There There

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TOMMY ORANGE

Born and raised in Oakland, California, Tommy Orange worked at the Native American Health Center there for years. Through a storytelling project he undertook through the center, he began to realize how invisible Native American stories are—especially stories about urban Natives. After falling in love with reading and writing while working at a used bookstore outside of Oakland, Orange graduated from the Institute of American Indian Arts MFA program. His debut novel *There There* was the subject of a major bidding war, and debuted to huge acclaim in 2018, garnering praise and awards including the PEN/Hemingway Award, the National Books Critics Circle John Leonard Prize, and the Center for Fiction First Novel Prize. Orange lives in Angels Camp, California, with his wife and son, and teaches at the IAIA MFA. He is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

There There is set in contemporary Oakland, and confronts some of the ethical and ideological issues facing present-day America. Daniel Gonzales's whirring drone, present in the background of several crucial moments in the novel, as well as Orvil, Loother, and Lony's reliance on their phones and on the internet for access to social media and websites about Native history and culture show the ways in which technology brings people together. However, Edwin Black's crippling internet addiction shows how forces meant to connect people can actually be painfully isolating. The novel also makes reference to the real-life occupation of Alcatraz Island. From November 20, 1969, to June 11, 1971, the Native American group Indians of All Tribes (IOAT) led a protest in the form of an occupation, which helped establish a precedent for Indian Activism and push back on federal Indian Termination Policies, which were designed to erase Native culture by assimilating Native Americans into white society.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Tommy Orange himself has cited the work of Native poet Layli Long Soldier (author of *Whereas*) and his IAIA classmate Terese Mailhot (*Heart Berries*) as contemporary inspirations, but his work has drawn comparisons to the writing of celebrated novelist Louise Erdrich (*Love Medicine*, *The Round House*) and controversial but canonical Spokane writer Sherman Alexie (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*). The interconnected segments of *There There*, and the ways in which they build to a larger climax, are reminiscent of great novels-in-stories such as *Olive Kitteridge* by Elizabeth Strout and *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan. The title of *There There* comes from a comment from the Modernist writer Gertrude Stein, who upon returning to her childhood home of Oakland after many years and finding it much changes, wrote: "There is no there there." Tommy Orange has commented that the quote spoke to him in terms of "the idea of having a place that is yours—land that you have a relationship to—then being removed and what that does to you, as a Native experience."

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *There There*
- **When Written:** 2010-2016
- **Where Written:** Oakland, California
- **When Published:** 2018
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary, Postmodern
- **Genre:** Fiction
- **Setting:** Oakland, CA
- **Climax:** Tony Loneman, Octavio Gomez, Calvin Johnson, and two others rob the Big Oakland Powwow—but when the job goes wrong, a shootout ensues, claiming the lives of several of the novel's Native characters who have gathered at the powwow to connect and celebrate their heritage.
- **Point of View:** First, second, and third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Long Haul. Tommy Orange got the idea for the book that would become *There There* in 2010. He spent the next six years developing his characters and finding ways to make their paths converge around the fictional Big Oakland Powwow.

PLOT SUMMARY

In the weeks leading up to the Big Oakland Powwow, a disparate but interconnected group of urban Native Americans living in Oakland prepare for the festivities, working through the losses and traumas they've suffered both in their own lifetimes and through the inheritance of an overwhelmingly painful cultural legacy of violence and racism. Among the attendees of the powwow are the lost and insecure Tony Loneman, a young man whose shame over having a face marked by fetal alcohol syndrome leads to his involvement in a scheme to rob the powwow; Octavio Gomez, a drug dealer and the mastermind behind the scheme; and Dene Oxendene, who's

hoping to honor his recently deceased uncle's legacy by collecting the stories of other Native Americans living in Oakland for a documentary film. Also present are Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield, her half-sister Jacquie Red Feather, and Jacquie's culturally adrift grandchildren Orvil, Lony, and Loother, who all struggle to understand one another, and the complicated cultural tradition they're a part of. Interwoven with these central stories are the tales of a number of other individuals who are interconnected in unlikely and amazing ways—though they are often unaware of the deep ties, both cultural and familial, which bind them to one another.

As the powwow nears, Octavio plots with Calvin Johnson, Calvin's brother Charles, and Charles's friend Carlos—along with Tony Loneman, who Octavio hopes will take the fall for the crime—about how to steal tens of thousands of dollars in cash prizes from the powwow. Calvin, who is on the powwow committee, provides the group with valuable inside information.

Jacquie, who attends a professional conference in Albuquerque while struggling to maintain an eleven-day sobriety streak, reconnects with Harvey, the father of the child she gave up for adoption long ago, and agrees to travel with him to Oakland to attend the powwow. Meanwhile, Dene Oxendene secures a grant to support his storytelling project, and begins collecting on film the stories of Native Americans living in Oakland. He joins the powwow committee so that he can set up a storytelling booth at the big event, and looks forward to realizing his uncle Lucas's dream.

Fourteen-year-old Orvil Red Feather, who has taught himself Native dance by watching YouTube videos after a lifetime of being forbidden to learn about "Indianing" by his great-aunt Opal, prepares to enter a dance competition at the powwow with the help of his brothers Loother and Lony—and also discovers, disturbingly and intriguingly, that a lump in his leg seems to be leaking **spider**'s legs. Meanwhile, Edwin Black joins the powwow committee after securing an internship at the Indian Center in an attempt to temper his internet addiction, reconnect with his Native roots, and perhaps even meet his birth father, Harvey, at the powwow. The adopted-at-birth Blue, another member of the powwow committee, reflects on the abuse she suffered at the hands of her ex-husband, Paul—and how far she's come as a Native community organizer over the years in spite of the cultural isolation which marked her privileged youth.

At the powwow, everyone arrives hoping for a chance to shine, to make some money, and to connect with far-flung or long-lost friends and family. Orvil joins a group of dancers in a Grand Entry showcase, and is reminded of the spiritual power of dance and community when one of the dancers gives a rousing speech. Thomas Frank, the recently fired alcoholic janitor at the Indian Center, is given a chance to redeem himself through music as he participates in a drumming group led by the kindly Bobby Big Medicine. Edwin meets Harvey (his birth father), and Blue recognizes his friend Jacquie as her birth mother, though she's too shy and shell-shocked to say anything. Elsewhere, Tony Loneman dons traditional regalia and heads to the powwow on a busy **BART train**, feeling a sense of purpose—however misplaced—for the first time in his life.

Daniel Gonzales, Octavio's teenage cousin, used his 3-D printer to create several plastic guns and sold them to Octavio—and now plans to watch the robbery unfold by flying his high-tech drone over the coliseum. When the robbery goes bad and Carlos attempts to steal the bounty for himself, the robbers begin exchanging fire. As the shootout grows bloodier and bloodier, several innocent powwow attendees are caught in the crossfire—Orvil and Edwin are wounded, but with the help of their friends and family make it to a nearby hospital, while Calvin, Charles, Thomas, coliseum employee Bill Davis, and Tony Loneman die in the massacre. As Tony lies on the ground dying after putting an end to the shooting by killing Charles, he feels he is at last free from the bodily prison which bound him for years. He hears birds singing overhead as his consciousness dims.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Tony Loneman – True to his name, Tony is something of a loner who has always been ostracized because of his strange face, disfigured due to fetal alcohol syndrome—which Tony calls "the Drome." He has an adversarial relationship with himself and often sees himself as a monster. Tony is not particularly intelligent, though his counselors at the Indian Center attempt to inspire him by pointing out that he's smart in other ways. Tony inadvertently gets involved in selling drugs, a path on which he meets Octavio and becomes a part of his scheme to rob the Big Oakland Powwow. Octavio selects Tony as the one to facilitate the robbery, ordering him to purchase bullets and hide them in some bushes at the coliseum entrance and come dressed in full regalia, so that when he demands the safe which holds the powwow's cash prizes, he'll be harder to identify and trace. Tony's alternating invisibility and hypervisibility often leaves him feeling unbearably lonely, and when he dies at the end of the novel due to gunshot wounds sustained in the robbery, he feels as if he has at last been freed from wearing the "mask" of his identity, which has always imprisoned and minimized him.

Dene Oxendene – Dene Oxendene is a storyteller at heart, a man on a mission to collect the stories of Native Americans living in Oakland in order to continue on the project his uncle Lucas died before finishing. Early on in the novel, Dene successfully secures an arts grant which will allow him to pay the participants of his project, incentivizing participation within

the Native community. Dene, an amateur graffiti artist in his youth, has tagged the name "Lens" throughout Oakland—Dene does indeed see himself as a kind of lens meant to spotlight the stories of others. He joins the Big Oakland Powwow committee and sets up a storytelling booth there so that he can gather as many stories as possible. Dene never puts his own story on film, demonstrating his belief that the best, most worthy work is lifting up the stories of other marginalized individuals in hopes of making those who hear their stories feel less alone, if even for a little while. Quiet, introspective, curious, and affable, Dene takes his duty as a storyteller seriously while at the same time feeling immense personal gratitude and satisfaction at the chance to hear so many unique, painful, and strange tales of growing up and living as an Urban Indian in Oakland.

Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield – Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield's story begins when she is a girl of twelve, dragged along to the Native occupation of Alcatraz island by her freewheeling mother. Opal and her half-sister, Jacquie Red Feather, have adventures on the island and even enjoy themselves for a time, but as their mother's drinking gets worse and Jacquie gets involved with a rambunctious group of teens, Opal begins to feel isolated and lonely. After leaving the island, the girls' mother passes away within just a few months, leaving them in the care of a dubious "uncle" named Ronald who lusts after the girls. Opal takes it upon herself to defend her pregnant half-sister and herself by striking Ronald with a baseball bat before fleeing his home, preferring to live in a group home rather than subject herself or her sister to Ronald's predation. Opal falls in love with a young man named Lucas who runs away to Los Angeles, leaving her high and dry. Years later, when Opal is raising her sister's grandchildren, Lucas returns to Oakland to die—and bequeaths unto Opal his Native regalia before passing. Opal fears raising the boys (Orvil, Lony, and Loother) with a strong connection to Native traditions because of the pain, trauma, suffering, and violence she's witnessed in her own community—but her avoidance of the topic only makes the boys more curious about their cultural heritage. Ultimately, Opal learns that the boys are traveling to the Big Oakland Powwow to participate, and goes there herself to watch and support them. Quiet but stern and fiercely loving, Opal is stealthy and secretive about her past but determined to give her sister's grandsons the best future she can.

Jacquie Red Feather – When readers first meet Jacquie, she is an eighteen-year-old girl going wild on Alcatraz during the Native occupation of the island in the early 1970s. She drags her younger half-sister, Opal, along on her adventures, but the girls drift apart as Jacquie flirts with an older boy named Harvey. After Harvey turns a "no into a yes" and assaults Jacquie, she becomes pregnant with his child, and later gives the baby up for adoption. When readers next meet Jacquie she is in her late sixties, and is eleven days sober. She is struggling to keep a hold on that sobriety as she attends a painful professional conference on substance abuse and suicide in Native communities. Jacquie has given her three grandsons to her sister Opal to raise, unable to do a good enough job herself in the painful wake of her second daughter Jamie's suicide. At the conference, Jacquie successfully abstains from drinking, reconnects with Harvey in a chance encounter, and meditates on the ways in which alcohol is like a **spider**'s web—both a trap and a home. Jacquie ultimately decides to accompany Harvey to the Big Oakland Powwow, sheepish and nervous but hoping to reconnect with her sister and her grandsons. Jacquie is strong, resilient, and complicated, but she considers her own faults, admits to her mistakes, and ultimately allows herself the privilege of being around her family after years of walling herself off out of fear and doubt.

Edwin Black – Edwin Black is an isolated, frustrated, and confused half-Native young man who lives at home with his mother and spends most of his life getting lost on the internet. After earning a master's degree in Native American literature and getting a promising start to his academic career, Edwin suddenly found himself floundering, unable to make a connection between the things he was studying and their reverberations in his own life. Edwin has never known who his father is, and, when readers first meet him, has just started to track down the man via Facebook, with help from his mother, Karen. Edwin has spent much of his life afraid to fully participate in the world, as he's unsure of who he even is—but as the novel progresses, he begins making smarter choices in order to lose the weight he's gained while living as a recluse and to involve himself more deeply in his community. As Edwin begins working as an intern on the powwow committee, he meets friends and allies in the community—and forms a close relationship with Blue, who turns out to be his half-sister. Edwin is ultimately able to reconnect with his father, Harvey, and though he's wounded in the shootout at the powwow, the narrative suggests that Edwin will pull through his injuries.

Calvin Johnson – A native man on the powwow committee at the local Indian Center in Oakland. Calvin is living with his sister, Maggie, and his niece, Sonny, when his brother, Charles, comes to him for help—Charles is in over his head with some drug dealers, and hopes that getting Calvin involved will take the pressure off of him. Calvin, too, soon finds himself dealing with more than he bargained for when he becomes part of Charles's dealer Octavio's plot to rob the Big Oakland Powwow. Calvin provides the group with essential information about the powwow's setup and how the cash prizes are being stored. He betrays his own people in hopes of helping his family and indeed himself, and is ultimately wounded—perhaps even killed—when the scheme at the powwow takes a terrible turn. Calvin represents the cyclical nature of trauma and violence, and the ways in which oppression and desperation lead people to betray the ones they should stand with, and do horrible things in the process.

Orvil Red Feather – A fourteen-year-old Native boy. Though he is Jacquie Red Feather's biological grandson, he and his younger brothers, Lony and Loother, are being raised by their great-aunt Opal after Jacquie found it too difficult and emotionally taxing to raise the boys her daughter Jamie left behind when she killed herself. Opal is not educating the boys in what it means to be Native, fearing there are too many risks associated with "Indianing." Nevertheless, Orvil finds himself compelled to learn more about his people and his history, and he turns to the internet for guidance. There, Orvil learns traditional stories and dances through YouTube, and begins practicing in secret for the upcoming Big Oakland Powwow, where he hopes to enter as a dancer and win a large cash prize that could help his great-aunt work less. In the days leading up to the powwow, Orvil feels an itching sensation in a lump on his leg he's had for years—when he scratches at it, **spider** legs emerge from it. This symbolic, magical happening suggests that Orvil is at last ready to emerge as a man in his culture, in spite of the ways in which he's been held back or prevented from learning more traditionally about his heritage. Orvil is curious, smart, resourceful, and slightly mischievous, and he loves his brothers and his family fiercely.

Octavio Gomez – An Oakland drug dealer whose intimidating, tough demeanor masks a deep and fierce love for his family. Octavio has known great sorrow and loss throughout his life, losing his mother and brother in a car accident and his cousin Manny in a drug-related episode of violence. Octavio, himself in hot water with his higher-ups due to Charles and Carlos's carelessness, comes up with a plan to rob the Big Oakland Powwow. Octavio hopes to use the money to pay his debts and improve things for his family, demonstrating that behind even terrible acts of violence, there are sometimes good intentions. The narrator of the novel's thoughtful interlude expresses a kind of empathy for Octavio and his gang, suggesting that the bullets fired at the powwow have been traveling there for years and for miles—implying that there are uncountable and unknowable factors, missed connections, and twists of fate which lead any individual at the brink to take their final step off the ledge.

Blue – The child of Jacquie Red Feather and Harvey, Blue was adopted at birth by a wealthy white family. Raised in a upscale suburb of Oakland, Blue grew up knowing she was Native American, but never felt connected to her roots. At eighteen, after learning the name of her birth mother, Blue endeavored to travel to Oklahoma to learn more about her roots. There, Blue became involved with programs for young Native people and married a Native man named Paul, with whom she participated in weekly plant medicine ceremonies. After Paul's father's death, he became abusive, and Blue fled Oklahoma to return to Oakland. Blue is quiet but confident, empathetic and caring towards others, and is deeply invested in her local Native community. She is shaken when she encounters the woman she knows to be her mother—and further disoriented when she learns that her coworker, Edwin Black, is her half-brother—but is there for Edwin in his time of need .

Harvey – When readers first meet Harvey, he is a rambunctious and heavy-drinking teen whose family is participating in the occupation of Alcatraz at the same time as Jacquie, Opal, and their mother, Vicky. Harvey and Jacquie flirt, but the interaction ends in an assault. Jacquie becomes pregnant with Harvey's child, and gives the baby up for adoption—unbeknownst to them, the baby girl is adopted by white parents and grows up to adopt the Indian name Blue and work on the Big Oakland Powwow committee. Harvey is also Edwin Black's birth father. After years of alcoholism, Harvey cleans up his act and gets sober. He reconnects with Jacquie at an AA meeting during a conference on substance abuse and suicide in Native communities out in Albuquerque, and the two of them travel to Oakland together for the powwow—which Harvey is emceeing. A gregarious and ultimately kind man, Harvey is wise enough to know that though he's let people down throughout his life, there's always a chance for redemption and reconnection.

Bill Davis – The boyfriend of Edwin Black's mother, Karen. Bill, a Native man, works at the Oakland Coliseum. Though Edwin doesn't like Bill very much, Bill is nonetheless devoted to Karen and to Edwin as well. In the midst of the chaos and violence that unfolds at the powwow, Bill throws himself into the line of fire in order to search for Edwin and help save him—and loses his life in the process. Kind, simple, nostalgic for old ways of life and skeptical of modern-day technology, Bill is an all-around good guy who takes pride in his work and his community.

Daniel Gonzales – Octavio's cousin, who is a young tech and coding whiz. In the basement of his mother's house, Daniel uses a 3-D printer to make the guns that Octavio, Charles, Carlos, Calvin, and Tony use during the robbery of the Big Oakland Powwow. Daniel has a drone, which he frequently flies around Oakland in order to see the city from a different point of view.

Ronald – The man with whom Opal and Jacquie live for a time after their mother Vicky's death. Whether he's a blood uncle or simply a friend of their mother's is unclear. The girls ultimately attack Ronald and clear out after he tries to assault a sleeping Jacquie in the middle of the night.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Thomas Frank – The janitor at the Indian Center in Oakland. He is fired from his job for drinking while at work, but feels redeemed by his love of music and rhythm when he joins a drum circle performing at the Big Oakland Powwow.

Lucas – Dene's deceased uncle, and Opal's long-lost boyfriend. Lucas is a heavy-drinking boom mic operator in Los Angeles who dreams of making movies. Before Lucas dies, he passes on to Dene the idea of making a film which collects raw, unedited

stories of people within the Native American community.

Rob – A smug white hipster competing against Dene for an arts grant.

Vicky – Jacquie and Opal's mother. She is a hard-drinking woman who brings the girls along as she decides to join the occupation of Alcatraz in the early 1970s.

Rocky – A boy whom Opal meets and befriends while living on Alcatraz. He is Harvey's younger brother.

Karen – Edwin's mother and Bill Davis's girlfriend. She is caring and concerned, but has trouble motivating her son to make the right choices.

Maggie – Calvin's sister, with whom he's currently living.

Sonny – Calvin's young niece.

Charles – Calvin's brother. A young man who has gotten in over his head in the drug trade, and must now answer for the mistakes he's made by assisting Octavio in coming up with a large sum of money.

Carlos – Charles's constant companion and associate.

Jamie – Jacquie Red Feather's deceased daughter, an addict who committed suicide many years ago. Jamie was the mother of Orvil, Lony, and Loother, and gave them their distinctively spelled names.

Lony Red Feather – Orvil and Loother's brother, Jamie's son, and Jacquie's grandson.

Loother Red Feather – Orvil and Lony's brother, Jamie's son, and Jacquie's grandson.

Manny Gonzales – Octavio's cousin and Daniel's brother. He is a young boy who dies in a violent drug-related incident.

Josefina – Octavio's grandmother. She is a kind and caring half-Native woman who believes in the power of nontraditional medicine and ritual.

Sixto – Octavio's uncle, who is responsible for the deaths of Octavio's mother and brother when all three of them are in a car accident.

Paul – Blue's abusive husband in Oklahoma.

Geraldine – One of Blue's friends in Oklahoma who helps her get to the bus station in Oklahoma City when she needs to escape her abusive husband, Paul.

Hector – Geraldine's brother and one of Paul's friends.

Bobby Big Medicine – The kindly leader of a Native drumming group in Oakland.

Maxine – Tony's grandmother.

Norma – Dene's mother.

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.

CULTURAL IDENTITY VS. PERSONAL IDENTITY

The characters who make up the cast of Tommy Orange's novel *There There* are wildly different—but they all share a tense relationship to the intersection of their cultural identity as Native Americans and their personal identities. Orvil Red Feather, Blue, and Edwin Black are each shown worrying that they are not "Native enough," or are Native in the wrong ways—and must reconcile what they know or believe about themselves with their idea of what it means to be a part of the Native community. As Orange's characters try to make sense of who they are within the Native community and outside of it, Orange argues that discovering one's place in a larger cultural identity can help that person to understand who they are on a personal level.

Fourteen-year-old Orvil Red Feather has been all but barred from learning about his family's Indian heritage by his great-aunt and caretaker, Opal. Opal believes that "learning about your heritage is a privilege" which their family does not have. Opal is careful to impress upon Orvil and his brothers, Lony and Loother, that there is little about modern-day Native culture that is original—much of Native tradition only exists because of the ways in which Native people have had to make do with the scraps given to them by their white oppressors. Though Opal tries to shield Orvil from the difficulty of navigating a cultural tradition with roots in pain, trauma, and ostracism, Orvil is drawn to the Native part of his identity. Through the internet, he learns about Native culture and memorizes Native dances. He digs out some old regalia from Opal's closet and, together with his brothers, plans in secret to attend the upcoming Big Oakland Powwow. Most mysteriously of all, Orvil finds that an itchy bump on his leg is full of **spider** legs. He does not know that when his great-aunt Opal was a young girl, she found the same phenomenon on her own body. The spider leg incident is symbolic of how one's cultural identity is a part of them, for better or worse, even if kept hidden. The emergence of the spider legs symbolizes the fact that Orvil is ready to embrace the heritage he's been denied all his life.

Blue, the chair of the Oakland Indian Center's powwow committee, doesn't know who her parents are—a fact that fills her with questions about her cultural identity. For most of her life, she's been called Crystal; adopted at birth by white parents, she grew up in an affluent Oakland suburb. At

eighteen, when her adoptive mother revealed the name of Blue's birth mother, Blue began a quest to find out who she really was. Her journey in search of her Cheyenne roots led her to Oklahoma, where she married a Native man and was given an Indian name—but after her husband Paul became abusive, she fled back to Oakland. Blue's journey of self-discovery resulted in pain and trauma—but rather than turn away from the heritage she discovered in Oklahoma, she continued to embrace her culture in Oakland and gave her time, energy, and love to the Native community there. She chooses to approach her connection to her Native identity as an extension of her personal identity, bringing to it the lessons she's learned throughout her life.

Raised by a white mother, and in total ignorance of who his Native father is, Edwin Black has been searching all his life for hints of who he might be—but has failed to construct a viable personal identity that allows him to thrive in the world. After a promising start to an academic career in Native American literature, Edwin has hit a wall. He is a recluse who spends most of his time on the internet, living in his mother Karen's home and avoiding the outside world. He successfully contacts his biological father Harvey through Facebook, but after confirming that they are related and learning what tribe Harvey belongs to, Edwin backs off from the communication, afraid of what a real connection might look like. When readers first meet Edwin, he has been constipated for over a week. This constipation serves as a metaphor for the ways in which Edwin has been holding himself back from the world around him, failing to understand on any real level who he is inside. Edwin's mother, worried about how much time her son is spending online, confronts him about the changes he needs to make to his lifestyle. Edwin applies for a job at the local Indian Center, begins doing exercises in his room, and resolves to eat more healthily. As the barriers between Edwin and the rest of the world break down, he's at last able to have a bowel movement—and feels as if he's finally moving forward in life. As the novel progresses, Edwin becomes a part of the powwow committee at the Indian Center, and through the planning is able to connect with his biological father Harvey and with his coworker Blue—who turns out, in a surprising twist of events, to be his half-sister. As Edwin learns more about his cultural history, he comes out of his shell and begins pursuing his passion—writing fiction. As he learns more about his people, he at last allows himself to care about something real, to develop his identity as an author and storyteller, and to thrive through his newfound connection to his larger Native community.

Through the example of these three major characters, Orange extends empathy to those who wrestle with the feeling that their personal identity is devoid of cultural identity. In examining the ways in which his characters have distanced themselves (or have been distanced against their wills) from Native culture—and the ways in which they try to reconnect with a vital part of who they are—Orange shows how cultural identity can enliven one's personal identity, bringing a new sense of purpose into their life.

STORYTELLING

Throughout the novel, Tommy Orange uses his characters to show how storytelling and memory are indispensable parts of Native American culture and tradition. Even though the history of the Native American people is a difficult and painful one, Orange's characters find that they cannot escape the traditions of storytelling and collective memory which allow their families and communities to survive. Throughout the novel, Orange argues that collective familial, community, and cultural memories and stories are absolutely necessary in sustaining a set of traditions under constant threat of erasure.

The characters within *There There* are, for the most part, lonely, poor, and in search of a way to reconcile their personal identity with their cultural heritage. For many of them, storytelling—and retreating into memory—is a way of both sustaining the past and muting the pain of the future. The most passionate storyteller among the many characters of *There There* is Dene Oxendene, an aspiring filmmaker who wants to carry on the project his uncle Lucas failed to finish during his lifetime by gathering the stories of the other Urban Indians who make up the Oakland Native community. Dene is desperate to collect these stories as a way of asserting his community's resilience and rich history, and tells the people he interviews that he doesn't care what kind of story they tell—long, short, happy, or sad—as long as it provides a window into how they experience being Native and being from (or living in) Oakland. As Dene collects stories—a couple times, even, from other characters in the novel such as Orvil Red Feather and Calvin Johnson—Orange examines the role Dene is taking on. Dene wants to give voice to others' stories, and seeks to amass and preserve them for the good of the larger community. Dene doesn't tell his own story on film, though—rather, towards the end of the novel, he films himself looking unblinking into his uncle's camera, an "unflinching stare into the void of addiction and depravity." Under the weight of all the painful stories he's collected, Dene doesn't have anything to say himself: his wide-eyed stare, in a way, tells the story of all the stories that have come before his own.

Stories also figure hugely in the life of Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield. Her mother, Vicky, once told her and her sister, Jacquie Red Feather, that they "shouldn't ever not tell [their] stories," and throughout their lives, the sisters reckon with this directive in their own separate ways. Opal, charged with raising Jacquie's three grandsons after Jacquie's daughter Jamie commits suicide, doesn't teach the boys very much at all about their Native heritage. She doesn't tell them any stories about their people or even their family—having witnessed the pain in every

branch of her family tree, and the larger struggles the Native community in Oakland faces, Opal has decided that some stories are better left untold. However, she fails to see the ways in which her stories could help guide and even prosper her grandsons, even as she finds herself retreating more and more often into the stories from her past during her long days working as a mail carrier.

Edwin Black also highlights the importance of storytelling, albeit in a slightly different way than the novel's other characters. He begins writing short stories midway through the novel—he's long wanted to put to paper the ideas in his head, but has been too daunted by fear of failure to do so until he begins working at the Indian Center and trying to get his life together. Edwin Black is arguably the most "educated" character in the novel, having earned a master's degree in Native American literature. His desire to be a fiction writer differentiates him from the other characters whose go-to stories are the stories of their parents or ancestors—but Edwin, in spinning these new tales, is participating still in the tradition of making sense of the trauma, pain, and erasure Native people face by telling the stories of their lives.

On a metatextual level, Orange himself is doing the same work as Dene Oxendene (a character who could, ostensibly, be based on Orange given his half-Cheyenne heritage and impulse to turn the spotlight on others). Orange is collecting the stories which defined his youth as an Urban Indian in Oakland and educated him about the history of his people. By fictionalizing real events such as the 1969-1971 Occupation of Alcatraz, blending fiction and nonfiction in the novel's prologue and interlude, and lending an almost magical sense of coincidence and interconnectedness to the stories he weaves throughout the novel, Orange shows what it means to see one's cultural heritage reflected back through fiction and nonfiction alike. Stories are vital to the sustenance of memory, allow for varying perspectives on common experiences, and help preserve the traditions, ideals, and lessons of marginalized people under constant threat of erasure.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS, COINCIDENCE, AND CHANCE

In the early pages of *There There*, it seems as if Orange's hopping and skipping around through the perspectives of various Native Americans living in Oakland—Urban Indians, as they often call themselves—is highlighting disparate and isolated points of view. As the story deepens, however, it becomes clear that all of the characters are interconnected—by their occupations, by chance, and even by blood. As the story builds towards a giant powwow, during which nearly all of his characters find themselves collected in the Oakland Coliseum, Orange argues that not only are people connected in ways they often can't begin to imagine—but also that the connections which ripple through the world have the power to change lives for the better.

The complicated connections between the characters of *There, There* at times seem too coincidental to be real. Through the various twists and turns of the narrative which both retroactively and in real time reveal unlikely connections between coworkers, strangers, and family members, Tommy Orange makes a larger comment on how interconnected not just the Native community but the world more largely is—and highlights the deeper importance of old adages that instruct people to love their neighbors and respect strangers as they love and respect themselves. Jacquie Red Feather, who gives birth to a child conceived on Alcatraz with the slightly older Harvey, gives that child up for adoption and never sees Harvey again. The child, Blue, is adopted by wealthy white Oakland residents and grows up in the lap of luxury. She later goes on to take a job at the Oakland Indian Center in hopes of reconnecting with her heritage, where she meets Edwin Black—who has just reconnected with the father he never knew through Facebook, a man whose name is Harvey. Blue and Edwin, unlikely siblings due to the sharp differences in their age and demeanors, nonetheless feel an uncanny sense of familiarity and connection with one another. Blue knows the name of her birth mother, and when Edwin meets Harvey, Harvey introduces him to Jacquie. Edwin introduces Blue to the woman, who instantly realizes that the young man she's gotten to know as her intern and coworker is actually her half-brother. This group of characters represents the power of redemption through human connection. Harvey and Jacquie have failed the children they each, in their own ways, gave up; but in reconnecting with them, even through a coincidence, there is the chance for true connection and healing.

Tony Loneman and Calvin Johnson are both roped into a dangerous group of drug dealers run by Octavio Gomez, who is at first glance an intimidating and frightening figure—but who is later revealed to be suffering his own pain and trauma related to the death of his father, mother, brother, and cousin, and the loss of a cousin as well. Octavio's other cousin, Daniel, operates a drone which he uses to survey the streets and landmarks of Oakland and which Edwin's mother's boyfriend, Bill Davis—a janitor at the Oakland Coliseum—tries to strike down out of the air. This grouping of characters demonstrates the idea that people are interconnected in surprising ways—often without even knowing it. Tony and Calvin's involvement in Octavio's scheme seems to be about a callous act of robbery, but in fact Octavio is trying to get the money for his family. Octavio doesn't have reservations about robbing the powwow because in spite of having indigenous South American ancestry, he doesn't feel a connection to the Native community—and yet he fails to see that he is indeed connected to the Oakland Native community in many roundabout yet meaningful ways.

Orvil Red Feather's life also proves that people are interconnected, and that such interconnectedness is often for

the better. Orvil's great-aunt Opal was once in love with a young man named Lucas, who left with barely a word to go live in Los Angeles. Lucas is also Dene Oxendene's uncle, and Lucas's return to Oakland near the end of his life allowed him to leave Dene his camera and pass on his tribal regalia to Opal, who later bequeaths the regalia unto Orvil. This collection of characters represents the ways in which the objects, stories, and legacies people pass down to their children, relatives, or family friends can have an unforeseeable—and remarkable—impact on the future, and influence connections they could never have possibly imagined.

At one point in the novel, when Harvey remarks upon the coincidence of running into Jacquie Red Feather at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in New Mexico, and states that there must be a reason for their meeting, Jacquie replies sarcastically that the "reason" is that the "Indian world is small." Though her statement is no doubt true—and though characters like Blue and Dene Oxendene have made their life's work the excavation and reinforcement of such a small community rife with so many unlikely connections—there is a mystical feeling to these instances of chance and coincidence which lends the novel a purposeful, fated quality. In making connections between his characters—many of whom are isolated, miserable, and in need of some small miracles—Orange suggests that the power to lift one another up regardless of personal connection should be a cornerstone of any community; people should treat those they meet as if they could be their long-lost daughter, a grieving friend-of-a-friend in need, or the relative of a deceased sweetheart, whether or not these unlikely connections actually turn out to be true.

GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

In searing nonfiction essays during *There There*'s prologue and interlude, Tommy Orange offers up unflinching and gruesome depictions of the violence, cruelty, and attempted genocides which have ravaged and depleted indigenous peoples all over North, Central, and South America since the 1400s. With this legacy of generational trauma to confront each day, Orange suggests, modern-day Native communities increasingly turn to substance abuse and suicide to cope with the staggering weight of inherited pain, trauma, fear, and isolation. As Orange demonstrates the ways in which generational trauma influences the cast of characters within *There There*, he makes a larger statement about the pain Native communities have been forced to bear over the years. Orange ultimately suggests, however bleakly, that until there is a wider reckoning with the history of colonization, extermination, and assimilation Native peoples have been forced to endure, Native communities will become trapped in a vicious cycle of more pain and suffering.

In the book's prologue, an unnamed narrator—perhaps Orange himself—describes the ways in which Native people have been brutalized and systemically attacked throughout American history. The narrator suggests that the widespread massacres and other attempted genocidal acts, orchestrated by American settlers and later the U.S. government, is itself the "prologue" to contemporary Native life. With such terrible weight to bear, pain, anger, and isolation have become the defining hallmarks of an entire community. Through the fictional character studies that follow, Orange illustrates this thesis, and shows how many of his characters have been brought to the breaking points of their lives by the sadness, suffering, and cruelty they've both witnessed and endured. The ways in which generational trauma manifests throughout the characters of *There There* is widespread and varied. Some characters turn away from their culture, such as Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield, while others are desperate to connect with the rituals and traditions of their ancestors, such as Blue, Edwin Black, and Orvil Red Feather. Some characters struggle with substance abuse to escape the pain of their own lives and the lives of their parents and forbears, such as Harvey, Jacquie Red Feather, and Thomas Frank, while others, such as Dene Oxendene, seek to bring even the most painful, excruciating stories to light, believing that only visibility can combat the cycle of generational trauma. All of the characters are, in their own ways, trying to find a way to understand and escape the painful legacy they've inherited—though few of them fully realize at first just how difficult this task will be.

In a nonfictional interlude, the narrator resurfaces to describe the desire for community and recognition that has spurred the tradition of the intertribal powwow—and to foreshadow the violence that will take place at the Big Oakland Powwow, which all of the major characters will soon attend. Just as the narrator posited the thesis of "massacre as prologue" to Native life in contemporary America, he now suggests that the bullets which will be fired at the powwow were in fact launched many miles and many years ago. The second half of the novel is focused on the ways the traumas the characters have either been ignoring or trying to abate rear their heads at the powwow, the central event around which the novel is organized. As the characters within the novel travel to the powwow for various reasons—to seek out or meet family members for the first time, to attempt to be a part of Native culture in a new way, to make or steal money, to distract themselves from the mundane, lonely nature of their lives—it becomes clear that the inevitable violence which will mark the day has its roots in the generational traumas, intercultural resentments, and desperation which form the basis of the lives of these Urban Indians living in Oakland. The violence which takes place at the powwow—and other violent events like it—are all, Orange suggests, precipitated by the ways in which Native communities internalize and replicate the violence done unto them for generations by white colonizers, oppressors, and now gentrifiers. Because America has never reckoned with the sins it has perpetrated against the Native community, there has

been no healing or change. The cycles of trauma, isolation, anger, and violence which serve as a "prologue" to these acts of violence will not stop, Orange suggests, until there is a major shift in how indigenous people not just in the Americas, but around the world, are seen and treated.

The novel ends in a crescendo of violence inflicted on members of the Native community by members of the Native community. Tony Loneman, in full regalia, tries to rob members of his own community. Meanwhile, Calvin Johnson and his brother, Charles, wound or kill elders and acquaintances as they fire on their accomplices in the robbery, Octavio and Carlos. The pain that ripples through the powwow is shocking and heartbreaking, but, it is suggested, not all that surprising in the end; when Opal hears the shots ring out, she seems almost resigned to or exhausted by the fact that someone has come to kill more Native people. With violence as a "prologue" to modern-day configurations of Native communities, Orange suggests through his novel's painful climax, only more violence—physical, emotional and psychological—will spawn until there is a shift in American culture to lend more resources, empathy, and indeed even reparations to Native people.

SYMBOLS

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

SPIDERS

In the words of Jacquie and Opal's mother, Vicky, spiders represent things that are both homes and traps—addiction, memory, and ignorance are just a few of the things the novel's characters encounter which threaten to ensnare them (and beckon to house them) much like a spider's web. From Jacquie's spiderweb tattoos to Orvil's and Opal's respective encounters with spider-leg-infested sores on their bodies, spider-related imagery is rife throughout the novel and the lives of the characters inside it.

At one point in the novel, Jacquie Red Feather is eleven days sober and struggling to remain so while attending a painful professional conference on the abuse, addiction, violence, and suicide in Native communities around the country. Right when she considers drinking the bottles in her hotel room's mini-fridge, she looks down and contemplates the spiderweb tattoos on her feet. She is reminded of her mother's speech about homes and traps, and successfully avoids drinking. She no longer wants to live in the house alcohol built for her, and is too wise to fall into its traps again.

Jacquie's grandson Orvil Red Feather is the second major character in the novel to encounter spider imagery. Banned by his great-aunt and caregiver Opal from learning about or participating in Native traditions, the fourteen-year-old Orvil has turned to the internet to learn about the history of his people and to study Native dance in preparation for the Big Oakland Powwow. As the powwow approaches, Orvil becomes bothered by an itchy sensation in the lump on his leg that he's had for as long as he can remember. When he picks at the lump, he pulls several spider legs out of it. The spider legs symbolize his emergence into adulthood, and his emerging sensitivity to the mysteries, coincidences, and stories all around him—he is beginning to make a home in the Native community, a place Opal warned him could only ever be a trap.

In a flashback, Opal reveals that she, too, found spider legs in her own leg as a girl shortly after helping Jacquie to escape the home of their "uncle" Ronald, a family friend who eyed the girls lustfully despite being entrusted to care for them after their mother's death. For Opal, too, the spider legs symbolized an emergence into adulthood, and her escape from a home that was also a trap.

BUSES AND BART TRAINS

Over the course of the novel, buses and BART trains come to represent the intersection between public and private lives, and symbolize the ways in which Native people in particular often struggle to reconcile their personal identities and cultural identities. The transit systems of Oakland—where it is frowned upon to stare at strangers, make disturbances, or even speak—are places where the characters who use them have time to reflect quietly on their own lives and thoughts while being in a public space surrounded by a community of sorts. Given the novel's overarching theme of cultural identity versus personal identity, and its examination of the identity crises that emerge when oppressed people must reckon with a past full of violence, erasure, and generational trauma, the buses and BART trains featured within its pages represent the tension between the desire to participate in a larger cultural tradition and a community and the desire to close oneself off to the pain of the past, the injustice of the present, and the uncertainty of the future.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Knopf edition of *There There* published in 2018.

Prologue Quotes

There was an Indian head, the head of an Indian, the drawing of the head of a headdressed, long-haired Indian depicted, drawn by an unknown artist in 1939, broadcast until the late 1970s to American TVs everywhere after all the shows ran out. It's called the Indian Head test pattern. It you left the T V on, you'd hear a tone at 440 hertz—the tone used to tune instruments—and you'd see that Indian, surrounded by circles that looked like sights through riflescopes. There was what looked like a bull's-eye in the middle of the screen, with numbers like coordinates. The Indian's head was just above the bull's-eye, like all you'd need to do was nod up in agreement to set the sights on the target. This was just a test.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3-4

Explanation and Analysis

Tommy Orange's novel *There There* opens with this passage, in which an unnamed narrator—possibly Orange himself—describes the disembodied (and arguably targeted) Indian head which appeared on television test patterns in the mid-twentieth century. In the brief essay that follows, the narrator describes the myriad ways in which images of Native Americans have been mutilated and commodified—often simultaneously—in mainstream white American media and public thought. The violence inflicted on Native people for centuries is not just physical, though the attempted genocides and nonstop vicious attacks on Native people and Native lands are innumerable and devastating in scope; a more insidious form of violence isolates and elevates Native imagery while at the same time making a kind of mockery of Native regalia, Native traditions, and Native bodies. This passage, and the essay which contains it, tie in with the novel's major themes of storytelling and generational trauma by alluding to the ways in which such violent imagery reverberates throughout the years and serves as a shorthand for the "story" of Native people before they are asked to tell it themselves.

Getting us to cities was supposed to be the final, necessary step in our assimilation, absorption, erasure, the completion of a five-hundred-year-old genocidal campaign. But the city made us new, and we made it ours. We didn't get lost amid the sprawl of tall buildings, the stream of anonymous masses, the ceaseless din of traffic. We found one another, started up Indian Centers, brought out our families and powwows, our dances, our songs, our beadwork.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8-9

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrator—describing the Indian termination policies under which the federal government first attempted to assassinate, and then attempted to assimilate, Native Americans in order to effectively erase their culture and cultural memory from the country's history—outlines the "final, necessary step" in these policies: moving Native people into cities. The narrator somewhat triumphantly—but not without exhaustion—notes that these policies ultimately failed. Rather than being absorbed by the "sprawl" of major American cities, Native people still found a way to connect with one another and keep their cultures alive even in an environment which their oppressors hoped would keep them from surviving, let alone thriving.

Part I: Tony Loneman (1) Quotes

I pulled my regalia out and put it on. I went out into the living room and stood in front of the TV. It was the only place in the house I could see my whole body. I shook and lifted a foot. I watched the feathers flutter on the screen. I put my arms out and dipped my shoulders down, then I walked up to the TV. I tightened my chin strap. I looked at my face. The Drome. I didn't see it there. I saw an Indian. I saw a dancer.

Related Characters: Tony Loneman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Tony Loneman is the first major character introduced in the novel. A twenty-one-year-old drug dealer whose face is marked by the hallmarks of fetal alcohol syndrome, Tony Loneman lives each day buried beneath the fact that his mother, while pregnant with him, abused and deformed him. The injustice Tony feels when he considers his mother's cruelty mirrors, no doubt, the injustice inflicted on countless Native peoples by colonizers and oppressors who cared nothing for the traumas they were inflicting on Native people as they killed them in horrible ways and attempted to snuff out their entire race.

Tony has just been informed by his boss, Octavio, that he is going to be a part of a scheme to rob the upcoming Big

Oakland Powwow and must do so wearing his Native regalia. In this passage, Tony dons his feathered regalia and examines himself in the blank screen of his grandmother's TV. In his regalia, Tony is unable to see "the Drome"—his nickname for fetal alcohol syndrome—and instead sees himself as a proud Indian dancer, part of a vast and important tradition. This passage demonstrates the ways in which cultural identity can help bolster one's personal identity—but for Tony, even this surge of pride and self-worth may not be enough to pull him back from the brink of chaos as he prepares for the robbery in the weeks to come.

Part I: Dene Oxendene (1) Quotes

"There is no there there," [Rob] says in a kind of whisper, with this goofy openmouthed smile Dene wants to punch. Dene wants to tell him he'd looked up the quote in its original context, in her *Everybody's Autobiography*, and found that she was talking about how the place where she'd grown up in Oakland had changed so much, that so much development had happened there, that the there of her childhood, the there there, was gone… […] Dene wants to tell him it's what happened to Native people, he wants to explain that they're not the same, that Dene is Native, born and raised in Oakland, *from* Oakland. Rob probably didn't look any further into the quote because he'd gotten what he wanted from it.

Related Characters: Rob, Dene Oxendene

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38-39

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Dene is at a building in downtown Oakland, preparing to present his project proposal before a panel in hopes of securing an arts grant to make the movie his uncle Lucas could never finish—a movie about Native stories, told raw and unedited. While waiting to go in to face the judges, a white hipster also interviewing for the grant talks at Dene more than to him about Oakland and how fast it's changing. Dene, perceiving the man—Rob—as a gentrifying force with no real knowledge of Oakland's history or investment in its future, becomes angry when Rob quotes Gertrude Stein. The quote, Dene feels, doesn't apply to people like Rob—it's much more profound when viewed through a Native lens, and when used to explain the desolation and confusion Native people have felt for centuries as they've been forced to watch the "there there"s of their collective cultural memories be stripped away. This quotation ties in with the novel's major theme of generational trauma, or the ways in which people inherit the pain and suffering of their ancestors, as well as themes of cultural identity and storytelling. Dene knows that he can do justice to Native stories—and doesn't want the chance taken away from him by someone who pretends to understand the gravity of what a changing Oakland means to so many disenfranchised people who have made the city—however unwillingly—their home.

[Norma] was crying. Dene […] thought about what it might have meant to her, losing her brother. How wrong it'd been that he'd left, like it was his loss alone. Norma crouched down and put her face in her hands. The camera was still running. He lifted it, pistol-gripped, pointed it at her, and looked away.

Related Characters: Lucas, Norma, Dene Oxendene

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38-39

Explanation and Analysis

As Dene reflects on his uncle Lucas's death, he remembers the first thing he ever filmed on the camera he inherited from the man: his mother, Norma, crying as she lamented her brother's death. This quotation puts into perspective who Dene is at the start of the novel, and just how deeply he's committed to his role as a storyteller in his community. Dene is—and, judging by this passage, always has been—committed to capturing even the painful parts of the Native experience in all its shapes and shades. Dene chose to film his mother in a moment of pain rather than comfort her out of his desire to capture her story.

Although Dene believes he's doing the work of bringing his community closer together by soliciting and sharing their stories, this passage posits that in the process of perfecting that role, Dene is actually making himself more distant from the very people he hopes to bring together, and closing himself off from deep emotions and human connection.

Part I: Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield (1) Quotes

"One of the last things Mom said to me when we were over there, she said we shouldn't ever not tell our stories," I said.

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?" "I mean having the baby."

"It's not a story, Opal, this is real."

"It could be both."

"Life doesn't work out the way stories do. Mom's dead, she's not coming back, and we're alone, living with a guy we don't even know who we're supposed to call uncle. What kind of a fucked-up story is that?"

Related Characters: Jacquie Red Feather, Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield (speaker), Ronald, Vicky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

After a strange, brief stint as part of a massive protest on and occupation of Alcatraz Island with their mother, half-sisters Jacquie and Opal return to the mainland and within months must bury their mother after she dies of cancer. Jacquie, pregnant after an assault on the island, tells Opal that she wants to terminate the pregnancy—but Opal urges Jacquie to keep the baby, as it's part of her "story" now. As Jacquie points out how messed up the girls' stories are so far, the passage connects to several of the novel's major themes. Storytelling is an essential part of human connection, but is especially sacred within Native cultures—it's a way of preserving Native history in the face of people and systems that want to erase it. Opal, in her youth, shares the same impulse to collect and honor every story as Dene Oxendene—but as she ages, her belief in the importance of preserving memory through story wanes. This quote could be seen as the moment when that deterioration began for Opal—the moment when she came to believe that some stories are too painful to be pulled along into the future.

Part II: Jacquie Red Feather (1) Quotes

Jacquie kneeled in front of the minifridge. In her head she heard her mom say, "The spider's web is a home and a trap." And even though she never really knew what her mom meant by it, she'd been making it make sense over the years, giving it more meaning than her mom probably ever intended. In this case Jacquie was the spider, and the minifridge was the web. Home was to drink. To drink was the trap. Or something like that. The point was *Do not open the fridge*. And she didn't.

Related Characters: Vicky, Jacquie Red Feather

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

Jacquie Red Feather is eleven days sober when she arrives in Albuquerque for a professional conference, and is instantly tempted by a minifridge full of alcohol right in the middle of her hotel room. As Jacquie considers whether or not to give into her worst urges, she remembers her mother telling her about spiders as a girl. Vicky, Jacquie and Opal's mother, revered spiders for their cleverness and industry—on their backs, for their whole lives, they carry a substance which is both "home and trap." Spiders are powerful but also unreliable, and as Jacquie confronts her addiction in the context of her mother's belief in the duality of homes and traps, she sees that even terrible things can be homes—and even good, healthy things can feel like traps in one's lowest of lows.

"There's gotta be some reason for all this. That we would meet like this," Harvey said, holding the elevator by putting his arm across the threshold.

"The reason is we're both fuckups and the Indian world is small."

Related Characters: Jacquie Red Feather, Harvey (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

After reconnecting with Harvey—a boy she flirted with on Alcatraz before being drunkenly assaulted by him many years ago—at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in

Albuquerque, Jacquie feels old surges of anger and new waves of confusion. Harvey, who seems to have done some serious work on himself over the course of his life and made attempts to atone for his past mistakes, suggests that there's a reason he and Jacque are reconnecting now—she suggests the reason is as simple as their shared misfortune, and the fact that "the Indian world is small." Jacquie's skepticism in this passage shows that she doesn't yet see the fact that mysterious and inexplicable coincidences and feats of chance are the patchwork that connects one part of her life to the next—or she does, and simply doesn't want to believe it's so. As the unlikely and surprising connections and reconnections between the novel's characters mount in the coming chapters, and as Jacquie witnesses some of these connections herself, her position will shift—but for now, her cynicism about the nature of fate and chance speaks only to how deeply traumatized and walled-off she is.

Part II: Orvil Red Feather (1) Quotes

❝ But his leg. The lump that's been in his leg for as long as he can remember, as of late it's been itching. He hasn't been able to stop scratching it.

Related Characters: Orvil Red Feather

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

As Orvil prepares to attend his first-ever powwow after months of studying Native history and dance on the internet, Orvil feels a strange itching in a familiar lump on his leg. Shortly after this brief passage, Orvil will pull several spider legs out of the lump—a mystical and symbolic discovery which will speak to Orvil's own emergence as a member of his community and an heir to Native tradition, and indeed to all the unexplainable and occasionally traumatic mysteries of life as a modern-day Urban Indian. Orvil has been unable to stop "scratching" at more than just his leg of late—in spite of his grandmother Opal's insistence that "Indianing" is risky for young boys and that true culture and identity come from within, Orvil wants to know more about his people and participate in their traditions—just as his scratching at his leg reveals the mysterious but fascinating spider legs, "scratching" at his people's history will reveal things equally spellbinding and horrifying as the powwow gets underway.

Part II: Interlude Quotes

❝ We all came to the Big Oakland Powwow for different reasons. The messy, dangling strands of our lives got pulled into a braid—tied to the back of everything we'd been doing all along to get us here. We've been coming from miles. And we've been coming for years, generations, lifetimes, layered in prayer and handwoven regalia, beaded and sewn together, feathered, braided, blessed, and cursed.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

As the day of the powwow dawns, the narrative breaks off into a brief interlude which discusses many of the same major themes and ideas as the prologue. The concept of fate, pilgrimage, and a "braid[ed]" interconnectedness is introduced as the narrator discusses the many uncountable journeys people are making as they converge on Oakland for the powwow. Their circumstances are interconnected in ways they can't understand or foresee—and are equal parts "blessed and cursed" because of this fact. Just as generational trauma carries an unbearable weight, the narrator posits that joyful pilgrimage, too, has a heaviness to it—the journeys to the powwow happening now are the accumulation of centuries of fighting to stay alive to keep the fires of tradition stoked, and to make a future for the generations still to come.

❝ Something about it will make sense. The bullets have been coming from miles. Years. Their sound will break the water in our bodies, tear sound itself, rip our lives in half. The tragedy of it all will be unspeakable, the fact we've been fighting for decades to be recognized as a present-tense people, modern and relevant, alive, only to die in the grass wearing feathers.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

Just as the many individuals who are traveling to the Big Oakland Powwow have actually been on journeys longer than hours or days—their journeys to this exact moment in

time have taken centuries—so too, the narrator posits, has the bullets' journey been a long and even fateful one. The mass pilgrimage of Native people to the powwow feels joyful and celebratory, but the bullets' journey there is a darker kind of fate. Though coincidence and chance are the ruling force of much of the novel, in this section, the narrator seems to be grappling with the parts of life that are unstoppable and unchangeable—the acts of violence and instances of trauma which are interconnected, to be sure, but inescapable in a dark and dangerous way. The bullets, the narrator says, are on a trajectory to tear down all the Native people at the powwow have been "fighting" for—and admits outright that there is nothing they can do to stop the bullets, or to change their fates.

Part II: Calvin Johnson (2) Quotes

❝❝ Dene starts to say something about storytelling, some real heady shit, so Calvin tunes out. He doesn't know what he's gonna say when it comes around to him. He'd been put in charge of finding younger vendors, to support young Native artists and entrepreneurs. But he hadn't done shit.

Related Characters: Dene Oxendene, Calvin Johnson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

At a powwow committee meeting where all present are asked to introduce themselves so that the new members can feel more at home, Calvin begins getting nervous as his turn to speak approaches. He is sitting on the powwow committee while also engaging in a plan to rob that very powwow—he is a traitor to his community and his people more largely, and on top of it all, he hasn't even done the bare minimum required by his position on the committee. Calvin is disconnected from his cultural identity and indeed his personal sense of self—he feels isolated from everyone and everything, and has no sense of allegiance or pride in who he is or what he stands for. Calvin feels bad about all of this—but in the end won't actually do anything to make amends or turn his ship around, a decision (or non-decision) which speaks to the cyclical and spiraling effects of generational trauma.

Part III: Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield (2) Quotes

❝❝ Opal pulled three spider legs out of her leg the Sunday afternoon before she and Jacquie left the home, the house, the man they'd been left with after their mom left this world. There'd recently been blood from her first moon. Both the menstrual blood and the spider legs had made her feel the same kind of shame. Something was in her that came out, that seemed so creaturely, so grotesque yet magical, that the only readily available emotion she had for both occasions was shame, which led to secrecy in both cases.

Related Characters: Orvil Red Feather, Jacquie Red Feather, Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

After Opal learns that her adopted grandson, Orvil, has pulled spider legs out of a lump in his leg, she is startled and spooked: the same thing happened to her when she was around his age. As Opal reflects on the frightening and strange incident, parallels and differences emerge between her story and Orvil's. Though the emergence of the spider legs symbolizes, for both Opal and Orvil, their emergence into adulthood and their capabilities as leaders, Opal felt only shame and fear when she pulled the legs out. Orvil, on the other hand, felt hypnotized and vaguely proud. The twinned stories, in spite of the differences in the way Opal reacted versus how Orvil did, represents the novel's theme of strange coincidences and inexplicable interconnectedness between strangers and kin alike.

Part IV: Orvil Red Feather (2) Quotes

❝❝ "Now you young men in here, listen up. Don't get too excited out there. That dance is your prayer. So don't rush it, and don't dance how you practice. There's only one way for an Indian man to express himself. It's that dance that comes from all the way back there. All the way over there."

Related Characters: Orvil Red Feather

Related Themes:

Page Number: 231

Explanation and Analysis

As Orvil Red Feather nervously dresses and prepares for his first dance in public at the Big Oakland Powwow, another dancer—unnamed but inspirational—gives a rousing speech meant to urge his fellow dancers to give it all out on the floor. The man suggests that the dances they're about to perform are their legacies—precious gifts their ancestors have entrusted them with, which they use to express not just their own selves but millennia of tradition. Orvil, who has learned to dance from watching YouTube videos, feels a little bit like an impostor as he listens to the speech—he feels "dressed up" and inauthentic. Orvil, though, is perhaps the most passionate dancer there—this passage suggests that cultural identity is not about authenticity of performance, but authenticity of feeling and investment, two things Orvil has in spades.

Part IV: Tony Loneman (3) Quotes

❝ To get to the powwow Tony Loneman catches a train. He gets dressed at home and wears his regalia all the way there. He's used to being stared at, but this is different. He wants to laugh at them staring at him. It's his joke to himself about them. Everyone has been staring at him his whole life. Never for any other reason than the Drome. Never for any other reason than that his face told you something bad happened to him—a car wreck you should but can't look away from.

Related Characters: Tony Loneman

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis

As Tony Loneman takes the train to the Big Oakland Powwow dressed in full Native regalia, he feels the familiar sensation of being stared at—but for a new reason. No one is looking at him because of his face, marked by "the Drome" (his nickname for fetal alcohol syndrome). Instead, people are staring in awe at his costume, which doesn't tell anyone that something "bad" has happened to him, but still sets him apart in a different way.

The buses and trains of Oakland's public transit system are potent symbols throughout the novel of the intersection between public and private spaces, as well as public and private identities. In this scene, the train is a catalyst for a public display of culture and heritage which Tony has never allowed himself. As the people around him stare—and even go on to ask prodding questions of him—Tony takes a kind of delight in being stared at because of his Native-ness rather than his facial deformity.

Part IV: Dene Oxendene (4) Quotes

❝ He crawls out through the black curtains. For a second the brightness of the day blinds him. He rubs his eyes and sees across from him something that doesn't make any sense for more than one reason. Calvin Johnson, from the powwow committee, is firing a white gun at a guy on the ground, and two other guys are shooting on his left and right. One of them is in regalia. Dene gets on his stomach. He should have stayed under his collapsed booth.

Related Characters: Calvin Johnson, Dene Oxendene

Related Themes:

Page Number: 270

Explanation and Analysis

As Dene hears shots ring out on the powwow floor, he stays still in his booth—but when a bullet hits a wooden support and brings the whole thing crashing down, Dene crawls out of the wreckage rather than choosing to stay hidden inside. What he sees is confusion, misery, and carnage—he also notes that Calvin, whom he's worked with on the powwow committee, seems to be at the heart of the violence unfolding all around. Dene, a storyteller and gatherer of experiences who has never shied away from looking a hard or painful truth right in the face, now regrets having emerged from his booth to look around at what's happening. The shooting represents a new level of trauma for Dene, and he at last encounters a story he doesn't want to see, hear, share, or be a part of in any way.

Part IV: Calvin Johnson (4) Quotes

❝ [Calvin] looks over to Tony, who's bouncing a little—he's light on his feet like he's ready to dance. Tony's supposed to do the actual robbing. The rest of them are there in case anything goes wrong. Octavio never explained why he wants Tony in regalia, and why he should be the one to take the money. Calvin assumes it's because someone in regalia would be harder to identify, and ultimately harder to investigate.

Related Characters: Octavio Gomez, Tony Loneman, Calvin Johnson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 272

Explanation and Analysis

As Calvin, Octavio, Tony, Charles, and Carlos prepare to put the robbery they've been planning for weeks in motion, Calvin reflects on the specifics of the plan. Tony, dressed in regalia, is supposed to do "the actual robbing," while the others act as backup. As Calvin considers why Tony has been instructed to be the one to take the money—and why he should be doing it in regalia—he realizes that Octavio, in spite of having some Native heritage himself, is essentially throwing his Native accomplice under the bus. To Octavio, Native people are so invisible and interchangeable that he presumes a Native robber wouldn't draw as much attention or ire as a white-passing or Latino one. Calvin's dawning realization of this fact demonstrates the ways in which other people seek to appropriate and use Native experiences, deepening the perception of Native people as props or lesser humans whose stories, feelings, and fates are of diminished value.

Part IV: Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield (4) Quotes

❝ She puts her hand over her mouth and nose, sobs into her hand. She keeps listening to see if it will clear up. She wonders, she has the thought, *Did someone really come to get us here? Now?*

Related Characters: Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 278

Explanation and Analysis

As shots begin ringing out at the Big Oakland Powwow, there is confusion and disorientation among the attendees—but for Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield, there is a surprising lack of shock. Opal is certainly upset and frightened, but she doesn't seem totally surprised by the idea that someone would "come to get" a group of Native people gathered together. This quotation demonstrates that Opal—and no doubt countless others in attendance at the powwow—are so used to being the subjects of senseless but hateful violence that it almost seems fated or unavoidable when it does occur. Opal's understanding that being threatened by continual violence is part of living as a Native person in America is bleak but acute, and certainly shared by several others at the powwow.

Part IV: Tony Loneman (4) Quotes

❝ Tony plays with his Transformers on the floor of his bedroom. He makes them fight in slow motion. He gets lost in the story he works out for them. It's always the same. There is a battle, then a betrayal, then a sacrifice.

Related Characters: Tony Loneman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

As he lies on the ground of the Oakland Coliseum, dying from gunshot wounds sustained in the powwow robbery gone awry, Tony Loneman recalls a single peaceful afternoon from his childhood. He remembers washing dishes with his grandmother and then retreating to his room to play Transformers. As he recalls the fantasy he constructed for his action figures, he remembers always putting them through the same scenario: "a battle, then a betrayal, then a sacrifice." The arc of the powwow has followed this trajectory—after a face-off that occurred when Tony refused to take the lead and demand the safe containing the cash prizes as planned, Octavio sprang into action, inciting a battle. Carlos and Charles turned on Octavio, demanding the spoils (a betrayal), after which a shootout began in earnest, requiring Tony to tackle and shoot Charles to stop the carnage while sustaining several serious gunshot wounds himself (a sacrifice). This evocative passage shows the ways in which the stories one tells him- or herself defines their life, and vice versa, and also suggests that Tony's actions, while no doubt part of the cyclical violence and betrayal which are part of generational trauma, also in the end aimed to stop that cycle—at least on a small scale.

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.

PROLOGUE

The prologue to *There There* is an extended essay which details the genocidal violence, cultural erasure and appropriation, and dehumanization Native Americans have faced since the arrival of white settlers in North America in the 1400s. An unnamed narrator—possibly the author, Tommy Orange, himself—details the unspeakably cruel ways in which colonists massacred Native Americans, often beheading, quartering, and scalping them after their deaths in order to render their bodies grotesque and less than human. The narrator also invokes the "Indian Head" test pattern, a broadcast which was beamed to every TV in America each night after 1939 and featured a Native American's head amongst "circles that looked like sights through riflescopes."

By opening the novel with a nonfiction prologue, Tommy Orange is establishing a context for the various traumas, insecurities, and disconnections his characters are all facing. He points out the countless ways in which Native people have been targeted, and the effect this profound generational trauma has had on modern-day Native Americans.

The narrator then transitions into telling an old Cheyenne folktale about a man who found his wife carrying on an affair with a water monster. The man killed and quartered both the monster and his wife, and served their bodies to his children for dinner. During the meal, a head rolled into their home, and no matter where they ran to escape it, it kept following them. The narrator speaks of white people's manufacture of Native rituals involving rolling heads in movies such as *Apocalypto*, and the other ways in which Native visages have become "logos and mascots."

There are many kinds of violence, the narrator posits—the brutalization and murder of Native people is one kind of violence, but the commodification and corruption of their legends and stories is another.

The narrator deconstructs the idea of "massacre as prologue," examining how the stories of extreme, brutal, unforgivable violence and mutilation Natives suffered for years at the hands of white settlers and colonizers is always in the background of modern-day Native life. White people have long tried to erase Natives from the country—and the "final, necessary step" in doing so was to move them to cities, off reservations, where they'd become assimilated. The narrator writes that Natives, however, made the cities they were moved to theirs, and found community with one another in spite of white American's desire to terminate Native culture.

The idea of "massacre as prologue" is important to the way in which the novel unfolds. Much of the action is set in the present day, and as these characters reach their tipping points, Orange suggests that the pain, suffering, and trauma they're enduring is the result of the weight of a cultural history marked by oppression, violence, and attempted genocide.

Urban Indians, the narrator writes, are the generation of Natives "born in the city." Though Urban Indians belong to the city, "cities belong to the earth." The narrator suggests that though the experience of living in a city should be alienating or not "traditional," many things associated with contemporary Native culture are not in fact traditional—Native people have to make their way in a world which has been arranged for them by white colonizers. "Everything," the narrator writes, "is new and doomed."

Lastly, the narrator points out the many paradoxes relevant to Native American life lived out in a major urban area. Cultures and identities comingle, diminishing in some ways and growing stronger in others, and highlighting the ways in which Native culture has been alienated from its roots through years and years of forced relocation and assimilation.

PART I: TONY LONEMAN (1)

Tony Loneman remembers the first day he noticed "the Drome." He was six years old, and one of his friends made a comment about how odd-looking his face was. He beat his friend up, but after his grandma Maxine arrived to bring him home from school, Tony stared at himself in the dark, blank screen of the TV, and saw his face "the way everyone else saw it." He asked his grandmother about why he looked different from other kids, and she sadly told him that because his mother drank while pregnant with him, Tony has fetal alcohol syndrome.

Tony Loneman is marked as different not just because of his heritage, but because of his face. He is an incredibly insecure young man whose physical discomfort in his own skin is exacerbated by the fact that he feels a violence has been done to him in the form of "the Drome"—his mother didn't care for him, and marked him as different and deformed without thinking of how her son would have to go through life.

Most people, Tony writes, don't look at their faces the way he looks at his own. He is obsessed with his own visage, and sees the fear the Drome inspires in others as his "power and curse." Now twenty-one and old enough to drink, Tony chooses to abstain from alcohol, disgusted by what his mother did to him when he was a defenseless fetus living inside of her. Tony sees a counselor once a week at the Indian Center, where he's been going for counseling since he was six. Though Tony worries he's dumb, his counselor assures him that in spite of failing intelligence tests in school, Tony is "smart where it counts"—he has street smarts, and is good at reading people. Maxine tells Tony often that he's a "medicine person," and looks different because he is in fact rare and different from others.

Tony is deeply insecure and struggles with feelings of worthlessness—yet he's obsessed with the failures he sees in himself. Though others around him offer him support, empathy, and even attempt to increase his self-confidence, Tony doesn't believe their kind words.

Tony often rides his bike around his hometown of Oakland, California, to take in the sights of all the city's different neighborhoods and the people who live there. Sometimes he speaks on the telephone to his mother, who is in prison, and begs her to tell him who his father is, but his mother insists that his father "doesn't even know [Tony] exist[s.]" Tony becomes incensed during these conversations. All his life he's had anger issues, and when he gets mad, he worries that he's "the opposite of a medicine person" who will spin out of control one day.

This passage foreshadows the total rage Tony feels—he's not just lonely and insecure, but in fact angry about his lot in life. Tony is clearly at a tipping point, and the ways he'll deal with that feeling of being on the brink will have devastating consequences for himself and for others.

Tony has been selling weed since he was thirteen, after meeting some drug dealers on the corner by accident. Tony gives most of the money he earns to Maxine, who is old and frail. Each night he reads to Maxine as she falls asleep, and though reading often frustrates him, Maxine is comforted by the stories he reads to her.

Tony tries to give back to his grandmother, one of his few champions in the world. Storytelling is shown here to be an activity which bonds them, and which demonstrates to Tony the power of stories to comfort people in difficult times.

One summer, Tony and his boss, Octavio, make good money procuring cocaine and selling it to white boys. Octavio is a hothead and a drunk who often speaks about the "curse" his grandmother helped him lift by using badger fur. Though Octavio has a tough exterior, he's sensitive about his grandmother. One afternoon, at the end of the summer, Octavio sits Tony down to ask him what a powwow is. Tony explains that at powwows, Native people get together to "dress up Indian," dance, sing, and "buy and sell Indian shit." Octavio asks what the powwows are for, and Tony tells him they're essentially about making money. Octavio tells Tony that he wants to rob an upcoming powwow at the Oakland Coliseum, and shows Tony a white plastic gun he has 3-D printed.

Tony and Octavio are alike in that they both use their illicit trade to help out their grandmothers—strong women who have supported them in times of need. Octavio's desire, then, to rob the powwow, represents a callous disregard for the connections he and Tony share: he wants to minimize the entire construct of the powwow, and bring violence and chaos into a space that's sacred to Tony's people.

The night before the powwow, Octavio calls Tony to tell them that he needs to buy and plant the bullets for the gun. Though the plastic gun will make it through a metal detector, bullets won't. Octavio instructs Tony to buy bullets from Walmart, put them in a sock, and toss them into the bushes at the Coliseum entrance. He instructs Tony to wear "some Indian shit." Tony agrees and hangs up. He goes over to his closet where he pulls out his regalia and puts it on. He stands in front of the TV and stares at himself—he cannot see the Drome, only "a dancer."

This passage suggests that the only time Tony really feels safe and like himself is when he's cloaked in the clothing and traditions of his ancestors. Tony's willingness, then, to take part in Octavio's scheme to rob the powwow, suggests that he's both emboldened by his heritage but ignorant of it—he isn't truly connected to his people or his culture, and sees the trappings of Native culture as a way of bolstering himself without taking part in something larger.

PART I: DENE OXENDENE (1)

Dene Oxendene walks up an out-of-order escalator at Oakland's Fruitvale Station and sees a **train** starting to arrive—he feared he'd missed it. Dene is tired and out of breath, and wishes he had a cigarette that could "invigorate" him. He refuses to drink, but no other substances he's tried make him feel any better. Dene studies the graffiti all over the tracks and thinks about the first time he saw someone tag, when he was much younger. He stared as another kid taking the same city bus as him wrote on the window, even though to stare at someone on an Oakland **bus** was—and still is—to ask for trouble. As the train pulls down the tracks, Dene fights the urge to throw himself in front of it.

This passage introduces Dene, one of the novel's central characters, as someone insecure, embattled, and full of self-loathing. Dene spends a lot of time lost in memory, reliving the stories of his own life as a way of coping with—or understanding—his fraught present.

Dene is on his way to face a "looming panel of judges" who will determine whether he is eligible for a cultural arts grant. Dene worries that appearing "ambiguously nonwhite"—not necessarily Native—will hurt his chances at securing the grant he's applied for. As the **train** pulls away from the station, he puts his headphones on and selects Radiohead's song "There There," the lyrics of which intone "Just 'cause you feel it doesn't mean it's there." As the train dips underground, Dene spots on the tunnel wall some graffiti he himself tagged years ago.

The Radiohead song which harkens to the novel's title warns Dene not to be deceived by his feelings—but clearly Dene is a man ruled by his emotions, his connections to the past, and his memories.

When Dene was younger and just starting to tag the word "Lens" throughout the **Oakland public transit system**, his uncle Lucas came to visit him and his mom, Norma, from Los Angeles. Dene hadn't seen his uncle in years, and was initially impressed by his uncle's claim that he'd been in Hollywood making movies—however, Dene grew disappointed when he learned that his uncle was only a boom mic operator, and only made his own movies "in his head." Dene grows even sadder when his uncle Lucas confesses to drinking heavily and nonstop in order to blot out the sense of failure he feels.

Dene idolized his uncle, whom he believed to be a great storyteller. The letdown of discovering that Lucas was a washed-up drunk hit Dene hard, but also caused him to feel a wave of empathy for his uncle, as he grapples with similar feelings.

Lucas told Dene that he had come to Oakland to work on a new project—a series of on-camera interviews with Indians living in Oakland. Lucas said that a woman named Opal, who "knows a lot of Indians" and may even be a distant "auntie" of Dene's, had connected him with some Natives who had agreed to share with Lucas the stories of what living in Oakland meant to them. After excitedly describing the project to Dene, Lucas pulled a flash from his hip and drank from it deeply, a strange look in his eyes.

In spite of his addiction and the setbacks he's clearly suffered in his life and career, Lucas remains clear-eyed about his vision for a project that could really make a difference. This passage foreshadows the role Dene will soon take up—the role of storyteller, and weaver of the disparate threads of the Native community in Oakland.

Back in the present, Dene has been stuck underground between stations for ten minutes. He begins to sweat heavily, nervous about missing his interview with the panel, or about having to condense his description of the project he wants to undertake—an extension of his uncle Lucas's original idea—for the committee.

Dene has shouldered his uncle's burden, and is seeking resources to continue the work Lucas could not complete himself.

As a youth, Dene tagged the word "lens" everywhere he could, but writing the graffiti made him feel lonely, as he came to picture the word as "a name written to no one," a useless cry for attention and connection. One afternoon, Dene returned home to find that Lucas, who had been staying with him and his mother, had been admitted to the hospital. Norma told Dene that Lucas was dying of liver failure due to his heavy drinking, and that there was nothing that could be done. Dene grew angry with his mother for failing to help Lucas, but Norma insisted that she never could have helped her brother for reasons she can't explain.

Dene sees himself as a lens—a scope which sees and absorbs what's happening around him. Dene has always felt this way about himself, and his current project is both a product of his desire to carry on his uncle's work and a desire to remain on the sidelines, a mouthpiece for other people's voices and a lens for their experiences.

In the present, Dene gets off the **train** in downtown Oakland and navigates his way through the busy streets, but continues thinking of Lucas. He remembers coming home from school and finding Lucas on the couch the day after Norma told Dene that his uncle was dying. When Dene asked Lucas how much time he had left, Lucas replied, "We don't have time, Nephew, time has us." Lucas took another drink from his hip flask, apologizing to Dene but assuring him that he would be around a while longer—long enough for them to make a movie together.

Lucas's sage warning that "time has us" is perhaps one of the galvanizing forces behind Dene's present moment. No one ever knows how much time they have left, and Dene wants to do all he can to ensure he's able to finish the movie his uncle never could before his own time runs out.

Dene enters the building where his interview is to take place. He mops his sweat using his undershirt and then sits in a waiting room next to a white hipster with a bushy beard who introduces himself as Rob. As Rob and Dene talk, Dene feels contempt for the man, who is clearly a white gentrifier with no real concept of what it means to live in Oakland. When Rob quotes a line from one of Gertrude Stein's writings about returning to her hometown of Oakland after a long time away and seeing the development that had taken place—"There is no there there"—Dene recognizes the quotation and becomes annoyed, feeling that Rob doesn't truly understand the quote and how it applies to Native experiences of the world.

The Gertrude Stein quote about the disappearance of the "there" she once recognized as home points to the novel's title and takes on a new light when viewed through a Native point of view. The lands that belonged to Native people for millennia were stripped away violently and totally, and the "there" of Native culture has been lost. Dene is angry with Rob for appropriating the quote when he's no doubt seeing it from a shallow point of view.

Dene is called into the interview room, where he sits in front of the panel of judges who are already discussing his work. The panel is made up of an older white woman, two middle-aged black men, two middle-aged white women, a young Latino man, an Indian woman "from India," and an older Native man wearing turquoise and silver feather earrings. Dene begins explaining his project to the panel, giving them the history of his uncle Lucas's mission and his desire to collect—and pay—Native storytellers for their stories in order to make what has long "remained invisible" visible. Dene is sick of Native stereotypes on film, and wants to tell "the Urban Indian story."

Dene is at last given the chance to share his goals with a group of people who are in a chance to help him realize them—he is nervous but determined, and his dedication to the project is genuine and evident.

As Dene nervously waits for the judges to respond to his pitch and ask questions about his proposal, he takes several deep breaths. After a minute, the only Native man on the panel speaks up to say that though Dene's idea is "interesting," it seems to lack "real vision." Dene, knowing that "it would be the Native guy" to question him if anyone was going to, grows upset. Dene worries that because he is only half-Native, he doesn't appear Native enough. Another judge, however, speaks up in support of the project, and then one of the women on the panel tells Dene that they'll all be in touch with him once they're done meeting with other applicants. On the **train** home, Dene can't stop himself from smiling, believing he has won the five-thousand-dollar grant.

The fact that a fellow Native person seems to reject Dene's idea outright signals to Dene that he's not seen as "Native enough" by other members of his community. This worry and self-consciousness no doubt weighs on him each day, and to have it confirmed in such a sensitive setting threatens to derail Dene—but with the support of the other judges, he at last allows himself to believe that his project is going to come to fruition.

In the past, Dene came home from school one afternoon to an empty house. He found his uncle's camera sitting on the coffee table—Dene picked it up, and found that it has a "pistol grip." Dene sat alone on the couch with the camera until Norma came home, wearing a look on her face which told Dene that Lucas had died. Dene took the camera out to a local park to escape from home for a while, and on his way back, began filming parts of Oakland, documenting his walk home. Dene came home to find his mother crying in the doorway, and despite feeling a sense of regret for treating his mother cruelly in a difficult time, pointed the camera at her and filmed her weeping.

The fact that Dene filmed his grieving mother unflinchingly, without looking away or providing her some peace and privacy, shows how dedicated he is to capturing and preserving even the most painful parts of the Native experience. Dene knows that to shy away from the truth is to betray his uncle's very mission.

PART I: OPAL VIOLA VICTORIA BEAR SHIELD (1)

Opal and her older half-sister, Jacquie Red Feather, are doing homework at the kitchen table one afternoon in January of 1970 when their mother, Vicky, comes home and tells them to pack: they are moving from their small East Oakland home to the island of Alcatraz with a group of other Native Americans. Opal remembers the last time their mother came home and told them, in a hurry, that they were moving: she'd been beaten up by a boyfriend. That time, on the bus to their new house, Opal had asked her mother about Native names, and Vicky had explained that Native last names were designed to "keep the power with the dads."

Vicky is a reckless wanderer who often sweeps her daughter up in her delusions and adventures. Jacquie and Opal are used to this lifestyle (if exhausted by it), and though they're beginning to grow skeptical of their mother's whims, they still absorb and internalize her thoughts, wisdom, and point of view.

Opal packs lightly for the trip, taking with her only two outfits and her teddy bear, whose name is Two Shoes. Vicky instructs Opal and Jacquie to say goodbye to their house as they walk out the door—the front of it is covered in eviction notices. On the **bus**, there are hardly any other riders, and though Opal longs to ask her mother about where they're going, she knows her mother doesn't like it when the girls talk on the bus. Opal can't resist, though, and asks her mother where they're going and why. Vicky replies that they're going to live with the Indians of All Tribes in the cells of Alcatraz prison as a protest against the ways in which Indian people are kept in metaphorical "cells" in larger society.

The real-life occupation of Alcatraz Island was meant to protest the treatment of Native Americans across the country under the ongoing Indian Termination Policy. By making Vicky, Opal, and Jacquie a part of this protest, Orange is rooting the story in a larger historical significance.

That night, on the island, Opal and Jacquie eat watery beef stew in front of a large bonfire while their mother smokes and makes friends with other Indian women. Opal and Jacquie enjoy themselves, and fall asleep happy by the fire. Vicky moves them inside the prison building, where everyone is sleeping in cells, and the sisters sleep soundly on an Indian blanket.

The first night on the island is new and exciting, and all three women believe that they are truly a part of something greater than themselves.

Jacquie, who is eighteen, makes more friends more quickly than the twelve-year-old Opal does, and starts running around with a group of teens. Opal mostly stays with her mother, attending meetings where groups of Natives work on plans for staying on the island long-term. When Opal feels lonely, she draws comfort from talking to her teddy bear, Two Shoes, and imagines long conversations with him in which Two Shoes reveals the origin of the name teddy bear and its roots with Teddy Roosevelt, who was said to famously spare a "scraggly old hungry bear" on a hunt, but in actuality slit the bear's throat out of "mercy." Two Shoes "tells" Opal that it's important to "know about the history of your people." Opal feels that she has had the same conversations she has with Two Shoes with her mother.

This passage suggests that when Opal is speaking to Two Shoes and listening to what the bear has to say, she's really just replaying conversations she's had with her mother. Vicky, distracted and erratic, isn't able to give her daughter the attention she wants and needs—and so Opal uses Two Shoes as a way of feeling connected to something, even when she's lonely or down.

One afternoon, Opal leaves Two Shoes behind some rocks and goes looking for Jacquie. She finds her with the group of teens—Jacquie is drunk, and introduces Opal excitedly to an older boy named Harvey. Opal spots another younger boy standing near the water tossing rocks into the ocean, and starts talking to him. He tells her that he is miserable to be stuck on Alcatraz with his family and wants to go back home. Opal asks his name, and he introduces himself as Rocky.

Things are slowly taking a turn on Alcatraz. Though in the beginning, Opal felt excited about being there, her loneliness is taking hold of her—and she's learning that others, like Rocky, are equally unhappy there.

Opal and Rocky go joyriding with Jacquie and some of the other older kids on a transport boat stolen from docks on the other side of the island. They're eventually caught by some elders and forced to return the boat to shore. Jackie and Harvey immediately scramble away, while the shell-shocked Opal and Rocky stay on the boat holding hands for a little while. Soon, Opal hears a woman screaming. She realizes the screams are Jacquie's, and goes off in search of her sister. She finds Jacquie throwing rocks at Harvey, and as Opal looks at Harvey's face, she realizes he and Rocky must be brothers. Jacquie leads Opal away, back to the prison, ignoring Opal's questions about what Harvey did to her to make her mad. Inside the prison, they find Vicky passed out drunk in her cell.

Things really start to take a turn for the worse after Jacquie's drunken but joyful connection to Harvey is severed by an incident of violence—and it becomes clear that Vicky, having succumbed to her own addiction, is not able or willing to prioritize her daughters' safety and happiness.

Things on the island begin to deteriorate. There are no supplies, scarce food, and zero electricity, and Opal notices that people are getting more drunk more often. Vicky assures the girls that she'll get them off the island, but Opal doesn't trust her mother anymore. One morning, Vicky takes Opal up to the lighthouse at the edge of the island, and Vicky blurts out the fact that she has cancer. Opal runs away from her mother to look for Two Shoes, but when she finds him he is weathered and scraggly, and she abandons him on the rocks.

Two Shoes' deterioration mirrors the physical and emotional deterioration Vicky is experiencing, too. Opal sees her mother in a new light, and cannot go back to idolizing her and hanging on her every word—just as she cannot go back to loving the worn, beat-up Two Shoes.

Back on the mainland, Opal, Jacquie, and Vicky go to stay with Vicky's "adopted brother" Ronald, whom the girls have never met. Vicky tells the girls that Ronald is a medicine man, and she insists that he can heal her even as she refuses traditional medical treatment. Soon, Vicky is dead, and on a visit to her gravesite, Jacquie reveals to Opal that she is pregnant with Harvey's baby. Jacquie wants to have an abortion, but Opal begs her to reconsider, insisting that the baby is now part of Jacquie's "story." The two girls walk home from the cemetery in silence, holding hands.

In the wake of their mother's death, Opal and Jacquie only have each other. The painful thing they've experienced in the past—and continue to endure in the present—are all making them into the women they'll become, and though Jacquie is full of hesitation and regret, Opal believes that they should honor even the painful parts of who they are and where they've been.

PART I: EDWIN BLACK (1)

Edwin Black sits on the toilet in his mother's house, struggling with his sixth day of constipation as he laments his years-long addiction to the internet and social media. His computer is fried, and being forced to step away from the internet is making him look at how he's wasting his life. He has a master's degree in comparative literature with a focus on Native American literature, but since graduating he's done nothing with his life—he's moved back into his childhood bedroom in his mother's house, gained over a hundred pounds, and hidden himself away from the world.

Edwin's physical constipation is a metaphor for the ways in which he's constrained and uncomfortable on a larger scale. Having abandoned a promising academic career and become a veritable recluse, Edwin is cut off from the rest of the world and stuck in the mire of his own inertia.

Edwin gets off the toilet and returns to his bedroom, where he is excited to see that his computer has flickered to life. He's still worried about being constipated, but knows he's caused the condition himself by eating such terrible food. Edwin has been holing up in his room eating junk and being fearful of using the bathroom at certain times because his mother, Karen, has moved her Lakota boyfriend, Bill, into the house. As Edwin begins googling constipation and gets lost in a series of forums on the subject, he considers how quickly time goes by when one is looking at the internet, which he believes is a mechanism "like a brain trying to figure out a brain."

Edwin's obsession with the internet stems from the fact of its endlessness—he is riveted by all the information and stories it holds, and can't accept that the internet is not a substitute for real life. Edwin is afraid of connection with other people, and is so loath to interact with his mother's boyfriend that he's letting his own health slide as a result.

Edwin hears a ping from his computer, which he knows means a message has been sent to his mother's Facebook account, which he's been using to try and find his biological father. His mother has told him little about his dad except for the fact that his name is Harvey, he lives in Phoenix, and he is what she—a white woman—calls "Native American Indian." Edwin resents his mother for using "this weird politically correct catchall," and for making Edwin himself feel removed from the Native community. Edwin has secured permission from his mother to message several different Harveys from her profile—and now one has responded.

Though Edwin is half-Native, his mother's ignorance—and his own isolation—are preventing him from connecting more deeply with the cultural heritage he's a part of. Edwin resents this fact and longs to make a change, but whether he'll be able to overcome his own fears remains to be seen.

Edwin reads the message from Harvey, which states that he's coming to Oakland for the Big Oakland Powwow in a couple of months—he'll be the emcee. Edwin writes back to Harvey, revealing who he is and apologizing for using the false premise of his mother's account to contact him. The two men chat back and forth for a while, and Harvey demands to see a picture of Edwin to confirm their resemblance. Edwin takes a quick selfie and forwards it to Harvey, who admits they look a lot alike. Edwin asks what tribe Harvey belongs to, and Harvey replies that he is Cheyenne. Edwin quickly thanks Harvey and signs off, feeling overwhelmed.

It seems that Edwin has at last found his father, and a piece of his cultural backstory to boot—but the interaction and the new information overwhelm him, and he retreats again into his loneliness and isolation.

Edwin considers how long he's been waiting to learn about his own Native heritage, searching for clues in his work as a Native American studies major and looking for a feeling of familiarity as he studied various tribes. Now, knowing what tribe he belongs to, Edwin still feels "not Native enough."

Orange is drawing connections between his characters in spite of their vastly different experiences. Edwin is connected to Dene by their shared connection to storytelling as well as their shared feeling of somehow being insufficiently or incorrectly Native.

When Karen comes home from work, she calls Edwin into the living room for a talk. Edwin complains, but his mother reminds him that they agreed on "updates" about Edwin's job search—and what he plans to do about losing some weight. Edwin spirals out of control, ranting about how badly he feels about his weight all the time. Edwin pours himself a glass of water and takes an apple from a basket in the kitchen, telling his mother this is his "update." Edwin expresses how frustrated he is with the job search, but his mother remains optimistic, suggesting different kinds of positions Edwin could apply for. She asks him how his writing is going, but Edwin feels patronized. Edwin's mother tells him that there's a paid internship position at the Indian Center he should apply for, and he halfheartedly says that he'll look into it.

Karen is trying to look out for Edwin and inspire her son to recommit to living his actual life—but Edwin is so ashamed of how far he's let himself fall already that any outside help feels like an attack. He is totally lost, untethered from his personal identity and his cultural identity alike, and needs help finding his way back to both.

Back in his room, Edwin listens to music on his headphones and lies down on the floor to do some exercises. He has difficulty doing push-ups and sit-ups, and quickly begins feeling sorry for himself. As motivation, he tries to tell himself that as a Cheyenne Indian he is a "warrior," but when he realizes how "corny" he's being, he gets angry and uses that as fuel to do some sit-ups. As he completes a set, he feels himself defecate in his pants involuntarily. He lies back down on the floor and says "Thank you" out loud.

Edwin's involuntary defecation symbolically suggests that he's moved past the emotional blockage that was holding him back. Having reconnected with his father and had a frank conversation with his mother, Edwin is ready at last to move on, test the waters of the real world, and reconnect with the truth of who he is.

PART II: BILL DAVIS (1)

Bill Davis works as a janitor at the Oakland Coliseum, going about his job with both exhaustion and pride. He has worked at the Coliseum for years, performing any job available from security to selling peanuts. He knows he's getting old, and will soon be edged out of work. As Bill pauses for a moment to catch his breath while picking up trash in the stadium seating, he looks up at the sky and sees something "unnatural" there. He is distracted when his phone vibrates in his pocket—it is his girlfriend Karen, no doubt calling to complain about "her man-boy son, Edwin." Bill hates the way Karen coddles Edwin, and hates the entitled, self-obsessed way the younger generation behaves more generally.

Bill is a relatively minor character throughout the novel, but by giving him his own point-of-view chapter, Orange is demonstrating the inherent relevance and worth of the stories of people who are often invisible in society. Bill has feelings of his own, and his contempt for Edwin and frustration with Karen shines a new light on another side of their makeshift little family's situation.

Bill answers the phone call—Karen tells him that Edwin needs to be picked up from his new job at the Indian Center later. Karen knows Bill doesn't want to pick Edwin up, but begs him to anyway, reminding him of "what happened to [Edwin] on the **bus**." Bill reluctantly agrees to pick up Edwin, telling Karen that she "owe[s] him" later tonight, then hangs up the call. Bill continues picking up trash, thinking about Edwin's tussle with an old veteran on the bus several weeks ago. He reflects on his history of working at the coliseum—Bill himself is a "crazy AWOL Vietnam vet" who has served jail time and as a result hasn't been able to find much work outside of the coliseum.

Bill has had a difficult past himself, and compared with the violent struggles he's faced, he feels that Edwin's problems are insignificant or even manufactured. He clearly has a tenderness for the boy in spite of his contempt for him, and more than anything is grateful for the ways Karen helps them both to feel less lonely.

As Bill looks out into the outfield, he sees a "tiny plane"—a drone has landed on the baseball field. As the drone heads for home base, Bill runs down the stairs with his trash grabber. He approaches the drone and tries to hit it with his trash grabber, but misses. The drone flies away quickly, and Bill watches it sail out "over the rim of the coliseum."

The drone's presence foreshadows that something—or someone—is watching Bill. Orange won't reveal the drone's significance until later on, but its presence now hints at a connection to something strange and unseen.

PART II: CALVIN JOHNSON (1)

Calvin comes home from work to find his sister Maggie and his niece Sonny, with whom he's living while he saves up money, sitting at the dinner table, ready to eat. Maggie and her and Calvin's mother both suffer from bipolar disorder, but Maggie is medicated whereas their mother—who disappeared long ago—never was. Calvin and his brother Charles feel that their sister is "the key to the history of [their] lives."

Though Maggie and Sonny are very minor characters, Orange still imbues them with the weight of a difficult family history. He does this to show that every person alive is walking around with a burden—and every story has inherent worth.

Maggie, Sonny, and Calvin eat dinner happily, but when Calvin goes to the kitchen for a beer and Maggie calls for him to bring back some lemonade, Calvin becomes angry at being bossed around, and yells at her. Sonny flees the room, and there is the sound of the front door opening and closing. Worried that Sunny has run out of the house, Calvin comes out of the kitchen and goes to the front door to find that his brother Charles and his "homie" Carlos are in the living room with big bottles of alcohol in their hands. Calvin, who owes Charles money, laments that the time for him to pay up has come.

Calvin is clearly yet another character who is at something of a breaking point. Desperate for his sister's help but strangled and embarrassed by this need, he lashes out at her—and clearly makes bad decisions which threaten her and her daughter, selfishly putting his needs before his family's.

At six-foot-four and two hundred and forty pounds, Charles is a huge and intimidating man. He sits down on the couch and begins berating Calvin for avoiding him and "playing house" with their sister. Calvin blames Charles for setting him up to get robbed at a recent powwow, and for roping him back into the drug trade—which he's trying to get out of. Charles threatening tells Calvin that he and Carlos are taking him for a drive. Charles and Carlos smoke a blunt before starting up the car, and Calvin reluctantly takes a hit, too. They drive into Deep East Oakland, and Calvin feels the potent effects of the marijuana, which he suspects was mixed with some other drug.

This passage establishes Calvin as an untrustworthy and self-serving individual who's trying to escape a troubled past—but doing a poor job of it.

They arrive at someone's house, but Calvin, disoriented, is uncertain of where they are. Soon, Octavio walks in, asking the "Charlos" what is going on. He diminutively refers to Charles and Carlos, who are almost always together, by this mononym. Octavio, too, is tall and imposing, and threatens Charles and Calvin with a gun, accusing them of failing to pay for drugs that they lost. Both Charles and Calvin owe him for various reasons, and Octavio wants his money. Calvin begins freaking out, imagining an elaborate scenario in which he is able to wrestle the gun away from Octavio and then force the man, at gunpoint, to drink so much that he forgets Calvin and Charles's debt.

As the connections between Octavio, who plans to rob an upcoming powwow, and Charles, who has been shown to have a dubious and changeable moral center, begin to emerge, Orange sets up a chaotic and doomed trajectory not just for the two of them but for Charles and Carlos as well.

When Calvin snaps himself out of his reverie, he realizes that Octavio, Charles, and Carlos are all laughing and shaking hands. Charles inspects Octavio's strange white gun, which Octavio reveals was 3-D printed in a basement by an old friend's little brother. Octavio urges Charles to tell Calvin what's going on. Charles tells Calvin—who is on the committee for the upcoming Big Oakland Powwow—that he and Octavio plan to rob the powwow to secure the fifty thousand dollars in cash prizes.

Calvin's position on the powwow committee makes him useful to the other men. Whether he will stand up for his people and take a moral stand or allow himself to get roped into yet another doomed scheme creates a good deal of tension throughout the novel.

Calvin says he has no interest in helping to rob the people he works with—and would never get away with it anyhow. Charles tells Calvin that if he helps them, he can have a cut of the money. Octavio raises a glass and drinks to their plan, and Calvin, feeling cornered, drinks too. The men down a whole bottle of tequila, and then Charles and Carlos drive home in silence. Calvin worries they are all headed "toward some shit [they'll] never make [their] way back from."

Calvin is coerced—and perhaps even a little bit enticed by the money—into helping out with Octavio's scheme. Even though Calvin senses a deep feeling of impending doom, he is too lazy or frightened to stop the gears that are being set in motion.

PART II: JACQUIE RED FEATHER (1)

Jacquie Red Feather lands in Albuquerque the night before the start of a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration conference. The theme of this year's conference is "Keeping Them from Harm," and is aimed at addressing the "staggering" number of suicides in Native communities. Jacquie takes a cab to her hotel and checks in—the woman behind the front desk smells like beer and acts fairly intoxicated as she checks Jacquie in. Jacquie herself is a recovering alcoholic, ten days sober after a recent relapse.

The conference Jacquie is attending is a heavy one, and its theme ties in with one of the largest themes of the novel itself: cyclical violence, pain, and trauma in Native communities. Jacquie herself is caught in a web of pain with regards to her own addiction

Jacquie reflects on the itinerant existence that she, her mother Vicky, and her younger half-sister Opal used to live. She remembers staying in a hotel one night and looking out at the beautiful glowing pool. She snuck out to dip her toes in the water, longing to be near it in spite of not knowing how to swim. Now, Jacquie asks the front desk attendant how late the pool here is open.

This passage establishes Jacquie as someone given over to her own memories, and her own whims. She longs to recreate the happy moments of her past, even though her present appears to be anything but happy.

Jacquie goes up to her room and lies down on the bed, thinking about Opal, who is raising Jacquie's three grandchildren out in Oakland. Jacquie texts Opal, asking how she's doing, before getting up from bed and donning a swimsuit. As she undresses, she looks at the tattoos that cover her body, including a pair of **spider** webs on the tops of her feet. Jacquie's phone vibrates with a text from Opal—the text states that Orvil, one of Jacquie's grandsons, "found spider legs in his leg." Opal says that the boys are convinced the omen represents "something ndn." Jacquie smiles at the text, then looks over at the minifridge. She thinks of something her mother used to say—"The spider's web is a home and a trap." Jacquie now understands the saying for the first time, realizing that drinking is both the home and the trap for her.

Jacquie, who is in a nondescript hotel in a desert town, finds the many threads of her life beginning to come together at this seemingly inauspicious, uneventful moment in time. She misses her family terribly, and as their experiences begin to mirror the memories and lessons of her own childhood, she feels a deep sense of loss.

Jacquie goes down to the hotel pool where she swims and then smokes a cigarette. She considers walking to a liquor store near the hotel, but decides against it. On the way back to her room, she gets a snack from the vending machine, and then eats it hungrily before falling into a fitful sleep.

Jacquie is tempted by the pull of her addiction, but attempts to distract herself with other things in order to stay above it.

The next morning, Jacquie finds a seat in the back of the main ballroom of the conference and looks around. There are two hundred people in attendance today, and Jacquie—who is here for work rather than a personal commitment to helping Native families—feel like a fraud. When the first speaker takes the stage and begins discussing the problems facing Native American youth—kids he describes as "jumping out the windows of burning buildings" set afire by their ancestors and their community—Jacquie becomes overwhelmed, and runs out of the room.

In this scene, Jacquie—like many of the novel's other characters—comes up against the ways in which she feels like an insufficient or fraudulent member of her own community. Combined with resurfacing memories of a past trauma, these feelings become too much for Jacquie to handle, and she flees.

Crouching in the doorway of her hotel room trying to steady her breath, Jacquie thinks about her own daughter's suicide, and the painful day thirteen years ago when she had to go identify her daughter Jamie's body. She saw the large hole that her daughter's gunshot wound had left in her head and was reminded of Veho, the trickster **spider**, who went about the world stealing eyes to see better. After her daughter's suicide, Jacquie broke a six-month streak of sobriety and began drinking more heavily ever. She became certified as a substance abuse counselor and worked for the Indian Health Service, all the while nursing her own addiction.

Jacquie is a hypocrite in many ways, but not a person of ill intent. She wants to help other people manage their addictions—even as she struggles with her own, a dependence created by past traumas.

Jacquie looks through pictures of her grandsons on her phone, feeling her mental state deteriorating every second. She is desperate for a drink, and knows she needs to go to an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting. There is one scheduled, she knows, for later that evening—these conferences always have them—and decides to take a nap in order to calm herself down.

For all of her fears that she'll start drinking again, Jacquie shows remarkable calm and constraint when facing her deepest desires.

That evening, Jacquie walks into the AA meeting to find a bunch of "older Native guys with long hair" sitting in a circle. A man in a cowboy hat introduces himself to her as Harvey, and Jacquie finds herself floored: she texts Opal to tell her sister that she is in a meeting with "Harvey from Alcatraz," the father of the daughter she gave up for adoption years and years ago.

The novel's unlikely and surprising connections and coincidences continue to mount as Jacquie finds herself face-to-face, for the first time in decades, with the father of her first child.

When it is Jacquie's turn to introduce herself to the group after the start of the meeting, she takes the opportunity to shame Harvey, and begins telling the story of her time on Alcatraz—and the "piece-of-shit kid" who "stretch[ed] a no into a yes" and impregnated Jacquie, who later gave up her daughter at seventeen. Jacquie suggests that the source of her alcoholism is the incident on Alcatraz, and that because of it, her addiction has ruined the lives of her second daughter and her grandsons.

Jacquie has a lot of unresolved anger towards Harvey, and the ways in which he forever changed her life before waltzing out of it forever. Blaming him entirely for her life's problems perhaps isn't right—but it's clear that the pain Harvey added to Jacquie's existence has weighed upon her over the years, and been the source of a lot of her own bad decisions.

Jacquie sits quietly while the other attendees speak, getting lost in thought about the day she, her sister, and her mother left Alcatraz—Harvey and his brother Rocky didn't want to leave, and jumped off the transport boat into the water. When Jacquie snaps back to the present, she realizes that Harvey is speaking, drawing a connection between outsized substance abuse in Native Americans and lives lived "in a world made to either break [them] or make [them] so hard [they] can't break even when it's what [they] need most to do." Harvey admits to feeling great shame about the things he's done in the past before leading the group in the serenity prayer.

Harvey has done horrible things in the past—but he's clearly focused on redemption not just for himself, but for the many individuals haunted by traumas they can't articulate—traumas which reach back hundreds and hundreds of years.

After the meeting, only Jacquie and Harvey stay behind. Harvey tries to make conversation with Jacquie, telling her he's going to Oakland soon for the powwow. Jacquie is hostile, and Harvey tries to explain how sorry he is, and even tells her that he's just found out "through Facebook" that he has another son. Harvey suggests the two of them travel to Oakland together to try to find their daughter, but Jacquie dismisses the idea. Harvey pushes her to accept, but Jacquie grows frustrated and heads for the elevator. Harvey catches up to her, and suggests there's a "reason" for their meeting here—Jacquie replies that the reason is that they're "both fuckups and the Indian world is small." As the elevator doors start to close, though, she tells Harvey he'll think about his proposal.

Even though Jacquie tries to remain closed-off and skeptical when it comes to Harvey's pleas, she can't help but admit that their meeting again in Albuquerque feels eerily fated—and agrees to entertain his invitation.

Back in her hotel room, Jacquie opens the minifridge and considers drinking. Instead, she unplugs the fridge, moves it out to the hallway, and calls for the front desk to come pick it up. Knowing that there is still time before they come up to get it, Jacquie puts on her swimsuit and heads for the pool. On the way past the fridge in the hall, though, she stops and pulls several bottles out of the fridge. Down at the pool, Jacquie swims a few laps, and then throws the bottles into the bottom of the pool and goes back up to her room. She texts Opal, asking if it's okay if she stays with her—she is thinking about coming to Oakland.

Jacquie remains determined to literally drown her traumas and addictions—and as she makes a grand gesture towards conquering them, she at last feels worthy of asking to reconnect in-person with the family she feared she'd lost.

PART II: ORVIL RED FEATHER (1)

Orvil Red Feather stands in his great-aunt Opal's room, using her full-length mirror to examine himself. He is dressed in full Native regalia—and is nervous that Opal will catch him wearing it. Opal has never taught Orvil or his brothers about what she calls "Indianing," claiming there are "too many risks" to young Native boys. Orvil has begged Opal to teach him about the Cheyenne tribe and his heritage, but Opal says that "learning about your heritage is a privilege" which their family does not have.

Orvil is drawn to the rituals and traditions of his culture, even though he's been effectively walled off from learning about his roots for all his life. Opal's desire to keep her grandchildren safe from the same traumas she endured as a child has led her to distance them from their culture—but Orvil is ready to change all that.

Orvil knows that he and his brothers were the unwanted children of a heroin-addict mother, given over to Opal after their true grandmother, Jacquie, was unable to care for them. The boys often beg Opal for details about their mother, who gave them all nontraditional spellings of common names—Orvil, Lony (pronounced "Lonny") and Loother—but Opal doesn't speak much about Jamie.

Orvil knows well the traumas which haunt his family's past—and yet doesn't want to shy away from them, but rather yearns to know more about who he is and where he comes from.

Now, standing in the too-small, itchy regalia, Orvil feels out of place and underwhelmed. He has learned everything he's learned about being Indian from the internet—YouTube videos of powwows and dances, and various other websites about Native culture and heritage. Orvil has wanted to be a dancer for years, drawn to the "ancient-seeming" ritual, but now that he is dressed like an Indian, he still feels like a "fraud."

This passage mirrors passages from Edwin's story—like Edwin, Orvil has turned to the internet, a tool of the future, to learn more about his past and his family's past.

Orvil, Lony, and Loother stop at the Indian Center on their way to get Lony a new bike. Orvil is participating in a project—and is being paid $200 to talk to a Native filmmaker named Dene about any story from his life he wants to tell. When Orvil sits down in front of the camera, Dene explains that stories told by people like you can make you "feel less alone" and strengthen the community. Orvil tells a sad story about a day when he and his brothers were still living with their mother: they came home to find her passed out on the kitchen floor with a bloody nose. Orvil called an ambulance, which took Jamie to the hospital. The boys went to meet their grandma Opal there, but by the time they got there, their mother was already gone—she'd just been knocked out from the fall.

Orvil wants to participate in Dene's project in order to make some money for his family—just like Octavio and Daniel, he's motivated by the desire to provide for those he loves. This shows that very different actions can have similar motivations. The story Orvil offers up is short, bleak, and deeply personal—yet he delivers it almost flatly, wanting to get the process over with so that he can obtain his $200.

Orvil and his brothers leave the Indian Center with a gift card for $200. As they ride their bikes to a nearby Target to get Lony one, Orvil feels an itching in the lump in his leg that's been there "for as long as he can remember." At Target, Orvil uses the bathroom, where he feels something poking out of the lump—he pulls it out, and sees that it is a **spider** leg. He keeps the legs he pulls out in toilet paper and shows them to his brother Loother, who is similarly astonished.

The spider legs emerging from Orvil's legs symbolize his emergence into manhood—and his preparedness to enter the larger Native community. Orvil, like the spider legs, has been buried and itching to escape—the legs portend that he will soon get that chance.

Lony buys his bike, and the brothers ride together down the streets of Oakland, listening to rap music even though Orvil's favorite thing to listen to is powwow music. When they stop for a rest, they discuss the **spider** legs in Orvil's leg, and decide to call their grandmother. They determine that whatever's happening, it's "definitely Indian," and Opal will know what to do. They leave a message for her and then poke at the legs in the toilet paper before resuming their ride home.

The boys all marvel at the strange omen, and in spite of their distance from what it means to be Native, even they know that the legs portend something connected to their family's culture.

The day of the powwow, Orvil and his brothers sneak out of the house quickly to avoid confronting Opal about where they're going. Over dinner last night, no one discussed the **spider** legs. They ride their bikes all the way to the coliseum, and are surprised by how big the arena is up close. As they approach, Lony asks if they can stop for a second. He asks his brothers what a powwow is—he wants to know why everyone dresses up to "dance and sing Indian." When his brothers don't answer them, he accuses them of making him feel stupid any time he asks them anything. Orvil gently replies that powwows are meant to carry on "old ways" so that the community doesn't forget them.

This passage makes it clear just how isolated Lony is from his people and his culture. He doesn't understand what the traditions and rituals of Native life are, let alone why they need to be preserved—unlike Orvil, he hasn't yet taken his cultural education into his own hands.

The boys approach the coliseum and see "real Indians" in full regalia streaming into the arena. They are excited to go inside the powwow, and, earlier that morning, stole coins out of fountains around the neighborhood in order to scrape together enough money to purchase Indian tacos—tacos made with fry bread—as a treat. At the entrance, Orvil realizes that Loother has forgotten to bring a bike lock, and so the boys hide their bikes in some bushes. Though Lony is anxious about leaving the bikes behind, Orvil says there's no way he's not going into the powwow.

Nothing is going to stop Orvil from getting into the powwow—he's worked so long and so hard to prepare himself for it, and he and his brothers have tirelessly scraped together funds to make the day as fun as possible.

PART II: INTERLUDE

In an interlude similar to the prologue, an unnamed narrator describes the pilgrimages that Natives from all over the country make to attend powwows, events which bring people together, give them an opportunity to tell their stories, and build community. Powwows were created because Native people "needed a place to be together"—a place where they could celebrate the old ways, make money, and see and hear each other. The people traveling now to the Big Oakland Powwow haven't just been traveling for miles or days; their journeys represent "years, generations, lifetimes […] beaded and sewn together, feathered, braided, blessed, and cursed."

Powwows serve many different purposes, and the things that bring people together for them are as varied as the attendees themselves. The journeys that lead people to powwows, the narrator suggests, are sacred—no matter an individual's motivation for attending one.

The narrator ruminates on the ways in which blood—blood status and "Native blood quantum"—has been used to identify and oppress Native people for centuries. The "unattended wound" of colonialism, discrimination, and attempted genocide has festered and grown infected. Native people are not "resilient" in the face of this wound, the narrator posits, and asks: "Would you call an attempted murder victim resilient?"

Even though powwows are events meant to celebrate Native culture, the narrator suggests that no powwow can be truly joyous, as the lingering wounds of trauma, violence, and attempted genocide are a part of the fabric of Native life.

The narrator discusses the structural disadvantages Native people have to face every day of their lives, and the pain of being told to "get over" the long, winding history of trauma folded into every Native family. The narrator suggests that the people who uphold these structures—namely, white people—will find their lineages "paved with gold, or beset with traps" if they look into their pasts, where their ancestors "directly benefited from genocide and/or slavery."

The narrator has no qualms about calling out the structural inequalities and systemic racism which still, after all these years, work together to erase the Native experience. The narrator suggests that because so many people benefit from—or live in ignorance of—these problems, they'll never really be fixed.

No one who has come to the Big Oakland Powwow has come expecting gunfire—though mass shootings in America are commonplace, no one arriving at the powwow believes it will happen to them. Like the Natives traveling to the powwow themselves, the shots that will soon ring out there will not just come from a gun—they will come from "everywhere, inside, outside, past, future, now." The narrator writes that "something" about the shooting will make sense, as the bullets launched during it will have been "coming from miles [and for] years."

The narrator describes the many unseen forces which have propelled this moment into existence. Many different things—from confused cultural identities to gun laws in America to internalized self-hatred to financial desperation caused by systemic oppression—are behind the terrible violence that's going to take place. The narrator is treating the story of the novel almost as a parable about how all the problems that plague America—and remain undealt with—will just create more and more violence and trauma as the years go by.

PART II: TONY LONEMAN (2)

The bullets fired in the powwow shooting make their journey from the Black Hill Ammunition plant in South Dakota to a Walmart in Oakland, where Tony Loneman purchases them and places them in his backpack until he arrives at the coliseum entrance, at which point he dumps them from their boxes into a sock and swings it up over the wall into a hedge the night before the event. As he does this, Tony wonders what has caused him to wind up where he is.

Tony experiences the briefest moment of doubt and uncertainty as he prepares for the robbery, but not enough to stop the plan from going forward.

PART II: CALVIN JOHNSON (2)

Calvin Johnson arrives at a powwow committee meeting, where everyone is chatting and eating. There is a "new guy" at the meeting—a tall, heavy young man. The head of the powwow committee, Blue—a friend of Maggie's who got Calvin his job here—is writing on a yellow legal pad. Thomas, the custodian, comes into the room talking to himself and reeking of alcohol. The janitor introduces himself to the new guy, who says his name is Edwin Black. Thomas takes the trash out and leaves the room, and then Blue clears her throat and brings the meeting to order by asking everyone to go around and introduce themselves, starting with Edwin.

Many of the characters converge in this passage for the first time, highlighting the steadily mounting coincidences and connections which are building as the powwow approaches.

Edwin struggles to speak, offering up nervous half-sentences and explaining that he is an unenrolled member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma. As Edwin finishes up his intro, another new member of the committee walks into the room in a baseball cap. The man looks, to Calvin, like he's white. Blue introduces the second new guy as Dene Oxendene, who is going to set up a storytelling booth at the powwow. Dene begins introducing himself, and Calvin tunes him out, struggling to think of a way to introduce himself and explain what he's bringing to the powwow—he feels he's done nothing in service of his job of bringing young Native artists and entrepreneurs in as vendors.

As Calvin finds himself surrounded by people who, in spite of their conflicting feelings about their Native identities, are giving their time and effort to the powwow, he questions his own motivations and shortcomings. He hasn't done anything to help his community and is in fact actively participating in its destabilization—and while he's been blaming his apathy on his cultural confusion, he's now in the presence of people helping one another to work through that very tension.

PART II: DENE OXENDENE (2)

Dene is set up in Blue's office with his camera and mic, interviewing Calvin for his storytelling project. Dene has learned through doing several of these interviews that sometimes people say the most interesting things when they don't yet know they're being recorded, so Dene keeps the camera rolling as the nervous Calvin settles in. Calvin asks what he's supposed to say, and Dene suggests he start by offering his name and tribe and describing what it's been like growing up as a Native person in Oakland. Calvin replies that his father never talked about being Native, and Calvin and his brothers don't know what tribe he is; his mother is half-Mexican, but has indigenous blood on that side of her family too. Mostly, Calvin says, he just feels like he's from Oakland.

Calvin's feelings of cultural and personal isolation are strong and painful, and are perhaps at the root of why he seems to feel few moral qualms about acting as a double agent as the powwow robbery approaches. Dene is interested in stories like Calvin's, and how they can help people who feel the same way to feel less alone—but, it's implied, Calvin himself has not had access to any of these stories in his lifetime, and it has made his loneliness worse.

Calvin tells a story about being robbed in the parking lot of a powwow a while back—he never made it into the festivities, and so the upcoming Big Oakland Powwow will be the first one he's attended. Calvin continues talking about the number of Native people he knows who hardly know anything about their own heritage, and then asks Dene when he's going to start recording. Dene admits that he already is. There is a lull, and then the two begin having a conversation in which Calvin admits he doesn't feel that the Native part of him is "true." He doesn't feel he can claim being Native as part of his identity when he doesn't know anything about the culture or the history of Native people.

The uncanny recurrence of a powwow robbery involving Calvin points more directly to the cyclical violence and trauma which permeates Native communities. Another reason Calvin perhaps doesn't feel badly about robbing this powwow is because of what he suffered before he could even make it into the last one.

PART II: JACQUIE RED FEATHER (2)

Jacquie and Harvey are in Harvey's Ford pickup, riding through the Arizona desert on their way to Oakland. Harvey doesn't like silence, and chats endlessly at Jacquie, who sits quietly and listens. Harvey tells a story about getting stuck out in the desert, once, when he was young. He and some friends—Navajo twins—got drunk in the desert and wandered out into the brush, but then got lost. Jacquie muses about how people in recovery love to tell drinking stories—she herself doesn't have any funny stories about drinking, as the act always felt like a chore to her.

In this passage, Jacquie muses on the strange nature of storytelling. Stories can comfort people and bring them together—but when stories have roots in painful experiences, Jacquie believes, they're hard to enjoy.

Harvey continues his story, explaining that he woke up freezing in the middle of the desert, disoriented and alone. He began walking, and eventually spotted two "very tall, very white guys with white hair" and wondered if he'd been drugged by the twins. Jacquie says that Harvey's memory must have been a dream, but Harvey insists it was real, and that when he looked up "tall white guys in the desert in Arizona" on the internet years later, he found other people's stories of similar encounters with strange pale beings—aliens, ostensibly.

Harvey's story of a strange, unexplainable phenomenon mirrors the story about Orvil and the spider legs—it's equally unbelievable, and yet if Orvil's story is true, then it's within the realm of possibility that Harvey's could be, too.

Jacquie's phone buzzes in her pocket—it is a text from Opal. She opens it and reads it: Opal has written to her to confess that when she was a girl, "before everything happened with Ronald," Opal herself found **spider** legs in a lump in her own legs. Jacquie feels sad for Harvey and Opal, the two of them with their ludicrous stories. Jacquie, feeling suddenly exhausted, leans her head against the car window and falls asleep.

The fact that Opal has a similar story to Orvil's should make Jacquie have more respect for Harvey's point of view—instead, though, she finds herself unable to truly believe that any of these ludicrous, miraculous stories are true.

PART III: OPAL VIOLA VICTORIA BEAR SHIELD (2)

Opal works as a mail carrier, and every time she gets into her mail truck, she can't stop herself from looking at her wizened reflection in the rearview mirror and considering all the things she's seen throughout the years. She remembers one time, soon after she'd adopted Orvil and his brothers, Orvil became spooked by his own reflection in a department store, and began to worry that he was a copy of himself.

Opal is haunted by her past, but she's not the only one—even her young grandsons seem to have been traumatized from a young age by an unseen force which makes them feel like impostors in their own lives. Orange is using Orvil and Opal's identity crises to highlight the difficulties both of them have in reconciling their cultural identities with their personal ones.

Opal never allows her mail route to become routine or automatic—a highly superstitious woman, she pays attention to every detail of her day, and is sure never to step on a crack in the sidewalk. She delivers mail on the odd side of the street first, believing in the luck of even numbers.

Opal's reliance on superstition and hypersensitivity to what's going on around her at all times speak to a nervousness within her caused by the traumas of her past.

As Opal looks back on her life during her long days delivering mail, she finds herself full of regrets—not regrets about things she's done, but regrets that the things that have happened to her and her family have happened at all. When things get too heavy, she listens to music to or audiobooks to distract herself from her memories.

Opal doesn't waste time feeling sorry for herself—but the constant threat of being bogged down by the pain and suffering her family has endured lingers at the edge of her consciousness at all times.

Yesterday, a message from Orvil stating that he'd pulled **spider** legs out of a lump in his leg rattled Opal. Though the message affected her, it didn't surprise her—spiders figure largely in her family's lore. Her mother, Vicky, had never let Opal or Jacquie kill spiders when they were young, stating that "spiders carry miles of web in their bodies, miles of story, miles of potential home and trap." In this way, Vicky had said, spiders were just like humans.

Spiders have a deep significance within Opal's family—spiders' webs are both homes and traps, depending on how you look at them, and Opal's life, too, has been a succession of situations which are both homes and traps for her and her family.

Several weeks ago, during one of her routine checks of all the boys' smartphones, Opal found a video Orvil took of himself powwow dancing in his room. She was shocked to see how good he was—and the fact that he was wearing regalia given to Opal herself by an old friend named Lucas, whom she met while living in a group home. Opal and Lucas loved one another, but Lucas abandoned her to live in Los Angeles; she only saw him once before his death, nearly two decades later, when he came to her to ask for an interview for a film he was making about Urban Indians, and gave her his old regalia.

The unlikely and surprising connections between the novel's characters are deepened in this passage, as Opal and Lucas's long-ago love affair comes to light.

Last night at dinner, Opal did not tell Orvil or the other boys about the time when she, as a young woman, pulled **spider** legs out of a bump in her own leg—the legs emerged the Sunday afternoon before she and Jacquie left the home of Ronald, the man their mother had left them with after dying. Opal never said anything about the spider legs, not wanting to upset Jacquie, who was pregnant with a child she'd soon give up for adoption.

Opal is nervous about saddling her grandsons with the weight of the pain and trauma she and her family have struggled with all their lives—but she has also denied them a feeling of solidarity, of togetherness, and of being less alone in the world.

Ronald had been walking past the girls' rooms at night, and Opal had taken to keeping a bat next to her in bed where she'd once held Two Shoes. One night, when Ronald came into the room while he thought Opal was sleeping and began grabbing Jacquie's legs, trying to drag her from the room, Opal cracked him over the head with the bat, knocked him unconscious, and pulled her sister out of the house while the sound of the Indian Head test pattern blared on the TV screen in the living room.

As Opal relives the night she and Jacquie escaped a dangerous, abusive situation, she recalls the Indian Head test pattern mentioned in the novel's prologue blaring on the TV—a physical reminder of the ways in which Native people, and women in particular, are both targeted and commodified.

The girls went to a shelter, and Opal constantly feared that she'd killed Ronald and would be in trouble. But as days and months passed and nothing happened, Jacquie and Opal grew estranged, and soon Jacquie disappeared. Opal began growing close with Lucas, and she eventually told him what had happened at Ronald's; he agreed to take her back to the house to get some answers. After waiting for two hours across the street form Ronald's house, Opal at last saw him pull up in his truck. Upon seeing him, she thought of the word *Veho*—a Cheyenne word meaning "**spider** and trickster and white man."

The spider imagery, so important and symbolic in the lives of Opal and her family, is strengthened as she considers the dark side of what spiders represent. They are strong creatures who create homes for themselves and traps for their enemies—but their resourcefulness and trickery can be used for evil purposes just as easily as it can be for good ones.

Now, on her mail route, Opal gets lost in thought and doesn't notice when she approaches the yard of a house in which a large, angry-looking pitbull without a collar is baring its teeth at her. Opal is stunned with fear, but the dog's owner calls out to it from down the street, and it flinches and cowers. Opal feels badly for the dog, but hurries into her mail truck and drives along.

Opal's memories are so powerful that they cause her to get lost in thought and put herself in danger—which perhaps explains why she tries to avoid lingering in the past, or sharing these stories with her grandchildren.

PART III: OCTAVIO GOMEZ (1)

Octavio Gomez returns to his grandma Josefina's house one afternoon, feverish and depleted. Fina, as Octavio calls her, suggests that Octavio has been placed under a curse. She takes him up to bed, then places a bowl of milk underneath the frame and lights a candle. She tells Octavio to drink some water, and tells him about the time her own father cursed her when she was eighteen with "some old Indian curse" by placing a braided lock of his hair under her bed after discovering she was pregnant. Josefina's mother put her on a bus to Oakland to get her away, but after her abortion she was sick for a whole year, until her mother mailed her some badger fur and instructed her to bury it at the western base of a cactus. The curse, Josefina says, lifted soon thereafter.

As readers get a glimpse into Octavio's life, it becomes clear that he has a strong connection to his family—particularly Fina—and has Native heritage of his own. Octavio's actions are seen in a new light as readers are forced to consider the softer, kinder sides of his personality, as well as the fact that he is, in a way, turning against his own people as he plots the powwow robbery.

Octavio falls into an uneasy sleep, dreaming of the night the house he and his family used to live in was shot up by drug dealers, angry that Octavio's older brother and uncle Sixto had stolen marijuana plants from them. Octavio's father was the only one to die in the shooting—he perished protecting Octavio from the bullets. Octavio can't stop thinking of Sixto, whom he called Six, as he sleeps his feverish sleep. Soon after the shooting, Sixto stopped coming around as much, and Octavio started hanging out with his cousins Manny and Daniel. Manny and Daniel's home was violent; their father often abused their mother. One afternoon, Manny attacked his father for hurting their mother, and Octavio helped Manny drive his dad to a nearby hospital and abandon him on the front steps.

Octavio has a lot of baggage, and he and his family have suffered terrible violence and losses—just like many of the other characters in the novel. Tommy Orange doesn't make clear delineations between heroes and villains, good guys and bad guys—everyone in his story has a complicated past, and the traumas therein often lead them to make poor decisions.

A week later, when Manny and Daniel's father returned home, they threw him out of the house. Manny and Octavio began stealing cars in rich neighborhoods, joyriding around in them for a while before parking them in a lot and abandoning them. They enjoyed living other peoples' lives for a little while.

Manny and Octavio bonded over their desire to live outside their own experiences for a while, and forget the troubles of their difficult and painful lives.

One afternoon at Manny and Daniel's, Fina called to talk to Octavio, and told him that Sixto had killed Octavio's mother and brother in a car accident. Sixto, she said, was in jail. After the funeral, Octavio moved in with Fina, and though she warned him not to visit Sixto—who'd been released from jail and cleared of charges—Octavio went over to Sixto's one night to find the man and his house looking "hella fucking sad-seeming," littered with trash. The two men drank and smoked marijuana, and Sixto told Octavio stories about finding Josefina's ritual altars as a child.

Even though Sixto was responsible for the deaths of his mother and brother, Octavio feels himself drawn to the man—and even expresses sympathy for the unique, unimaginable pain he must be going through.

Sixto brought Octavio down to the basement, where he lit a ceremonial plant on fire and blew the dust from it in Octavio's face to heal the "bad blood" and wounds that had been passed down to them. Feeling nervous, Octavio escaped the house through the haze of the plant, and returned to Fina's. The next morning, Fina drove Octavio out to the countryside, where they found a wild badger and pulled out some of its fur. Fina told Octavio she was planning on making him a medicine box to help him deal with the things "deep inside" of him that hurt, such as his burning anger towards Sixto. When Octavio told Fina he had no idea what to do, Fina told him that he wasn't supposed to.

Octavio is skeptical of his family's connection to the mystic, but when Fina offers the potential for healing, Octavio trusts the woman and goes along with her plan—even though it's inherently ridiculous and a little bit dangerous. Octavio is lost and looking for answers—but his ability to find them in his family's past and their cultural traditions is still uncertain.

PART III: DANIEL GONZALES (1)

Daniel's friends "los[e] their shit" as he shows them a gun he has 3-D printed in his basement. Everything has been "so fucking serious" since Manny died a while ago in a drug-related incident, so Daniel is grateful for his friends' excitement and laughter. He shows them YouTube videos of the printing process to impress them even further.

Daniel's ability to make something from nothing impresses all of his friends, and he is so grateful for the validation that he doesn't stop to consider the pain and suffering his creations could create.

In many ways, Daniel thinks, Manny's death was Octavio's "fault"—and yet Octavio, Manny, and Daniel had become like brothers in recent years, and Octavio still comes over often to check on Daniel. When Daniel shows Octavio the printed gun on one such visit, he feels that the gun is "real" for the first time as he sees it in Octavio's hands.

Daniel craves Octavio's praise and validation more than he craves the attention of any of his friends in spite of how Octavio's lifestyle has forever changed their family.

One night, Daniel writes Manny an email to express the feelings he's been holding inside. In the email, he tells Manny what he's been up to lately, and includes the story about the 3-D printed gun. Daniel tells Manny about how into coding he's gotten, and how, through the connections he's made online, he was able to secure the printer. Daniel tells Manny that he's printed six guns—Octavio has paid him five thousand for all of them. Daniel is slightly worried about "what the guns will do"—he knows Octavio is planning to use them to rob a powwow, and will give him another five thousand if he and his group pull it off. Daniel wants the money to help support his and Manny's mother, who has been deeply depressed since Manny's death. Daniel signs off on the email, saying he misses Manny and will write again soon.

Even though Manny is gone, Daniel misses his brother so much that he feels compelled to "write" to him. Even though Manny will never hear Daniel's story, Daniel is compelled to share it. He is excited about helping Octavio—and scoring some money for himself and his mother—and doesn't worry too much about the kind of continued, cyclical violence he's enabling.

With the money from the guns, Daniel buys a drone. He decides to use the drone to run around the baseball field at the Coliseum, and flies it right into center field when he spies, through the camera, a man with a trash-grabber coming towards the device. The man hits the drone, but Daniel flies it out before any real damage is done. At home, he watches the video over and over again until he hears a scream from upstairs—his mother. He goes upstairs and realizes she's found the envelope with all of the cash. Rather than asking Danny about the money, she wraps him in a tight embrace.

Daniel's drone, which has been seen throughout the novel, is connected to Dene's storytelling project—though a different kind of lens than Dene's. Dene wants to give agency to the people he's filming, whereas Daniel simply wants to absorb experiences that don't belong to him.

PART III: BLUE (1)

Blue, who has been known for all her life by Crystal—the name her white adoptive parents gave her—states that two years ago she was married to a Native man named Paul in a tipi ceremony. Paul's family gave her a Cheyenne name which means "Blue Vapor of Life," and now she goes by Blue. She knows very little about her birth mother other than her name—Jacquie Red Feather—which her adoptive mother told her on her eighteenth birthday. Despite learning of her Native heritage, Blue still feels white, having grown up in a suburb of Oakland living a life of privilege and luxury.

Blue, like Dene and Edwin, struggles with feeling insufficiently or fraudulently Native. Her heritage is complicated by the fact that she grew up surrounded by whiteness and privilege—and yet she has formed her adult life around giving back to the Native community and searching for her own roots.

In order to feel more connected to her heritage, Blue took a job at the Oakland Indian Center. One day, she saw a job posting for a youth-services coordinator with her tribe out in Oklahoma, and decided to apply. She got the job, moved to Oklahoma, and took up with Paul—her boss—whom she soon moved in with. Every weekend, Paul, his father, and Blue would take peyote and conduct ceremonies. After Paul's father died, Paul became abusive, and Blue returned to Oakland to escape him.

Blue's search for the answers to the hidden parts of herself led her only to pain and suffering. She is learning, as the other characters in the novel have, that the Native community is largely marked by cyclical generational trauma which begets more and more violence and suffering.

Blue tells the story of how she escaped Oklahoma. One day, when Paul said he needed the car all day, Blue told him she'd get a ride home with a coworker—but knew she'd never return to their house. Instead, after work, she began walking down the highway towards the faraway Greyhound station with nothing but her phone and a box cutter. As she walked, she saw her coworker Geraldine driving down the road, and asked for a ride. Inside the car, Geraldine's brother Hector was passed out in the back. Blue told Geraldine her plan, and though Geraldine warned her against leaving the protection of a marriage, she agreed to bring her to the station.

Blue knew she needed to get out of Oklahoma, and was so desperate to leave that she was willing to walk herself miles and miles to the bus station. Blue's journey to Oklahoma, no matter how painful it was, fortified her into a stronger and more resolute person determined to take charge of her own life.

Blue fell asleep on the drive, and woke up to a struggle. Hector, disoriented, had leaned up from the backseat and was attacking Geraldine. The car swerved off the road, jumped a curb, and crashed into a car in the parking lot of a motel. Geraldine's airbag went off, bloodying her nose, and Hector got out of the car and ran away from the wreck. When Blue pulled out her phone to call an ambulance, she saw that Paul was calling her. She answered, and he asked what she was doing in Oklahoma City—then realized Hector must have texted him. She hung up and hurried into the Greyhound station, where she went straight to the bathroom.

The disoriented Hector violently derailed Blue's escape plan, and yet she remained determined not to give up. As Orange creates tension and chaos in these passages, he highlights how difficult it can be to regain control of a part of one's life story that has gone off the rails.


Paul began texting and calling Blue while she tried to make a bus reservation, and though she tried to lure him away from the station by insisting, via text, that she and Geraldine had gone to a bar near the motel, she began to panic when she heard Paul open the door to the bathroom and come inside, calling her name. The woman in the stall next to Blue called out that no one was inside but her—after Paul left, Blue told the woman next to her that Paul was after her. The woman whispered to Blue that she carried mace, and would help her leave the bathroom. With the woman's help, Blue made it onto the bus, away from Paul.

Because of a stranger's kindness, Blue was able to make her escape and return to her hometown. The interconnectedness of people—and the shared human responsibility to support and care for one's fellow humans, regardless of a perceived personal connection—is a cornerstone of the book's theme of interconnectedness, coincidence, and chance.


PART III: THOMAS FRANK (1)

Thomas Frank speaks mysteriously and poetically about how he came into the world. Born with an arrhythmic heartbeat, Thomas grew up with an insatiable desire to drum on things, and learned quickly that the world was "made of sound." Some sounds, he found, were full of sadness.

Thomas Frank's innate love of rhythm and music shows that there are cultural inheritances other than trauma and strife—but also sets up the fact that sometimes, these forces can invade a life and turn things upside down.


In the present, despite having quit drum classes, Thomas has been invited to perform at the Big Oakland Powwow with his drumming group, which he joined a year after taking the janitorial job at the Indian Center. Initially, Thomas was insecure about the singing portion of the drum group, but with the help of the best singer in and de facto leader of the group, Bobby Big Medicine, he gained confidence and patience.

Thomas Frank is a dedicated and involved member of his community—but his lack of self-confidence has caused him to question whether he truly deserves to be a part of its traditions and celebrations.

As Thomas walks towards the **BART station** to take the train to the powwow, he passes a group of white teenagers and fights the urge to scream at them and scare them to try to get them "out of Oakland." Thomas thinks of his "one thousand percent Indian" father, a recovering alcoholic medicine man for whom English was a second language. Growing up as an Urban Indian, Thomas was embarrassed by how "noticeably Indian" his father was—now, Thomas regrets being cruel to his father. Thomas's mother was white, and he often thinks about how he is "from a people who took and took [...] and from a people taken."

As a young man, Thomas felt embarrassed and isolated by his family's culture and his father's dedication to enacting and preserving their people's traditions. Thomas always felt conflicted about his identity, and now, later in his life, has only just started to accept the duality of his cultural heritage and search for how it fits in with who he is at his core.


Thomas started drinking in his twenties to alleviate the constant itching and irritation he felt all over from a lifelong struggle with eczema. Drinking calmed him down at night and stopped him from scratching. Drinking became both "a medicine [and] a poison," and now, Thomas has just been fired from the job he's held for a long time at the Indian Center for showing up to work drunk. On the **BART train**, Thomas remembers the first powwow he ever went to—one his father took him to. Thomas longs for his family, scattered after his parents' divorce many years ago. He thinks of his older sister and her experimentations with drugs, of his father and his drinking, and of his own use of alcohol as "medicine," and wonders if substances are what have torn his family apart.

Thomas's struggles with substance abuse in order to dull a physical ailment have derailed his life and threatened his connection to his community. Looking back on his life and his family, he sees how this pattern has affected them all—and understands the ways in which they are generationally linked by pain, trauma, and the desire to escape the harsh realities of their lives.

As Thomas arrives at the coliseum, he feels a flutter of excitement. He both wants to be heard drumming and is afraid to be—at the same time, he's nervous to see people from work, and encounter again the shame of being fired. Inside, Thomas joins the drumming circle—he is late—and Bobby Big Medicine leads them in their first song.

Thomas is determined to make amends, and arrives at the powwow full of hope that he can find a way to somehow stand out and blend in at the same time.


PART IV: ORVIL RED FEATHER (2)

The coliseum is packed with people and vendors—the entire field is covered. Orvil and his brothers buy themselves some Indian tacos and go up into the stands to eat. Loother and Lony make cracks at one another, but Orvil is nervous for his upcoming dance. His brothers ask him how much money he stands to win in the competition, but Orvil is afraid to jinx his chances. While his brothers daydream about all the things they could do with the money, Orvil finishes up his taco and heads down to the locker room to change.

Orvil is nervous and excited to be at the powwow—and no doubt overwhelmed to be around Native people expressing their culture and identity without reservation, shame, or hesitation.

In the locker room, Orvil slowly and carefully puts on his regalia. One of the larger men in the room gives a speech, urging first-time competitors to enjoy their dances as a kind of prayer and not worry about winning—dance is the "only" way "for an Indian man to express himself."

Orvil feels that his months and months of work and practice are validated after hearing this speech from another Native man. He has been drawn to dancing for reasons he can't explain—and now sees that others find refuge and self-expression in dance as well.

Out on the field for the Grand Entry dance—an unjudged portion of the competition—Orvil looks around at all the other men in regalia, he feels inspired and excited. He admires the other men's costumes, feeling a little like a fraud himself, but pushes the feeling from his mind as the music starts and he tries to focus on the dance. He feels one with the other men all around him, "Indians dressed up as Indians."

Though Orvil is feeling a sense of swelling pride and confidence, there's also a disconnect that comes from knowing that this part of his identity is inextricably intertwined with the performance aspect of it.

PART IV: TONY LONEMAN (3)

Tony Loneman takes a **train** to the coliseum. He is dressed in his regalia, and tries to ignore the stares he gets from the other passengers. He is used to stares because of the Drome, but now people are staring at him for a different reason. When a white woman asks Tony for directions to the airport, he knows she just "wants to see if the Indian speaks." He tells her that she should come to the powwow at the coliseum, then tunes out her reply and watches the tracks fly by underneath the train.

Tony knows that by taking the train in his regalia, he's inviting stares. This choice is a conscious one, though, rather than the involuntary ways in which he feels on display every day due to the "Drome."


PART IV: BLUE (2)

Just after dawn, Blue is on her way to pick up Edwin and drive him to the powwow—it is the day she has been anticipating and planning for over a year. As she looks at herself in the rearview, she is grateful that she has made it back to Oakland—and back to her old self. Blue smokes a cigarette and thinks about a few nights ago, when she went out with Edwin on a friendly "non-date" to the movies. The showing was sold out, so they spent the evening walking around the lake and talking. To Blue, Edwin feels somehow "like family," and she attributes this feeling to the fact that both of them know little about their backgrounds.

Readers at this point have intuited that Blue and Edwin are related through their connection to Harvey. Blue herself, though, is missing this piece of information, and yet still feels an inexplicable familial connection to the kind, nervous Edwin.

Blue pulls up to Edwin's house and calls his phone. He doesn't answer, so she gets out and knocks on the door—again, there is no answer. Blue starts to get nervous that she is going to be late for the powwow, and starts to blame Edwin, but then begins feeling sorry for the insecure, self-conscious young man. She knocks again, then scrolls through old texts and emails. Soon, Edwin comes to the door with two cups of coffee in his hands.

Blue feels genuine tenderness towards Edwin, and accepts him for who he is. Both of them have had difficulties connecting with others in the past, and their friendship is a balm to each of them.

PART IV: DENE OXENDENE (3)

At the powwow, Dene is in the makeshift storytelling booth he's set up on the field, recording his own stoic face with the camera his uncle Lucas left behind when he died. He wants to document his own "unflinching stare into the void," a "realness" he believes Lucas would have appreciated. When he's done, he switches the camera off, sets it up on a tripod, and points it at the stool where visitors to the booth will sit to tell their stories. He's planning on asking everyone who comes in what the powwow means to them—and what being Indian means, more largely—even though he doesn't need any more stories for his project.

Dene—the man who has dedicated so much of his life to helping others share their stories—has nothing to say himself. The only thing he can manage, after bearing the weight of so many painful and traumatic stories, is a knowing stare that attempts to sum up the strife he's witnessed, and the fact that any response would be insufficient.

PART IV: OPAL VIOLA VICTORIA BEAR SHIELD (3)

Opal sits alone in the stands, watching the hubbub on the field below. She is hoping her grandsons won't find her or see her. Opal considers how she's closed "her eyes and ears to the closing of her eyes and ears" for years now, as she realizes that she hasn't heard a drum since she was young. The last time Opal came to the coliseum, it was for a baseball game, and the boys were young. She looks up at the sky, recalling the day, and sees something that is "not a bird" flying over the coliseum.

Opal has come to the powwow to look for her grandsons—not out of any real desire to be there—but as she enters the event she feels a wistful longing to be part of the culture she's turned away from for so long. The flying object Opal sees, which is "not a bird," is likely Daniel's drone, which has shown up several times throughout the novel, each time emphasizing that people are connected to one another in surprising ways.

PART IV: EDWIN BLACK (2)

Edwin hands Blue her coffee, and together they walk excitedly to the car. Edwin thinks about the "countless hours" he, Blue, and the rest of the committee have put in as they've worked towards the powwow. The committee has been more than a job for Edwin—it has become a "new life."

When readers first met Edwin, he was a total recluse cut off from the world and engaging in many unhealthy behaviors. His connection to his culture and community has enlivened him and helped him to feel more confidence in who he is.

On the drive to the coliseum, Edwin begins telling Blue about the new story he's writing about a Native guy who lives in a nice big apartment in downtown Oakland which gradually becomes overtaken by squatters, the friends of a white guy whom the main character has become friends with. After Edwin finishes relaying the plot he becomes embarrassed, and tells Blue the story sounded better in his own head. Blue assures Edwin that the story sounds good and true to life—she says that white people's culture is "taking over."

Edwin's story is a modern take on the ways in which white people invade, commodify, and erase indigenous peoples and culture. Though Edwin knows these patterns to be true, he's still nervous to share his worldview—but Blue confirms that Edwin is telling a story that is worthy and important.

At the coliseum, Edwin and Blue set up their booth. Once it's finished, Blue asks Edwin whether they should get out the safe full of Visa gift card prizes now or later. Edwin says they should get it now, so that it's not a hassle later in the chaos of all the prize-winning. Edwin and Blue go together to Blue's car to retrieve the heavy safe. Blue worries, as they carry it back inside, that the gift cards are a little too "flashy," but Edwin points out that "powwows are all about flash."

Blue and Edwin are, in this passage, making a pivotal decision which will alter the course of many lives—though they don't yet know how this decision is connected to the plans and divisions of others.

PART IV: CALVIN JOHNSON (3)

Calvin, Charles, Carlos, and Octavio eat breakfast at the Denny's next to the coliseum. They are all quiet, worried about getting away with their scheme. Calvin is angry at Charles for involving him in "this shit plan." Anxious, Calvin attempts to talk strategy with the other guys, suggesting they steal the money "sooner [rather] than later." Calvin tells the others that the cash prizes are being kept in a safe. Octavio reminds them that the people in charge of the safe are a "big dude" and a "kinda pretty" older woman of about forty. Charles agrees with Calvin's idea to get the robbery over with quickly rather than wait around—he suggests they steal the safe right away and figure out how to open it later, once they're off the premises. As the group eats their breakfast in silence, it becomes clear how nervous and on edge they all are.

Calvin has chosen to betray his coworkers and indeed his people more largely in order to save his own skin. In the moments leading up to the fateful robbery, Calvin is forced to reckon with the choice he's made—but despite his anxiety, he shows no signs of changing his mind or stopping this plan in its tracks.

PART IV: DANIEL GONZALES (2)

Daniel has begged Octavio to take him along to the powwow so that Daniel can see how it all goes down, but the night before the powwow, Octavio definitively refuses to take him. Daniel asks if he can at least fly his drone overhead and watch that way, but Octavio says he's nervous that if the drone should fall, they'll be able to trace it back to them. Daniel presses Octavio, and Octavio angrily relents, telling Daniel that as long as he keeps the drone out of the way, he can use it to watch. The two shake on their deal, and Daniel promises he himself will stay behind.

Daniel's desire to witness the powwow via his drone shows how badly he wants to be a part of something larger than himself—and also how inured he has become to the trauma and violence others both inflict and endure.

PART IV: JACQUIE RED FEATHER (3)

Jacquie and Harvey get to Oakland the night before the powwow and stay in separate rooms at the same hotel. The morning of the powwow, Jacquie wakes just before dawn and watches the sunrise. Later, she and Harvey eat breakfast together at the hotel, and Jacquie asks Harvey if he's nervous to emcee the powwow. Harvey says he isn't—he does his best thinking out loud, and sometimes, his announcing even feels "like a prayer."

Jacquie is nervous about attending the powwow and returning to the place she's abandoned for so long, but for Harvey, the event is a chance to connect socially and spiritually with his community.

At the powwow, Jacquie sits next to Harvey in the sound system booth. She wonders aloud if their daughter will be there—she would be, she tells Harvey, about forty-two years old. Jacquie absentmindedly looks down a list of dance competitors, and freezes when she sees Orvil's name on it. She takes out her phone and texts Opal.

As the far-flung but intimately connected individuals attending the powwow begin to converge, the narrative momentum picks up, and it becomes clear that everyone's paths are about to cross in a cataclysmic way. Because of the nonlinear narrative, it's likely that Jacquie's text to Opal is what brings Opal to the powwow in the first place.

PART IV: OCTAVIO GOMEZ (2)

Even though the guns are plastic, Octavio is nervous as he and his group go through the metal detectors. They make it through without incident, and Octavio sneakily retrieves the bullets from the bush where Tony left them. In the bathroom, Octavio, Charles, Carlos, and Calvin load their guns. Octavio feels a sense of dread. His hands shake, and he drops a bullet on the ground. It rolls out of the stall and onto the bathroom floor. Octavio hears shoes squeaking outside his stall, and knows that Tony has come into the bathroom to get his bullets.

As the moment of truth approaches, Octavio is clearly having second thoughts about his plan—and becoming both hasty and nervous in the process of preparing for what he has to do.

PART IV: EDWIN BLACK (3)

Blue and Edwin sit together at their booth, watching the dancers emerge from the locker room for Grand Entry. Edwin tells Blue that the emcee's voice they're hearing announce the dance is his father's voice—the father he's never met. Edwin excitedly watches the dancers file out onto the field, feeling a rush of pride and belonging. Edwin stands up and says he's going to get a taco—Blue urges him to go talk to his father. Edwin says he's nervous to do so, and Blue says she'll go with him.

Edwin both wants to meet his father and fears doing so. He has come so far in such a short time, but another major life event could either derail him or bolster him.

Blue and Edwin approach the sound tent, and Harvey seems to recognize Edwin right away. He puts his mic down, takes off his hat, and stands to wrap Edwin in a big hug. Harvey introduces Edwin to Jacquie Red Feather, and Edwin calls Blue over to meet the both of them. As Edwin introduces Blue, he notices that her face goes pale and twisted. Blue attempts to hurry out of the tent, asking Edwin to come with her. As the two of them walk back to the table, Blue tells Edwin that she believes Jacquie is her mother. Edwin is confused, but tries to smile at Blue—who is clearly freaking out.

In this passage, Edwin and Harvey are not the only far-flung relatives who reconnect. Unlike Edwin, though, Blue is not yet ready to meet the mother she's never known, and instead retreats into herself, consumed by anxiety and uncertainty.

PART IV: THOMAS FRANK (2)

After performing the first song with his drum group, Thomas Frank is distracted. Bobby Big Medicine asks him if he's okay—and if he's still drinking—but Thomas insists he's doing better. Thomas expresses nervousness about keeping up with the drum group, but Bobby assures him he'll be fine as long as he pays attention to the music and plays from the heart. Thomas thanks Bobby for inviting him today, and then, at the break, wanders around the powwow hoping to see someone from the Indian Center—Blue, specifically—to apologize for his behavior. As he makes his way across the field, he hears screaming, but can't tell where it's coming from.

Thomas is attempting to redeem himself through his connection to his community, and is about to make amends with those he's let down when things at the powwow, for reasons Thomas can't possibly understand, begin to spin wildly out of control.

PART IV: LOOTHER AND LONY

Loother and Lony walk around the field looking for Orvil, bored of sitting up in the stands. Drawn to the sound of the singing in the drum group, they go towards the noise, hoping to find a lemonade stand along the way. Soon, they turn around after hearing people screaming far away.

As the first signs of chaos begin to spread throughout the powwow, Tommy Orange shows how each of his major characters process the uncanny shift in the day's events—and where they are in proximity to the violence.

PART IV: DANIEL GONZALES (3)

Daniel watches the powwow through his VR goggles, which are linked up to his drone. All week, he has been having dreams of "people running in the streets and gunfire all around"—all the people in these dreams are Indians. As Daniel flies his drone over the top of the coliseum, his mother comes downstairs looking for him, asking if he wants to come up and have lunch. Daniel brushes his mother off, telling her he's busy and will be up soon.

Daniel is clearly conflicted about what he's going to see at the powwow—he both wants to watch the chaos and drama unfold, and is aware of the pain and suffering his cousin stands to cause should something go wrong.

PART IV: BLUE (3)

As the morning goes on, Blue feels herself becoming more and more aware of the safe. She never considered it a safety hazard or a liability in the weeks leading up to the event—but after getting nervous because of Jacquie's presence, she has noticed a group of "thuggish-looking guys" standing nearby, and is growing bothered. As the group creeps closer to the table, Blue tells herself she's being paranoid—no one would rob a powwow. Nevertheless, she looks under the table at the safe, which is covered up in a brightly-colored Pendleton blanket, just to be sure it's still with her.

Blue's instincts are calling out to her and telling her that something is wrong—but to her, the idea of someone causing violence at a powwow or simply disrupting the joyful, sacred gathering is unfathomable.

PART IV: DENE OXENDENE (4)

Dene hears the first gunshots from inside his booth. A bullet whizzes through the curtains, and Dene springs into a defense position, placing his back against the wooden pole holding up the tent. Something hits him in the back, and the booth collapses. Dene is frightened, and worries he's been shot—but he feels that the wood has stopped the bullet, and he is okay. The shots don't stop, and Dene struggles to crawl his way out of the collapsed wooden beams and black curtains. As he emerges, he sees Calvin Johnson from the powwow committee firing a gun at a guy on the ground. Two other guys flank Calvin, and are also shooting—one of them is in regalia. Dene wishes he had stayed inside the collapsed ruin of his booth.

Dene feels exposed and betrayed as he realizes that the violence has been caused by someone he knows—someone he even worked with to bring the powwow to fruition. Dene wishes he could hide from what's actually happening, and remain in ignorance about the violence swirling all around him.

PART IV: ORVIL RED FEATHER (3)

Orvil hears the shots as he is walking onto the field for another round of dancing, and immediately thinks of his brothers—and of how much trouble he'll be in with Opal if something happens to them. He begins running towards the noise, but a loud boom "pulls him to the ground." Orvil realizes he's been shot, and puts a hand to his stomach—his fingers come away red with blood. He coughs up blood, and as he does, wishes he could hear drums "one more time." He wishes he could fly away, but instead knows he must focus on one objective: "keep breathing."

Orvil's first foray into celebrating and embracing his Native roots is one marked by violence and danger. The trauma and violence Orvil's ancestors endured has come for him, too, and the only thing on his mind as he realizes this horrible fact is survival.

PART IV: CALVIN JOHNSON (4)

Calvin stands near the table where Blue and Edwin sit with the prize money, his hat pulled low around his face as he keeps an eye on Tony, who is supposed to do the actual robbing, because someone in regalia will be harder to identify and investigate. Calvin and the others are here just for backup. Tony walks towards the table, but stops suddenly, turns around, and walks the other way.

Calvin is nervous and full of dread as the moment of truth approaches. He sees that Tony is unable to go through with his part of the plan—and knows that something awful must be coming next as a result.

Octavio springs into action, pointing his gun at Edwin and Blue. He is remarkably calm, Calvin notices, as he demands they hand over the safe. Edwin hands over the bag of gift cards, but "stupid-ass Carlos" points his gun at Octavio and demands the bag. Charles follows suit, and yells at Octavio to drop his gun. Octavio throws the bag towards Charles—but then fires a few shots at him. Charles, hit, fires back at Octavio, hitting him too. Carlos fires at Octavio's back. Daniel's drone crashes on Carlos's head, knocking him to the floor. Calvin stands immobile, watching, and then feels himself get hit in the hip. He falls to his knees and is shot again, and looks up briefly to see Tony shooting at everyone before he falls unconscious.

When Carlos and Charles turn on the rest of the group, their greedy plan becoming clear at last, everything descends into chaos. Even Daniel is, in a way, a part of the fight to defend his family from violence—but it's too late, and the violence unfolding between these five young men is seeping into the rest of the powwow.

PART IV: THOMAS FRANK (3)

Thomas can hardly believe shots are being fired until he sees people running and screaming. Thomas ducks and looks around, trying to spot the shooter. He stands up to see better, and gets shot in the throat. Thomas berates himself for being so stupid. Bullets are flying all around him as he clutches at his bleeding neck. Someone pulls him into their lap and ties a scarf or shawl around him to try to stop the bleeding. Thomas can't see anything, and welcomes sleep gratefully—until someone slaps his face, trying to keep him awake. Thomas's body grows heavy but peaceful as he feels himself pulled down towards sleep, and death.

Thomas is the first point-of-view character to die, and he does so almost gratefully. Exhausted by the weight of his life—and in a compromised physical condition—Thomas succumbs to his wounds quickly.

PART IV: BILL DAVIS (2)

Bill is in the employee office when he hears shots being fired, and immediately thinks of Edwin. He stands up and leaves the room, moving towards the sound. He starts running down towards the field when his phone starts ringing in his pocket—it's Karen. He picks it up and tells her not to come to the coliseum—he begs her to pull over, call the police, and tell them there's been a shooting. Karen is asking questions about what's going on, her voice frantic, but Bill feels a bullet hit him just above the eye. He falls to the ground, and his head throbs. He has a brief flashback to Vietnam, when a grenade landed near him and immobilized him, before losing consciousness.

Bill is desperate to save Edwin and prevent Karen from arriving—demonstrating that in spite of his contempt for Edwin, he does truly love the young man. Bill nonetheless is struck down, and his final moments are full of resurfacing trauma and pain.

PART IV: OPAL VIOLA VICTORIA BEAR SHIELD (4)

As gunfire and screams fill the stadium, Opal runs downstairs to the main level. She pulls her phone out and calls Orvil, but gets no answer. She calls Loother, and though she gets through, the reception is terrible and she can barely hear him. Opal begins sobbing, unable to believe that "someone [has] really come to get [them.]" Opal runs out the front of the coliseum and sees Loother and Lony waiting for her—but Orvil is not with them.

When the shots begin ringing out, Opal is shocked but not quite surprised. She is used to living her life knowing that her people are the targets of trauma and violence—and this is just another episode in a long history of persecution.

PART IV: JACQUIE RED FEATHER (4)

Harvey tries to push Jacquie down onto the ground to take cover, but she insists on walking out of the booth to see what's happening. She can hear the whizzing of bullets, and sees lots of bodies on the ground. Jacquie is determined to find Orvil. She wonders briefly if what's happening is a "performance-art piece"—all the still bodies on the ground dressed in regalia make the scene look like a true massacre.

The fact that all of the wounded Natives lying on the ground in their full regalia makes the massacre at the powwow look like a massacre that might have taken place early on in the history of America's colonization is almost a cruel joke, and makes Jacquie believe what's happening isn't even real.

Jacquie sees the shooters, and then quickly scans the bodies all around her, looking for the colors of Orvil's regalia. She spots it, and sees him lying on the ground—she walks towards him, even though she knows she's moving in the direction of the shooters. When she gets to Orvil's body she puts her fingers to his neck—there is a pulse, and she screams for help. No one comes, and Jacquie lifts Orvil's body and runs in the direction of the entrance. Outside, she spots Loother and Lony, and asks them where Opal is. Just then, Opal pulls up at the curb in her car, and everyone gets inside.

Though Jacquie has been absent for much of her grandsons' lives, she is there in the moment Orvil needs her most—and rescues him from certain death in an act of love and redemption which reconnects her to her family.


PART IV: BLUE (4)

Blue and Edwin escape the coliseum and get all the way to Blue's car. Edwin is out of breath and pale as they get into the car—he's been shot. Blue straps him in and immediately begins driving to the hospital. Even though Edwin is slumped over in pain, Blue implores him to hold some spare powwow t-shirts against his stomach to stanch the bleeding. Edwin says he believes the bullet has gone through him and out his back.

Blue and Edwin stick together in the midst of all the chaos. Though Blue has recently half-realized that she and Edwin are kin, this new development doesn't matter—before she knew the truth behind their connection, she supported and cared for him as if he were her own brother.

By the time Blue pulls up to the hospital, Edwin is unconscious. She runs inside to get someone to come out and help, and as she comes back out accompanied by an aide, she sees a car full of people pull up. The doors open, and Harvey, Jacquie, and several other people—one of them a wounded, unconscious teenager—pour out of the car. Jacquie places the boy in her arms on the stretcher, and Harvey helps Blue take Edwin out of the car. Together they help him inside, where two orderlies put Edwin on a gurney and rush him away.

The chaos at the hospital as everyone scrambles to ensure their loved ones are properly cared for shows just how desperate things are for marginalized people in situations like this one—their pain is so often overlooked that there is a mad dash to ensure that no one is left behind.


Blue sits next to Jacquie in the waiting area. She wishes she could say something to her, but has no idea what it could be. She looks at Harvey, and is amazed by how much Edwin and Harvey look alike. She wonders if Harvey and Jacquie are together—and if they are, whether Harvey is her father, too.

Blue is burning with questions about the people around her and how they're all connected to her—but the trauma of the present moment keeps her silent, so close and yet so far from learning the full truth about herself she's been seeking for years.



PART IV: OPAL VIOLA VICTORIA BEAR SHIELD (5)

Opal tells herself, over and over, that Orvil is going to pull through and make it. As Opal looks over at her sister, Jacquie, she knows that if Orvil doesn't make it, none of them will. Opal closes her eyes and prays for help, though she isn't sure who or what she's praying to. After a while, a doctor comes out to the waiting area. Opal is afraid to look at the doctor's face. She counts the swings of the doors the doctor has come from—they swing eight times before coming to a stop. Opal takes the number as a good omen, and sighs as she looks up at the doctor to hear what he has to say.

Opal's superstition about numbers—and the fact that the door swings a number of times she finds auspicious—suggests that Orvil will be okay, and that their entire extended family will be, too.

PART IV: TONY LONEMAN (4)

After abandoning his mission, Tony walks away from the booth where the safe is being kept, but turns around at the sound of gunfire, believing the others are shooting at him. Instead, he sees Carlos shooting at Octavio, and begins shooting at Carlos himself. After a couple shots, the trigger sticks and the gun becomes too hot to hold. Tony drops it and feels himself get shot in the leg. Tony feels like he's going to pass out, but pushes himself to start running towards Charles, determined to tackle him. Even though Charles continues shooting at him, he keeps running, and uses the last of his strength to bring Charles to the ground.

The narrative backpedals a bit to the moment which marked the start of the shooting. Tony, unable to go through with the plan, nonetheless found himself caught up in something he didn't want to be a part of—but used all his strength to attempt to stop the violence and end the chaos.

Charles reaches up and begins choking Tony, but Tony fights back. He grabs Charles's gun and shoots him in the head. Tony, exhausted, rolls over onto his back, and feels himself sinking. He hears the sound of Maxine singing an old Cheyenne song, and becomes determined to stop himself from giving in to the sinking feeling. He rises up out of himself and looks down at his body, and realizes that both Tony and the Drome were "masks" he wore. Tony looks back on an afternoon when he was three or four. After helping Maxine with the dishes, he went to his room to play Transformers, constructing the same story he always does—"a battle, then a betrayal, then a sacrifice."

Tony commits a terrible act of violence in this passage in order to stop the proliferation of more violence. As Tony reels from his wounds—physical and psychological, he retreats into memory. Even in Tony's childhood games, however, his awareness of violence and treachery was acute and nuanced.

Tony feels himself return to his body—he is anchored to "the middle of the middle of him[self]." Lying on the field of the coliseum, he believes he can hear birds singing, and remembers how Maxine once told him that when dancing he should be light on his feet as a bird's morning song. Tony tells himself to be light—deep inside him, he feels the birds are singing.

As Tony dies, he experiences a strange moment of peace. He reflects on his memories of being instructed in Native dance—a pure, ancient method of expressing pain, strength, and pride alike—and prepares to leave his earthly "mask" behind.

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