

The theme of  
perseverance in what  
you pawn i will  
redeem, a short story  
by sherma...



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Life is full of situations that challenge people to overcome the odds and achieve what they thought was impossible. Such is the case in Sherman Alexie's short story, "What You Pawn I Will Redeem." The narrator is faced with what seems to be an impossible situation - to come up with \$999 in just 24 hours to obtain his deceased grandmother's stolen regalia from the owner of a pawnshop to whom it had been pawned. These insurmountable odds bring out the best in the otherwise flawed narrator, Jackson. Jackson is a homeless alcoholic whose disease has almost cost him his life. Nonetheless, Jackson rises above his circumstances and show three tremendous qualities while overcoming his extremely difficult task. He shows endurance through hard times, generosity in spite of dire financial need, and patience with other people along the way.

The first of Jackson's astonishing characteristics in the face of adversity worth considering is his tremendous ability to endure through impossibilities. Almost anyone in Jackson's position - being able to buy back his deceased grandmother's stolen regalia - would have desired to accomplish the goal. However, not many people would have endured through the impossibility of coming up with \$1, 000 cash in less than 24 hours, especially consider the odds against him in the sense of him being a homeless alcoholic. Most people would have given up without even trying. Jackson, however, not only tries to accomplish the goal, but he does so with extreme optimism.

Consider, for example, when Alexie tells us that Jackson buys two lottery tickets, each with a possible winner of up to \$500, and scratches them off hoping to win the necessary \$1, 000 to accomplish his goal. It is arguable that he is delusional; however, one could likewise suggest that Jackson

simply has so much endurance in the face of adversity that he genuinely feels he can win against such insurmountable odds. Despite all practical notions to the contrary, Jackson seemingly glides from one deadbeat endeavor to the next with a nonchalant, carefree approach that borders on self-deception but nonetheless leads him on with endurance despite the odds that are stacked against him.

The second of Jackson's outstanding characteristics that come to the surface during his struggles is his financial generosity. It would be easy for someone in his situation to hoard every penny possible in order to try to get as much of the necessary \$999 as possible. Jackson, on the other hand, does exactly the opposite. Rather than hoard his money, he gives it away. When he gets \$100, for example, he gives \$20 back to the woman and keeps the \$80 for himself. However, he doesn't even spend the \$80 on himself but rather buys drinks for the other people in the bar. According to De Leon, good short stories are those that portray "characters with real desires" (2016). Alexie does just that in a superb fashion by juxtaposing Jackson's real desire to get money quickly for his grandmother's regalia with his extreme generosity. It has been said that money doesn't turn one into someone else; it simply reveals who the person already is. The same has been said about adversity. With those two thoughts in mind, it seems that Jackson is inherently a very generous person. When both adversity and money fall into his lap at the same time, he shows himself to be a generous giver rather than a stingy hoarder.

The final amazing characteristic of Jackson that comes to life during his adversity is his patience with other people along the way. He had two friends  
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to help him on his journey, Rose of Sharon and Junior. Very soon into their quest to obtain the money, however, Rose of Sharon leaves and Junior passes out drunk. Most people would become very upset in such a situation. They would get angry at Sharon for “ abandoning” them and would accuse Junior of “ leaving them at their work moment” as if he purposely chose to hurt them by getting drunk and passing out during their time of need.

Jackson, however doesn't respond in such a manner. He speaks well of both characters. In fact, he justifies and makes up reasons as to why Rose of Sharon left. Additionally, he continuously checks to make sure Junior is still breathing thereby taking responsibility to help and protect his drunk friend in spite of the weight upon him to get so much money so quickly. Jackson, therefore, shows tremendous patience with both of his friends.

Overall, it is important to note that this story is told as a story. It is a first-person account that is related as if the narrator were sitting across a coffee table telling the reader what happened to him at a certain time in the past. This is evident in the text when he says “ This whole story really started at lunchtime...” The reason this is important to point out is that the story shows a lot about the thoughts of the narrator. For example, Ebenbach points out that “ stories reveal what we believe” (2010). Therefore, it can be assumed that the story the narrator tells reveals what he believes about himself. By reading the story, it can be inferred that he endured through tough times, he was generous, and he was patient. Therefore, not only do readers see these characteristics in the narrator, but the narrator actually sees them within himself. Jackson believes that despite all the odds against him, he is in fact a

man of endurance, one who is generous, and certainly someone who is patient with those he loves.