

# SCENE 2 SCRIPT

## FIRE AND THE FIRST PEOPLE *(As Told by an Aspen Stand)*



*An individual aspen tree can live to be 100 years old, but many aspen trees grow from root systems that have been alive in the ground for thousands of years. In many aspen forests, the trees are all connected to the same root system. Thus, it can be said that aspen forests live for thousands of years. In the following story, it seems that some of the individual aspen trees can remember things that happened thousands of years ago – a time when The First People lived on the land we now call Wisconsin.*

### • CHARACTERS •

Aspen Tree 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Aspen Tree 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Other Characters \_\_\_\_\_

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**Aspen Tree 1** .....Nice day, wouldn't you say?

**Aspen Tree 2** .....Yep.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....A one in a million day I think.

**Aspen Tree 2** .....Yep.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....Do you remember what the weather was like a million days ago?

**Aspen Tree 2** .....Yep.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....I don't believe you.

**Aspen Tree 2** .....(*Stands silently.*)

**Aspen Tree 1** .....Okay. smarty. How many years ago was that?

**Aspen Tree 2** .....2,739 years.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....Good memory.

**Aspen Tree 2** .....Yep.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....So, what was it like then?

**Aspen Tree 2** .....About the same as today.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....Okay. Okay. The weather was the same but what about other things like animals and plants and stuff.

**Aspen Tree 2** .....That was different.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....Different how?

**Aspen Tree 2** .....You are not going to stop asking question are you?

**Aspen Tree 1** .....Nope.

**Aspen Tree 2** .....Fine. The plants and small animals were about the same back then, but there were a lot more fires – all the time as I recall. There were also a lot of big animals like wolves, elk, cougar, and even bison. We don't sense many of those animals or many fires any more.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....Why?

**Aspen Tree 2** .....I don't know.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....Hah! Something you don't know!

**Aspen Tree 2** .....Well, I do know what the little bird told me.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....And...

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**Aspen Tree 2** .....It's complicated, but it goes something like this. The people of that time, who the little bird called "The First People," used fire to manage the land for the big animals that they liked to hunt.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....I like fire.

**Aspen Tree 2** .....I know. So do many animals. Many animals, like deer, eat the green, sun-loving plants and shrubs that grow in the clearings after fire. The First People used fire to round up animals for hunting, to provide habitat for animals that they hunted, and to clear land for agriculture.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....And the big animals?

**Aspen Tree 2** .....I'm getting there. So, what I am trying to say is that the First People started changing the landscape with fire. They did this to provide themselves with food and clothing. They did it so well that their numbers grew and they started forming settlements and planting food crops. They began to hunt more and...

**Aspen Tree 1** .....And they killed off all of the big animals!

**Aspen Tree 2** .....No. I don't think so.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....You don't know or you don't think so?

**Aspen Tree 2** .....Well, it is not very clear because a second group of people moved onto the land. And they completely changed the course of history.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....So you don't know.

**Aspen Tree 2** .....Well, I only know what I can sense from right here.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....Obviously.

**Aspen Tree 2** .....So, what I am saying is that the little bird hasn't told me what happened since then.

**Aspen Tree 1** .....Well, when is the bird coming?

**Aspen Tree 2** .....Any year now, I think.

## • END SCENE 2 •

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Why could one of the aspen trees remember what happened so long in the past?

Who were The First People?

How did The First People use fire?

How did their use of fire change the landscape?

How is the use of fire different now?