

## THE VETERAN OF TWO RIVERS

*A Hidden Herald Microplay*

### Dramatis Personae

**HERALD** - the pigeon narrator (Karen)

**VETERAN** - a Dakota veteran, recently returned from service, sleeping out near Wakan Tipi (Samuel)

**RIVER (VOICE)** - the voice of the Mississippi, speaking in two timelines (Anna & Alex in unison)

**ANCESTOR WIND** - a softer, older voice carried through the reeds  
Adrienne

### THE PLAY

*Italics indicate soundscape.*

#### HERALD

*Wingbeats. A coo that becomes a voice.*

Wakan Tipi, remembers everything.

The ancestors.

The soldiers.

The ones who left, and the ones who came home different.

And sometimes... the cave remembers forward too.

*Night insects. Slow river. A faint echo from inside the cave.*

#### VETERAN

*Settling onto a bedroll.*

Just one night.

Just need one quiet night.

Hear that, spine? Cease fire for tonight.

We'll just bed down here in the tent and forget about the roots.

Looks quiet enough. Haven't been here since the 20 teens, when I was a kid. Smelled better back then...

*He exhales.*

Finally alone...

*The river answers with a low, harmonic pulse.*

**RIVER (VOICE)**

You're not alone.

**VETERAN**

*(Exhausted)*

Okay, cave, I get it. You're mystical.

Just cool it and let me sleep.

**HERALD**

He thinks it's the wind.

It isn't.

**ANCESTOR WIND**

*Soft, older.*

Čhaŋtéwašte (chan-TAY-wash-tay) Iyáya (ee-YAH-yah).

Good heart.

**VETERAN**

*Puzzled*

Grandmother?

No... no, I'm tired. That's all.

**RIVER (VOICE)**

You came home carrying too much.

Lay it down.

**VETERAN**

I can't.

People back home think I'm fine.  
People in the city don't see me at all.  
And the ones I served with—  
*He stops himself.*  
They don't understand this place any better than I do.

#### **ANCESTOR WIND**

This place understands you.  
  
*Wind through reeds. A soft, rhythmic pulse like a heartbeat.*

#### **VETERAN**

What does that even mean?  
  
I don't understand myself.  
  
What do you want from me?

#### **RIVER (VOICE)**

To show you what comes next.  
  
Maybe then you can find what you lost.  
  
*The river sound shifts—deeper, fuller, as if widened.*

#### **HERALD**

The future is coming.  
Not bright.  
Not easy.  
But possible.

#### **RIVER (VOICE)**

In the years ahead — if the people choose it — the noise of the city softens.  
Power is granted only where harm is limited, and the land begins to breathe again.  
  
Kinship spreads across the plains, carried by lighter footsteps, as if the earth remembers how to welcome us without fear.

**ANCESTOR WIND**

The riverbanks breathe again. Rivercane psá (psah), manohmen  
 Psínj (seen), lilies waḥpé tǎnka (wah-peh tahn-kah).  
 Your people return to the water, and the water rises to meet  
 them.

They learn to return what was taken,  
 and to grow with the earth rather than grinding it beneath their  
 feet.

Anáǵoptaŋ wo! (ah-NAH xgh oh-p tah<sup>n</sup> woh)

None of this is promised.  
 But all of it is possible.  
 And your return makes it more possible than before.

**VETERAN**

That's...

That's not the St. Paul I know. It's... Imnǐžaska...

(beat)

...I don't even know how to get to the river...

**ANCESTOR WIND**

It's the Imnǐžaska that could be.  
 If you stay.  
 If you help.

**VETERAN**

Help how?  
 I'm no Itǎŋčhaŋ (ee-TAHN-chahn) I'm not any kind of leader.  
 I'm barely holding myself together.

**RIVER (VOICE)**

You don't have to lead.  
 You only have to return.  
 To the language.  
 To the land.  
 To your own breath.

**VETERAN**

*Quiet, breaking.*

I'm here because I didn't know where else to go. Grandma said,  
"You lose your way, come to the Dwelling Place of the Sacred."

But look at me! I'm a mess!

What if I fall down? My knees, my back... an old paratrooper can't  
carry that kind of load. I'm not even half the man I was when I  
left. Just ask the VA.

**ANCESTOR WIND**

Then let the river carry you.

Just for tonight.

Wówačhiŋ thánka yuhá we (WOH-wah-cheen TAHN-gah yoo-HAH weh).

**HERALD**

And he does.

Not all the way.

Not forever.

But enough.

He doesn't touch the river.

The river touches him – in breath, in memory, in that place  
behind the ribs.

*The river softens. The wind settles. The cave exhales.*

**VETERAN**

*Breath steadying.*

Anáǵoptaŋ (ah-NAH-zhop-tahng)

I came here to... but now...

*(Beat)*

Alright.

I'll stay.

I'll try.

**RIVER (VOICE)**

That is all we asked.

**HERALD**

Wakan Tipi doesn't promise miracles.

Just direction.

And sometimes, that's enough to bring a soldier home. In the dwelling place of the sacred, a son of St. Paul finds hope for the future.

Wakan Tipi remembers forward and tonight he does too.

*Wingbeats. Fade out on river and wind.*