

"WASTELAND ROSE"

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WRITING SAMPLE

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BLACK SCREEN.

We hear the sound of CREAKING TIMBER, WOODEN WHEELS ROLLING and horses PATTERNING on hard dusty ground.

SALLY - V.O

He always told us to call her Rose, but her real name was Tala. They say it means, wolf. I never could quite figure which name suited her best.

TITLE: Based on true events

INT. WAGON - DAY

The wagon SQUEAKS and YAWNS as it trundles along the open plains; somewhere near the Colorado / Nebraska border.

SUPER: 1867

TALA "ROSE" MILLER, late-20's, Native American, scruffy; sits with a sackcloth over her head. We can see her eyes, peering through makeshift holes in the cloth. She sits perched on a wooden bench at the rear of the wagon, facing the door. Her arms are lifted and apart; secured by rope. Her feet are held by the same rope as it loops down from the walls. The slave collar around her neck is attached by a cuffed chain to the barred wall behind her.

Opposite Rose, sitting some eight feet away, is one of her captors - EDDIE. Listlessly resting on his upstanding .44 caliber Henry rifle, Eddie looks instantly unlikable.

The two stare at each another. The wagon GROANS on.

It feels like an age since we've been watching them.

A fly makes itself heard; BUZZING around the wagon.

At first, both parties ignore it, but we all know how irritating insects can be. Unable to keep his attention on Rose, Eddie soon follows the fly with his eyes. It darts around inside the wagon.

The fly lands on the sack where Rose's forehead would be. Her eyes do not move. She stares at Eddie blankly as he raises his rifle and aims at both the fly and Rose's face.

He pauses a moment.

One very tense moment.

Then gently makes a gunshot noise with his mouth. "POW".

He sniggers and lowers his weapon.

Eddie slowly and confidently leans toward Rose.

He softly reaches out to the insect, but it flies off. His hand hovers for a moment in the air.

He lifts the sack from Rose's head.

Finally seeing beneath, we can make out that she is gagged with a rope and cloth.

Eddie pauses again, as if contemplating touching her.

But he doesn't.

Instead, he spits in her face and places the sack back over head, then sits back.

They both return to staring at each other. Rose has not flinched or responded this entire time.

Another long pause.

The distance between Rose and Eddie exposes a window in the side of the wagon. Through it we can see FOUR NATIVE AMERICAN BANDITS galloping on horseback towards the wagon; unnoticed and unheard.

As they get closer they disappear out of sight, heading straight for the driver.

DRIVER (O.S.)
Bandits! *Bandits!*

Eddie half stands, and the wagon jerks to a stop. Eddie steadies himself and exits the back of the wagon.

Rose turns her head to see out of the window as Eddie walks past it.

There are GUNSHOTS.

Rose jerks her arms, trying to escape.

Her breathing quickens.

More GUNSHOTS.

The DRIVER is heard SCREAMING and then GARGLING desperately. We can assume his throat has been cut.

Rose panics as one of the BANDITS - a man we will soon come to know as HAND PRINTS - walks past the window to the back of the wagon.

He enters the wagon and silently approaches Rose.

She gives a series of muffled screams from behind the sack as she frantically tries to free herself --

EXT. PLAINS - CONTINUOUS

Rose is thrown to her knees alongside Eddie and a black man called TWINK. The sack and neck chain have been removed from Rose; while the rope remains dangling from her wrists.

She reaches up and pulls the gag from her mouth; it drops to her neck.

She looks down the line past Eddie and TWINK, and sees a man she first mistakes for a SOLDIER standing over the DRIVER. He wears a blue military coat, and cap. Something is wrong though, his clothing is covered in blood stains. The soldier rips at and then lifts the scalp off the DRIVER's head, as Rose quickly realises he is a bandit also. SOLDIER turns, lifting the scalp. His shirt half undone, we can see a bare chest with various old wounds. Across SOLDIER's throat is scar tissue; possibly caused by a failed attempt at killing him sometime in the past.

Looking up, Rose notices the other bandits. One is a BOWLER HAT wearing man in a duster coat; beneath which are dirty otter skin trousers. He has a pony express satchel over his shoulder, and sits atop a horse with a white stripe down its nose. Soldier tosses Bowler Hat a golden pocket watch from the dead drive. Rose's attention is turned to Hand Prints. He wears pinstripe trousers, and his painfully skinny chest has black hand prints on it; his hair is a rough cut of differing lengths, and large earrings hang from his ears. He crouches in front of Twink and lifts his chin with the edge of a tomahawk. He considers Twink for a while. He smiles.

TWINK

Why, you doing this? We aint got nothin' much.

HAND PRINTS

We are the children of nowhere.

Hand Prints chuckles and looks over at a fourth man.

He looks back at Twink.

HAND PRINTS (CONT'D)

We are the spirits of our own making.

Hand Prints lets out an obnoxious roar of laughter.

Twink looks like he wants to rip into the man, but fear and a blade to his throat hold him back.

Hand Prints gently taps Twink on the cheek with his empty hand and stands.

The fourth bandit, and clearly the LEADER, steps forward and stands over Eddie.

Wearing trousers and waistcoat with no shirt, it is clear these items have been taken rather than chosen; they simply do not match.

At first, Rose thinks Leader is some form of monster, as over his face, he wears a rotten head mask made from horse hide. Not quite human or animal in its appearance, the mask has fur around its base, and buffalo horns protruding from its top, it has eyes painted on in red, and the rest of the mask is dusted in ashen blue. The mask has a mouth, which is wide open, and through it we can see Leader's face. His dark eyes seem sunken and lifeless, under a thick black paint which covers his entire skull.

Leader removes his mask and drops it to the floor. A single thick ponytail of dusted white hair hangs down from the top of his otherwise bald head. Beneath his stolen waist coat sits a necklace of bear claws.

Leader turns to Bowler Hat and says something Rose cannot hear. Bowler Hat pulls a rifle out from his saddle holster and tosses it to Leader. It is Eddie's .44 Henry. Leader steps back about 12 paces and places the rifle on the floor. He points at Eddie and then at the .44 Henry.

LEADER

We are the children of nowhere. We are the spirits of our own making. We serve no tribe. We take what we want and we die when we're done.

Leader points at the gun and then looks at Eddie.

LEADER (CONT'D)

Who will die today?

Eddie hesitates. Leader barks aggressively. The other bandits laugh and bark as well.

TWINK

Don't do it Eddie. I don't know about these devils. They 'aint no Indians.

Eddie stares at the rifle.

TWINK (CONT'D)

Eddie!

Hand Prints digs his axe under Twink's chin with renewed purpose.

Leader points at Eddie again.

The scene goes utterly QUIET.

Eddie pulls a bowie knife out from his boot, jumps up and leaps towards Leader.

Leader steps back.

TIME SLOWS TO 10,000 FPS.

He pulls an axe from behind his back and buries it in the side of Eddie's head. Eddie instantly falls to the floor dead.

TIME ALTERNATES BETWEEN 24 FPS (on Rose) AND ABOUT 2,000 FPS (on everyone else)

The bandits cheer and howl.

Hand Prints and to Twink and swings his axe, slashing Twink's throat.

The four men become lost in a frenzy of sick enjoyment.

Rose, panicked, notices the bowie knife by Eddie's body.

Taking a second to muster the courage, she scrambles to it.

No one has yet registered her movement.

She is inches away.

and picks it up.

TIME RETURNS TO 24 FPS FOR ALL.

Holding the knife in both hands, Rose points it at the four Bandits like a sword.

They stop in unison and stare at her. The whole world, it seems, it waiting to see what Rose will do.

Her shallow breath echoes as she stands for a moment deciding what happens next.

She runs.

During her efforts to escape, she hears two GUNSHOTS which are quickly followed by the WHOOSH of bullets passing her ear. She hears LAUGHING and HOWLING. But at no point does Rose look back.

After a long time of ferocious running, with nowhere to go, Rose carries on into the flat landscape ahead.

EXT. GREAT PLAINS - CONTINUOUS

The scenery drops into a maze of shallow gullies. Like a ghostly river of sand and stone.

Frantic, Rose comes across a small opening under one of the formations. She drops down onto her back and edges into the minuscule gap.

Exhausted. She pants and searches for breath.

Still clutching to Eddie's knife, Rose stops - holding her breath - and looks over her shoulder. Was it a noise or just paranoia?

A pause.

She sees nothing and carries on panting; more faint.

The dusty ground blows and billows around her.

As regular breathing patterns return, Rose turns her head and watches a scorpion scuttle slowly along in the near distance.

It's awkward steps and rigid frame RATTLE in the gentle BREEZE. This small insect takes her complete attention. Its beauty. Its movements. Something deadly.

Rose continues to stare at it lifelessly.

The serenity is soon disturbed as Rose hears the nearby sound of FEET.

A pair of boots come near.

Rose holds her breath.

The boots stop and stand. One of the boots gently and firmly crushes the scorpion. The CRUNCH echoes in the cavity where Rose hides.

A moment longer. The wind seems to be picking up.

The boots continue on.

Then they turn. They head back. In a leisurely fashion Bowler Hat crouches down and peers into the cavity. He smiles at Rose with crooked teeth and grabs at her. She kicks back but he is strong.

He drags her out into the open. She fights and struggles. Rose swipes at him with the knife, missing, and then successfully kicks him in the stomach. He loses his grip. Rose scurries away on her hands and knees, sliding on the dusty floor; slow to stand.

Bowler Hat moves forward with purpose. He swats her on the back on the head with some form of club. Rose becomes disorientated.

Bowler Hat grabs a chunk of her hair and pulls her up to her feet.

Without a word, he drags her out of the gully and toward the three other bandits.

They are standing nearby with their horses. Some their own, the others stolen.

Bowler throws Rose in front of Leader.

Leader handles her face roughly and examines the back of her head. He opens her mouth and observes her teeth. He takes out a knife and puts it to her throat.

LEADER

All must die.

Rose is not even looking at him.

This lack of fear. This drowsiness, seems to kill his buzz.

He stops.

FROM ROSE'S FOGGY PERSPECTIVE, we see, just past Leader, a strange FIGURE crawling along the dirt. It seems to be the form of a man, but it is oozing a black tar. Soggy black rags hang from its body, and it has an arm and leg missing. It makes no sound; just drags itself slowly towards us.

WHACK! A slap to Rose's face.

Leader gazes down at the disorientated woman before him.

He is almost...fearful.

Leader squats.

He studies Rose and then looks over his shoulder, and then back at Rose.

LEADER (CONT'D)

What do you see?

He says something to Hand Prints.

Hand Prints walks over and looks at Rose's eyes. He pulls, roughly, at her eyelids. He nods.

FROM ROSE'S FOGGY PERSPECTIVE, the figure collapses to the ground, still reaching for her.

Hand Prints gets on a horse and rides off.

Rose starts to regain some sense. She fumbles for the knife. Leader gently takes it from her. He holds it up by the blade in front of her face and then flings it off into the distance.

Hand Prints comes riding back, only this time he has a body flung over the rear of his horse; it is the corpse of Eddie - half dressed, the gash in his head dripping blood.

Soldier and Bowler Hat walk over to the body and drag it to the floor. Hand Prints dumps the shackles from the wagon onto the floor also.

Soldier locks one end of the chain around Eddie's wrist and then grabs Rose. She struggles, but is still a little drowsy from the club blow. Soldier yanks on her arm. He takes a knife and cuts the loose ropes hanging from her hands; tossing them away. He then locks the other end of the chain around her wrist.

Soldier and Bowler Hat climb up on to their horses.

Leader stares at Rose for a moment longer.

LEADER (CONT'D)

Earn my mercy.

He stands and walks to his horse. Bowler Hat steadies the horse whilst Leader climbs up the saddle. He clicks his tongue and the four men ride off into the distance; leaving Rose chained to a dead man, stranded in the wilderness.

Alone and terrified, but alive, she lays back on the ground. As the sun sets, she loses consciousness.

EXT. GREAT PLAINS - DAY

Rose is awake; frantically pulling and yanking and shaking the chain around her wrist, trying to free herself from the corpse of Eddie.

She tries dragging the body, and does so very slowly. But it is exhausting work.

With no shirt or jacket to search, Rose delves into Eddie's trouser pockets. Nothing. She takes his remaining boot off. Nothing inside.

With frustration she kicks and spits at the corpse.

She sits on the ground, facing away from the body and stares off into the distance.

Longingly, she looks at the small silver glint some 30-feet away. The only visible sign of the bowie knife.

Rose removes the remnants of the gag from her neck, and tosses the rope.

The WIND blows and carries a whisper. The voice of an unseen shadow. Almost inaudible. It is short and sharp.

SHADOW - O.S

Rose.

Rose tilts her head slightly, listening. The wind continues, gently blowing Rose's hair.

She looks around.

Nothing.

She goes back to staring at the horizon.

EXT. GREAT PLAINS - NIGHT

Rose slowly opens her eyes. Laying on the floor now, she HEARS an unfamiliar noise, something snuffling, BREATHING in and out.

She moves her eyes downward and then lets her head gently follow. What she sees fills her with dread.

Two COYOTES are gorging on the body of Eddie. Their fixed eyes shine in the heavy moonlight; a terrible menace.

After the initial shock has worn off, Rose decides that she needs to creep away.

She moves away slowly but with purpose. The chain RATTLES and it catches the animals' attention.

They go back to eating.

She moves forward faster and tries to get some distance between herself and the coyotes.

The chain reaches its maximum tension, and Rose begins to drags Eddie's body with her.

The fear and rest seems to have given her a little bit of extra strength.

As she moves, the body follows and so do the coyotes.

One coyote snarls, the other advances.

She is disturbing their meal.

The knife is a little closer.

She moves more.

The same thing happens.

Her motions are frustratingly slow yet pronounced, and the knife just seems to be so far away.

She moves again and this time the coyotes back away from the body of Eddie. Their attention turns to Rose.

The coyotes separate and start to circle her. The tension is insufferable.

Rose is moving as fast as she can now.

The knife closer with every agonising lunge and drag.

Almost there.

The coyote on her right leaps forward and gets Rose by her shirt. It twists and growls, tearing the fabric, as Rose lets out a muffled groan.

The knife is just out of reach. She inches to its handle.

The second coyote lunges at her.

She grabs the knife and slashes at the beast.

Contact is made and the coyote yelps. She stabs the other one, and it instantly releases her arm.

Both animals run off into the darkness.

Rose watches for a moment as she waits for something, anything, to return from the darkness ahead. But nothing does.

She exhales deeply and falls back onto her bottom.

As she sits in the darkness holding the knife firmly in two hands, Rose becomes acutely aware of the fact she must separate herself from this body.

But for the moment, she needs to take a breath and regain herself.

With great hesitation she crawls over to the half eaten body of Eddie.

She looks down at his face and grimaces.

She turns his face away and then focuses her attention on his shackled wrist. She puts the knife to his flesh.

With a brief pause, she makes the first cut.