# What You Pawn I Will Redeem

## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SHERMAN ALEXIE

Like Jackson Jackson, the protagonist of "What You Pawn I Will Redeem," Sherman Alexie is a Spokane American Indian. He grew up on the Spokane Indian Reservation with his mother and father, who were both alcoholics, although his mother later got sober. Alexie was born with hydrocephalus and suffered from various health issues throughout his childhood as a result, including seizures that prevented him from participating in different cultural rites of passage on the reservation. He was bullied at school but was academically gifted, which eventually led him to transfer to a high school off the reservation. He had more educational opportunities here, but he also struggled as the only American Indian student at the school. His acclaimed young adult novel, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, is semi-autobiographical and depicts a fictionalized version of a young Alexie navigating these hurdles. Outside of writing, Alexie supports various organizations and initiative focused on giving American Indian youth opportunities to explore the arts and develop stronger connections to their cultures. He currently lives and writes in Seattle, Washington with his wife and two sons.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"What You Pawn I Will Redeem" gives insight into the contemporary issues that affect American Indian communities as a result of both historical and ongoing displacement and oppression. Many of Jackson's problems—such as poverty, homelessness, and alcoholism—are struggles that are widespread among American Indian people. White colonists and the U.S. government carried out genocide against American Indians for hundreds of years, and many of those who weren't killed were forced to assimilate through boarding schools or Christian missions in the 19th and 20th centuries. These practices prevented American Indian people from transferring their cultural traditions and languages to future generations. The Indian Appropriation Act of 1851 marked the beginning of the reservation system that is still in place today and has contributed to the marginalization and oppression of American Indian communities. For example, American Indians see higher rates of illnesses like heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and alcoholism due to lack of adequate health care infrastructure on reservations. Reservations also lack quality housing and educational opportunities. A significant portion of reservation lands are held in trust by the federal government, rather than belonging to tribes themselves. This continued dispossession of land contributes to intergenerational poverty and a lack of resources among American Indians.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Although published in 1974, James Welch's novel *Winter in Blood* explores many of the same themes that appear in "What You Pawn I Will Redeem," including grief, the impacts of colonialism on American Indian culture, and alcoholism. These similarities highlight how American Indians have been raising awareness of the issues their communities face for decades, yet still receive inadequate support from American society at large. Alexie produced a film adaptation of *Winter in the Blood* in 2012. More recently, Tommy Orange's novel, *There There*, explores American Indian life (specifically in large, West Coast cities) and highlights similar issues such as alcoholism, mental illness, unemployment, and questions of culture and identity.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** What You Pawn I Will Redeem
- **When Written:** 2003
- **Where Written:** Seattle, Washington
- **When Published:** 2003
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Fiction; Indigenous Nationalism
- **Genre:** Short Story, Native American Literature
- **Setting:** Seattle, Washington
- **Climax:** Jackson dances in the street while wearing his grandmother's regalia.
- **Antagonist:** The Pawnbroker, white society
- **Point of View:** First Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**The Silver Screen.** Alexie wrote the screenplay for *Smoke Signals*, which was the first film whose cast, director, and production team were all American Indian. The screenplay is based on his short story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*.

**Role Models.** Alexie's stories were removed from Arizona school curriculum under House Bill 2281, which was later ruled unconstitutional because it was determined that this ban targeted and discriminated against Mexican Americans. In response to the ban, Alexie emphasized the importance of giving non-white students books featuring people of color as a means of empowering them to change the world.

## PLOT SUMMARY

"What You Pawn I Will Redeem" is the story of one day in the life of Jackson Jackson, a homeless, alcoholic Spokane American Indian man living on the streets of Seattle. The story begins at noon, when Jackson and his friends, Rose of Sharon and Junior, see Jackson's grandmother's **powwow regalia** in the window of a pawnshop. The regalia had been stolen from her 50 years prior, but the pawnbroker claims that he bought the regalia for $1,000 and that he didn't know it was stolen. He feels sympathetic toward Jackson but is only willing to sell it back to him for $999. Jackson only has **five dollars**, and the pawnbroker gives him $20 and 24 hours to come up with the remaining cash.

Jackson and his friends immediately spend the $25 on alcohol, get drunk, and pass out in an alley. When Jackson wakes up, he finds that Rose has abandoned them (he later learns that she hitchhiked to her sister's reservation). Junior remains passed out, so Jackson leaves to find the money for the regalia on his own. He comes to view the task of earning the regalia back as a quest that he must complete on his own, and one that he wishes could bring his grandmother, Agnes, back to life. Although Agnes died of breast cancer when Jackson was only 14, his grief for her is all-consuming. He wishes he could have seen her dance in her regalia at a powwow and views her as a lost connection to his Spokane culture. Like Jackson, she was acutely aware of how white society discriminates against indigenous people.

After Rose of Sharon has left, Jackson meets and befriends three Aleut cousins from Alaska who came to Seattle 11 years ago on a fishing boat and are still waiting for the boat to return to take them back home. The cousins don't have any money to give Jackson, so he then attempts to sell newspapers for a charitable organization called Real Change. The organization's leader, Big Boss, gives him 50 papers to sell, but Jackson gives up after selling only five in one hour.

After this, Jackson plays the lottery and wins $100, $20 of which he gives to Kay, the cashier at the Korean grocery where he bought the tickets. When he goes to tell Junior the good news, he finds that his friend has left. (He later learns that Junior hitchhiked to Portland and died of exposure in an alley.) Jackson spends his remaining lottery winnings at an "official Indian bar," where he treats the patrons to $80 worth of shots and has a sexual encounter with a woman named Irene.

After this long night of drinking, Jackson wakes up on the train tracks to a policeman, Officer Williams, kicking him the ribs. Jackson and Officer Williams have gotten to know each other throughout Jackson's years living on the streets, and while Officer Williams can't understand why someone as smart as Jackson is homeless, he also doesn't have any faith in Jackson's ability to get his life together. Jackson believes that Officer Williams is a "good cop" because he reminds him of his grandfather, who was a tribal police officer more interested in helping people than punishing them. Officer Williams gives Jackson $30 towards his regalia fund.

Jackson spends $25 of the $30 Officer Williams gave him on a meal for himself and the three Aleut cousins and then bids them farewell. (He later learns that they walked into the sea and likely drowned). Jackson's 24 hours to earn back the regalia have come to an end. He has five dollars to his name, which is the same amount he started out with the day before. When Jackson shows up at the pawnshop, the pawnbroker asks him if he's worked hard for that five dollars. When Jackson says yes, the pawnbroker gives him the regalia for free. Jackson then puts on the regalia and dances in the middle of the street, stopping traffic as drivers and pedestrians watch him. In this moment, he feels that he has become his grandmother.

## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Jackson Jackson** – Jackson is a homeless Spokane American Indian man living on the streets of Seattle. He is an alcoholic with an unspecified mental illness, and before he ended up homeless, he dropped out of college, was married a few times, and had a couple of kids. Jackson believes that being homeless is the one thing he's been most successful at in life. The story revolves around his 24-hour journey to earn the $1,000 he needs in order to buy his grandmother's **powwow regalia** (which was stolen from her 50 years prior) back from a pawnbroker. Jackson belongs to the sizeable community of homeless American Indians who live on the streets of Seattle, and it's with them that Jackson maintains a sense of belonging and family—although by the end of the story, each American Indian that he's met along the way has disappeared. While Jackson is often highly suspicious of white society, he repeatedly praises the white people he encounters throughout the day and believes that they are both fair and genuine in their attempts to help him buy the regalia. Jackson comes to view the task of earning the regalia back as quest that he must complete for himself—to him, the regalia is a way of connecting with his late grandmother and, by extension, the cultural traditions that died with her. While he manages to come into some money in a variety of different ways, each time he has money he can't help but spend it (usually on food or alcohol) or give it away to others. At the end of his 24-hour quest, Jackson has **five dollars** in his pocket, which is exactly how much he had when his quest began. The pawnbroker ends up giving Jackson the regalia for free, which Jackson views as a grand and generous offer, even though the regalia rightfully belonged to him all along. At the end of the story, Jackson wears the regalia and, in front of stunned onlookers, dances in the middle of the street, feeling that he has become his grandmother.

**Agnes** – Agnes was Jackson's grandmother. Although she died of breast cancer in 1979, years before the story takes place, she and her **powwow regalia** are in many ways the heart of the story. Each of Agnes's family members have different theories as to where her cancer may have come from, but each of their theories are universally tied back to violence or heartbreak. She died when Jackson was only 14, but she is deeply important to him and his grief for her is a fresh as if she'd died only yesterday. Jackson views Agnes and the powwow regalia that was stolen from her as connections to his Spokane American Indian roots and culture. He mourns the fact that he never got to see her dance in a powwow, feeling that when she died, so did a piece of his cultural heritage. Jackson doesn't have many memories of his grandmother, but one of her stories that remains with him is about the time that she met a Maori man when she was working abroad as a military nurse. The two of them discussed how indigenous people worldwide are oppressed by white society. At the end of the story, Jackson gets the regalia back and wears it while dancing in the street, a moment that he feels symbolically connects him with Agnes.

**The Pawnbroker** – The pawnbroker is an old white man who claims to have paid $1,000 for Jackson's grandmother's **powwow regalia, which was stolen from her 50 years ago.** The pawnbroker immediately assumes that Jackson is lying about the regalia belonging to his family but isn't surprised when Jackson proves it's his with the yellow bead sewn into garment. The pawnbroker acts sympathetic and even admits that the right thing to do would be to give the regalia back to Jackson—but he claims he can't shoulder the financial loss. When Rose of Sharon threatens to go to the police, the pawnbroker claims that he had no idea the regalia was stolen. The pawnbroker believes the "fairest" offer he can make Jackson is to sell it back for $999, give Jackson 24 hours to come up with the money, and give $20 to get him started. At the end of the story when Jackson returns to the pawnshop with just **five dollars**, the pawnbroker appears most concerned with whether Jackson worked hard for the money. When Jackson says yes, the pawnbroker offers up the regalia for free and admits that he doesn't want Jackson's money. Jackson is dejected because he was invested in truly winning it back, but the pawnbroker assures him that he *did* win it back. For this, Jackson praises the pawnbroker as one of the many great men in this world—though, really, the regalia rightfully belonged to Jackson all along.

**The Aleut Cousins** – The Aleut Cousins are three American Indians from Alaska that Jackson first discovers crying on a bench while looking out over the water. Jackson describes that the Aleuts, like many others, came down to Seattle on a fishing boat to earn money, but then spent it all on alcohol and became stranded and homeless with no way to return home. The cousins explain that they are sitting on the wharf waiting for their boat to come back. Jackson returns to the cousins throughout the course of the story: he cries with them, asks them to sing him ceremonial songs, and finally spends the last of his money treating them to a meal at a diner. The cousins' boat never comes, and later Jackson hears from other homeless American Indians that they'd waded out into the sea and disappeared. While some insist that they walked on the water and headed back to Alaska, others claim that they witnessed them drown. The cousins' tragic fate represents the fact that it's impossible for many American Indians to return home or regain the land that once belonged to their people.

**Officer Williams** – Officer Williams is a Seattle police officer who has gotten to know Jackson well over the years that he's been homeless. While the way Williams talks to Jackson and helps him out suggest that he has respect and sympathy for Jackson, his actions often conflict with his words. Williams believes that Jackson is smart and can't understand why he ended up on the streets, but at the same time, he doesn't believe that Jackson could get himself off the streets even if he *did* have money, because he'd spend it all on alcohol. Jackson believes that Williams is a "good cop" because he reminds him of his grandfather, who was a tribal police officer back home on his reservation. Jackson believes that, like his grandfather, Williams is dedicated to helping people rather than just punishing them, despite that fact that Williams doesn't help Jackson in any lasting way.

**Junior** – Junior is a part of Jackson's "regular crew." He is a Colville American Indian, and he makes Jackson feel insecure because he has what Jackson views as distinctively American Indian features, whereas Jackson sees his own features as evidence of the destruction that colonialism wreaked on indigenous people. Junior is drunkenly passed out for most of the story, and Jackson returns to him periodically to make sure he is still alive and to rummage around in his clothes for money. Eventually, Jackson returns to find that Junior, like Rose, has abandoned him. Junior had hitchhikes to Oregon, where he tragically dies of exposure in an alley behind a Hilton Hotel.

**Rose of Sharon** – Rose of Sharon is a part of Jackson's "regular crew." She's Yakama American Indian from Washington, and Jackson describes her a short woman with a tall personality. She's with Jackson when he initially finds his grandmother's **powwow regalia** in the pawnshop but abandons him shortly after the quest to earn it back begins. Instead, Rose hitchhikes to go live on her sister's reservation.

**Big Boss** – Big Boss works at Real Change, a social service organization in Seattle whose mission it is to alleviate poverty and homelessness. Homeless people like Jackson go to Big Change to make money by selling the organization's newspapers. Big Boss is unwilling to loan Jackson the hundreds of papers he would need to sell to earn the $1,000 required to buy back his grandmother's **powwow regalia**—he knows that Jackson would never be able to sell enough papers, given that the average profit for a day of selling papers is only $30.

Instead, he makes what he believes is the most generous offer he can and gives Jackson 50 papers for free, which would leave him with $50 if he managed to sell them all. Big Boss is blind to the reality that the small actions that both he and his organization take are insufficient to accomplish their stated mission about poverty and homelessness.

### MINOR CHARACTERS

**Kay** – Kay is a young Korean woman who works at her parents' grocery store in Seattle. Jackson claims to be in love with Kay and fantasizes about her despite being much older than her. He insists on giving her $20 of the $100 he wins in the lottery.

**Irene** – Irene is a Duwamish American Indian woman whom Jackson meets and has a sexual encounter with at Big Heart's bar.

## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

### NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE AND IDENTITY

In Sherman Alexie's "What You Pawn I Will Redeem," Jackson finds his late grandmother's beloved **powwow regalia**, which was stolen from her 50 years before, hanging in the window of a pawn shop. The white pawnbroker tells Jackson that he'll sell him the regalia at a slight loss, since it's the "moral thing" to reunite the regalia with its rightful owner. But nonetheless, Jackson must come up with nearly $1,000, which is essentially impossible for him; he's homeless and unemployed, and whatever money he does come up with, he spends on liquor or gives away to other struggling American Indians. So, while this might seem like a fair bargain to the white pawn shop owner, Jackson's fruitless quest to gather the money shows how American Indians continue to be systematically oppressed by a culture that doesn't value or understand them. Furthermore, Jackson's efforts during his 24 hours of moneymaking show the lengths that American Indians must go in order to preserve their culture and carry it from one generation to the next.

The relationship between Jackson and the pawnbroker is a metaphor for how white people have systemically stripped American Indians of their cultures and identities since the initial colonization of the Americas. When Jackson proves that the regalia belongs to his family, the pawnbroker doesn't deny that it's rightfully Jackson's—but he still refuses to give it back to Jackson because he doesn't want to shoulder the economic loss. This relationship mirrors the historical relationship between white colonizers and American Indians: colonizers stole American Indian land and, in the process, destroyed American Indian people's cultures and identities (and indeed their very lives) for economic and political gain. Even in the present day, when white people like the pawnbroker are more willing to admit that land and culture was stolen from its rightful owners, white society is still unwilling to make reparations by giving back stolen land and cultural artifacts, because to do so would come at an economic cost. In the present, white people like the pawnbroker continue to actively inhibit American Indians from passing their culture from one generation to the next.

In light of this symbolism, Jackson comes to understand his quest to earn back his grandmother's powwow regalia as a way to regain the cultural knowledge that his family has lost over the generations. Because his grandmother's powwow regalia was stolen from her, and because she died when he was still young, Jackson never got to see his grandmother in her regalia. His deepest wish is that he could have seen her dance. His cultural inheritance and identity exists only in the photographs he's seen of her wearing the regalia, which is representative of how his entire cultural identity feels lost to and trapped in the past. Therefore, Jackson comes to view earning the regalia back as a quest that he must complete to bring his stolen culture back into his life. At one point, he muses, "I know it's crazy, but I wondered if I could bring my grandmother back to life if I bought back her regalia." While Jackson knows he can't literally bring his grandmother back to life, earning the regalia back would give him a tangible connection to her and would mean that his culture (or at least a small piece of it) could be passed on to the next generation.

Furthermore, this quest to earn the $1,000 to buy back the powwow regalia represents the lengths that American Indians have had to go to in order to preserve their cultures amid centuries of violence and destruction. Jackson lacks the resources to earn back the powwow regalia, and he lacks the resources precisely because white society oppresses him and his fellow American Indians. Without the proper resources, the sheer impossibility of his task reflects the often-insurmountable obstacles American Indians face if they want to preserve their cultures. The fact that their cultures live on to thrive in the present despite the odds stacked against them is testimony to their drive to keep their identities alive, and this resolve is reflected in Jackson's determination to win back the regalia. Even though he likely knows that he won't be able to raise $1,000 in 24 hours, he tries anyway.

In addition, Jackson speaks directly to the readers in a way that presumes his audience is primarily white people, and in his narration is careful not to reveal secrets that white people may use to further their destruction of American Indian culture. In the very first line of the story, Jackson makes clear that he

won't be telling the story of how he ended up homeless because it's his "secret story" and "Indians have to work hard to keep secrets from hungry white folks." This direct address presumes that the readers of his story are the "hungry white folks" that Jackson and other American Indians must keep at arm's length if they are to preserve their cultural "secrets." Similarly, Jackson mentions that he is often scared of history because of the horrors and atrocities that have been carried out on American Indians, but he won't reveal the depths of his fears to his readers, as he knows that "silence is the best method of dealing with white folks." Again, this suggests that American Indians must be careful not to reveal anything that white people may later use against them and for their own destruction.

By the end of the story, the pawnbroker agrees to give Jackson the regalia, and Jackson symbolically carries his grandmother's legacy into the present by putting on her regalia and dancing in the street. He feels that he has become his grandmother, and his dancing embodies the generational transfer of cultural knowledge and identity. However, his surroundings haven't changed—the passersby (who are implied to be white) stop and stare, and there's no indication that they understand the significance of what he's doing. This suggests that as Jackson fights to keep his cultural legacy and inheritance alive, white society will likely continue to misunderstand and harm American Indians like him.

## MONEY, CAPITALISM, AND MORALITY

"What You Pawn I Will Redeem" can be read as an allegory for how capitalism fails American Indians. At the heart of the story is Jackson's quest to come up with nearly $1,000 to buy his grandmother's **powwow regalia** from a pawn shop, regalia that was stolen from her 50 years before. The white pawnbroker may feel that he's offering a fair bargain (taking a slight loss on an item he bought without knowing it was stolen, while Jackson gets his heirloom back), but Jackson's 24 hours of desperate moneymaking show that this proposition was always doomed. Jackson is unemployed and homeless—he has no way of making that kind of money and no friends wealthy enough to lend it to him. This plot evokes generations of predatory capitalism ruining American Indians' lives. The stolen powwow regalia echoes the way white settlers stole Indian land, and Jackson's quest to buy this stolen heirloom back shows how fundamentally unfair it is to ask someone without access to money—in fact, someone whose capital has been stolen for generations—to "earn" what should simply belong to them.

Throughout the story Jackson is caught in an endless cycle of earning and then immediately spending his money, which makes him unable to save. His difficult life circumstances drive him to drink, and his addiction to alcohol eats up much of the money he earns, which keeps him on the streets. By the time Jackson reaches the end of his 24-hour quest to earn $1,000, he has just **five dollars** left, which is exact same amount that he started out with. This is a moment of cruel irony that represents the ways in which capitalism keeps poor people from accumulating wealth and instead traps them exactly where they started out in life. Additionally, although the regalia was stolen and rightfully belongs to Jackson, he's asked to buy it back, which is another way that American Indians have been denied wealth. Just as someone stole and sold the powwow regalia, white colonists have, for generations, stolen American Indian wealth and resources and then forced American Indians to exist without access to capital. The regalia represents the generations of wealth that have been stolen from American Indians—the most important example of which is their land, which is the foundation of economic success in American society.

Furthermore, Jackson's habit of giving his money away to others represents how American Indian culture in incompatible with, and even runs directly counter to, the individualistic and profit-driven motivations that are the heart of capitalism. With the initial $5 they earned from panhandling, and the $20 from the pawnbroker, Jackson treats Rose of Sharon and Junior to three bottles of alcohol under the pretense that it'll help them brainstorm ideas to earn money for the regalia. Then, when Jackson wins $100 on a lottery ticket, he gives a portion of his prize money to the cashier at the grocery store where he purchased the ticket. When the cashier tries to reject his offer, knowing that he's homeless and struggling, Jackson insists that "It's an Indian thing. When you win, you're supposed to share with your family." Although she is not actually Jackson's blood relative, Jackson's definition of family extends beyond the nuclear family (itself an invention of capitalism) to a more communal sense of the term. That he shares the money out of commitment to an American Indian tradition likewise demonstrates how capitalism is opposed to his cultural norms. Therefore, he must either retain his cultural beliefs and suffer the economic consequences, or abandon his beliefs in pursuit of capitalist success. Later that night, Jackson spends the remaining $80 of his prize on the patrons in "Big Heart's" bar. He calls the American Indians there his cousins, even though they are strangers to him, because he says that "Indians like to belong, so we all [pretend] to be cousins." At the end of the story, when Jackson has $30 to his name, he spends $25 of it on breakfast for himself and the Aleut cousins whom he's returned to throughout the course of his quest. Before inviting them out to eat, the Aleuts sing Jackson ceremonial songs that speak to Jackson's grief for his grandmother, and his decision to treat them to breakfast can be read as a reciprocal gesture and thank you for what they've given him.

Finally, Jackson's insistence that he must earn the regalia back himself points to how he's internalized the capitalist and American belief in meritocracy (the belief that individuals

deserve wealth and economic stability only if they've invested time, effort, and hard work into earning it), despite that fact that the regalia is rightfully his and is owed back to him. When the pawnbroker gives him the regalia for free at the end of the story because he's decided that Jackson worked hard for the five dollars he has, Jackson is disappointed, because he was invested in truly winning it back. He even praises the pawnbroker for his gesture, exclaiming, "Do you know how many good men live in this world? Too many to count!" Even though the pawnbroker wasted Jackson's time with the impossible quest for $1000, Jackson's still regards the pawnbroker as a good man. This reveals the extent to which Jackson has internalized the capitalist belief in meritocracy. He still believes it's fair to expect people to earn what they want through hard work, even when that something is owed to them in the first place.

## RACISM AND COLONIALISM

Throughout "What You Pawn I Will Redeem," Jackson encounters well-intentioned white people who try to help him in controlling or condescending ways. The pawnbroker offers to let him buy his grandmother's stolen **powwow regalia**—but only if he can come up with an impossible amount of money. Big Boss, the man who runs an anti-poverty organization, gives Jackson a token number of newspapers to sell, as though that will help him at all. Officer Williams, who finds Jackson passed out drunk on the railroad tracks, gives him a small amount of money and asks him, since he's so smart, why he's living on the streets—a question that reveals the officer's profound ignorance of the centuries of colonialist oppression that have contributed to Jackson's circumstances. These white people have genuine sympathy and goodwill for Jackson, but they're reluctant to do anything to meaningfully improve his life, and they seem incapable of recognizing that the racist systems and ideas that benefit them have also caused Jackson's misery. In this way, the story satirizes how small acts of "generosity" can make white people feel moral while failing to actually improve the lives of those they ostensibly wish to help.

While the pawnbroker admits that the right thing to do would be to give Jackson the regalia back for free, he still tells Jackson he has to buy the regalia for $1,000, which shows that he's unwilling to act morally if it comes at a financial cost. In this way, his actions mirror those of modern white American society at large. Many people have sympathy for American Indians and other marginalized groups, but few seem to want to give the economic support required to actually improve their lives. Instead, the pawnbroker sends Jackson out on what he knows is an impossible mission: to earn $1,000 in 24 hours. In the end, however, when Jackson returns with **five dollars** (just like he had when his quest began), the pawnbroker judges that Jackson has worked hard for the money and thus deserves the regalia back. While this is certainly a meaningful gesture to Jackson, who is reunited with a beloved family heirloom, it's odd that the pawnbroker justifies giving him the regalia in terms of how hard he has worked for his money. In fact, the regalia is stolen and rightfully belongs to Jackson's family in the first place, so he shouldn't have to work hard to deserve it—he inherently deserves it because it's his. So the sympathy and goodwill of the pawnbroker are somewhat condescending and manipulative, even as he does something kind for Jackson.

Big Boss and his organization, Real Change, reveal how the efforts of non-profit and charitable organizations are not enough to remedy the root causes of poverty. Big Boss is unwilling to give Jackson the 1,000 or so newspapers he would need to earn his $1,000 because he knows that selling that many papers is an impossible task. He reminds Jackson that, on average, someone can make $30 in a day selling papers—but because Big Boss feels bad for Jackson, he decides to give him 50 papers for free, hoping that he can make a $50 profit. Jackson sells papers for an hour, and in that time, he only makes five dollars. At that rate, he'd have to sell papers for 10 hours in order to make a mere $50. In this sense, Big Boss's gesture is an empty one, and it represents the reality that non-profits and charitable organizations offer sympathy but aren't addressing the root causes of the problems they're claiming to fix. "Real Change," in other words, can't offer any change at all.

Finally, Jackson insists that Officer Williams is a "good cop" who is more interested in helping people than punishing them—but Williams's actions only further fuel the vicious cycle that Jackson is trapped in. Officer Williams has been encountering Jackson on the streets for years, but he doesn't do anything to truly help him, nor does he really know him. For example, at one point, Jackson muses that Williams has been giving him candy bars for years, and he wonders if Williams knows that he's a diabetic. What Williams thinks is a kind gesture is actually bad for Jackson, and this mirrors how white American society contributes to the poor health outcomes and subpar quality of living that American Indian communities face.

Officer Williams tells Jackson that he's too smart to be on the streets, which he seems to believe is a compliment. It's an insulting statement, though, that reveals Williams's ignorance: Jackson's intelligence has nothing to do with him ending up on the streets, as his circumstances are the result of centuries of systemic oppression of American Indians. But Officer Williams's belief that Jackson is homeless because of some kind of personal failing, rather than a systemic issue, illuminates his behavior: he thinks he can help Jackson by tweaking various aspects of his life—such as repeatedly dropping him off at a detox center—when helping Jackson would require a much more significant change in American culture. In this way, the routine between Williams and Jackson (where Williams makes futile and misguided attempts to help Jackson) represents the greater cycle that Jackson is trapped in as a homeless, alcoholic

American Indian. Williams the other white characters Jackson encounters on his quest highlight how sympathy and good intentions aren't enough to make real social change. Instead, white people merely use these acts of generosity to make themselves feel better. In the end, they are unwilling to give what is truly needed, which is economic support.

## DEATH AND GRIEF

The many deaths referenced in the story reflect the horrific conditions of American Indian life. For instance, Jackson's grandmother died from cancer that was caused either by the uranium mine on her reservation, an injury from getting run over by a motorcycle, or her grief over her stolen **powwow regalia**. Each of these explanations points to the disproportionate hardships that American Indians face, which often shorten their lives. Furthermore, the community of homeless American Indians that Jackson lives among in Seattle also frequently meet tragic fates. For instance, the Aleut cousins Jackson hangs out with appear to walk into the sea and drown because they realize they can't go home to Alaska, and Jackson's close friend Junior later dies of exposure in an alley. The story depicts a cycle in which white people oppress American Indians, American Indians die horrible deaths because of it, and those left alive are forced into constant grief. This grief then makes their lives even harder, leading to their early deaths. But in addition to providing evidence of the cruel conditions of American Indian life, these deaths point to another tragedy: the loss of indigenous culture among the younger generations. Part of Jackson's deep mourning for his grandmother has to do with his loss of cultural knowledge and connection in the wake of her death; had she lived, she could have shared more memories with him and connected him more deeply to his heritage and culture. Because of this, death in the story is doubly tragic; it both reflects the hardship of Indian life and contributes to that hardship by estranging the living from their culture.

Jackson's memories of his grandparents are limited due to their early and traumatic deaths. Rather than the cultural inheritance he longs for, Jackson has inherited an unrelenting grief that fuels the mental illness and alcoholism keeping him on the streets. When Officer Williams finds Jackson passed out on the train tracks, Jackson tells him that got so drunk and passed out there because he's mourning his grandmother. Although she passed away years ago, Jackson explains, "I've been killing myself ever since she died." This speaks to the deep grief he feels for the people and culture that he's lost, which is part of what's driven him to alcoholism and homelessness. Officer Williams asks Jackson who beat him up, and Jackson jokes that it was "Mr. Grief" who "always wins." This personification of grief as what brutalized Jackson's face the night before highlights its painful physical and emotional effects. Grief is literally a wound that contributes to the many hardships of American Indian life. It also suggests that grief can haunt generations who feel that pieces of their identity have been lost along with their dead family members and friends. Later, Jackson asks the Aleut cousins to sing ceremonial American Indian songs about wishing and hoping, because he's wishing and hoping that his grandmother was still alive. The cousins respond that every song they know is about this longing. This points to the prevalence of grief in American Indian life.

Jackson's grandmother, especially, represents how the horrible and often deadly conditions that American Indians must contend with destroy American Indian culture, preventing it from being passed on from one generation to the next. Each member of his family has a theory as to what could have caused his grandmother's cancer, and Jackson believes that it could have "started in her broken heart and then leaked out into her breasts" after her regalia was stolen. Her broken heart represents the pain of having one's culture stolen and erased, and the idea that her broken heart could have killed her suggests that the pain of being separated from one's culture can be fatal (even if indirectly). One of the few things Jackson remembers from his grandmother is a story about her time working as a military nurse in World War II. She met a Maori man while stationed in Australia who explained the cruel irony of the war was that "brown people are killing other brown people so white people will remain free." Rather than inheriting cultural artifacts like the regalia, this story Jackson has inherited from his grandmother is one of death and resulting grief suffered at the hands of the white society.

Finally, many of the American Indians that Jackson meets during his quest likewise meet tragic deaths. Jackson thinks of his friend Junior as a "Before Columbus Indian," as compared to an "After Columbus Indian" like himself who is "living proof of the horrible damage that colonialism has done to us Skins." In this way, Jackson views Junior as a link to a past before colonization, and this link is lost when Junior later dies of exposure in an alley behind a Hilton Hotel. The juxtaposition of his horrible death and the Hilton Hotel, and symbol of wealth and luxury, represents how colonial destruction lives on in the present and continues to prevent American Indian people from carrying their cultures on to future generations. Likewise, the Aleut cousins later die a tragic death—and with them, their cultural knowledge (including the ceremonial songs they sang to Jackson) disappears. The Aleut cousins die trying to return home, and their deaths therefore represent the impossibility of returning to a home that's been destroyed and erased. Death and grief are so present throughout "What You Pawn I Will Redeem" that they almost become characters in their own right who haunt Jackson and other American Indians throughout the story. Death erases their cultural ties to past and future generations, and their resulting grief exacerbates the many hardships they face.

## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

### THE POWWOW REGALIA

Jackson's grandmother's powwow regalia represents the property that white people's destruction of American Indian people's property, cultures, and identities. The regalia was stolen from Agnes 50 years before the events of the story—but rather than having what is rightfully is returned to him for free, the pawnbroker makes Jackson earn it back by sending him on an impossible quest for $1,000. In this way, the pawnbroker symbolizes white Americans more broadly, and the regalia symbolizes the land, cultural practices, artifacts, and other material possessions that they've taken from American Indians for generations. These stolen possessions should be returned to their rightful owners, but American society, just like the pawnbroker, is unwilling to shoulder the economic cost of making reparations to American Indians.

The powwow regalia also reveals how violence and theft have disrupted the generational transfer of cultural knowledge in American Indian communities and have left the younger generations, like Jackson's, feeling disconnected from their cultural identities. Jackson never got to see his grandmother dance in her regalia and desperately wishes that he had; in fact, he sees his quest to retrieve it as a way to bring her lost cultural knowledge back into his life. When he finally gets the regalia back, Jackson is able to symbolically reconnect with a piece of his cultural identity that had been missing.

### THE FIVE-DOLLAR BILLS

The five-dollar bills that Jackson begins and ends his day with represent impoverished people's hopeless position under capitalism. Jackson begins his quest at the pawnshop with five dollars, and when he returns a day later after attempting to raise $999 to buy his grandmother's **powwow regalia**, he still only has five dollars. Although, importantly, it's not the same five dollar bill that he originally started with. That he begins and ends with five dollars is a cruel irony that represents how capitalism traps poor people in an endless cycle of spending and earning with no real gains.

Jackson's inability to save the money he earns for the regalia is a symptom of living in a capitalist society that tempts people with endless consumption. As quickly as a person earns money, capitalist society encourages them to spend it just as quickly—most often on necessities such as food or caring for others, which is where most of Jackson's earnings go. Jackson starts and ends the story with almost nothing, and this reveals how capitalism prevents poor people from making progress financially.

## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Grove Press edition of *Ten Little Indians* published in 2004.

### Noon Quotes

One day you have a home and the next you don't, but I'm not going to tell you my particular reasons for being homeless, because it's my secret story, and Indians have to work hard to keep secrets from hungry white folks.

**Related Characters:** Jackson Jackson (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 169

**Explanation and Analysis**

Jackson begins his story with this powerful statement, declaring that there are some stories he must keep secret, especially from white people who are always hungry to know American Indian secrets. Jackson addresses his readers directly, which implies that he assumes his audience is primarily made up of white people. From the very beginning of the story, then, Jackson makes his distrust of white people clear, and while that distrust is rooted in historical events, Jackson is also letting his white audience know that they are still complicit in the oppression of American Indians even to this day. He fears how white people might use his own story against him to further the colonial destruction of American Indian life and culture. Jackson knows he must protect himself, his stories, and his culture, and the rest of the story follows Jackson as he attempts to preserve and protect his culture as represented by the regalia.

Probably none of this interests you. I probably don't interest you much. Homeless Indians are everywhere in Seattle. We're common and boring, and you walk right on by us, with maybe a look of anger or disgust or even sadness at the terrible fate of the noble savage.

**Related Characters:** Jackson Jackson (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 170

**Explanation and Analysis**

Jackson directly addresses his readers here again, as he does several times throughout the beginning of his story. And once again, he shows that he assumes that his audience is primarily white people—the kinds of people who walk past him and other homeless American Indians without really seeing them as people, just as pitiable embodiments of the "terrible fate of the noble savage." This implies that he finds white people somewhat hostile and disrespectful, so it's no wonder he has previously said he needs to keep some secrets from them.

This quote also highlights how pervasive the problem of American Indian homelessness is in Seattle. It's so common to see homeless American Indians that passersby, and more specifically white people, have become accustomed to witnessing their suffering. Their reactions range from disgust to pity, and while they acknowledge the "terrible fate of the noble savage," they don't acknowledge their role in perpetuating this grim reality. They ignore the larger problem just as they ignore the homeless individuals living on the streets.

> If you put Junior and me next to each other, he's the Before Columbus Arrived Indian, and I'm the After Columbus Arrived Indian. I am living proof of the horrible damage that colonialism has done to us Skins. But I'm not going to let you know how scared I sometimes get of history and its ways. I'm a strong man, and I know that silence is the best way of dealing with white folks.

**Related Characters:** Jackson Jackson (speaker), Junior

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 171

**Explanation and Analysis**

Throughout the story, Jackson struggles to reclaim his American Indian identity, which has been systematically stolen from him and his community for centuries. His stolen identity is most tangibly symbolized by the stolen powwow regalia. This comparison to Junior shows how American Indian identity has been stolen not just through displacement, cultural erasure, and forced assimilation, but through sexual and gendered violence. Sexual violence against American Indian women was used to genetically erase American Indian identity and thus was a weapon in the colonial genocide against American Indians. Jackson mourns the fact that his physical features are themselves a product and reminder of the violence his people have been forced to endure.

Again, Jackson speaks directly to his audience. He doesn't want his readers to know the extent to which history and its atrocities scare him because he is afraid to reveal his vulnerabilities to white people who may use them against him. He says that silence is the best way of dealing with white people but continues to tell them the story of the regalia anyways. He wants his story to be heard, but there are dangers inherent to telling it.

> I set the crumpled Lincoln on the countertop. The pawnbroker studied it.
>
> "Is that the same five dollars from yesterday?"
>
> "No, it's different."
>
> He thought about the possibilities.
>
> "Did you work hard for this money?" he asked.
>
> "Yes," I said.

**Related Characters:** Jackson Jackson, The Pawnbroker (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 193-194

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Jackson returns to the pawnshop 24-hours later, he only has five dollars left, and this is the same amount he started out with the day before. It's not the same five dollar bill, however, and this detail matters to the pawnbroker who is most concerned with whether or not Jackson has worked hard for the little money he has. The pawnbroker represents American society's obsession with meritocracy, meaning that one must earn what they want through hard work, talent, and dedication. But Jackson is owed the regalia, the same as the American Indian community is owed their land and culture that have been systematically stolen from them, so it shouldn't matter whether he worked hard for his money—the regalia should be his anyway.

The fact that Jackson starts and ends with the same amount of money represents the way that capitalism traps poor people in an endless cycle of earning and spending. Capitalism makes it very hard for someone who starts out with very little to accumulate wealth. Instead, like Jackson, capitalism forces poor people to end exactly where they started.

I knew that the solitary yellow bead was a part of me. I knew that I was the yellow bead in part. Outside, I wrapped myself in my grandmother's regalia and breathed her in. I stepped off the sidewalk and into the intersection. Pedestrians stopped. Cars stopped. The city stopped. They all watched me dance with my grandmother. I was my grandmother, dancing.

**Related Characters:** Jackson Jackson (speaker), Agnes

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 194

**Explanation and Analysis**

In the final scene of the story, Jackson gets the regalia back and, through it, reclaims a piece of his stolen culture and identity. The yellow bead, which is a feature unique to his family's regalia, reconnects him to his lineage, which has been repeatedly fractured by the systematic oppression that cuts American Indian life short. Dancing in her regalia is his way of bringing his grandmother back to life, and with her he brings back the cultural knowledge and identity that was lost when she died. Rather than a pitied, homeless American Indian, in this final scene Jackson transforms into an American Indian who is proud of his culture that is powerful enough to bring white, colonial society to a stop.

On the other hand, in the eyes of the pedestrians and passersby, Jackson dancing in the middle of the street might be read as proof of just how crazy and sad this homeless American Indian is. They may regard him with the same looks of pity and disgust that he mentions at the beginning of the story.

## 3:00 P.M. Quotes

I wondered if my grandmother's cancer had started when somebody stole her powwow regalia. Maybe the cancer started in her broken heart and then leaked out into her breasts. I know it's crazy, but I wondered if I could bring my grandmother back to life if I bought back her regalia.

**Related Characters:** Jackson Jackson (speaker), Agnes

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 175-176

**Explanation and Analysis**

Jackson sits next to a passed-out Junior and thinks back on his grandmother's fatal cancer. Each of his family members has a different theory about the origins of her illness. Jackson's theory that his grandmother's cancer may have started when her heart was broken over her stolen regalia represents the physical pain of being stripped of your culture. His theory serves as a metaphor for the toxicity of colonialism.

His musing that earning back the regalia may bring his grandmother to life highlights how he sees the regalia as a connection to a culture and identity he feels he has lost due to colonial destruction. It's not that he'll literally bring her back to life by regaining the regalia, but he'll bring her cultural legacy and practices back to life so that he can preserve and carry them into the future.

## 6:00 P.M. Quotes

"It's funny, isn't it?" he asked.

"What's funny?"

"How we brown people are killing other brown people so white people will remain free."

"I hadn't thought of it that way."

"Well, sometimes I think of it that way. And other times, I think of it the way they want me to think of it. I get confused."

**Related Characters:** Agnes (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 179

**Explanation and Analysis**

One of the few of his grandmother's stories that Jackson remembers is a story about grief and loss. This reveals the extent to which loss and grief have affected the American Indian community. Furthermore, the Maori soldier's commentary on war highlights the reality that white people's freedom is directly contingent upon brown people's suffering, not only in America but worldwide. America, "land of the free," was literally built on the genocide of American Indian people.

The Maori man struggles with internalized oppression. He sometimes views the world from an indigenous perspective, recognizing the cruel irony that indigenous lives were being lost for a white man's war and freedom. At other times, he views the war through a white lens, which is how white people want him to view it. His confusion represents the contradictions inherent to living in a society that is steeped in white, Western ideology and beliefs. The West exerts its colonial perspective on the rest of the world and after a while that perspective can start to feel like the only one, or the right one to believe in because it permeates everything.

## 7:00 P.M. Quotes

"Thank you," I said and gave her one of the bills.

"I can't take that," she said. "It's your money."

"No, it's tribal. It's an Indian thing. When you win, you're supposed to share with your family."

"I'm not your family."

"Yes, you are."

She smiled. She kept the money.

**Related Characters:** Jackson Jackson, Kay (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 181

### Explanation and Analysis

After Jackson wins $100 on his lottery ticket, he insists on sharing it with Kay. He convinces her to take the money by explaining that it's an American Indian cultural tradition to share a windfall with loved ones. This highlights the ways in which American Indian culture exits in opposition to white, Western capitalist society. American Indian culture is communal. Relationships are valued, and resources are shared. On the other hand, capitalism is steeped in individualism. Success in a capitalist society requires that individuals hoard their wealth. This ideological difference is another factor that makes it difficult for American Indians to thrive in a colonial, capitalist culture. Additionally, if Jackson were to abandon the practice of sharing his resources, it would further remove him from the culture and identity that he feels he's lost and wishes to redeem.

## 6:00 A.M. Quotes

"And somebody beat the hell out of you," he said. "You remember who?"

"Mr. Grief and I went a few rounds."

"It looks like Mr. Grief knocked you out."

"Mr. Grief always wins."

**Related Characters:** Officer Williams, Jackson Jackson (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 186

### Explanation and Analysis

Officer Williams discovers Jackson asleep on the train tracks where he'd drunkenly passed out after getting beat up by the bartender at Big Heart's bar. Rather than tell Officer Williams what really happened, Jackson tells him that "Mr. Grief" beat him, implying that his own grief has physically maimed him. This is somewhat true, as it seems that his grief over his grandmother and his other myriad losses is what makes him drink and get into fights to begin with.

Throughout the story, grief permeates Jackson's life and the lives of many of the American Indians he encounters. This personification of grief as "Mr. Grief," the person who beats him up, emphasizes the physical pain that grief and loss cause. Grief is more than an emotion, but a violent and destructive force that wounds. His statement that Mr. Grief always wins highlights the destructive hold that grief has on those it attacks. Grief is what fuels many of Jackson's destructive behaviors, including his alcoholism which he uses to cope with his feelings and his painful circumstances.

"You Indians. How the hell do you laugh so much? I just picked your ass off the railroad tracks, and you're making jokes. Why the hell do you do that?"

"The two funniest tribes I've ever been around are Indians and Jews, so I guess that says something about the inherent humor of genocide."

**Related Characters:** Officer Williams, Jackson Jackson (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 186-187

**Explanation and Analysis**

While Officer Williams is driving Jackson to the detox center, the two have a long conversation. Officer Williams can't comprehend how Jackson and other American Indians can laugh when their lives are full of struggle and hardship. Jackson's response points to the global connection between groups that have been subject to genocide. Like American Indian life and culture, Jewish life and culture has been systematically attacked and destroyed by the same white society that carried out the colonization and genocide of American Indians. His statement highlights the astounding extent of the damage that white people have wreaked upon the rest of the world throughout history, and that white people in the present, like Officer Williams, continue to uphold and carry out. The notion that genocide leads directly to humor may seem counterintuitive, but throughout the story, Jackson has leaned into various avenues to cope with his pain: alcohol, for example, or fantasizing about being in a relationship with the grocery store cashier. Humor may just be another one of those ways to cope, as it makes the difficulty of the world a little easier to bear.

## 8:00 A.M. Quotes

"The Aleuts sang their strange and beautiful songs. I listened. They sang about my grandmother and their grandmothers. They were lonely for the cold and snow. I was lonely for everybody.

**Related Characters:** Jackson Jackson (speaker), The Aleut Cousins, Agnes

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 191

**Explanation and Analysis**

Jackson returns to the Aleuts and asks them to sing him ceremonial songs that American Indians sing when they are longing and hoping. He tells them he is wishing his grandmother was alive, and they tell him that all the songs they know are about that type of longing. The songs the Aleuts sing have multiple meanings. For one, they are a piece of cultural knowledge that the Aleuts have, and one that is lost when the Aleuts later die, just like the grandmothers they mourn in the songs who had a cultural legacy to pass down. The songs also reveal the extent to which grief and loss have shaped both their lives and culture.

The Aleuts being lonely for the cold and snow represents their longing to return to their home in Alaska. Their endless sitting, waiting, and hoping by the water highlights the impossibility of returning to a home that has been colonized and dispossessed. Jackson is lonely for everybody, not only his grandmother, but also all of the American Indian friends and acquaintances he's lost along the way. If people and community are connections to his culture, he is without and cultural connection completely.

## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

### NOON

Jackson explains that homelessness is something that can happen overnight. It happened to him, but he isn't going to tell that story—he wants to keep it a secret, and "Indians have to work hard to keep secrets from hungry white folks."

*Jackson begins the story by telling his audience that there are parts of his life story that must be kept secret, specifically from white people. This implies that his audience is primarily white people, and that Jackson is wary of revealing too much to the group of people responsible for the oppression of American Indians.*

Jackson is a Spokane Indian, Interior Salish. He grew up in Spokane, Washington before moving to Seattle, where he flunked out of college, worked blue-collar jobs, married two or three times, and fathered a couple of kids. Then he went crazy. "Crazy" might not be the right label, but "asocial disorder" doesn't fit either, because it makes him sound violent, which he is not. Jackson has been homeless for six years, and he's really good at it. He's proud to know the best places to get free food, and he is friends with local business owners who allow him to use their clean, employees-only bathrooms. In fact, being homeless is the only thing he's ever really been good at.

*Jackson's life has been unstable, which has culminated in homelessness. It seems that, as a result of being unable to gain financial security, he has lost lovers and children. Importantly, Jackson's financial difficulties are at least in part a result of the oppression of American Indian communities for generations—as will soon become clear when he finds a stolen family heirloom at a pawn shop, white Americans have been stealing American Indian wealth for centuries, which leads American Indians to live poorer and less stable lives.*

Jackson considers that maybe none of this is interesting, since there are lots of homeless Indians in Seattle. Seeing them is "common and boring," and people walk by feeling angry or sad at the "terrible fate of the noble savage." But these homeless Indians have dreams and families. In fact, Jackson knows a homeless man whose son is the editor of an East Coast newspaper—although this man might be lying, since he calls himself a "Plains Indian" rather than identifying a specific tribe, which is suspiciously generic.

*Jackson often sees non-indigenous people regarding American Indians with either pity or disgust, if they acknowledge them at all—but it seems that no one does anything to help them. This will be a thread throughout the story, where (mostly white) people take pity on Jackson but their gestures of sympathy aren't particularly helpful. The Plains Indian cannot name which tribe he is from, which points to the loss of culture and identity that is a direct result of colonial oppression and forced assimilation.*

Jackson's "regular crew" are Rose of Sharon and Junior, who are also homeless Indians. Even if nobody else cares about them, they care for one another. Jackson is jealous of Junior's looks, though—Junior looks like a "Before Columbus Arrived Indian," while Jackson looks like an "After Columbus Arrived Indian." Jackson believes this makes him proof of the forced assimilation and destruction of American Indian people and cultures. Nonetheless, Jackson won't talk about his fear of history, as silence is the best way to deal with white people.

*Junior is a handsome man whose good looks Jackson associates with American Indians before Columbus arrived, suggesting that the precolonial past was an idyllic one in which American Indians were healthier and better looking, bearing no physical trace of the hardship they would experience after white people came to the Americas. Jackson himself is less handsome and his looks are more weathered, which he believes is a reflection of the hardships that American Indians face in the colonialist era. Again, Jackson directly addresses the audience when he refuses to elaborate on his fear of history, as he doesn't want to reveal too much to his white readers who are complicit in the oppression of American Indians*

Today, Jackson, Rose of Sharon, and Junior are panhandling at Pike Place Market. After a couple hours, they take their earnings—**five dollars**—to buy a bottle of "fortified courage." On the way, they pass a pawnshop that Jackson has never noticed before. In the window of the pawnshop is an old **powwow-dance regalia** that Jackson immediately recognizes as his grandmother's. It was stolen from her 50 years prior. He's never seen the regalia in person, but he knows it from photographs—and, besides, it has the same color feathers and beads that his family always uses.

*The cycle of earning and spending that will plague Jackson throughout the story begins here. As soon as Jackson earns money, he almost immediately spends it on alcohol for him and his friends, which makes him unable to save money. But the regalia in the window of the pawn shop adds another dimension to Jackson's poverty: he's not simply poor because he spends all his money immediately, he's poor because people have stolen his family's wealth for generations, including this regalia. The missing regalia is an important artifact culturally, as it connects him to American Indian traditions and to his ancestors who have passed on. The fact that it was stolen represents how American Indian culture and identity has been stolen from their communities due to colonization and forced assimilation.*

Inside the pawn shop, Jackson tells the old white pawnbroker that the **regalia** is his grandmother's, which was stolen 50 years ago. The pawnbroker is suspicious, which Jackson understands, but he says he can prove it: Indians always sew "flaws" into their regalia to show that they aren't perfect, since only God is perfect. Jackson's family would always sew a yellow bead onto their regalia, somewhere hard to find. The pawnbroker agrees that they can look for the bead, and when they quickly find it, the pawnbroker admits that Jackson is right.

*Jackson attempts to claim what is rightfully his and is met with suspicion from the pawnbroker. The pawnbroker represents white society, which views American Indians as untrustworthy and denies them ownership of what is rightfully theirs. It's noteworthy that the yellow bead represents imperfection but also proves the lineage of the regalia by giving it an identifying marker. In this way, the story ties imperfection to family and heritage, suggesting that whatever is broken in Jackson is also what makes him unique and himself.*

When Junior starts to tell the pawnbroker that the **regalia** has been missing for 50 years, Jackson tells Junior that it's his family's story, so he should be the one to tell it. Rose of Sharon asks the pawnbroker if he'll return the regalia to Jackson, but the pawnbroker says he "can't afford to do the right thing" because he paid $1,000 for it. Rose of Sharon suggests going to the police, but Jackson scolds her for making such a threat. The pawnbroker says that the police wouldn't believe their story, and his tone is sad, "as if he was sorry for taking advantage of [their] disadvantages."

*The pawnbroker knows the regalia is an important cultural artifact that belongs to Jackson. He is sympathetic and understands that the moral thing to do is return the regalia, but he is unwilling act morally because he doesn't want shoulder the economic loss. The pawnbroker represents white Americans more broadly who sometimes admit their wrongs and feign sympathy while refusing to do anything meaningfully to right past wrongs and, in fact, continue to take advantage of systems that benefit them while oppressing others.*

The pawnbroker asks for Jackson's name, and he explains that his first and last name are both Jackson. While the pawnbroker is willing to sell Jackson the **regalia** for $999—taking a one-dollar loss would be, he says, "the moral thing to do"—Jackson only has **five dollars** to his name. So the pawnbroker offers a deal: he'll give Jackson 24 hours to come up with $999 to buy the regalia back. Jackson agrees, and the pawnbroker gives him $20 to get him started. Jackson, Rose of Sharon, and Junior walk out of the store in search of the remaining money they need to get the regalia back.

*The pawnbroker believes his offer to sell the regalia back at a one-dollar loss is moral, while ignoring the reality that making $1,000 is an impossible task for Jackson and, besides, the regalia is rightfully his. The deal alleviates the pawnbroker's guilt over his role in oppressing American Indians because it makes him feel like he's being generous and fair, but in fact he's just setting Jackson up to fail. The five dollars that Jackson starts out with represents the severe lack of wealth and resources American Indian communities face due to decades of economic exploitation and theft.*

His 24 hours allotted by the pawnbroker have passed, so Jackson says goodbye to the Aleut cousins. Later, he hears that the cousins waded off a dock and into the seawater, and while some Indians believed they had walked on the water itself and headed back north, others witnessed them drown. Jackson doesn't know what to believe. Disoriented, Jackson can't find the pawnshop and swears that it's moved from where it had been the previous day. He wanders for blocks and asks strangers for directions.

*The Aleut cousins' deaths are not only another loss of American Indian life, but a loss of culture as well. The ceremonial songs they knew are lost with them. It's also significant that they died trying to return home on the water, as this represents the impossibility of returning home for American Indians because their homes and land have been systematically stolen from them.*

Jackson is on the verge of tears and feels like he will die if he doesn't find the shop. He's about to give up when he finally finds the pawnshop tucked away behind one last corner. He walks inside and says hello to the pawnbroker. The pawnbroker asks after Rose of Sharon and Junior, and Jackson tells him that they are travelling, but that "it's O.K." because "Indians are everywhere."

*While Jackson won't literally die if he doesn't find the pawnshop, one connection to his culture and identity will be lost forever if he doesn't get the regalia back. Jackson's statement that Indians are everywhere contradicts his experience of the last 24 hours. Every American Indian he encountered has disappeared from his life.*

The pawnbroker asks Jackson if he has the money, and Jackson asks, hopefully, if his price is still the same. The pawnbroker tells him the price hasn't changed, and Jackson wonders why he hoped it would have. He says that he only has **five dollars** and sets it on the counter. The pawnbroker asks if it's the same five-dollar bill from yesterday, and Jackson tells him it's a different one. The pawnbroker contemplates the "possibilities" before he asks Jackson if he's worked hard for the five dollars. Jackson says yes, and the pawnbroker closes his eyes to think intensely about the "possibilities."

*Jackson returns to the pawnshop with five dollars, which is the exact same amount that he started out with. This shows how capitalism doesn't allow for the poor to accumulate wealth, and instead keeps them right where they started out from. Like capitalist society, the pawnbroker believes that Jackson should only receive the regalia if he's worked hard enough for it, even though it's unfair that he should have to earn back something that was stolen from him in the first place.*


The pawnbroker steps into the back room, where he's moved Jackson's grandmother's **powwow regalia** from the front window. He holds the regalia out to Jackson and tells him to take it. Jackson reiterates that he doesn't have the money, but the pawnbroker says, "I don't want your money." Jackson explains that he was set on completing his quest and wanted to win it back. The pawnbroker tells him that he did successfully win it back, and to take it before he changes his mind. Jackson exclaims to himself, "Do you know how many good men live in this world? Too many to count!"

*The pawnbroker tells Jackson that he doesn't want his money after all, revealing that he sent him on the impossible quest for $1000 dollars for no reason. Instead of being angry at the pawnbroker for wasting his time, Jackson is disappointed in himself for not successfully earning the money and he even praises the pawnbroker for his generosity. The fact that he believes the pawnbroker is a good man points to his naïve willingness to trust other people, specifically white people, even when they've done him wrong.*

Jackson walks outside with his grandmother's **powwow regalia** in hand. He knows that he is a part of the hidden yellow bead, and that the yellow bead is likewise a part of him. He wraps himself in the regalia and breathes his grandmother in. He steps into the intersection and brings the cars, the pedestrians, and the entire city around him to a stop. Jackson begins to dance and reflects that "they all watched me dance with my grandmother. I was my grandmother, dancing."

*When he puts on the regalia, Jackson brings his grandmother and his lost cultural identity back to life. He feels connected to his family through the yellow bead that is unique to them. While the moment is incredibly important and powerful to Jackson, the cars and pedestrians that stop to watch him may view him as just another crazy, homeless American Indian living on the streets.*

## 1:00 P.M.

With the $20 from the pawnbroker, and the $5 from their panhandling, Jackson, Rose of Sharon, and Junior head over to the 7-Eleven and buy three "bottles of imagination." They drink all of it in an alley while they brainstorm different ways to come up with the money for the **regalia**.

*Jackson is caught up in a vicious cycle of earning and spending. As soon as he earns money he spends it on alcohol, which is his main way of coping with the hardships he faces every day as an American Indian.*

## 2:00 P.M.

Jackson wakes up after briefly passing out from the alcohol. Rose of Sharon is gone, and Jackson only later learns that she hitchhiked back home to live with her sister on the reservation in Toppenish. Junior is passed out next to Jackson and covered in vomit. Jackson has a headache from drinking and decides to leave Junior to walk along the water, which he loves doing.

*Rose of Sharon is the first American Indian character to disappear from the story. Her departure represents the breakdown of American Indian communities, as it shows how people whom Jackson loves and depends on can and do suddenly disappear from his life. This is yet another loss that Jackson must suffer.*

At the wharf, Jackson encounters three Aleut cousins who are looking out over the bay and crying. Jackson explains that most homeless American Indians that wind up in Seattle are originally from Alaska. They come on working boats, earn money fishing, then drink themselves broke at the "highly sacred and traditional Indian bars" in Seattle. Then, like the Aleut cousins, they're stuck trying to find their way back to Alaska. The cousins' boat has been gone for 11 years, and hearing this, Jackson sits down and cries with them for a while before asking them for money. But they don't have any to give.

*The Aleut cousins yearn to return home to Alaska, and their yearning represents the reality that many American Indians have lost their homes and lands due to colonialism and are unable to get them back. Jackson and the Aleut cousins cry together, which symbolizes the grief that is embedded into American Indian life because of their dispossession and oppression. It's also significant that the Aleut cousins, and many other American Indians, seem to be trapped in the same cycle as Jackson: they spend their money on drinking to try to drown their grief, but in the end it leaves them stranded with no way to fix their lives or reconnect with their family or homeland or culture.*

## 3:00 P.M.

Jackson walks back to Junior, who is still passed out. Jackson checks to see that Junior is still breathing. After confirming that he is alive, Jackson digs around in his pockets and finds a cigarette, which he smokes while thinking about his grandmother, Agnes. She died from breast cancer when Junior was only 14 years old, and Jackson's family had different theories about the cause of her cancer. His father believed the tumors were a result of the uranium mine on their reservation, while his mother believed that the cancer was a result of the broken ribs that Agnes suffered after she was hit by a motorcycle on her way home from a powwow.

*Jackson's grandmother represents a connection to his cultural identity and heritage. Older generations are meant to pass practices and traditions down to the younger generations, but the fact that she died when Jackson was so young interrupted the transfer of cultural knowledge and identity. The theory that her cancer was a result of the uranium mine on their reservation points to another life-threatening effect of the colonization of American Indian land.*

Surrounded by the smell of smoke and vomit, Jackson ruminates on his own theory that her cancer could have leaked out from her broken heart and into her breasts after her **powwow regalia** was stolen. If he earns back the regalia, he might also be able to bring his grandmother back from the dead. He admits that this thought is crazy, but it nonetheless inspires him to refocus on the task of finding the money. So, he leaves Junior behind again to walk over to the Real Change office.

*Jackson's theory that a broken heart over her stolen regalia may have caused her cancer highlights the extreme pain that results from having one's culture stolen, and it suggests that grief, which plagues American Indian communities, can often have physical effects, too. Jackson's desire to bring his grandmother back from the dead is really a desire to regain the culture and identity he lost when she died.*

## 4:00 P.M.

Real Change is an organization whose mission is to resolve homelessness and poverty. They publish a newspaper and pay homeless people to distribute it. Each copy costs 30 cents and gets sold for a dollar, and the homeless get to keep the 70-cent profit. The catch is that the homeless must stay sober to sell papers.

*Real Change has a mission to end homelessness and poverty, and while the organization may do some good in people's lives, the notion that a homeless person earning 70 cents per newspaper sold might end poverty or homelessness writ large is absurd—it's not even enough money to end one person's poverty. This represents how non-profits often have idealistic and compassionate mission statements that they fail to back up with significant action.*

Jackson asks Big Boss at Real Change for 1,430 papers on loan. Confused, the Big Boss asks him why he needs to make so much money so quickly. Jackson explains the story of his grandmother's **powwow regalia**, and Big Boss suggests that they call the police instead. But Jackson is opposed this, because he's come to view the task of getting the regalia back as a quest that he needs to complete.

*At this point in his journey, Jackson believes that earning the $1000 is a personal quest that he must complete to prove that he is worthy of the regalia. His dedication to this impossible task demonstrates how he has internalized the capitalist belief that people must earn everything, even that which is owed to them.*

Big Boss doubts that Jackson will be able to sell so many papers, as most vendors only earn $30 in a day. Jackson realizes that this plan won't work and asks if Big Boss can lend him some money instead. Big Boss won't give Jackson money but offers him 50 free newspapers and then hugs him. Jackson sets off back toward the water to sell the papers.

*Big Boss acknowledges that his organization can't live up to its own mission statement. He offers Jackson sympathy, but he is unwilling to genuinely help him. Big Boss knows that Jackson is unlikely to sell the 50 papers, and he simply offers them as a way of convincing himself that he is helpful and moral.*

## 5:00 P.M.

Jackson stands outside a terminal and tries to sell the papers to commuters, but he's discouraged after selling only five in one hour. He throws out the remaining 45 papers. With the money earned from the five papers, Jackson walks to McDonalds and orders four one-dollar cheeseburgers, which he eats slowly. He walks outside after finishing his meal and promptly throws up. He explains that he's an "alcoholic Indian with a busted stomach" who can only hope that he can keep enough food down to stay alive.

*After making only five dollars in one hour, Jackson gives up on selling papers, further demonstrating the futility of Big Change and other non-profits, despite their best intentions. Again, as soon as Jackson earns some money, he immediately spends it, and this time he spends it on a basic necessity. The fact that he immediately throws up the food further reinforces the vicious cycle of earning and losing that keeps Jackson poor.*


## 6:00 P.M.

Jackson walks back to Junior with only a dollar remaining. Junior is still passed out, so Jackson checks again to make sure he's still alive. He is, so Jackson removes his shoes and finds $1.50, which he takes. He sits beside Junior and daydreams about his grandmother's stories about being a military nurse in Australia during World War II. Once, she treated a Maori solider who had lost his legs in battle and had dark skin, black hair, and a face covered with bright tattoos. The man thought Agnes was Maori, too, but she explained that she was Spokane Indian. The man had heard of the Indian tribes in the United States but had never met one before Agnes.

*One of the few memories Jackson has of his grandmother is about her story of war and loss, which represents how grief becomes a cultural inheritance in American Indian communities. The Maori man appears in the story to highlight how grief and loss impact indigenous people worldwide, not just in America.*


Agnes told the Maori man that many American Indians were fighting in the war, including her brothers. One had died in Okinawa. The man found it ironic that "brown people are killing other brown people so that white people will remain free," while at other times he believed in the war the way that white people wanted him to fight. He asked Agnes if she believed in Heaven, and she asked him which Heaven he was talking about. He joked that he was talking about the one where his legs are waiting for him, and she teased back that he'd have to strengthen his arms if he wanted to chase them down.

*The Maori man's revelation that brown men are dying in a white man's war highlights that white people's freedom is directly contingent upon indigenous suffering, oppression, and death. Each indigenous solider that dies, like Agnes's brother, makes indigenous communities already ravaged by colonial genocide even smaller. Additionally, each person lost is another person who doesn't get to pass down their cultural knowledge to the next generation.*

Jackson is still sitting next to Junior and laughing to himself at the memory of this story. Once again, he checks to make sure that Junior is still alive, and finding that he is, he walks off to a Korean grocery. He brings his remaining dollar from the papers and the $1.50 he stole from Junior's shoes along with him.

*Jackson laughs at the memory of his grandmother's story even though it's one about loss and grief. His reaction reveals how desensitized to grief he has become after facing so much of it.*

## 7:00 P.M.

Jackson spends his $2.50 on a cigar and two scratch lottery tickets, figuring that if he wins the $500 cash prize on both he'll have enough for his grandmother's **powwow regalia**. Jackson is in love with Kay, the cashier at the Korean grocery, and tells her that he loves her every time he's there. He knows he is too old for her and says he can only dream. She gives him permission to dream so long as the dreams don't involve sex or kissing, and he agrees. Jackson leaves the store and walks to a park where he smokes his cigar and scratches off his lottery tickets. He loses on the first card, but wins a free ticket on the second, so he walks back to the grocery and redeems his prize.

*Like alcohol and the cigar, Jackson's dreams about a relationship with Kay are an attempt to escape the brutal reality of his situation. The lottery tickets Jackson purchases with the little money he has represent how success in capitalist society often depends on luck.*

On the third ticket, Jackson wins $100 and walks back into the store to redeem his cash. As Kay hands him the money, their hands touch, and Jackson describes that this feels "electric and constant." Jackson hands Kay one of his new $20 bills and explains that Indians always share prizes with their families. Kay says that she isn't Jackson's family and tries to reject the offer, but Jackson insists, and she keeps the money. He walks out of the store into the cold night with $80.

*Jackson falls into his familiar pattern of earning and immediately losing money, but this time that loss is tied to an American Indian cultural practice: American Indians always share a windfall with family, and he considers anyone important to him family. This represents how American Indian culture is itself at odds with capitalism and what is required for capitalist success.*

## 8:00 P.M.

Jackson walks back to Junior, excited to share his good news. However, just like Rose of Sharon, Junior has disappeared. It's only later that Jackson finds out he hitchhiked to Portland, Oregon, where he died in an alley behind a Hilton Hotel due to exposure to the elements.

*Junior's death is another example of how grief permeates American Indian life. Jackson viewed Junior as a "Pre-Columbus Indian" who was evidence of American Indian life before the destruction brought by colonization. His death represents the continued destruction of American Indian cultural identity. The fact that he died without dignity in an alley behind a luxury hotel chain subtly points to the fact that capitalism is built on American Indian suffering and death.*

## 9:00 P.M.

Feeling lonely, Jackson decides to walk to the all-Indian bar, Big Heart's. He explains that its unknown "how or why Indians migrate to one bar and turn it into an official Indian bar." Big Heart's has been an "official" Indian bar for 23 years. Jackson remembers that a "crazy Lummi Indian" burned the original bar down.

*To deal with their loneliness, Jackson and other American Indians congregate at bars where they are surrounded by others who understand their cultures and identities. The popularity of bars among American Indians also shows that others are caught in a destructive cycle with alcohol similar to Jackson's.*

Jackson doesn't know anyone inside the bar but he remarks that Indians treat one another like cousins, because "Indians like to belong." At the bar, Jackson hands over his $80 in exchange for 80 shots of alcohol. He announces that he is treating all his "cousins" in the bar to a long night of drinking. Jackson sits down with a woman named Irene and man named Honey Boy. He asks them what tribe they belong to. The woman is Duwamish and the man is Crow from Montana. Jackson remarks that Honey Boy is far from home.

*Jackson immediately spends the remaining $80 dollars from his lottery win, and again he spends it on others. American Indian culture is grounded in community, so much so that they regard each other as family even when they have never actually met. This is in direct opposition to the individualistic culture of capitalism. Jackson's communal mindset keeps him poor in an individualistic capitalist society.*

Honey Boy is a two-spirit, and Irene warns that he can seduce Jackson with his magic. Jackson insists that he's in love with Kay only. The other Indians in the bar buy more rounds, including Honey Boy, who charges the alcohol to his credit card. Twelve shots in, Jackson and asks Irene to dance, but she turns him down. Honey Boy puts Willie Nelson's "Help Me Make It Through the Night" on the jukebox, and Irene and Jackson watch as he sings and dances around the bar. Jackson leans over and kisses Irene, who kisses him back.

*Like Jackson, Honey Boy and the other American Indians in the bar treat everyone to more drinks. Honey Boy charges the alcohol to his credit card, which shows how he is willing to go into debt for his community, just as Jackson is willing to spend all his money. The song that Honey Boy puts on the jukebox speaks to the grief and daily struggle that the American Indian community experiences as a result of marginalization and oppression.*

## 10:00 P.M.

Irene leads Jackson into the women's restroom and promptly puts her hand in his pants. Jackson describes Irene as "wonderfully fat" and starts to grab and squeeze her body all over, noticing that "every part of her body felt like a large, warm, soft breast."

*Like his relationship with Kay, Jackson sees Irene as another woman who can provide him with an escape from his struggles and hardships.*

## MIDNIGHT

Incredibly drunk, Jackson wakes up and finds himself alone at the bar. He doesn't realize that he blacked out, and two hours have passed since he was with Irene. He demands another shot from the bartender, but neither he nor the remaining patrons have any money. Jackson asks the bartender where Irene and Honey Boy are, and the bartender tells him that they took off a while ago.

*Still caught in the cycle of spending and earning, Jackson has run out of money again. With only 12 hours to raise the $1000 for the regalia, he is starting over from square one. Like Rose of Sharon and Junior, Honey Boy and Irene abandon Jackson and leave him alone.*

## 2:00 A.M.

Jackson asks after Irene and Honey boy again, and frustrated, the bartender reiterates that they left hours ago. Jackson asks the bartender, "What am I supposed to do?" It's closing time, and when the bartender tries to kick Jackson out, Jackson calls the bartender an "ungrateful bastard," prompting a fight. The bartender lunges towards Jackson just as he blacks out.

*The bar was only a temporary cure for Jackson's deep sense of emptiness. Without his community Jackson doesn't know what to do.*

## 4:00 A.M.

Four hours later, Jackson wakes up and is surprised that he's walking behind a warehouse. He has no idea where he is, his face is injured from the fight, and his nose might even be broken. To shield himself from the cold, he wraps himself in a tarp that "feels like a faithful lover." He lays down in the dirt and falls asleep.

*Jackson repeatedly loses himself when he blacks out. His desperation is clearest in this scene when a tarp is the closest thing he has to human warmth and connection.*

## 6:00 A.M.

After only two hours of sleep, Jackson is woken up with a kick to the ribs by a police officer named Officer Williams. Jackson knows Williams and thinks he is a "good cop" with a sweet tooth. Officer Williams has given Jackson hundreds of candy bars over the years, and Jackson wonders if he knows that he's diabetic. Officer Williams calls Jackson a dumbass because he's passed out on the railroad tracks. Jackson is scared at this realization and embarrassed in front of the dockworkers. He realizes he's lucky that he wasn't hit; then, he pukes all the alcohol from the night before.

*Jackson repeatedly calls Officer Williams a "good cop," which is ironic given that his character is introduced by kicking Jackson and calling him a dumbass. Williams believes he is helping Jackson when he gives him the candy bars, but his efforts are in fact not helpful because Jackson is diabetic. It's clear that Williams doesn't really know Jackson despite the many years he's been picking him up off the streets.*

Officer Williams remarks that Jackson has never acted so stupidly, and Jackson explains that his grief over his grandmother's death has driven him to this low. Sympathetic, Officer Williams asks when she died and is surprised to hear that it was back in 1972. He asks Jackson why he's only decided to kill himself now, and Jackson replies that "he's been killing himself ever since she died." Officer Williams pities Jackson and asks who beat him up. Jackson tells him that it was "Mr. Grief," who "always wins."

*Jackson reveals the effects that grief and loss have had on his life. He sees his grandmother's death as the beginning of his long path of self-destruction. His grief is literally killing him. He personifies grief as "Mr. Grief" and says that's who beat him up and wounded his face. This personification shows that grief is painful, aggressive, and unrelenting.*

Officer Williams puts Jackson in the back of his police cruiser to take him to the detox center. Jackson jokes that he doesn't want to go because it's "full of drunk Indians." They both laugh at his joke, but Officer Williams is stunned that Indians laugh so much even in the face of their struggles. Jackson replies that "the two funniest tribes I've been around are Indians and Jews, so I guess that says something about the inherent humor of genocide." Again, they both laugh at Jackson's dark joke.

*The fact that the detox center is full of other alcoholic American Indians like Jackson reinforces how the cycle that traps him has likewise trapped many in his community Jackson's dark joke about genocide shows that grief is a connecting factor between communities that have suffered immense loss worldwide.*

Officer Williams asks Jackson why someone smart like him is on the streets. Jackson replies that he'll tell the story of why he's homeless in exchange for $1,000. Officer Williams says he'd agree if Jackson could guarantee that he'd straighten up his life. Jackson reiterates that Officer Williams is a "good cop," second only to his grandfather, who was a tribal cop. Jackson explains that his grandfather cared for people rather than arresting them, the same way that Officer Williams does.

*Williams can't understand, or refuses to acknowledge, the systematic oppression that keeps smart people like Jackson on the streets. He believes Jackson's personal choices are to blame for his circumstances. Jackson keeps the story of why he's homeless a secret from Williams, who is one of the "hungry white folks" Jackson mentions having to keep this a secret from in the very beginning of the short story. Again, Jackson calls Williams a good cop despite all the evidence that shows otherwise.*

Jackson and Officer Williams drive past the city's missions, where homeless men and women stare up at the grey morning sky. Jackson describes it as "the morning after the night of the living dead." He asks Officer Williams if he ever gets scared on the job, and Williams says that he doesn't get scared because he won't let himself think about fear. He admits that sometimes fear takes over when situations get really bad. Jackson explains that his grandfather was killed on the job, and that his was one of only three murders on his reservation in the last hundred years.

*Grief surrounds Jackson both in the past and present. The homeless people outside of the mission are the "living dead" who like Jackson suffer hardships day in and day out without any clear path or support to escape their difficult situations. Then Jackson mentions his grandfather only to tell the story of his death.*

Jackson explains that his grandfather was killed by his brother while responding to a domestic violence call between him and his girlfriend. The brother spent the rest of his life in jail and wrote letters in an attempt to understand why he killed Jackson's grandfather, but he never figured it out. Officer Williams asks Jackson if he can remember his grandfather, but Jackson doesn't remember much besides the funeral where his grandmother had to be dragged away from the grave. Officer Williams doesn't know what to say, and Jackson says that he doesn't either.

*Another one of Jackson's few memories of his grandparents is defined by grief and loss. His grandfather was killed responding to a domestic violence call, which points to the social problems that can destroy the communities living on under-resourced reservations. These atrocities that American Indians have had to endure leave both Jackson and Officer Williams speechless.*

At the detox center Jackson won't go inside because they'll keep him a day, and he'll miss the deadline to buy back his grandmother's **powwow regalia**. Officer Williams says that the right way to go about getting the stolen regalia back is to file a police report. But Jackson believes that would be unfair to the pawnbroker, who didn't know the regalia was stolen. Williams takes a long look at Jackson before offering him $30. He explains that he's giving it to him because he believes in what Jackson believes and hopes that he'll somehow turn the $30 into $1,000.

*Jackson has cycled in and out of the detox center many times before and knows that it won't' help him. Officer Williams fails to recognize that his efforts to help Jackson aren't sufficient, and despite his what may be his good intentions, he is unwilling to do more to help Jackson. It's also worth considering why Jackson won't call the police to get his stolen regalia back. He says it's out of concern for the pawnbroker, who may not be able to afford the $1,000 loss, which shows that Jackson's suffering has given him deep empathy for others—an empathy that, unfortunately, most other people don't have for him.*

Jackson tells Officer Williams that he believes in magic, but Williams knows that he'll more likely use the money to buy alcohol. Jackson asks why he gave him the money then, and Williams responds that it's because there aren't any atheist police officers. Jackson insists that there are, even if Williams isn't one of them. Williams lets Jackson out of the car, and Jackson walks off back toward the water with his $30.

*Officer Williams recognizes that Jackson is caught up in a vicious cycle that keeps him poor, but he only fuels that cycle by giving him money that he knows won't really help him. Williams gives Jackson the money because he wants to alleviate his own guilt and feel like he is doing the moral thing, which is implied in his statement that there are no atheist police officers.*

## 8:00 A.M.

Back on the wharf, the three Aleut cousins are still waiting for their boat. Jackson asks if they've seen it yet; they've seen a lot of boats, but not theirs. Jackson sits down with them, and they sit in silence for a long time. He starts daydreaming about his grandmother again and feels sad that he'd never seen her dance in her **regalia**. He wishes more than anything that he could've seen her dance at a powwow.

*The Aleuts' boat hasn't come, which is a metaphor for impossibility of returning home for Indian Americans whose homes have been stolen from them for centuries. Jackson's wish that he could have seen his grandmother dance in her regalia is an intense desire to regain the pieces of his culture that have been stolen from him.*

Jackson asks the Aleut cousins if they know any songs. They tell him that they know all of Hank Williams's songs, but Jackson wants to hear sacred Indian songs. The Aleuts tell him that Hank Williams is both Indian and sacred, but Jackson explains that he wants to hear the ceremonial songs that Indians sing back home when they are wishing and hoping for something.

*Jackson's request that the Aleuts sing him ceremonial songs points to his continued yearning to connect with American Indian culture. The fact that American Indians sing these ceremonial songs when they are wishing and hoping demonstrates the effect that loss and grief have had on their culture.*

The Aleuts ask Jackson what he's wishing and hoping for, and he tells them that he wishes his grandmother were alive. The Aleuts tell him that every song is about that wish, so Jackson asks that they sing as many as they know. The cousins sing their "strange and beautiful songs" that are about Jackson's grandmother as well as their own grandmothers. Jackson thinks that "they were lonesome for the cold and snow. I was lonesome for everything."

*The Aleuts say every American Indian song they know is about wishing that their grandmothers were alive. This points to the way that loss and grief permeate the culture of American Indians due to centuries of oppression. The Aleuts yearn for the cold and snow of their home, while Jackson yearns for everything he's lost: family, a home, and his culture and identity.*

## 10:00 A.M.

The Aleut cousins run out of songs, and the four sit in silence again. Jackson observes that "Indians are good at silence." He wants to hear more songs, but the cousins explain that the other ones they know are only for their people, which Jackson understands because Indians have to keep their secrets. He notes that the Aleuts are so secretive that they don't even call themselves Indians. Jackson asks the cousins if they are hungry, and they accept his offer to go eat.

*Jackson returns to the subject of secrets, which are critical to the preservation of American Indian culture. The Aleuts don't call themselves American Indians, perhaps in order to protect themselves against an American society that wants to destroy and oppress American Indian culture and communities.*

## 11:00 A.M.

Jackson and the Aleut cousins go to a diner called the Big Kitchen that serves homeless Indians. The four sit at a booth, and the waitress asks if they'll need separate checks. Jackson tells her he is paying for everyone, and the waitress remarks that he's generous. She calls him Mr. Professor and asks what they'd like to order. Jackson tells her to bring out as much food as $25 can buy, minus her tip. Jackson and the cousins retreat into their silence until their food arrives. Jackson finds it remarkable that so little money can go so far, and the four feast gratefully.

*Again, Jackson spends most of his money on others. His commitment to helping his community makes it so that he is unable to thrive in a capitalist society that requires individuals hoard their wealth in order to be financially stable.*

## HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

### MLA

Parks, Rebecca. "*What You Pawn I Will Redeem.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 31 Aug 2021. Web. 31 Aug 2021.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Parks, Rebecca. "*What You Pawn I Will Redeem.*" LitCharts LLC, August 31, 2021. Retrieved August 31, 2021. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/what-you-pawn-i-will-redeem.

To cite any of the quotes from *What You Pawn I Will Redeem* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

### MLA

Alexie, Sherman. What You Pawn I Will Redeem. Grove Press. 2004.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Alexie, Sherman. What You Pawn I Will Redeem. New York: Grove Press. 2004.