**“How to Write the Great American Indian Novel”**

**By Sherman Alexie**

All of the Indians must have tragic features: tragic noses, eyes, and arms.

Their hands and fingers must be tragic when they reach for tragic food.

The hero must be a half-breed, half white and half Indian, preferably

from a horse culture. He should often weep alone. That is mandatory.

If the hero is an Indian woman, she is beautiful. She must be slender

and in love with a white man. But if she loves an Indian man

then he must be a half-breed, preferably from a horse culture.

If the Indian woman loves a white man, then he has to be so white

that we can see the blue veins running through his skin like rivers.

When the Indian woman steps out of her dress, the white man gasps

at the endless beauty of her brown skin. She should be compared to nature:

brown hills, mountains, fertile valleys, dewy grass, wind, and clear water.

If she is compared to murky water, however, then she must have a secret.

Indians always have secrets, which are carefully and slowly revealed.

Yet Indian secrets can be disclosed suddenly, like a storm.

Indian men, of course, are storms. They should destroy the lives

of any white women who choose to love them. All white women love

Indian men. That is always the case. White women feign disgust

at the savage in blue jeans and T-shirt, but secretly lust after him.

White women dream about half-breed Indian men from horse cultures.

Indian men are horses, smelling wild and gamey. When the Indian man

unbuttons his pants, the white woman should think of topsoil.

There must be one murder, one suicide, one attempted rape.

Alcohol should be consumed. Cars must be driven at high speeds.

Indians must see visions. White people can have the same visions

if they are in love with Indians. If a white person loves an Indian

then the white person is Indian by proximity. White people must carry

an Indian deep inside themselves. Those interior Indians are half-breed

and obviously from horse cultures. If the interior Indian is male

then he must be a warrior, especially if he is inside a white man.

If the interior Indian is female, then she must be a healer, especially if she is inside

a white woman. Sometimes there are complications.

An Indian man can be hidden inside a white woman. An Indian woman

can be hidden inside a white man. In these rare instances,

everybody is a half-breed struggling to learn more about his or her horse culture.

There must be redemption, of course, and sins must be forgiven.

For this, we need children. A white child and an Indian child, gender

not important, should express deep affection in a childlike way.

In the Great American Indian novel, when it is finally written,

all of the white people will be Indians and all of the Indians will be ghosts.

“I Would Steal Horses (for Kari)”

By Sherman Alexie

I would steal horses

for you, if there were any left,

give a dozen of the best

to your father, the auto mechanic

in the small town where you were born

and where he will die sometime by dark.

I am afraid of his hands, which have

rebuilt more of the small parts

of this world than I ever will.

I would sign treaties for you, take

every promise as the last lie, the last

point after which we both refuse the exact.

I would wrap us both in old blankets

hold every disease tight against our skin.

“Poverty of Mirrors”

By Sherman Alexie

You wake these mornings alone and nothing

can be forgiven; you drink the last

swallow of warm beer from the can

beside the bed, tell the stranger sleeping

on the floor to go home. It's too easy

to be no one with nothing to do, only

slightly worried about the light bill

more concerned with how dark day gets.

You walk alone on moist pavement wondering

what color rain is in the country.

Does the world out there revolve around rooms

without doors or windows? Centering the mirror

you found in the trash, walls seem closer

and you can never find the right way

out, so you open the fridge again

for a beer, find only rancid milk and drink it

whole. This all tastes too familar.

“The Powwow at the End of the World”

BY SHERMAN ALEXIE

I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after an Indian woman puts her shoulder to the Grand Coulee Dam and topples it. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after the floodwaters burst each successive dam downriver from the Grand Coulee. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after the floodwaters find

their way to the mouth of the Columbia River as it enters the Pacific and causes all of it to rise. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after the first drop of floodwater is swallowed by that salmon waiting in the Pacific. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after that salmon swims upstream, through the mouth of the Columbia and then past the flooded cities, broken dams and abandoned reactors of Hanford. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after that salmon swims through the mouth of the Spokane River as it meets the Columbia, then upstream, until it arrives in the shallows of a secret bay on the reservation where I wait alone. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after that salmon leaps into the night air above the water, throws a lightning bolt at the brush near my feet, and starts the fire which will lead all of the lost Indians home. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after we Indians have gathered around the fire with that salmon who has three stories it must tell before sunrise: one story will teach us how to pray; another story will make us laugh for hours; the third story will give us reason to dance. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall when I am dancing with my tribe during the powwow at the end of the world.