The Powwow at the End of the World

BY [SHERMAN ALEXIE](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/sherman-alexie)

I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall

after an Indian woman puts her shoulder to the Grand Coulee Dam

and topples it. I am told by many of you that I must forgive

and so I shall after the floodwaters burst each successive dam

downriver from the Grand Coulee. I am told by many of you

that I must forgive and so I shall after the floodwaters find

their way to the mouth of the Columbia River as it enters the Pacific

and causes all of it to rise. I am told by many of you that I must forgive

and so I shall after the first drop of floodwater is swallowed by that salmon

waiting in the Pacific. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall

after that salmon swims upstream, through the mouth of the Columbia

and then past the flooded cities, broken dams and abandoned reactors

of Hanford. I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall

after that salmon swims through the mouth of the Spokane River

as it meets the Columbia, then upstream, until it arrives

in the shallows of a secret bay on the reservation where I wait alone.

I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after

that salmon leaps into the night air above the water, throws

a lightning bolt at the brush near my feet, and starts the fire

which will lead all of the lost Indians home. I am told

by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall

after we Indians have gathered around the fire with that salmon

who has three stories it must tell before sunrise: one story will teach us

how to pray; another story will make us laugh for hours;

the third story will give us reason to dance. I am told by many

of you that I must forgive and so I shall when I am dancing

with my tribe during the powwow at the end of the world.

Sherman Alexie, “The Powwow at the End of the World” from *The Summer of Black Widows*. Copyright © 1996 by Sherman Alexie. Used by permission of Hanging Loose Press.

Source: *The Summer of Black Widows* (Story Line Press, 1996)