

SILENCE

(An Excerpt)

By Hank Schachte

CANADA, WEST COAST, 1978

THE SETTING

There is not a living tree on the Indian reserve, yet it has an attractive aspect. The coarse grass stretches in undulating curves and hillocks down to the beach and the sea. The cottages line the beach.

EXT. DAY- THE BEACH

JOHNNY is splitting blocks with a steel wedge and sledgehammer from large cedar rounds chain-sawed into two foot sections from a log along the high tide line at the top of the beach. The ancient saw and gas and oil cans lie close by his old green pickup truck. Beyond, the TALL BOY is near him in b.g. among the big logs, bending over an upturned half-completed rough-looking dugout canoe. He is chipping at the end to form a bow with a small hand adz. In the middle distance Johnny's daughter MARY ENTERS FRAME walking with her head down toward the cottages beyond. JOHNNY sees her passing between them. He turns:

JOHNNY

(a friendly greeting)

Hey.

MARY, head down, hurries on OUT OF FRAME, not looking over. JOHNNY sees the TALL BOY standing watching her, too. He smiles:

JOHNNY (CONTINUED)

You'll never get it finished.

The TALL BOY smiles back.

TALL BOY

Maybe.

JOHNNY

(still grinning good-naturedly)

Why don't you get an aluminum one?

TALL BOY

They cost money.

JOHNNY

You could work with me.

The TALL BOY looks at him a long moment, contemplating, then shaking his head 'no':

TALL BOY

I'd rather do this.

JOHNNY

Shoot yourself.

JOHNNY strikes the wedge another blow. The TALL BOY bends to his (more delicate) task.

INT. NIGHT- THE COTTAGE- FRONT ROOM

The small cottage is crammed to bursting with things. Here and there the sea of objects has been kept back, and islands of space occur. The dining table occupies one of these. (new description DOS) ADD: There is a (functioning) large tin airtight heater near the center of the room.

Seated at the head of it, JOHNNY is eating supper with MARY. DOLORES, Johnny's wife, ENTERS from the kitchen and seats herself along the side. MARY, who is eleven or so, barely pubescent, thin under plain white short-sleeved blouse, cuffed, as from a parochial school uniform, sits rigidly, her eyes cast down on her untouched food.

After some fast, rather coarse eating, JOHNNY notices MARY, still sitting motionless, her meal untouched. He speaks through the last of a piece of chewed white bread.

JOHNNY

Hey, what's the matter?

MARY's eyes stay down.