

Richard Weingartner
from *South Dakota*

Curly

(To audience)

Down and down. I was 13. Aunt Dot and Priscilla finally arrived. Bud and I drove to Rapid City to pick them up. We took Judd (*JUDD enters*) along, mainly because he had set up camp outside our house like a lost coyote. He was a hick and he smelled like one. It always hit me how much there was to smell on that farm, how big the sky was. It also hit me how much I loved it out here. We did all kinds of things that summer. We visited Mount Rushmore; we'd ride our bicycles to Sioux reservation and fish the small streams outside cherry creek. One night we camped out at the Hangman's tree. We carried sleeping bags and flashlights and an old Sony Walkman and crackers. Bud said we couldn't build a fire because he said we might burn down the field. (*JUDD, CURLY, PRISCILLA pantomime rolling out sleeping bags.*)

Judd

(To audience)

Priscilla promised she'd tell us a ghost story. (*Sets up sleeping bag.*)

Curly

(To audience)

Priscilla told us this story about a ghost girl who danced in the corn and sang songs at midnight. The first time she told me and Judd, we didn't believe her. (*Music fades out*)

Judd

(To audience)

I didn't really care what she had to say . . . I just liked the sound of her voice.

Priscilla

(Underscored by Native American flute music, she slowly walks across stage while telling)

This is the story I told them at Hangman's Tree. I woke up all sweaty. I was having a heat dream. I could see my mom and dad, in the front seat of our car. I was in the backseat. Tires started flying off this old truck driving in front of us, then another, then another flying through the air. My daddy had to swerve to get away from the tires. My mother was yelling at him. He spun the wheel the other way. I had my little stuffed bunny, Floppy. I had 'em holding right. The car started to flip. I was looking out the window like I was in a spinning clothes dryer. I woke up. The farm house was dead quiet. I heard this crying sound. I was full awake. I climbed out of bed and walked down the hall. I could hear Uncle Bud snoring away. I stood at the top of the stairs. I followed the crying sounds. I was thinkin' maybe Aunt Dot was upset or somethin', so I walked to her door

Priscilla *(Continued)*

out past the kitchen. I could still hear the crying, but it was coming from outside. *(GHOST GIRL enters)* As the house slept, I opened the screen door and walked down off the front porch. The cool air played on my summer night gown. The crying voice called to me. I moved across the lawn to the cornfield. Guided by this voice I moved on. I was heading toward the Hangman Tree. "You're awake, Priscilla," I told myself. I could feel my bare feet on the dirt. My hand moved the cornstalks from my face. *(CURLY and JUDD rise and walk backwards toward tree, sit)* At Hangman's Tree, there was a girl, singing. She floated past me and started to dance. She spoke to me. She told me the story. The story of how she died. *(Music fades.)*

(JUDD, CULRY, and PRISCILLA sit on crate, under ghost girl as she stands on "tree")

Ghost Girl

(To audience)

Big Foot and our people were gathered at Wounded Knee Creek. We danced *Hawiwacipi*, ghost dance, chanting and avenging our ancestors long gone. Four days we danced, hoping it would drive the *Washitu* away, the soldiers. They watched us, holding their weapons in their hands while we danced. On our last day, they fired, we had no weapons but the *Washitu* shot in every direction, killing every living creature in their way. Children ran as fast as their feet could go, running and pushing the others that they once cared for, looking for a place to go . . . falling. . . *Talutah*. Blood everywhere. I ran all the way to the tree, but they caught up. A soldier pulled my arms back while another soldier pulled rope around my neck. I couldn't breathe. The world was red and I was spinning. High and higher. I could see the darkness. I could hear laughter. Higher and higher. It was silent, there was no laughter. Mother came to bring me to the new land, but I could not go.

(GHOST GIRL begins singing in Sioux. As she taps characters on the head with her Shaman stick, characters begin singing as well, forming a line downstage. As GHOST GIRL passes them, characters begin dancing and fall to ground, asleep. GHOST GIRL exits.)

Judd

(To audience)

After Priscilla told us that story, I couldn't sleep a wink. *(Original rock music underscore begins.)* I stayed up all night eatin' cheese crackers. It occurred to me under these stars that I was just a dumb farm kid from South Dakota, who didn't know much about this world. I thought I saw a ghost move out of the corner of my eye. I shined my flashlight into the brush.

Priscilla

(To Judd from across the stage, not looking at him. Curly sleeps downstage, opposite Judd)

She's not coming tonight, Judd. Go to sleep.

Judd

(To audience)

Priscilla had cast a spell on me. I turned to look at her.

Priscilla

(To Judd)

Sweet dreams, Judd.

Judd

(To audience)

Nobody had ever said that to me before or since. . .