screen adds three more faces. The Tribal Elders gesture “Hello.”

BEN

Jesus. It’s only taken 37 years to meet you.

ROSS

Nevertheless, your tribal elders want you to go to Nashville to share your music and spread the pride of the Ojibwe nation. And the next surprise is Global Media will give \$100,000 to your Tribe for a new Music and Arts Center.... After you go to Nashville and perform your song with George Strait.

BEN

Well, that’s just great. All of a sudden three tribal elders appear and the money flows. That’s what I’m talking about. It’s too much. I can’t be part of this.

PAUL LONG ARROW

We remember your father, Ben. He was a musician, too, with a beautiful voice. He sang the old songs.

JIM BODWAY

We can use music to interest our young people in the arts. We will name the Center after you.

BEN

I’m sure you would. I’m sorry.... Get someone else to whore out your youth center.

ROSS

Ben, listen to me. Your music is one-of-a-kind, and you want to get it out there to the world. Nashville can do that. You live for your music, now you can turn the world on to it. The Center is the cherry on the top.

BEN

You sure became a big fan in a short time. Aren’t you the one who handles the hip-hop rappers and is always putting me down?

ROSS

My job is to promote the Global brand and the music we believe in. When George Strait called and said he likes your music I became a believer.

DAVID ATEPA

Ben, our reservation is in decay. The young people are leaving. The old ways are disappearing. The Center can help preserve our culture. We urge you to accept the Nashville performance and give us the Center.

BEN

I'm sorry. It's too much pressure. Where were you three when my father was drinking himself to death and my mother didn't have a dime to her name? No one reached out to her. She suffered alone. Off the reservation because she was white.

DAVID ATEPA

We were here. You could have come to us at any time. You overcame your accident and prison. The gods look kindly on people who rehabilitate themselves.

BEN

The answer is no. I'm battling forces you can't understand. Find another Redbone singer.

ROSS

Look, Ben. There's a lot riding on you. The TV show pilot, a record deal, promotion, distribution, peoples jobs. Our offer is way beyond what you could expect.

Tomorrow I'm going to fly to Lexington, Kentucky and meet you and the crew. We can talk face to face. I'm not giving up on you.

BEN

I told Tom, I'll do three more concerts, as planned, then I'm going back to Chicago. You can make your show out of that footage or not.

He suddenly gets up and leaves. As he passes Francine he smacks the lens of her camera. She recovers and follows him off stage, filming everything.

RENATA

Thank you, Elders. We will continue to try to convince Ben to do the Nashville concert.

The three Elders leave the Skype call. Abe appears on the screen.

ABE

Unbelievable. Turning down a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Ross had to pull an insane amount of strings to make this happen. There is a ton of publicity set up. Media coverage. Interviews. A recording session is scheduled. George Strait went out of his way for him.

ROSS

What did you guys do to turn him off? Unbelievable. Well. Not that you deserve it, but I can still save the day and the show. I'm flying out and I'll see you all tomorrow in Lexington. I'll e-mail my itinerary. Pick me up at the airport.

In the background, off camera, a voice.

ILONA

I want to come! I can teach him to dance! He's so Gucci!

The Skype call ends.

TOM

Cliff, stop shooting. We have to figure a few things out.

CLIFF

This is great stuff, man. Dramatic. Crazy.

TOM

And it's way too intrusive on us. Shut it down.

Cliff stops recording.

TOM

What is the matter with this guy?

CLIFF

Don't know, Man. That was a surprise. An avocado bar might have taken the edge off.....
But Beth might be the key. She's the only one who seems to have gotten through to him.

BETH

He doesn't seem to have the same value system most of us do. I'm not sure more money, fame, the Arts Center are going to make that much difference. His traumas need fixing way beyond Nashville.

CLIFF

That's why you need to convince him he is worthy of this opportunity.

BETH

I'll try. No guarantees. He was really upset.

CLIFF

We should check on Francine and Ben. They might be fighting it out somewhere.

TOM

Right. Text me when you find them. Christ. How could it blow up so fast? I've got to call Renata.

Cliff and Beth exit. Tom absently picks up one of Cliff's seaweed bars, takes a bite, and dry heaves as the lights go down.

SCENE 20

An outdoor setting. A storefront has the sign "Liquors" on it.

Francine is walking with Ben and shooting footage.

BEN

This whole mess is out of control. And shut that damn thing off.

FRANCINE

Are you too stupid to see this is the chance of a lifetime? You could kill a lot of your demons with a big gesture like performing in Nashville. Your tribe would get some positive recognition.

BEN

Why do I think you could care less?

FRANCINE

You're right. I don't care about you at all. But I respect all of the time and effort people are putting in to make the TV Show work. And the Elders really want you.

BEN

Why do you hate me so much? Will you shut off the camera?

Francine puts the camera in a bag she is carrying.

FRANCINE

I watched you get out of prison while I was in Iraq.

BEN

That was three years ago. You didn't know me then. Something isn't right.

FRANCINE

I couldn't believe they let you out.

BEN

You know what? You do your time, they let you out. Why are you so down on me? I'm the one who had to live all of this. Not you.

FRANCINE

Every time you sing that song about killing the little girl I get sick.

BEN

So do I.

FRANCINE

There's something else that makes me sick.

Francine takes out her cell phone, calls up Ben and Beth's lovemaking, and shows Ben.

The **Video Screen** activates and we see a dark, shadowy replay of the lovemaking from the POV of the smoke alarm camera.

FRANCINE

Thought you might like to see a replay of your "fun" with Beth. Whore dog that you are.

Ben is shocked.

BEN

You are really a low-life. That's private. How could you do this?

FRANCINE

Do you deserve privacy? Now I've got you. Forever. Think about that for a while.

BEN

Give me the phone.

He lunges for the phone

FRANCINE

In your dreams.

She pulls away. Ben grabs her. She puts a quick submission hold on him. He cries out.

FRANCINE

Think about everybody you would be letting down if you don't let us finish the pilot with the happy ending.

BEN

Well, screw you and the pilot.

He breaks away. Francine takes out her camera and films him as he goes through the door into the Liquor store.

FRANCINE

That's right. Get drunk. Just like your father.

Disgusted, Francine shuts down her camera and walks away.

The **Video Screen** goes dark as the lights go down.

SCENE 21

The **Video Screen** activates with the words

Two Hours Later

The screen goes dark.

Lights up. Francine and Beth are sitting on a bench.

FRANCINE

He's been in his room drinking since the phone call. Pathetic.

BETH

He told me he's been off the booze for over two years. I guess the chance for fame rocked him pretty hard.

FRANCINE

What an idiot. He's throwing away his last chance.

BETH

We think it's a big opportunity, but he's different. I understand his need for small, intimate places and privacy. I'm like that myself.

FRANCINE

Look, Beth. You are a nice person with normal needs. You are probably the only normal one on the crew. But he is using you for his own pleasure. In a few days he's going to throw you away.

BETH

Maybe. But he's fulfilling some of my needs, too. Single moms don't get a whole lot of chances for fun and games with handsome Ojibwe singers. He's a fascinating guy with a lot of talent. So, why can't I have a fling, too?

FRANCINE

OK. I buy that part of it. But deep down he is a disturbed, selfish killer. Why should he get away with killing someone?

BETH

He didn't get away with it. He is still haunted by it. Why can't you give him some respect?

FRANCINE

For a lot of reasons you can't understand. There is more to the story than you know.

BETH

This all seems so personal to you. Ever since that first concert in the church. You got upset when he sang that song about the girl in the car accident. What's going on?

Francine gets up and starts to pace.

FRANCINE

I know who Ben really is. Besides the "dark, sexy" singer. He's James Birdsong and he killed my sister. The girl in the song was my sister, Nan. I was there and saw it all.

BETH

(stunned)

O my god. I'm so sorry, Francine. Does he know who you are?

FRANCINE

No. I was eight then. He was in jail while I was growing up. I changed my last name after my dad and mom died. No way he could know. When I see him I'm so angry. Why should he live?

BETH

Now, you're scaring me. This is way too complicated.... Tom wants us to get him sober by tomorrow. If he learns about you it will probably send him over the edge.

FRANCINE

You should go talk to him. Try to reason with him. Anything to get him straight for Nashville.

BETH

After what you told me, why do you care about this opportunity? You are sending out mixed signals.

FRANCINE

I know. I'm really screwed up over this. He has a chance to do a lot of good, but I still hate him. How could you understand? My sister was the only person who ever loved me. She sacrificed herself for me.

BETH

Maybe you haven't given people the chance to love you. That wall you've built is pretty high.

FRANCINE

I showed him a video I made of you two. The camera is in his room, in a fake smoke alarm.

BETH

What?! Why would you do that?

FRANCINE

I wanted to see him squirm.

BETH

This is unforgivable. I have a son. He can never see it. Jesus.

FRANCINE

Don't worry. I'm not after you. Can't you see him for who he is?

BETH

I see him better than you do. Sure, he's messed up and lonely and lost. But so far he's way more honest than you are.

FRANCINE

That hurts.

BETH

Good. Now maybe you'll stop all of this obsessive recording of people's personal lives.

FRANCINE

Don't let him con you into anything.

BETH

He's not the one I'm worried about anymore.

FRANCINE

Please don't tell the others about me. I have to sort this out. OK?

BETH

OK.... For now.

Beth gathers up her sound gear and exits.

Francine pulls out her phone, puts it in record mode, points it at herself, and starts to pace back and forth. Her back is to the audience.

The **Video Screen** activates and we see a shaky hand held close-up of Francine on her cell phone.

FRANCINE

Everything is slipping away. The killer. Beth.... The pilot..... Can't forget... I'm Nan's revenge...

She gathers her gear and shakes her head.

FRANCINE

Wait! Beth!

She runs after Beth. Lights and the **Video Screen** go dark.

SCENE 22

Ben's motel room. A bed and table. Clothes, covers, and an empty whiskey bottle are on the bed.

Lights come up. Francine and Beth enter.

FRANCINE

Where the hell did he go? I'll look for him. Why don't you stay here in case he comes back? We can check in with each other on our cell phones.

BETH

Christ. What a mess.

As Francine exits Beth sits on the bed. Lights go down.

SCENE 23

A park. A mound of grass and a bench. Lights come up.

Ben stumbles on stage. He has his guitar slung over his back and a bottle of whiskey is in his coat pocket. He slowly sits down on the mound, takes a swig of whiskey, and unslings his guitar.

Upstage a light comes on and reveals Francine in an elevated position filming Ben.

Ben tries to sing the song "Lost Morning" but is too drunk. While he misplays and sings off-key, Francine slowly descends and, still shooting, slowly walks toward him. He doesn't see her...

BEN

"Can I take it back child?
Back up those crooked wheels.
Start over that lost morning
Can I make another deal?...
.....another deal,,,

Ben lies back and passes out. Francine enters and stands over him. She suddenly shakes her head violently as her lights dim.

The **Video Screen** activates and we see a Flashback of the Accident.

The action in the accident replay is distorted and speeded up.

It ends up on an extreme close-up freeze frame of James Birdsong/Ben Nighthawk's crying face.

The **Video Screen** slowly goes dark as the lights come up full on Francine and Ben.

Francine's jaw sets. She puts her camera in her shoulder bag, leans down, shakes Ben awake, then helps him up. She puts the guitar and strap around his neck. He is drunk and babbling incoherently.

Francine puts her arm around him and they start to awkwardly walk across stage as lights go down on the park setting.

SCENE 24

Lights come up on a brick wall in an alley. There are a few large pieces of concrete stacked in front of the wall. Francine and Ben arrive. He rallies a little.

BEN

You.... Always around.... Like a pet demon... I'll write a song.... Francine, the Ojibwe stalker....

FRANCINE

Shut up.

She violently shoves him to the ground. His guitar shatters. He is groggy and barely conscious.

There is a broken piece of concrete in the alley. Francine picks it up and stands over him. He looks up and smiles a maniacal smile.

BEN

Go ahead. What difference does it make?

FRANCINE

I see her every day. She loved me and protected me. You took her away.

BEN

(Shaking his head)

“Took her away?” The sister thing.... In the church....

Francine puts her foot on his chest.

BEN

Oh.... Now I get it.... No wonder you’ve been acting so weird. She was your sister.... And you’ve been waiting to get even. All these years....

FRANCINE

Why should you live? You ruined two lives forever.

BEN

Make that three.

FRANCINE

This is all really pretty simple. A life for a life.

BEN

I’ve been carrying around the guilt for your sister’s death for eighteen years.... So it’s all caught up with me and guess what?... I don’t care any more. Do it.

He passes out. She stares at him for a moment then sits down in front of Ben with the concrete block in her lap. She pulls her camera out of her camera bag and starts recording.

FRANCINE

So now it’s real. You. Lying there drunk, helpless. Poor, screwed up Redbone from my hometown.... I didn’t expect to find someone with the beautiful gift of music.... That you so cleverly wrapped around your guilt.... Will killing you remove that jagged knot in my stomach? Will my flashback ghosts finally stop because you’re dead?... Will I ever be free?...

She stands up and raises the concrete block over her head.

FRANCINE

Better luck in the next world James Birdsong....

Suddenly, Beth appears, runs and tackles Francine. They fall down together and grapple on the ground.

BETH

Stop! Are you crazy?

FRANCINE

Let me go. I don't want to hurt you.

BETH

You're going to ruin your life. You'll be just like him.

FRANCINE

Goddammit, Beth. Goddammit.

Francine violently pushes Beth away and picks up the concrete block.

BETH

Put it down. He's paid a terrible price. It won't bring Nan back.

Francine shakes her head and raises the cement block over her head.

BETH

No!

Francine slams the piece of concrete on the stage next to Ben. It breaks in two. She slowly sits down next to Ben and cries softly. Beth puts her arm around her. Francine picks up her camera, activates it, and looks into the lens.

FRANCINE

I'm sorry, Nan.

She turns off the camera, gets up, and exits. Beth begins to follow her, then stops and goes to Ben. She cradles Ben in her arms as the lights go down.

End Act 1

ACT 2

SCENE 25

A park bench.

The **Video Screen** activates. The words

Moments After the Alley

Appear for a few seconds, then the screen goes dark.

Lights up.

Cliff is sitting on the bench. Francine enters with her gear.

CLIFF

Where is our tortured star? Tom is upset big time.

FRANCINE

He's lying drunk in an alley over by the Park. Beth is with him. A pretty disgusting sight.

CLIFF

Why'd you leave him there?

FRANCINE

Because he doesn't deserve our sympathy.

CLIFF

That's a great attitude. Man, I don't get you. Something went wrong somewhere... What's important now is saving Ben and the pilot. That's number one for me. I'll go get him.

FRANCINE

Be my guest. Make sure you roll on his sorry, drunken ass.

CLIFF

You really have it in for him. You can't seem to understand, this pilot is supposed to be a notch or two above the usual reality crap. No way we're doing *Big Brother*... This crazy hate thing you have going for Ben has got to stop. It's going to kill the show.

FRANCINE

We're telling his story. It's not our fault he's self-destructing.

CLIFF

Are you sure about that? Man, something stole a lot of your humanity. You need some help. Go see Tom. He needs an update.

FRANCINE

Thanks, asshole.

Francine exits. Cliff gets up and walks off stage.

The lights go down.

SCENE 26

The alley.

Lights up.

Ben is still passed out sitting against the wall. The broken concrete block is next to him. Beth is trying to get him up as Cliff enters.

CLIFF

He is really out.

BETH

Ben. Wake up.

She shakes him. He starts to come out of it. Still drunk.

BETH

Let's get him back to the motel.

BEN

What's happening? Where's my whiskey? Who are you?

BETH

I'm Beth and you have to get back to the motel.

BEN

Who's that.

CLIFF

I'm Cliff and you need to come back to the real world. The TV pilot. *Backroads*. Remember?

They lift him up.

BEN

I didn't mean to kill her.

He starts to cry.

BETH

It's OK. You'll feel better after you rest.

BEN

You don't hate me?

BETH

No. Tomorrow things will look better. Your music will get you through.

CLIFF

Man, you've got to get it together. Tomorrow is a huge day. You have to stop turning good news into bad.... I'll make you a rutabaga smoothie when we get back.

Ben suddenly stops and throws up.

CLIFF

OK. Scratch the smoothie.

They exit as the lights go down.

SCENE 27

Motel Restaurant. A booth table.

Lights come up.

Francine joins Tom. She has her camera and puts it on the table.

TOM

Where is you know who?

FRANCINE

He decided to get drunk and passed out in an alley. Beth and Cliff are getting him back to his room.

TOM

Jesus. What a time to fall off the wagon. Just what we need, a drunken star who just happens to be half Native American.

FRANCINE

Look. I rolled on a lot of his day today, and it is interesting stuff. He is losing his cool and coming apart. I got it all. We had a bad disagreement and there were some physical exchanges.

My question to you is should this unexpected shift in the story line become part of the show? Should I roll on this conversation?

TOM

My gut says let's wait until Ross gets here and see if Ben buys into the Nashville gig and the 100K gift to his tribe. If he does, we can right the ship and forget about today.

Francine turns off the camera.

FRANCINE

OK. But you're missing the real story.

TOM

No, I'm not. I'm making a TV Pilot about Americana music and its country roots, not *The Jersey Shore*.... You have to back off this antagonism between you two. What is it about him that bugs you so much?

FRANCINE

I've seen guys like him everywhere. They use drama and vulnerable women to plug up the big holes in their lives. And I don't buy it.

TOM

Aren't we all trying to plug up some holes in ourselves? Life is pretty screwed up these days. Are you sure there isn't more to it than that? You two seem to have a weird connection the rest of us can't figure out.

FRANCINE

He killed an innocent girl before she had a chance to live her life. You don't get a pass for that.

TOM

Maybe not. But that was then. Keep your cool these next few days. You are an exceptional shooter and art director. Visually, this could be a ground breaker. Just keep it all business. Deal?

FRANCINE

Deal.

She rises and exits as the lights go down.

SCENE 28

Ben's motel room. A bed and table

Lights come up. Ben is still drunk and Beth is sitting next to him.

BEN

I can't do this anymore. Where's my whiskey?

BETH

It's time to sleep. You'll feel better in the morning.

Ben grabs her hands.

Help me.

BEN

As he passes out, Beth gives him a tender kiss. Then she stands on the bed, lifts Francine's camera from the smoke alarm, puts it in her bag, and calls Tom on her cell phone.

Tom. He's back in his room. Taking a nap.

BETH

Lights go down.

SCENE 28

The **Video Screen** activates and we see a Dance Club in full swing in New York. The music pulses.

Lights come up on a nightclub table near the Video Screen. Ross and Ilona are sitting there along with a GOTH TEENAGER (17), and a FAMOUS ROCK STAR (28). The Goth Teenager, who is stoned, is all over the Rock Star.

It's late. We should buzz. You have Kentucky tomorrow.

ILONA

Don't worry about it. It's all set up.

ROSS

Let's jam. I'm tired.

ILONA

Here. Try one of these.

ROSS

Ross pops an amphetamine pill, gives one to Ilona, then shifts his attention to the Goth Teenager. He asks the girl to dance. They get up.

I love your hair. Like neon grass....

GOTH TEENAGER

ILONA
You dance with her. I'm gone.

ROSS
Don't come to my place tonight.

ILONA
Someday your sick world is gonna fall down on top of you.

ROSS
Don't you wish.

Ross and Goth Girl start to dance as the lights go down.

The **Video Screen** goes dark, but the pulsing music continues.

SCENE 29

Ross's apartment. There's a door and a bed.

A dim light comes up.

We see mostly shadows and moving forms. The movement is synched to the pulsing music and often looks grotesque.

Ross slowly undresses the Goth Teenager, who is babbling incoherently. He undresses himself, picks up a whip from the bed and lashes himself on the chest. It draws blood. He smiles. Then he lashes the Goth Teenager on the stomach. She screams and begins to bleed. Ross gets on his knees and gently licks her stomach. There is a loud knock at the door.

ILONA (OFF-STAGE)
Let me in you fucking perv! I know what you're doing. Let her go. You fucking creep!

Upset, Ross releases the Goth Girl. She stumbles around whimpering.

Ross opens the door while the Goth Girl gathers her clothes, puts some of them on, and runs out the door past Ilona.

Lights come up full on Ross and Ilona. The music continues to pulse.

ROSS

Well. Look who's here.

ILONA

Always on the prowl. Like an oversexed gorilla.

ROSS

And you love it.

Ross takes her hands and rubs them on his chest.

ROSS

Are you up for some fun and games?

He gives her an ecstasy pill. She can't resist.

ILONA

One last time. You piece of shit.

Ilona runs her hands over Ross's body as the lights return to their dim setting and the pulsing music gets louder.

As Ross and Ilona writhe onto the bed the music crescendos and the lights slowly dim to black.

SCENE 30

Outside Ben's Hotel Room. A railing and a flashing "Motel" light.

Lights come up.

Ben is still half drunk and smoking a cigarette. Francine enters him while filming him.

FRANCINE

Quite a day today. Where's Beth?

BEN

Sleeping. Turn it off.

FRANCINE

Can't. This is the story now. Redbone blows his big chance. Feels sorry for himself. Drinks himself into obscurity.

BEN

You know, it's too bad you don't have the feelings Beth has. At least she understands that I screwed up and don't feel good about it. How many times do I have to say I'm sorry about what happened to your sister? Shut the camera off.

He reaches for Francine's camera. She jerks it away and steps up nose-to-nose with Ben

FRANCINE

Don't ever do that again. I learned how to hurt people in the service.

BEN

Well, you had your chance in the alley.... Maybe I'll write a song about it some day.

FRANCINE

What about your tribe? You selling them out, too?

BEN

I don't remember my Fond du Lac Ojibwes ever doing anything for me or my family. Having a white mom always seemed to upset the full bloods. OK. Life was rough for everyone. It just seemed it was a little rougher on us.... Try growing up with an alcoholic father and a beaten down mother. School was a nightmare of racial hate.... I'm going in and have a nice long drink.

FRANCINE

Sure. Run away from facing up. My father beat my mom and continually raped my older sister, the one you killed. He died of alcohol poisoning when I was in junior high school. Being in the war in Iraq was fun compared to my childhood.

BEN

You should have finished our story in the alley. I wouldn't have felt a thing.

FRANCINE

Maybe that's your problem. You have to start caring about other people.

BEN

Why do *you* care all of a sudden? Two hours ago you tried to kill me.

FRANCINE

Yeah. I'm probably just as screwed up as you are. We didn't make it out of our childhoods without big damage, but maybe Nashville can be a new beginning.... For both of us... Maybe music can be the key.

BEN

Music is the key. Just not the big time. And not with you.

FRANCINE

This Nashville deal could bring a little good to kids who have pretty bleak lives.

BEN

I just want to be left alone with my music. It's my disconnect. I thought the TV pilot was going to be small places where I play for handfuls of people....

FRANCINE

Maybe I can see those Ojibwe kids turning their lives around. If you'd just care about people other than yourself.

BEN

Well, you didn't kill me, so I'll think about it.

FRANCINE

Try listening to some of your own lyrics.

Francine turns to leave. As Ben takes a long drag on his cigarette, Francine suddenly turns back and grabs for it. This time he avoids her.

BEN

I'm learning.

They stare at each other for a long moment. Then Francine exits and the lights go dark.

SCENE 31

The **Video Screen** activates.

We see a video of the Crew Van driving through farm lands and rolling hills.

The POVs are from the van driver's seat and a drone following the van, which reveals Ben's battered old Buick following the van.

The sound track is Ben's song "Daybreak"

After a few seconds, the words "Lexington, KY" are superimposed over the footage.

The song ends as the **Video Screen** goes dark.

SCENE 32

The lobby of a hotel in Lexington, KY.

The lights come up.

Tom is handing out room cards to Beth, Cliff, and Francine. The check-in clerk is busy with a customer.

TOM

Where's Ben?

BETH

He's sleeping it off in his car.

CLIFF

Man, this has turned into one big, weird soap opera. If our haunted star had just eaten healthy when he was young. Kelp has great healing powers. Although there probably isn't a lot of kelp in prisons.

FRANCINE

I've got so much good footage of his quick downfall. I think his story is "Redbone blows it."

CLIFF

You won't stop, man. You really have it in for him.

FRANCINE

You're just too soft. If the story leads into dark places, go there. Once you've lived in war zones the world isn't so rosy. Shit happens. Every day.

CLIFF

Man, the war messed you up. Where's your compassion?

FRANCINE

In a ditch outside Duluth.

CLIFF

Some green tea would go a long way toward settling you down.

BETH

He'll be OK. He just needs some time to realize what Nashville means.

TOM

Ross showing up tomorrow is a weird wrinkle in all of this.

CLIFF

A big time New York producer isn't going to bounce with our star.

TOM

It better. It's our last chance.

FRANCINE

Do you want to roll on Ross?

TOM

Good question. What do you think?

FRANCINE

Definitely. Let's get everything. Who knows? Maybe there'll be a miracle and a happy ending after all.

Ben enters. Hung over, wobbly, and in a bad mood. Francine starts her camera and begins filming him.

BEN

No More. I'll smash your camera and your face.

Ben goes for the camera. Francine sidesteps, as Cliff and Beth jump in to separate them.

FRANCINE

Careful. Talk to Tom if it will make you feel better.

Francine picks up her gear and bag and exits.

BEN

What's happening?....

TOM

Ah.... You getting sober would be number one on the list.

CLIFF

Man, it's pretty obvious you haven't been eating the avacado sticks I gave you.

BEN

Where are we?....

BETH

Lexington, Kentucky. Let's go to your room. A shower will help.....

They exit.

TOM

The pilot is dangling by a thread. Ross and Ben live in different universes. Tomorrow is going to be oil and water. You've got to keep Francine under control.

CLIFF

I'll have plenty of kelp jerky for everyone.....

The lights go down.

SCENE 33

The **Video Screen** activates and we see footage of a small airport. We hear "Flight 603 arriving from New York City"

After a few seconds the **Video Screen** goes dark.

Lights come up on an airport setting.

Francine is standing alone. She has changed into a form-fitting top. Tom rushes in.

TOM

Can't believe they wouldn't let me park right outside. Big pain in the ass. He'll be here any minute. Roll on him as soon as you see him.

FRANCINE

You got it.

She starts her camera and begins shooting. Ross enters with a small bag.

TOM

Welcome to Lexington.

ROSS

Why is she filming?

TOM

This crisis is now part of the story. Since you might be the saviour of the show, why not record you?

ROSS

I don't know about that. We can try it later. But right now I say turn off the camera.

TOM

Francine, shut it off.

FRANCINE

OK.

She turns off the camera.

FRANCINE

Nice to meet a cool New York music man.

ROSS

Ha. Ha. There are a lot of people who wouldn't agree with you. But thanks.

TOM

Good to see you. So what is the new plan?

ROSS

I restate the original offer: \$100,000 for the Music and Arts Center, and we add two additional nuggets: The Center will become the focal point of the arts for all eight Ojibwe reservations in the state of Minnesota. Finally, his mother will be made an official member of the tribe posthumously.

TOM

That is one hell of a deal.

ROSS

It better be. So, what's our schedule?

TOM

We're meeting Ben at the hotel conference room in an hour. The rest of the crew will be there. We will discreetly roll on the new offer. Ben has come to hate the cameras, but hopefully he won't make an issue of it.

ROSS

Piece of cake.

TOM

Let's hope. Hang right here. I'll get the van and be right back.

Tom exits.

FRANCINE

You're quite the dude. Riding in on your white horse to save the day. He would be crazy to turn it down.

ROSS

Don't worry. I wouldn't be here if I didn't think it would work.

FRANCINE

I loved New York when I was shooting music videos there. Had a ball. Hung out in some clubs. Met lots of weird people. It was cool.

ROSS

I could show you some clubs that would blow your mind.

FRANCINE

Always wanted to be part of the hip New York scene, whatever that is. Just get dressed up, get high, and let it all go.

ROSS

Really. Well, if this project ever gets finished and you get to New York again I can show you around. Do you like some kink in your sauce?

FRANCINE

Oh, Yeah.... Sweet....

ROSS

That's good to know..... Guess you all were glad I came up with this sexy solution, or the show would be where it probably belongs... in the toilet.....

Francine takes a step closer to Ross.

FRANCINE

I like your hair.

ROSS

Ha. Ha..... So, how does that camera work?

FRANCINE

(Flirting)

It's a little miracle.

Francine leans in close to explain the camera.
Ross is very attracted.

The lights go down.

SCENE 34

Ben's hotel room. A bed and table.

Lights come up.

Ben is sitting up in bed. Beth is beside him.

BETH

Feeling better?

BEN

I feel like crap. I need a drink.

BETH

Don't do it, Ben. Let's get through the meeting with Ross. Listen to what he has to say. You have a chance to right a lot of your wrongs.

BEN

What's it like to be a parent?

BETH

“It’s a struggle filled with joy.” I read that somewhere and it’s about right.

BEN

You are pure. There’s no poison in your past. You’re so patient and understanding. I wish I could find someone like you. But, like always, I’d find a way to ruin it.

BETH

Don’t get so down. You have to learn to like yourself more. Then you’ll find some happiness.

Ben starts to cry. Beth holds and soothes him.

BETH

Promise me you’ll listen to Ross and accept his offer.

BEN

Hold me. Help me.

They kiss and gently fall back on the bed. The lights go down.

SCENE 35

A Conference room at the Motel with a table and chairs.

Lights up.

Tom, Ross, and Francine walk in. Cliff is already there with his camera set up. Francine begins setting up her cameras.

ROSS

Let me do the talking. This will be short and sweet. The Nashville date is one week from today. It’s booked. There are a lot of media opportunities the day of the concert. Part of this meeting is having Ben sign a contract that forces him to perform in Nashville.

Ross puts a sheaf of papers on the table and a pen.

TOM

OK. Francine you follow Ben. Cliff you focus on Ross. The Go-Pros have the wide shots. This is a big moment. Here they are.

Ben and Beth enter. Francine and Cliff begin filming the action. Ben is sober, hung over, and not in a good mood. Beth has her shotgun mic and audio gear.

ROSS

Hello, Ben. Thanks for coming.

BEN

Hello.

ROSS

I was listening to your song “Can’t Fly On One Wing” on the way over here and it’s beautiful. But it’s also got a strong hook and I think it has commercial potential. You really have a gift.

BEN

Thanks. Let’s cut through all the BS.

ROSS

All right. As we stated yesterday, when you do the Nashville gig that will trigger a \$100,000 contribution to build the Ben Nighthawk Music and Arts Center on your home reservation.

To sweeten the deal, we will also promote the Center as the focus of a music-arts initiative for all eight Ojibwe reservations in the state of Minnesota. Finally, your mother will be made an honorary member of your Ojibwe tribe.

BEN

You don’t miss a trick. It all sounds so good. The problem is I don’t want to do Nashville and be a hero for my long lost Ojibwe tribe. My mom died three years ago, so what does her being a member of the tribe matter? I just want to sing my last three concerts and go back to Chicago.

ROSS

Well, that’s not good enough. Right now we have the auditorium booked in Nashville. George Strait will join you on stage for a song. He loves your work. The Tribal Elders will be there and be on stage when Global gives you the check for \$100,000. It’s time to stop being a hardhead and step up. The wheels of opportunity have been set in motion and you have to be there.

BEN

You are the reason I don’t want to be there. I’m not worth all this.

ROSS

I wouldn't be standing here making you this offer if you weren't good. Americana singers are rarely main stream. You might be the exception. Think about your mother.

BEN

You are really disgusting.

ROSS

Be that as it may, those papers on the table confirm you will play the Nashville gig, and by doing so all of the goodies fall into place.

BEN

What happened to the little pilot show we started to make for *Backroads*?

ROSS

George Strait changed all that. The seed has grown.

BEN

You know, greedy creeps like you are the reason people like me don't care anymore about getting rich or being famous. I'm just a small voice and I don't want all this responsibility heaped on top of me.

ROSS

Well, that's tough. There is no turning back. And believe me, if you don't agree and sign those papers, I'll make sure every club owner in Chicago and any where else you might go knows you aren't worth wasting time or money on. You will be the half-breed singer who sold out his own people.

Ben suddenly throws a punch at Ross, who easily ducks it. Tom and Beth step between them and calm Ben down.

BEN

My father used to call people like you Sick Coyotes.

ROSS

Good for him. So Ben. It's nitty-gritty time. Sign the papers and your life will change forever. And, you'll have given a lot of people the opportunity of a lifetime. Don't sign and I'll squash you and your career like a bug. Well..?

Ben shakes his head and reluctantly sits down.

BEN

Trapped like a dog.... OK. You win. I'll sign and do the concert in Nashville. But someone else will have to do all of the Center stuff.

ROSS

I'm sure the Tribal Elders will be able to handle that part of it.

Ben signs the papers and exits. Francine moves to follow, but Tom motions not to.

ROSS

Not bad, if I say so myself.

TOM

Thank God. Now we have the end of the show. Cliff and Francine you can stop rolling. No sense getting him pissed any more than he is. Beth, stay with him. He is in a super fragile state and we have a concert tonight.

BETH

All right. But I might need some help. I'll text updates.

She exits.

ROSS

How did I look, Francine? Star power?

FRANCINE

No question.

ROSS

See you later today, Tom. I'll catch the performance tonight. My plane leaves tomorrow morning.

TOM

He's singing at a community center. Nice, homey venue. We're leaving here at five. You're welcome to a ride.

ROSS

We'll see. Francine, let's get lunch.

FRANCINE

Sounds good. When's Crew Call for tonight?

TOM

Four-thirty. In front of the hotel.

FRANCINE

See you then.

Ross puts his arm around Francine and they leave laughing.

CLIFF

Man, that is super strange. She's attracted to that pompous idiot?

TOM

This keeps getting weirder and weirder. But we have a climax that should be prime time worthy. Renata and Abe will be pleased.

Cliff takes out a kelp bar and takes a bite.

CLIFF

Ross doesn't look like a kelp guy.

The lights go down.

SCENE 36

Ben's hotel room. A bed and a table.

Lights come up.

Ben is drinking whiskey.

BEN

Well. The white man did it again. Took my life away.

BETH

Try to see the good side. A lot of young people are going to be exposed to music and art in a positive way. And your mom getting tribal acceptance is pretty huge.

BEN

Big shot New York producer throws money at poor Redbone and owns him.

BETH

Nobody owns you but you. Your music is worth all this. And you shouldn't be drinking. Ross will be at the concert tonight. Please stop.

BEN

(Dreamily)

My mom was such a good person. Why did she marry a handsome Ojibwe? Her life was so painful. I didn't help with that accident, jail.... Booze takes it all away.....

BETH

Please, Ben. Don't do this.

She tries to take the bottle away from him. They struggle. He loses his balance and falls. On the way down he hits his head on the table and knocks himself out.

BETH

You just don't want to be happy.

Lights go down.

SCENE 37

The **Video Screen** activates and we see a Skype call between Tom, Renata, and Abe.

TOM

He pulled it off. Ben has agreed to everything. He even signed the papers so it's legal.

RENATA

What a relief. Good work. We've got one hell of a show now. No reason the pilot can't also be a Special. George Strait is gold.

ABE

Must admit I'm amazed Ross made it happen. Looks like Ben Nighthawk is about to be famous, whether he likes it or not.

TOM

We still have to keep him happy for the next week. He has fallen for one of our crew members and she is nursing him through this.

RENATA

Stay on him. We are so close to the finish.

TOM

OK. Thanks. Good-bye.

The call ends. The **Video Screen** goes dark.

SCENE 38

Ross's Hotel Room. A bed and two chairs.

Lights come up.

Ross and Francine are sitting in the chairs doing lines of cocaine. Techno music is playing on Ross's iPod.

FRANCINE

That was impressive stuff.

ROSS

All in a days work. You should see what closing a deal with a Big Rap Star is like. There is so much cocaine on the papers the lawyers get high off it for weeks.... Then the parties start.

FRANCINE

Tell me what the parties are like.

ROSS

With lots of details? Are you sure you can handle it?

FRANCINE

Try me.

ROSS

It's pretty easy to get lost in the moment.

FRANCINE

That's what I want. Let all my inhibitions go. Be who I really am.

ROSS

Do you do harder drugs?

FRANCINE

Sometimes. When the time is right.

ROSS

How about sex? Do you like it in many shapes and sizes?

FRANCINE

I don't know. There's always a first time. Right? Tell me about your steampunk girlfriend. She was in some of the Skype calls.

ROSS

Ex-girlfriend. Ilona. She was up for anything. Wore the wildest outfits. Man, in the clubs the guys and girls went wild.

FRANCINE

I want to do that.

She stands up and begins to sway back and forth. She unbuttons her top.

ROSS

Very nice. Can I see more? Pretend you are in a crazy club in the Village and the music has you.

FRANCINE

Why don't you join me?

She pulls him up. Ross is smiling as he takes off his shirt. Francine takes off her top.

FRANCINE

Tell me what you like.

They continue to sway to the music.

ROSS

Are you sure you want to know?

He caresses her breasts

FRANCINE

Mmmmm. I like that.

They continue to move slowly to the music. Francine slips off her pants. Ross does the same. They kiss. Francine notices the cuts and scars on his body.

FRANCINE

You like it rough?

ROSS
Oh yeah. How far will you go?

FRANCINE
Anywhere you want.

Ross picks her up, carries her to the bed, and puts her down. Francine is writhing slowly on the bed. Ross goes to his travel bag and takes out a whip and small chain.

The lights begin to dim. The music gets louder.

ROSS
Thank god I always travel prepared.

Francine runs her fingers over his scars and cuts.

FRANCINE
Pain is your friend?

ROSS
Sometimes. Here.

He hands her the whip.

ROSS
Just keep drawing it across my body. Little lashes.

Francine does. She closes her eyes.

FRANCINE
Do you do this often?

ROSS
Oh, yeah. Ilona spoiled me.

FRANCINE
Play with me.

ROSS
Better idea. You play with me. Put this chain around my neck.

FRANCINE
Do the New York girls like this?

ROSS

Who cares. I like it. Pull on it. Harder. Oh yeah.... Harder.... Now lash me with the whip.... Like riding a horse....

FRANCINE

This is a little too weird....

ROSS

Tough shit. I'm about to come so keep the pressure on the chain....

FRANCINE

You know what? I've got to go.

ROSS

No! Not now!

He grabs her violently. She reacts and twists his arm. He groans.

The lights continue to dim while the music gets louder.

FRANCINE

Careful.

She suddenly pulls the neck chain tight and lashes him hard with the whip. She smiles and jumps out of the bed.

ROSS

What are you doing? Get back here.

FRANCINE

I don't think so. Too freaky.

She gathers her clothes, puts them on, and starts to leave.

ROSS

Don't say anything about this.

FRANCINE

Have a nice day.

She exits in a hurry.

The lights go down and the music fades.

SCENE 39

A Community Center. A low platform is upstage center. There are chairs with his audience in them.

Ben is sitting and noodling on his guitar while occasionally sipping a Dr. Pepper

Cliff, Beth, and Francine are finalizing shooting prep. Tom is at his control table down stage right.

Lights come up.

Ross enters in an agitated state and sits with Tom.

The **Video Screen** activates and we see a quad screen with four camera's pictures.

The lights dim on Ben.

ROSS

Where did you find Francine? A real hard bitch.

TOM

She's been shooting some amazing footage. Love her cameras. And she works her butt off. A positive from her time in the military.

ROSS

Military?

TOM

Yeah. She spent two years in Iraq. Combat photographer. Scary stuff.

ROSS

So how is Ben?

TOM

Seems OK.

ROSS

Hard to believe I had to bail this whole crazy project out, and I don't like the music or the man. But it looks like he has something we can sell. George Strait coming on board changed everything.

TOM

Sorry. We're close to start time.

Tom activates the intercom. Everyone is whispering.

TOM

Cliff, Francine do you read me?

CLIFF

Yes. Hate to say it but that big can of Dr. Pepper he's got isn't filled with a soft drink.

FRANCINE

Loud and clear. Hello, Ross. Did you get some rest?

ROSS

You'll never work for Global again.

Francine laughs.

TOM

Looks like the audience is ready. Beth, give Ben the start cue.

The lights come up full on Ben.

He is slurring his words and angry. He continues to babble incoherently and noodle on his guitar. The audience is alarmed.

Francine and Cliff move around the perimeter filming.

BEN

Hello every one..... Faithful, clueless fans.... Thanks for showing up.... Had some bad news today.... The white man tried to buy my spirit.... But I told him to shove it.... So my friend, Dr. Pepper, and I decided to have a little party.....

He takes a swig of the whiskey and has a drunken reaction.

BEN

Here's a song for you.... "Lost Morning.".... Hope you hate it.... Like I do....

He starts to sing off-key.

BEN

"With the white earth 'round me
I lost my inno.... inno..... cence...."

He suddenly laughs uncontrollably, then starts to cry. Then starts to sing again.

BEN

"Two miles from home....."
My screwed up home.... Off the reservation.... My mom tried as hard as she could....
Dad was gone..... Whose fault was it.....?

He takes another drink then starts to sing again.
The Audience begins to take cell phone pictures.

BEN

"Just a jump beyond..... Beyond..... Beyond....."

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1

You're drunk! I want my money back!

Ben tries to stand up. Belligerently.

BEN

Screw you! I can sing any time, any where....

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2

You're pathetic. I drove fifty miles to see this.... I'm outta here!

BEN

Go! See if I care..... Sick Coyotes.....

Audience Member #2 leaves. Ben tries to follow but falls down and begins to babble. Beth runs to him and tries to calm him down. The audience hoots and boos.

TOM

What a mess.

CLIFF

Gotta pull the plug quick.

FRANCINE

I knew this would happen.

BEN

Get out! Who needs you?.....

Ben slowly sinks whimpering into Beth's arms.
The Audience is milling around in an angry mood.

ROSS

This is a joke. After everything I did to bail your sorry asses out, and you can't control him for one concert.

TOM

It happens. We'll get him ready for Nashville. We have a week.

ROSS

You know what. Forget Nashville. Forget *Backroads*. We can't take a chance on this freak. Global's reputation is too important. George Strait will understand. We'll find somebody else.

TOM

You can't cancel the pilot. Abe and Renata are behind us. We can fix this.

ROSS

Bullshit. When I tell them what's been going on, you and the show are finished. You are nothing but a small timer who got in way over his head.

He gets up and exits. Tom stands up.

TOM

(Yelling)

The concert is over everybody. Thanks for coming. Ben isn't feeling himself tonight.

He walks toward Ben and the small platform.

The **Video Screen** goes dark.

TOM

Cliff and Beth shut it down. Francine, go outside and try to get some positive bites from the fans. Ben, the concert is over.

Francine exits with the Audience.

BEN

You never understood who I am and what I'm doing...

He passes out.

TOM

Get him back to the van. I've got to call Renata right away. Ross wants to cancel everything.

CLIFF

That son-of-a-bitch. You would think he's seen so many stoned artists this wouldn't phase him.

BETH

So sad. What a waste of talent. Life just overwhelmed him.

Lights go down.

SCENE 40

Outside the Community Center.

Lights come up.

Francine is shooting an interview with an angry couple, CLAY (33) and JANINE (29).

FRANCINE

What do you think happened in there?

CLAY

Ah. He got drunk and made a fool of himself?

JANINE

I'm pissed. I came to hear his music, which I've been lovin' for over a year, and he goes on this drunken pity party. Far as I'm concerned he's sunk lower than a snake's belly in a wagon rut... and I won't be around when he sobers up.

CLAY

Are we gonna be in the documentary?

FRANCINE

Maybe. I don't do the editing.

JANINE

I ain't catching the drift. Right now, Ben Nighthawk's sittin' on a hill a nasty beans and I got it on video.

CLAY

Ease up, girl. Hard times are what his songs are all about. So what if he gets a little strung out. Country soul don't need glitz.

JANINE

It needs singin' on key, though... If he just wasn't so hot!

They laugh and exit. Francine looks around as
Ross enters.

ROSS

Well, little miss run-away-just-as-the-action-gets-good. Say good-bye to your stupid music series project. I just canceled *Backroads*.

FRANCINE

You've never seen a singer get drunk before?

ROSS

Not like this. These fans are burning up social media right now. They were taking cell phone videos like it was a wedding.... Hey. Turn that camera off.

FRANCINE

OK.

Francine smiles and puts the camera in her bag.

ROSS

That half-breed folkie is nothing but trouble. So.... How come you left our little party so fast?

FRANCINE

I think you have a problem, Ross.

She takes out her cellphone and calls up a video. She shows it to Ross.

The **Video Screen** activates and shows footage from a hidden camera in Ross's room. It's a replay of their sexual encounter with audio. It ends in a freeze frame, then goes dark.

ROSS

How did you get that?

FRANCINE

It's called a surveillance camera in a phoney smoke alarm. It took me about thirty seconds to install it in your room this morning.

ROSS

You sneaky bitch.

FRANCINE

And you aren't going to be stopping our show. Because if you do I'll post this on the web and send a copy to Abe and just about everyone you know.

Ross makes a grab for the cellphone, but Francine easily avoids him.

FRANCINE

The video is resting comfortably on a cloud now. The cellphone playback is just for show and tell.

ROSS

I should have known you couldn't be trusted. Well, I'm going to call your bluff. The *Backroads* pilot gets cancelled tonight.

FRANCINE

Oh, really. Here's another video you might like.

She calls up a video phone call with Ilona and shows it to Ross.

The **Video Screen** activates and shows Ilona's video phone call.

ILONA

Hello, Ross. You piece of shit. The curve is on forever. Thank god for Facebook. Francine found me and we had a nice talk earlier today. She showed me your sex video.

Puke level stuff. If Francine is playing this for you, then you have done something extra, as usual. Hyper sus. When Francine lets me know I'll call your father and explain all of your dating "rituals". That should make his day. Maybe I'll share your sex video with your social media friends, too. You just got your wig snatched. I'm skurt, Ross. You pervo piece of shit.

On the **Video Screen** the playback ends on a freeze frame of Ilona's face, then goes dark.

ROSS

How could you do this? I should kill you.

FRANCINE

I hope you try someday. Go back to New York, forget about cancelling our show, and our video will never be seen. Is that a deal?

ROSS

What about Ilona. How can I trust her?

FRANCINE

I don't know. That's your problem. But if I ever hear that you've harmed her in any way, I'll post our creepy drug and lovemaking video for all to see.

ROSS

Too bad you didn't get blown up in Iraq.

FRANCINE

Why don't you find Tom and tell him the show is back on. Make up some excuse. This will be our little secret.

ROSS

Bitch.

Ross exits. Francine looks at her cellphone.

FRANCINE

Ilona. That was Gucci!

The lights go down.

SCENE 41

The Community Center where Ben was performing. Cliff and Tom are breaking down the gear. Beth is cradling a passed out Ben.

Lights come up.

Ross runs in.

ROSS

Your stupid show is back on. Don't ask why. If you've called Renata, call her back.

TOM

What happened? Where's Francine?

ROSS

I changed my mind. Just make sure Ben is in good shape for Nashville. Francine should be fired. Like now.

TOM

How are you getting back to the hotel?

ROSS

That's what Uber's for.

Ross exits.

Francine runs in.

TOM

What the hell is going on?

FRANCINE

It's a long story. But the good news is we won't have to deal with Ross anymore.

CLIFF

Man, how did you pull that off? Magic time.....

FRANCINE

You might say that.... You have any of those kelp bars left?

Cliff hands her a kelp bar and they toast each other as the lights go down.

SCENE 42

Ben's hotel room. A bed and three chairs.

Lights up.

Tom, Cliff, Beth, Francine, and Ben are there.
Ben is sitting on the bed drinking coffee, still
half-drunk.

TOM

Tonight was pathetic. Totally lame. We need your word that you will honor your commitment to Global, your tribe, and us. And by that I mean you stay sober and in good voice until the Nashville concert is over.

BEN

I'm sorry I screwed this up for everybody. I'm just not the person you thought I was.

FRANCINE

You know. It's time to grow up. We are all carrying baggage around, and we are dealing with it. God gave you a gift. Use the gift to bring happiness to others, even if you can't bring it to yourself.

BEN

I can't handle losing control of my life. I feel like I'm drowning.

FRANCINE

Stop feeling so sorry for yourself. Beth doesn't need all of this extra duty. Tom's job is riding on this. Even that asshole Ross went out of his way for you.

BETH

You need some rest. We all do. What's the schedule for tomorrow?

TOM

We drive to Dayton, Ohio for a performance tomorrow night. Then Cincinnati the next night. After that it's on to Nashville. We'll have two days there to prepare for the big concert.

CLIFF

Man, why don't you make a pact with us. You get and stay straight for the next week and I'll make you some broccoli biscuits with infused humus that will set you.... freeeee?
Hello? Do we have a deal?

BEN

I'll try. I'm not worth all this.

CLIFF

Trust me, man. We can do this. Stay straight, remember....

Tom and Cliff get up and exit.

BEN

Please stay with me, Beth.

He lies down and passes out.

FRANCINE

He can't stop the suffering.

BETH

It would be life-changing if you forgave him.

FRANCINE

That wouldn't bring my sister back. She sacrificed herself for me. Let my dad do disgusting things to her. All to protect me. I can never pay her back.

BETH

Yes, you can. You can forgive another soul that hasn't been happy since the accident.

FRANCINE

Happy?... My stomach has never stopped churning... You better stay with him. Call me if you need any help.

Francine exits and the lights go down.

SCENE 43

The **Video Screen** activates.

A **Travel Montage** of shots that show Ben and the crew on-the-road. His song "Daybreak" plays under the visuals.

-- The Crew van travelling on rural roads from Drone and Driver perspectives

-- Ben drinking celery smoothies, eating humus, and forcing down kelp. Cliff mugs for the camera.

-- The names "Dayton" and "Cincinnati" float by.

Close-ups of Ben performing, audiences cheering, and Francine enjoying filming.

-- The Crew and Ben celebrating in local bars. Ben is always drinking coffee or Dr. Pepper.

-- Ben and Beth are enjoying the fun like the lovers they've become.

Suddenly, the pictures switch to a **New York City Montage**. The music transitions into pulsing club music

-- At Global, Renata and Abe are pleased with the footage and show it to George Strait, who loves it.

-- Ross is hanging out in clubs, chasing young girls, and taking drugs. He is getting more and more manic.

-- Abe finds Ross passed out in his office. They argue.

-- Ilona is making out with a Rap Star at a club

The montages end and the **Video Screen** goes dark.

SCENE 44

A restaurant in Cincinnati. Tom is at a table Face Timing with Renata.

Lights come up.

The **Video Screen** has Renata's face in it.

RENATA

How is it going? I saw the Dayton and Cincinnati footage. Looks terrific.

TOM

I don't want to jinx us, but Ben never sounded better. He's sober and focused. I think he will be able to pull Nashville off. What's happening on your end?

RENATA

All the arrangements are in place. George Strait will be there Saturday afternoon for a sound check two hours before the concert. He would like to sing "Daybreak" with Ben. Say, did anything strange happen to Ross while he was with you?

TOM

Other than canceling the show then changing his mind? Don't think so.

RENATA

He's been acting weird. Really hyped up. Been missing work. Abe isn't happy. They argue all the time.

TOM

Is Ross going to be in Nashville?

RENATA

Not sure. Keep me posted on everything.

TOM

Will do. We leave for Nashville in a few hours. Fingers crossed. Good-bye.

The call ends.

The lights go down as the **Video Screen** goes dark.

SCENE 45

A club in NY City. A table and chairs.

The **Video Screen** activates and shows the action of a packed club. The music pulses.

Lights up.

Ilona is at the table with a well known RAPPER (26) and a GOTH GIRL (19). Ross enters and comes to the table.

RAPPER

Yo, Ross. What's up?

ROSS

See you have a taste for my stuff.

ILONA

Never your smash again. Fucking pervo.

RAPPER

When's my single gonna drop? Been a while since we wrapped the studio.

ROSS

All in good time. Any party ladies here?

GOTH GIRL

Hey! Don't I know you? Let's dance. You're blazing.

ROSS

Check it for a minute.

The Rapper gets up and Ross draws him down stage.

ROSS

Ilona's a freaky girl. She screwed me over big time and how about putting some hurt on her for me? She needs a lesson in how the world works. Your single can come out next week. Call me tomorrow.

RAPPER

That could all happen.

They return to the table. Ross leans down and pulls the Goth Girl up. They move in front of the **Video Screen** and dance.

ILONA

(Yelling.)

You sleeze! Don't forget my phone call with Francine.

The Rapper gives her a big kiss as the music thumps, the lights go down, and the **Video Screen** goes dark.

SCENE 46

Beth and Francine's hotel room. A bed and chairs and a door.

It's the night before the concert at Ryman Auditorium.

Lights up. Francine is sitting in a chair holding her camera. She closes her eyes, shakes her head, and her body spasms.

FRANCINE

No! Stop!

The **Video Screen** activates and the Accident replays in a wild, disjointed, out-of-sequence version. The final visual is a close-up of Ben crying. The **Video Screen** goes dark.

Beth comes out of the bathroom toweling her hair.

BETH

You OK?

FRANCINE

I see the accident every day. See him sitting by the side of the road crying while Nan was dying.

BETH

He's been carrying the same burden. Your crazy attack in the alley really shook him up. Such a shame you can't help each other.

FRANCINE

Why didn't I kill him when I had the chance? What is happening to me? Now, all of a sudden he seems to be enjoying himself... Why can't I enjoy any of this?...

Francine gets up. Beth gives her a hug.

FRANCINE

You've been a great influence on him.

BETH

I think he's finally figured a few things out. When he's sober and focused he can be a charmer.

FRANCINE

Will you see him again after the concert?

BETH

Don't know. That will be up to him. I have to get back to my son and my real life.

Ben knocks and walks in.

BEN

Hello.

FRANCINE

Hello. Big day tomorrow. Got your play list picked out?

BEN

Yep. George Strait and I are singing "Daybreak." A little nervous about that.

FRANCINE

Understandable.

BEN

You seem to be more friendly lately.

FRANCINE

Don't get your hopes up. I gotta go. Cliff and I have to discuss how we're going to shoot you in the big hall.

BEN

With a gun or a camera?

FRANCINE

This time with a camera. See you later.

She leaves.

BEN

Guess I'll never break through.

BETH

Maybe we should talk about what happens to us after the concert.

BEN

I'm no good for you Beth. Sorry, but there are too many pieces that don't fit. I'll be spending my time in Chicago and Minnesota and God knows where else. Not the life for you and your son.

BETH

I know. But I wanted to say thanks for giving a quiet audio person from New Jersey a walk on the wild side.

BEN

You are very special, Beth.

They kiss and embrace as the lights go down.

SCENE 47

Global Media Conference Room. A table and chairs. The next day.

Abe is sitting while Ilona, who has two black eyes and a lot of bruises on her face and arms, stands.

Lights up.

ABE

I know Ross likes to party. That's part of the business. But the perverted sex, drugs, violence, I can't believe it.

ILONA

Ask him yourself. He is so sick. A devo dog.

Ross enters.

ROSS

What are you doing here?

ILONA

Spilling your dad on what a creep you are.

ABE

Is all of this true? The perverted sex, drugs, violence....?

ROSS

There's a lot to the business today you don't understand. Ilona was never forced to do anything. The metal-rap-hip-hop world is a wild beast. Keeping artists happy isn't what it used to be.

ABE

But the perversions? Drugs? Ilona's face and her bruises?

ROSS

What do you mean? I haven't been with Ilona for weeks.

ILONA

But you got your rapper bro to take care of me, didn't you. I saw you talking to him. He turned out to be worse than you.

ROSS

She's on a groupie trip. What does she expect?

ILONA

Sure. Blame me. Remember that bump nasty video you made in Lexington? Your father was one sad panda when he saw it.

ROSS

You showed that to Dad?

ABE

This is all very disturbing. Thanks for coming in Ilona. I'm sorry for the bad experience that got you those black eyes and bruises. What can I do to help? Do you need money? A doctor?

ILONA

Get your head case son some mental help. He's totally bent. He's going to kill someone. Now you know. Good-bye Ross. You jack hole.

She spits on Ross and exits.

ABE

What do you have to say for yourself?

ROSS

Uh.... How about you were never there while I was growing up? How about you never showed any affection toward me or mom. You know. The usual stuff. Ilona is a total tramp. Why would you believe her?

ABE

Because she didn't ask for anything when she came in here. I mean look at her. Do you deny everything?

ROSS

She knew the chances she was taking when she started hanging out in the clubs. I've got my tastes and she liked them, for a while. Then she got a little too smart for her own good. What difference does one lost party girl make in the world? It's none of your business, anyway.

ABE

What is keeping her from going to the media and spreading her story everywhere? She could ruin you and hurt Global with a scandal like this.

ROSS

We have lawyers who can take care of this.

ABE

Not when there's video.

ROSS

(Shaking his head)

Why did I get mixed up with that bitch and this crazy *Backroads* show?

ABE

I'm suspending you for the time being. Don't come in to work or have any contact with our personnel or clients. Find a psychiatrist and work this out. I'm warning you. No contact. I need time to sort this out.

ROSS

What about Nashville?

ABE

You're off the show. Period. We can finish it without you. Something went wrong inside you and you have to get it fixed.

ROSS

You prick. I put in all the work. Saved the show, and you take me off the big finale.

ABE

You took yourself off of it. Call me when you've taken some steps to get better.

ROSS

You call me when you decide to be a father who gives a shit.

Ross picks up a water pitcher and throws it right past Abe's head into a wall. It shatters. Abe cringes. Ross exits.

Lights go down.

SCENE 48

A dressing room in Ryman Auditorium in Nashville. One hour before Ben's concert.

We hear Ben and George Strait rehearsing "Daybreak" over a wall speaker.

The **Video Screen** activates and has a photo of the outside Marquee at Ryman Hall in Nashville. It reads "Special Concert Tonight: George Strait and Ben Nighthawk"

Lights come up. The singing fades away.

The three Tribal Elders are with Tom and Renata. Renata is holding an enlarged check for \$100,000.

TOM

Hope your stay has been comfortable?

JIM BODWAY

Yes. Thank you. Nashville is quite a city. I hear Ben was a hit in Dayton and Cincinnati.

TOM

He was. His voice is the best I've heard it. He's rehearsing right now with George Strait.

PAUL LONG ARROW

When do we get the check?

RENATA

Right after Ben and George do their duet. You'll be in the first row with me. The seats are roped off. The Emcee will tell us when to come on stage.

DAVID ATEPA

This is exciting.

TOM

The crew would like to interview you all right after the awarding of the check. On stage, then here in Ben's dressing room. Is that OK?

JIM BODWAY

Yes. That's fine. Can we mention our tribe and the Fond Du Lac Reservation?

RENATA

You can mention anything you want. It is a warm and wonderful moment. Hard to believe sometimes that music can have this kind of power.

JIM BODWAY

Ben is a struggling soul who was given a beautiful gift. Sharing that gift with his own tribe sets a strong example for our young people.

TOM

I need to leave now to meet with the crew and set up my control area backstage. See you soon.

He exits.

RENATA

You must be very proud of Ben.

DAVID ATEPA

He overcame a lot of hardship. He is purifying his spirit with his music and this gift. We appreciate all of this very much.

The lights go down. The **Video Screen** continues to be on.

SCENE 49

Tom's Control Center Backstage. A chair and table with four monitors and intercom equipment.

Lights come up.

Cliff, Beth, and Francine are finalizing shooting prep when Tom enters.

TOM

It looks like Ryman Auditorium is going to supply a cover camera at the back of the house. Cliff, you and Beth are in the front center of the house shooting up at Ben and George. Francine, you're on stage, shooting from the wings and behind. Your Go-pro cameras are all set.

I'll be directing you but the live music will be cranked up and it might be hard to hear. After the concert, both of you get on stage with everyone and work the faces. Questions?

CLIFF

How is the Hall for all of these wireless signals? Cameras. Audio. Intercom.

TOM

The house sound guy told me the wireless intercom cuts out from time to time. The fact I'm backstage doesn't help. If you lose me just stick to the plan.

FRANCINE

Exciting stuff. I used to feel this way before combat shooting.

CLIFF

Man, adrenaline works the same everywhere. Looks like we are going to finish with a blast. Anybody want some kelp trail mix?

They help themselves from a packet Cliff is holding.

TOM

I'll take some. My teeth won't turn green will they?

CLIFF

You never know. See you after the show.

Beth, Cliff, and Francine bump fists then exit.

Tom's lights dim. He sits and becomes a busy silhouette at his Control Center.

We hear Ben and George rehearsing.

The **Video Screen** remains on. The picture changes to video of a cab driving through Nashville. The video runs for a few seconds, then returns to the photo of the Ryman Marquee.

SCENE 50

An abstract cab. A front and back seat.

Lights up. Ross is in the back seat in a crazed state. He pops an amphetamine pill. The CAB DRIVER (43) is in the front.

ROSS

You sure you know where Ryman Auditorium is?

CAB DRIVER

Of course. I hear George Strait is going to be there tonight. With some new singer.

ROSS

Right. A new singer who is in for a big surprise.

CAB DRIVER

You know the singer?

ROSS

You could say that.

CAB DRIVER

What's the surprise?

ROSS

Let's just say he's not going to like it. And neither is a certain lady who stepped over the line.

CAB DRIVER

Are you sure you're OK? You don't look right.

ROSS

Oh yeah? How would you know what's right? Out here in the boonies. I have a life in New York City you couldn't imagine.

CAB DRIVER

Oh. A big shot New Yorker. We get a lot of you guys here. Think you know what our country Americana world is all about. Slick doesn't cut it in Nashville....

ROSS

Look, asshole, let's forget the small talk.

Lights go down.

SCENE 51

The **Video Screen** changes to a quad screen of four cameras.

Tom's Control Area Backstage.

Lights come up. He is still in silhouette and animated. We see Ben's back onstage as he sings "Can't Fly on One Wing" to the unseen house.

The wireless intercom is buzzing, cutting in and out, and causing communication problems between Tom and the crew.

Ben's voice lowers.

TOM

Cliff! Stop down your iris a half step! Cliff!.... God dammit!....Francine! Watch out for Cliff being in your shot..... Francine!..... god damn intercomm.....

The buzzing of the intercomm increases. Ben's singing reduces in volume. Tom goes into a deeper silhouette. The lights dim slightly.

SCENE 52

An alley with a Stage Door outside Ryman Hall.

Lights up.

Ross walks up to the stage door and knocks. A GUARD (40) opens the door.

ROSS

How are you doing? I'm from Global Media and I need to get backstage. I just got here and can't find anyone with my badge. Ben Nighthawk is our client and I have some urgent news for him.

GUARD

Sure. His sister just married Brad Pitt. And his father robbed a bank. Get lost. No green haired freaks allowed.

ROSS

OK. You're a wiseguy. How about this.

He pulls a hundred dollar bill out of his pocket.
The Guard takes the money and waves him in.

GUARD

Be my guest.

Lights go down.

SCENE 53

Tom's Control Area Backstage.

Ben continues singing with his back to Tom.
Tom is fighting the intercom buzzing.

TOM

Cliff!.... Francine!.....

A light comes up upstage left. Francine is filming Ben. A light comes up upstage right.
Ross appears.

The **Video Screen** is still in a quad screen of all the cameras.

Suddenly, the output of Francine's camera takes over the screen: She snap zooms into a close-up of Ross. He smiles and opens his coat. He has a gun in a belt holster.

The **Video Screen** returns to its quad screen.

Ross smiles and exits as his light goes down.

Francine looks alarmed, continues shooting, and grabs her headset.

FRANCINE

Tom! Ross is here and he has a gun.

The static in the intercom system prevents Tom from hearing her. Francine looks worried, but continues to film.

FRANCINE

Tom! Can you hear me? Ross is here with a gun.

Static in her headset. No response.

FRANCINE

Cliff can you hear me?

More static. No response. She continues to shoot the concert.

Her light goes down.

Ben continues to sing “Can’t Fly on One Wing.”.

TOM

God damn it. The intercom is out.

In desperation he turns to a STAGEHAND (57).

TOM

Can you get this fixed?

STAGEHAND

Unfortunately, No. It happens a lot. Backstage isn’t a good space for wireless signals.

TOM

That’s just great.

SCENE 54

Ben’s Dressing Room.

Lights come up.

Ross bursts in. He paces frantically.

ROSS

Well, Mr. Half-Breed-Nobody, hope you're enjoying your last concert. The only problem is, along the way, you ruined my life. You and Francine.

He takes out his gun and spins the cylinder. He pops a pill. He has a look of madness.

His lights dim. He becomes a pacing silhouette.

SCENE 55

A front view of Ben on stage singing.

Lights come up.

Cliff is downstage center shooting up at Ben. Beth is next to him. Francine is stage left shooting from the side/rear.

Ben finishes his song. Applause. GEORGE STRAIT (60) walks out. More applause.

GEORGE STRAIT

Hello, Everyone. I'm George Strait.

Applause and Cheering. George and Ben embrace.

GEORGE STRAIT

You know, it isn't often that you discover a new voice that speaks to everybody across all styles and genres. When I heard Ben's songs I knew he was a diamond in the ruff that needed to be heard by everyone who loves Americana music. We thought you would enjoy the two of us singing one of Ben's songs: "Daybreak."

The audience cheers. They start singing "Daybreak."

Lights dim. They continue singing. Their sound goes down.

SCENE 56

Ben's dressing room.

Lights come up.

Ross is pacing frantically back and forth, psyching himself up for the coming confrontation. He is waving the gun.

ROSS

Killing should be fun.... A lot more fun than my life.....

His lights dim, throwing Ross into silhouette.

SCENE 57

Stage.

Ben and George Strait finish their song to applause. The EMCEE (45) comes out.

EMCEE

Ladies and gentlemen. We have a surprise for you. As many of you know Ben is a Native American of the Ojibwe tribe from the Fond Du Lac Reservation in northern Minnesota. Because he is a special singer who brings his history to his art, Global Media, his sponsor and record company, has decided to make a special gift to Ben and his people. Would the three Tribal Elders of Ben's Ojibwe tribe and Renata Marengo of Global Media please come out.

The three Tribal Elders and Renata enter. A STAGEHAND (25) brings out the large check.

Francine, Beth, and Cliff are moving to re-position themselves for capturing the moment.

Francine waves at Beth and tries to signal there is something wrong. Beth misreads the signal.

The intercom is still buzzing static and Tom's desperate voice is cutting in and out.

EMCEE

And now, George Strait and Renata Marenco will make the presentation of a \$100,000 check to Ben and his Tribal Elders. This check is to be used to create The Ben Nighthawk Music and Arts Center on The White Earth reservation, Ben's home. It will offer these new resources and facilities to all eight Objibwe tribal reservations in the state of Minnesota.

The check is awarded. Loud applause and happiness all around.

BEN

My deepest thanks to George Strait for sharing a song with me. To Global Media for believing in me when I didn't believe in myself. And to my tribal Elders who have reawakened in me a spirit I felt was gone forever.

Applause. Everyone hugs and handshakes. Cliff and Beth move in closer to film the action.

Francine is agitated. She suddenly exits upstage.

The Group begins to very slowly move toward Ben's Dressing Room.

Lights go down on the Stage. The Group is in silhouette.

SCENE 58

Tom's Control Area backstage.

Lights come up.

Francine runs in.

FRANCINE

Tom. Ross is here. I saw him in my lens during the concert. He's got a gun. I couldn't get through to you. The god damn intercom.

TOM

Holy shit.

Looks around. Sees the Guard that let Ross in. Waves him over.

TOM

Get back filming. We can't miss this.

FRANCINE

I'm telling you. He looked crazy. He could be anywhere.

The Guard arrives.

TOM

There's a man with a gun lose in the Hall. Can you call the police?

GUARD

Sure. What did he look like?

FRANCINE

Medium height. Suit. Sun glasses. Spiked hair.

GUARD

Ah. I might have seen him earlier. Said he was with the record company. Wanted to know where Ben Nighthawk's dressing room was.

TOM

(To Francine)

OK. OK. I'm on it. Get going.

Francine runs toward the Group..

Lights go down.

SCENE 59

Lights up on the Group.

Cliff and Beth are interviewing the Tribal Elders. The Group has stopped.

Francine runs in. Ben sees her, breaks away from the Group, and follows her as she runs toward Ben's Dressing Room.

Lights down on the Group.

SCENE 60

Ben's Dressing Room

Lights up.

Francine bursts into the dressing room. Ross is startled and points his gun at her. She stops.

ROSS

There she is. The bitch who ruined me. All because of a second rate singer and a stupid TV show. What a joke. Still filming to the end...

FRANCINE

It's over, Ross. You don't have the guts to shoot me. Give me the gun.

Francine moves toward him. Ross backs up.
Ben arrives.

BEN

What's going on? Ross! Put the gun down.

ROSS

Only after you two are dead.

FRANCINE

Give me the gun.

ROSS

How about I blow your head off instead? Say good-bye, Ben. You're first.

As Ross points his gun at Ben, Francine steps between them. Ross fires. The bullet hits Francine in the chest. As she falls forward, she bashes her camera into Ross's face. They go down together. Ben overpowers and disarms a screaming Ross.

The Guard arrives with TWO POLICEMEN. They handcuff Ross, and confiscate the gun. ONE POLICEMAN calls for Emergency Medical help on his cell phone.

Francine is dying. Ben kneels down to hold her. She looks up at him.

The **Video Screen** activates. A wild montage.

* The Accident plays back in jerky, slow motion.

* Francine in the storage room in Iraq with Ben on the computer screen being let out of jail.

* Ben performing in the church and her shock of realization.

* Francine in the alley with the chunk of concrete about to kill him.

* Ben singing in Ryman Auditorium

* Francine's sister, Nan, smiling on the way to the bus stop. The image freezes.

The **Video Screen** fades to black.

Francine smiles at Ben.

FRANCINE

We're both free now.

She dies. Ben cries as he holds her.

Lights slowly go down.

SCENE 61

A Graveyard in Northern Minnesota. Francine's gravestone.

Lights up.

Francine has just been interred. Tom, Beth, Cliff, and Ben are standing by her gravestone.

TOM

Nice of Global to pay our way to this god-forsaken part of Minnesota. It's sad we're the only ones here.

BEN

Renata told me they will keep their commitment to the Music and Arts Center. That was unexpected. A lot to process.

CLIFF

Man, how about Ross? A very creepy, scary guy. I think he had his eye on Francine for a while. She must have had fun putting a big clamp on that.

BETH

She was so confused. Your song about her dead sister triggered so many bad emotions.

BEN

The accident happened about a mile from here.

CLIFF

I don't know, it's like there was some evil outside force working on you two.

BETH

Keep playing your music. She wouldn't admit it to anyone but she listened to it a lot... Oh.... There's someone else who would like to say something...

Beth holds up her cellphone. The **Video Screen** activates and Ilona appears.

ILONA

Hello Everyone. Missing Francine. She's with Mr. Who now.... She brought the truth and protected us.... Ben! You're still Gucci. Your singing is The Wiz. Carry on.... I love you Chummbas!

The call ends and the **Video Screen** goes dark.
They all smile.

BEN

My reservation is only ten miles away. The Elders want me to meet with the young people. Get their input on what the Center will be like.

CLIFF

You have a gift, man. Keep sharing it with your people.

TOM

Good luck, Ben. You sure deserve it.

BETH

You have so much to give.

(Beat)

You've given me a lot.

Ben taps his heart.

BEN

I'll write that song about your eyes. I promise.

She gives Ben a hug. They all say good-bye. Tom, Beth, and Cliff turn and exit. Ben watches them, then turns to Francine's gravestone and tenderly runs his hand along the top.

BEN

I already know your song.

Ashe lights go down, guitar music starts.

SCENE 62

The **Video Screen** activates. The words

One Year Later
The Fond Du Lac
Ojibwe Reservation

appear for a few seconds then the **Video Screen** goes dark.

The new Arts and Music Center. A small platform with some chairs arranged for the Audience.

Lights up.

Ben is on stage noodling on his guitar. In the Audience are the Three Tribal Elders, Abe, Renata, Cliff, Beth, Tom, Ilona and others.

BEN

Thanks for coming today. It's a humbling experience to be up here playing for you. I'm not sure I am worthy of all this.

Let's hope this Center will become a place where young members of our tribe can learn about music and its powers. Here's a song I've been working on. It's about a friend of mine who grew up just down the road. Hope you like it. It's called "Francine"

Ben sings. As the song progresses the Stage Audience rises, turns, and takes their curtain calls.

When Ben finishes singing. Francine enters and joins him as they take their bow.

BEN

"Can the Spirit hear me singing
On my Turtle Island stone?
My wolf howls to the sunset
Light fires for Crane and Loon

White earth rose up one morning
A perfect day for fun
We cruised around Du Lac
Crazy moments in the sun

We came around a bend
Ice cut me like a knife
The shouts turned into screams
And I took a precious life

A sacred sister angel
Was taken by a boy
Too young to understand
How the spirits can destroy

I sing the song Francine
Who watched with crying heart
She never had a chance
To give her life a start

I sing the song Francine
Pursued by unfair ghosts
So much hurt and sadness
For one so strong and bold

But the fire of retribution
Found a singer-killer's heart
Stole the winner from the loser
And tore our lives apart.

I sing the song Francine
Sweet soul beneath the pain
My music understands
Dark eyes bound up in chains

Her sister reached out softly
Through the gauze of ghosts long gone
She struggled through the smoke
Fought wars she knew were wrong

I sing the song Francine
Her tormentor and her friend
A grateful Redbone singer
Who loved her at the end

I sing the song Francine
With eyes that finally see
She stepped into the bullet
Now both of us are free.”

The lights slowly go dark.

THE END