

# The Promise We Made

Mason Mantla

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"The Promise We Made" is a compelling and thought-provoking screenplay written by Mason Mantla. Set in a remote northern community, the story delves into themes of ancestral connections, environmental degradation, and the consequences of humanity's actions on nature. With a touch of the supernatural, the screenplay offers a unique perspective on the importance of honoring our relationship with the land.

The protagonist, Nazee, is a relatable and complex character who undergoes a transformative journey throughout the narrative. As a young Dene student, she initially appears disinterested in her studies and disconnected from her heritage. However, her encounter with the Caribou Woman sets her on a path of self-discovery and responsibility.

The screenplay effectively blends realism with supernatural elements, creating an intriguing and atmospheric tone. The animated cave paintings provide visually captivating moments that showcase the historical significance of the land and its inhabitants. The presence of the Caribou Woman as a spiritual guide adds a layer of mysticism to the story, reinforcing the importance of Indigenous traditions and wisdom.

The dialogue is well-crafted, allowing the characters to express their perspectives and engage in meaningful discussions. Nazee's interactions with the Caribou Woman reveal her internal conflict as she grapples with the weight of humanity's impact on the environment. The exchanges between Nazee and the Caribou Woman also provide opportunities for reflection on cultural heritage and the interdependence between humans, animals, and the natural world.

One of the screenplay's strengths is its ability to evoke a sense of urgency and consequence. The climactic moment, where the wolves descend upon the town, serves as a powerful metaphor for the price paid for neglecting our responsibilities to the environment. The final resolution leaves the audience contemplating the future of the community and the potential for redemption.

In conclusion, "The Promise We Made" is a thought-provoking and evocative screenplay that delves into the relationship between humans and nature. Through its engaging characters, mystical elements, and timely themes, the story serves as a reminder of the importance of honoring our ancestral connections and taking responsibility for our actions. Mason Mantla's screenplay holds great potential to captivate audiences and spark discussions on environmental stewardship and cultural preservation.

The Promise We Made

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FADE IN

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Nazee, 17, a female Dene student plays with her braids during class. She zones out as the teacher speaks.

TEACHER

- further more. The population of the Bathurst caribou herd has dropped to a historical low. Over 80 percent of the caribou have been decimated due to multiple limiting factors. If we -

Who cares? What can she do about it thought Nazee. She looked outside the window and looked at the frost covered trees outside school limits.

She saw a woman. No wait. A caribou.

The Caribou Woman motions her arm beckoning Nazee to come hither.

CARIBOU WOMAN

Nazee.

Did anyone else hear this? Nazee looked around at her classmates. No? Only Me?

TEACHER

Nazee!

Nazee startles.

TEACHER (cont'd)

I asked you a question!

NAZEE

There are multiple factors that led to the decline of the caribou population. The decline was mostly driven by increasing negative trends in adult female and calf survival rates and possibly reduced fecundity possibly due to climate change and mining.

The teacher looks surprised that Nazee was indeed paying attention.

2.

TEACHER

The research also shows that the effect of a constant hunter harvest on the declining herd was one potential cause for the recent accelerated decline in adult survival.

The brows on Nazee's head can't furrow any faster.

NAZEE

Yes but I dispute that.

TEACHER

What are your reasons for disputing peer reviewed published research?

NAZEE

Only what my ancestors tell me. That we have been harvesting the caribou since time immemorial and the only new factors are major mining operations in their calving grounds.

Beat.

NAZEE (cont'd)

Oh we also royally fucked up the earth and the caribou have paid the price.

Mic drop.

TEACHER

Nazee.

The teacher puts their hand in their face.

TEACHER (cont'd)

You can't say fuck in my class.

Nazee smirks.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

Nazee is walking home from school when she hears something from the woods.

She stops and listens as the world goes silent around her.

CARIBOU WOMAN

Nazee.

3.

Nazee trails of the road and heads to the voice in the woods.

EXT. WOOD TRAIL - DAY

The trees open into a clearing. It looks like the a pathway into the woods. She sees footprints in the snow.

INVERTED SHOT NAZEE WALKING DOWN THE PATH

Nazee walks along the path for what seems like 5 minutes.

She comes upon a cave. Nazee peers into the cave and sees a pulsating blue light. She enters the cave.

INT. THE CAVE - DAY

The cave is covered in paintings depicting humans, caribou, and wolves.

In the center of the cave is the figure, Caribou Woman.

The spirit is dressed in a hide dress, has long dark raven black hair, and antlers on her head. A bright blue aura envelopes her.

Nazee grabs a large rock and hides behind her.

NAZEE

Who are you?

CARIBOU WOMAN

I am the spirit of the Caribou.

NAZEE

Why have you been following me?

CARIBOU WOMAN

This meeting has been etched in the fabric of time since the grandfathers went back into the land.

NAZEE

(incredulous)

I don't believe you. How do I know you're not just some nutcase?

CARIBOU WOMAN

We must follow ceremony.

The Caribou Woman points to a smoldering bundle of sage.

4.

Nazee picks it up.

NAZEE

What am I supposed to do with this?

CARIBOU WOMAN

You forgot. You all did.

The caribou woman points at the sage and then paints the air with her finger. The smoke magically follows the path of her finger and envelopes Nazee.

When the smoke clears the Caribou Woman has made her way towards the cave drawing.

Nazee follows.

NAZEE

Hey Lady, I asked you why are you following me? You know we just got 911 right?

CARIBOU WOMAN

There was once a time where the beings of the land lived in harmony.

INT. THE CAVE WALL - DAY (ANIMATED)

The animated caribou and the wolf figures start to move around the wall.

CARIBOU WOMAN

Then the humans came.

The animated human figures enter the scene.

CARIBOU WOMAN (cont'd)

But they had no defense. They were as powerless as calves and the wolves massacred them.

The animated wolf figures attack the animated human figures and blood spills from the walls.

CARIBOU WOMAN (cont'd)

The caribou saw this and took pity on the humans. They approached the wolves and made a treaty. If the wolves leave the humans be, then the caribou will offer some of their herd for the wolves to eat.

5.

The animated caribou figures and the animated wolf figures meet. The animated caribou figures exit the scene and leave a few animated caribou. The animated wolves jump on the caribou.

CARIBOU WOMAN (cont'd)  
Thus it was that humans were able to  
prosper and flood the earth with  
their number.

The animated human figures grow in multitude and take over the cave wall.

INT. THE CAVE - DAY

The caribou woman walks towards the center of the cave again.

NAZEE  
I never knew.

CARIBOU WOMAN  
Humans forget what should never be  
forgotten and tread on what should  
never be tread.

NAZEE  
What do you want from me?

CARIBOU WOMAN  
You are the descendant.

NAZEE  
Of who?

CARIBOU WOMAN  
Yamozha.

NAZEE  
No. My mom is Alice and my dad is  
Johnny. We own a convenience store.

CARIBOU WOMAN  
Only the blood of the lawgiver can  
step into these walls.

NAZEE  
Look lady I think you have the wrong  
person here.

6.

CARIBOU WOMAN  
(angry)  
Quiet!

The Caribou Woman grew slightly larger and her voice becomes dark and disjointed.

The bright blue aura around her turns to a dark navy.

Nazee falls backwards and throws the rock. It goes through the Caribou Woman.

CARIBOU WOMAN (cont'd)  
We also made a treaty with the humans. But I guess you forgot that too? If you respected us. If you used all the parts of our body. If you gave us offering. We would continue to honor our treaty with the wolves.

NAZEE  
It's colder than a witch's tit in here. I better get going.

CARIBOU WOMAN  
But you pillaged our land, poisoned our water, and greedily took from our number until we couldn't give anymore but still you took.

NAZEE  
I know. I know that we have been shitty towards your kind. I know that we could've, should've done better. If you let me out here alive I will try my best to make it right.

CARIBOU WOMAN  
We have gathered here today in the sacred site of the Grandfathers. We have a representative of the Dene. The descendant of Yamo. Daughter of Alice and Johnny, Nazee. With all parties present we continue with the decision. To annul the treaty between the Dene and the Caribou due to malfeasance. Nazee do you have anything to say to this?

NAZEE  
I uh -



7.

CARIBOU WOMAN

The offending party has not made a credible defense. The treaty has been annulled.

The caribou woman walks towards the fallen girl.

NAZEE

I don't understand what does it mean?

CARIBOU WOMAN

Humans will never step onto these hallowed grounds again. We will stop protecting you. You will never ever see a Caribou in your lifetime. The wolves will come to call.

NAZEE

The wolves?

CARIBOU WOMAN

May the creator have mercy on your soul.

The Caribou Woman snaps her fingers.

The cave becomes blurry and wavy in Nazee's eyes. Then she is in the middle of town.

EXT. BEHCHOKO - DAY

Confused, Nazee looks around her. Everything seems normal. Was it all a dream?

Then she hears it. First a lonely howl on the horizon. Then a cacophony of howls respond. The multitude of voices as loud as jet engines.

Life stops in the town. People get out of cars to see where the noise is coming from. Office workers leave their complexes. Students run from their studies.

Then Nazee looks at the ice and finally sees it.

AERIAL SHOT THOUSANDS OF WOLVES RUNNING TO TOWN.

The howling continues once again and the bloodletting begins.

FADE TO BLACK

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**Mason Mantla** is a Tłıchq First Nations hailing from Behchokò, NT, Canada. He started working in the arts right out of high school. While employed with the local high school he was part of resiliency pilot project using film as an art based intervention technique to get youth to take more interest in their studies. Based on the success of the project he was hired by the Education Authority to deliver similar programming throughout the Tłıchq region. Using film, the youth were able to show their views on social and health issues in the Dene communities and create a dialogue about these sometimes taboo topics. Mason now works full-time as a freelance videographer.