

SHERMAN ALEXIE

THE
LONE
RANGER
AND TONTO
FISTFIGHT
IN HEAVEN

Includes
an
INTRODUCTION
and
TWO NEW
STORIES

"Alexie's prose startles and dazzles."—*The Boston Globe*

EVERY LITTLE HURRICANE

Although it was winter, the nearest ocean four hundred miles away, and the Tribal Weatherman asleep because of boredom, a hurricane dropped from the sky in 1976 and fell so hard on the Spokane Indian Reservation that it knocked Victor from bed and his latest nightmare.

It was January and Victor was nine years old. He was sleeping in his bedroom in the basement of the HUD house when it happened. His mother and father were upstairs, hosting the largest New Year's Eve party in tribal history, when the winds increased and the first tree fell.

“Goddamn it,” one Indian yelled at another as the argument began. “You ain’t shit, you fucking apple.”

The two Indians raged across the room at each other. One was tall and heavy, the other was short, muscular. High-pressure and low-pressure fronts.

The music was so loud that Victor could barely hear the voices as the two Indians escalated the argument into a fistfight. Soon there were no voices to be heard, only guttural noises that could have been curses or wood breaking. Then the music stopped so suddenly that the silence frightened Victor.

“What the fuck’s going on?” Victor’s father yelled, his voice coming quickly and with force. It shook the walls of the house.

“Adolph and Arnold are fighting again,” Victor’s mother said. Adolph and Arnold were her brothers, Victor’s uncles. They always fought. Had been fighting since the very beginning.

“Well, tell them to get their goddamn asses out of my house,” Victor’s father yelled again, his decibel level rising to meet the tension in the house.

“They already left,” Victor’s mother said. “They’re fighting out in the yard.”

Victor heard this and ran to his window. He could see his uncles slugging each other with such force that they had to be in love. Strangers would never want to hurt each other that badly. But it was strangely quiet, like Victor was watching a television show with the volume turned all the way down. He could hear the party upstairs move to the windows, step onto the front porch to watch the battle.

During other hurricanes broadcast on the news, Victor

had seen crazy people tie themselves to trees on the beach. Those people wanted to feel the force of the hurricane firsthand, wanted it to be like an amusement ride, but the thin ropes were broken and the people were broken. Sometimes the trees themselves were pulled from the ground and both the trees and the people tied to the trees were carried away.

Standing at his window, watching his uncles grow bloody and tired, Victor pulled the strings of his pajama bottoms tighter. He squeezed his hands into fists and pressed his face tightly against the glass.

“They’re going to kill each other,” somebody yelled from an upstairs window. Nobody disagreed and nobody moved to change the situation. Witnesses. They were all witnesses and nothing more. For hundreds of years, Indians were witnesses to crimes of an epic scale. Victor’s uncles were in the midst of a misdemeanor that would remain one even if somebody was to die. One Indian killing another did not create a special kind of storm. This little kind of hurricane was generic. It didn’t even deserve a name.

Adolph soon had the best of Arnold, though, and was trying to drown him in the snow. Victor watched as his uncle held his other uncle down, saw the look of hate and love on his uncle’s face and the terrified arms of his other uncle flailing uselessly.

Then it was over.

Adolph let Arnold loose, even pulled him to his feet, and they both stood, facing each other. They started to yell again, unintelligible and unintelligent. The volume grew as other voices from the party upstairs were added. Victor could almost smell the sweat and whiskey and blood.

THE BASIS FOR THE AWARD-WINNING MOTION PICTURE
SMOKE SIGNALS—NOW WITH TWO NEW STORIES AND
AN INTRODUCTION FROM THE AUTHOR

Sherman Alexie's critically celebrated first collection, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* established its author as one of America's most important and provocative voices. Vividly weaving memory, fantasy, and stark reality to paint a portrait of life in and around the Spokane Indian reservation, this book introduces some of Alexie's most beloved characters who inhabit his distinctive landscape. There is Thomas Builds-the-Fire, the storyteller who no one seems to listen to, and his compatriot—and sometimes not-so-great friend—Victor, the basketball hero who turned into a recovering alcoholic. Now with two new stories and an introduction from Alexie, these twenty-four interlinked tales are narrated by characters raised on humiliation and government-issue cheese, and yet filled with passion and affection, myth and charm. Against a backdrop of alcohol, car accidents, laughter, and basketball, Alexie depicts the distances between Indians and whites, reservation Indians and urban Indians, men and women, and, most poetically, modern Indians and the traditions of the past.

“Poetic [and] unremittingly honest . . . *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is for the American Indian what Richard Wright's *Native Son* was for the black American in 1940.” —CHICAGO TRIBUNE

“Again and again, Alexie's prose startles and dazzles with unexpected, impossible-to-anticipate moves. With this stunning collection, Sherman Alexie has become quite clearly an important new voice in American literature.” —THE BOSTON GLOBE

“There is, to be sure, too much booze and too little hope on the reservation in Alexie's work, but also resilient real people—living and loving, and, above all, laughing.” —SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

READING GROUP GUIDE INSIDE

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