Bourne toWrite... creative writing workshops

One Shot Man

by Douglas Fresh

Huddled in the town square. Saloon and a few other buildings on fire. Pawnee with fiery arrows surrounded Liberty West. Silent, flaming ghosts, their horses circling to be free of the fumes.

Me and the Mayor's widow locked eyes. We knew each other in so many ways: deep words, rhythmic caresses, laughter. Memories echoed in my tense body.

A Pawnee rode in from the black darkness, wrought in war paint across his eyes. Embers dripped off his arrow like baying wolf saliva. His weapon trained on me… then at Jonjoe, my heart. My kid.

I squeezed his hand on my jade knife, and blood dripped.

The Pawnee leader gawped for a second… shouted and drew his fiery arrow back.

The villagers pierced the silence with hollering and wailing. The Pawnee eyes grew wild, as did their horses. They circled one time. 3 times, then they'd turn everyone to ash.

They began singing.

Damn, I'd been scanning them all, couldn't make head nor tail. The butcher, the veteran, dressmaker, cake maker, blacksmith… the deputy? Who was it? There was no earthly law that could fix this.

They turned twice. Then the big, dark-eyed Pawnee paused, rode the war party closer, and pointed his arrow towards Jonjoe. His little hand was sweating blood.

Silence.

The Pawnee were halfway through the killing turn, their sweat and fire mating angrily with the wind.

Time slowed, and my wits quickened. Jonjoe struggled to bring his eyes out from under my firm hand, but I held fast. The Pawnee made their move. The dark one drew back his bow; he would go first. I stepped to the side, swung Jonjoe, and shot Eileen through the temple. The wind was with me. The smoke was not.

My bullet whistled and found an old Pawnee. His heart angrily tried to breathe through the new air hole I had provided. His arrow arm moved to three o'clock and exploded into the shoulder of the dark one. The other Pawnees unleashed hell.

The elder flew off his horse like a comet. His bones began at cracking and lengthening, his shape changing. A tomahawk had beheaded the creature. A Pawnee of some of 40 years walked to me with a bag and laughed when he saw Jonjoe, blood like war paint across his young eyes. His face turned serious. Chief's son broke the flaming arrow in the dark would-be challenger's arm, lay him over his horse, and smacked its ass as it galloped off. They melted into the distant land.

The villagers were silent and hateful as I made my way towards Eileen and knelt. I made Jonjoe turn away and put the contents of the bag on her head, eyes, and up her nose. One punch hit me. I waved my gun around some, and we walked.

Jonjoe breathed heavy tears and smoke. Thought we'd settle. Life had other, quite twisted intentions. Bodie and Clyde were calm, manes tousling the breeze a kilometre or so away. They knew the drill. I lifted Jonjoe onto Clyde. The wind howled low in our ears. Then the silence broke. I took Clyde's rope, and we burned against the wind towards the town. My hat came off.

Water bottles and the rifle dropped with the force of the thunderous ride. It went off. I jumped off Bodie and ran through the fearful revelry, casting aside Pastor Nevill. Eileen choked to life in my arms. She slapped me, then softened; she knew she would have disagreed with her part of the plan. The job. The only Pawnee who knew they had a shapeshifter among them was the Chief's son, now worthy successor. Jonjoe cried a smile. We walked home; the fire cart spat best it could on the chaos. My burgundy jacket was wet.

The bad blood rose in me, just like wine.