

## ACT 1

*Going Home Star* is the story of a young contemporary First Nations woman named Annie. She is confident and self-reliant living in an urban city; and, she finds some creative satisfaction working as a hair stylist for upwardly mobile, chic, urban women. At the end of a typical day, Annie joins the fast-paced activity of the city and the carefree encounters that come with it. Her nights often end with a line of cocaine and a random lover. Work, commute, clubs and random lovers are the highlights of Annie's existence. Her restlessness comes from this meaningless life style. Annie feels strangely disconnected within her superficial urban loop.

Gordon is a homeless First Nations man. He was born on the reserves, but was scooped from his home as a young boy and forced into the Residential School system. Ultimately, Gordon fled this life to live on the streets not as a victim but as a true survivor. Gordon remembers and understands the teachings of Anishinaabe trickster. It's this magical power and the deeper story of his people that is present when Annie and Gordon first meet.

In the bowels of the subway commute, surrounded by urban people, Annie and Gordon's initial attraction is more than just physical. Annie has the sensation that Gordon knows something deeper about her being. Although Gordon struggles with his conflicted past he recognizes the disconnected spirit in Annie. Gordon becomes that being that teaches Annie about her people, her past and ultimately, her story.

One night after her random lover departs Annie lays motionless on the floor dreaming of her day. Gordon appears in her dream. He approaches and kisses her on the forehead. Dreaming she is flying through time Annie sees a nomadic First Nations woman pulling a great weight though blowing snow. Upon waking Annie senses her dream was more like a vision and the strange connection she felt with Gordon is somehow connected with this faraway image.

Annie begins her busy day at the hair salon. She feels out of place after her dream. All the urban women want highlights and coffee. Mistakenly, Annie gives one patron her measuring cup full of hair bleach to drink. Luckily the patron spits it out; but, Annie is mortified.

Closing the hair salon and escaping toward the clubs Annie finds a wallet dropped on the subway floor. When the owner returns he aggressively retrieves his wallet. Annie becomes aware that all the urban commuters are looking at her suspiciously.

Gordon, the trickster, enters. The mysterious cloth that Gordon usually carries (which Annie thought he used for sleeping) is now spread out upon the floor. Resting on top is a Reliquary (Shrine) model of a Residential School. Gordon pulls the cloth and the Reliquary in a similar manner to the First Nations woman in Annie's dream. For Annie, Gordon's burden (the Reliquary) and the burden of the nomadic First Nation's Mother are both strangely familiar.

The Reliquary is an exact replica of the Residential School from Gordon's past; and, like the Greek Sisyphus, Gordon is somewhat banished with this burden. Gordon is a story-telling trickster and his life experience is at the heart of his teachings.

Afraid of Gordon's mystical power, Annie runs back to her lover. She has another dream of flying and this time a dream of urban people walking all over her. Upon waking Annie realizes that her life, thus far, has been spinning on the spot. When Gordon is near she feels part of something greater than herself.

Annie and Gordon are now separated from the urban world. Gordon stands behind the Residential School Reliquary, waiting for Annie's attention. When she looks his way Gordon lifts the Reliquary over his head. The weight, the burden, is too great and crushes him. Annie comes to his aid. Now having Annie's attention, Gordon begins to tell his story of the Residential Schools.

Moving back through time, towards a Residential School in a birch wood forest, Gordon's story begins with two First Nations children, Niska and Charlie. They were forced from their home to be educated by a Clergyman. Abusing the power entrusted to him, the Clergyman subjects the children to corporal punishment and his religious zeal.

Annie is heartbroken over the treatment of the children but Gordon knows she must venture deeper into the story; that to know only a few surface details makes it easier to dismiss the truth. Gordon leads Annie to a dilapidated wall of an abandoned school. She has passed this wall many times but never even considered its origins. They climb and sit upon the wall. Staring at the night sky Gordon continues his story.

Moving back through time Annie sees Niska and Charlie in the Residential School. They sneak around looking for food and mischief. They are excited to be out of bed and even more elated at their ability to avoid the Clergyman's detection.

When Niska entered the School she managed to hide the tobacco pouch which her Mother placed around her neck for protection. Niska now retrieves the tobacco pouch from its hiding place for her and Charlie to enjoy. The smell of tobacco reminds Niska and Charlie of home and the rituals practiced by their family. Although they cannot fully remember the details their desire to be with Mother and Father is too great. Homesick, Charlie lights a votive candle for fire and Niska sprinkles tobacco in the flame. The kids recreate their parents' prayer ritual.

The ever-watchful Clergyman discovers Niska and Charlie practicing their sacred ways. The Clergyman is bent on destroying their culture and assimilating these children into his way of life. His retribution against the children is severe.

Sitting upon the wall with Gordon, Annie learns of Charlie's beating and of Niska's hair shearing by the Clergyman. When she returns to her hair salon chair she understands that the antique chair may have a darker history. Searching through the hair on the floor Annie looks for the tobacco pouch. Gordon has inherited this artifact and he gives the tobacco pouch to Annie.

Continuing his story Gordon reveals the truth hidden in the cracks of the Residential School wall. Annie sees the loving moment when Niska's Mother and Father gave her the tobacco pouch: the moment Niska's parents said, "Goodbye". She then sees the moment that the Clergyman rapes Niska.

Annie is greatly distressed by this final story and Gordon moves to console her. Repulsed and angry Annie pushes Gordon away and exits.

Alone, Gordon remembers Charlie's story. Charlie escaped the Residential School and the punishments of the Clergyman. He fled into the nearby woods looking for the railroad tracks that would lead him home. He also used the North Star, known by his people as "the Going Home Star" to help navigate his course.

For Gordon the stars in the night sky are intuited as spirits or Star Children. In Gordon's past these Star Children and his Mother and Father have acted as guides and helpers. Gordon's hope is that they were there for Charlie on his frightening journey home.

Gordon holds the artifacts from the past and communes with Charlie's plight. The Votive candle and matches were carried by Charlie for energy and strength. Charlie's fate, his disappearance, is like the fate of many children from the Residential Schools. Gordon knows it could have been his fate as well.

Annie returns to console Gordon. Like the vision in Annie's dream -- the vision of the nomadic First Nations woman pulling the great weight -- Annie now realizes she shares Gordon's burden. Like the First Nations woman before her Annie picks up the burden of the past and begins her new destiny as healer for Gordon and potentially healer for her people. The "Going Home Star" is clear in the sky and Annie knows the direction of her future.

### *Intermission / Entracte*

## **ACT 2**

Annie, having picked up the burden of the past, immerses herself fully in the healing of Gordon. Harnessing the ancestral power of the Sweat Lodge, Annie stokes the stone fire pit. The turtle shell mirror from her hair salon and the shallow vanity it represented is gone. In its place Annie has hung a large turtle shell. For Annie, the turtle shell has a deeper meaning. It is an inspiration to unite with her people's Creation Story by building a new home for her and Gordon.

Mourning the loss of his own childhood Gordon's every thought is with Niska and Charlie. He remembers the torture these young children endured and he knows there was more than just one abuser. Many clergymen practiced corporal punishment and more. It was an approach to education unknown to his people. The abuses haunt Gordon's thoughts. His body is present, but his mind is trapped with these children in the past.

Earlier Annie followed Gordon through the underworld to learn about the past. Now she follows Gordon to help him reconcile his own conflicted memories.

Gordon knows he has to "build his fire up" and Annie aids in this endeavor. In search of answers

Gordon contemplates a time before the Residential Schools. He questions how European colonialism became a campaign of forced assimilation for his people. A comical image of Louis the 14th, Divine Louis, is imagined by Gordon. Gordon remembers the first contact with his people. He believes that Canada was not discovered by these Divine explorers, but was shown to them by his people. Their very survival depended on it.

Gordon wants to laugh at these earlier explorers, but when he thinks of Niska being raped he only feels anger; and his anger leaves him weak. He tries to remember a better time when Niska and Charlie were with their Mother and Father, but the clergyman's abuses are difficult to forget.

Annie continues to make a home for Gordon and herself. Her hope is to commune with the Star Children without anger; to hold them in loving memory. Annie brings the turtle shell down as an idea of shelter for Gordon and herself; it is her way of unifying all the past lives under one beautiful idea, shelter...refuge.

The loss of Charlie, his disappearance, is too painful for Gordon. He cannot so easily forgive this mistake. Gordon holds the votive candle and says a prayer for Charlie. Gordon's hope is to find reconciliation. He imagines both sides joining in a prayer for Charlie. He also imagines both sides coming together in prayer for all the survivors and the damage that's been done...for the child taken, for the parents left behind.

Annie crosses the stage with her playful animal being. Gordon is at a cross-road: his ancient path of animal tracks leads one direction and the difficulties of his more recent path, the railroad tracks, lead another. Annie invokes a new symbol for Gordon's dilemma. She also invokes the healing power of the medicine wheel. Entering with ribbons representing the medicine wheel's four colours, Annie begins hanging these ribbons on the trees. Recognizing the sacred ways of his people Gordon and Annie begin making a shelter for their Sweat by placing the glowing stones underneath the turtle shell.

Annie has prepared one more healing action for Gordon. She leads Gordon to the pyre that she has built. Resting on top of the pyre is Gordon's ever-present burden: the Residential School Reliquary. Annie instinctively desires another realm for Niska, Charlie and Gordon's past; a realm where the children no longer live trapped in the Residential School. Annie envisions a world where Niska and Charlie run free and happy as Star Children. Annie hands the flame to Gordon.

Gordon feels deeply the damage that has been done and the anger he carries inside. Following Annie's lead, her hope, Gordon knows what he must do next. Gordon sets the pyre on fire. His gesture is a willing surrender to never returning moments. For a brief period, Annie and Gordon commune with Niska, Charlie and their Elders.

Gordon is weakened but feeling held only by love. Annie builds back his strength by braiding his hair. The future that shines in Annie's youthful spirit unites with the dark past haunting Gordon. Annie and Gordon validate each other's truth. Their journey has been like a dream and in their hearts are the words from their people's Morning Song: "Sun finally here. Beautiful day. Just got back from a long walk in the forest".

