The Dream Catcher

*We think we see it beyond the sun’s wrath,*

*Rocketing hope, a star on its path.*

*Bursting through clouds, pulsing with light,*

*Gifts in a trail, succeeding its flight.*

*And then we look closer.*

*We think we see it in the clear blue sky,*

*The dule of doves having squawked goodbye,*

*A single white feather resting at our feet,*

*This treasure: a key to make ends meet.*

*And then we look closer.*

*We think we see it behind the couch,*

*Beside the street, without its pouch,*

*Its bronze-copper eyes smiling back,*

*The penny promises to give our luck back.*

*And then we look closer.*

*The shooting star is just a burning meteor. The feather is only just a feather. The penny is only ever just a coin.*

*Reality ripples in as the riches fade away. We looked closer, and the illusion looks away.*

As soon as the final letter was typed, the sly low-battery notification reared its ugly head, smirking from its place in the center of the screen. *Plug your device into a power source, or your device will automatically shut off in a few minutes*. So, naturally, a few seconds passed, accompanied by a horrible whirring from the laptop’s fan, and then, just as quickly as it had started, the noise shut off all together—along with the computer itself. If you looked closely (and maybe with just a hint of deluded frustration,) you could still see its sick smirk etched onto the dark screen. As usual, hours of progress had been lost to the ever-present war against time. At the sight of his own reflection on the layers of glass and plastic, the man almost laughed in agonized exhaustion.

“Damned piece-of-crap,” Akira Lorieman muttered, setting the laptop down on the rotting coffee table before him. As he leaned back on the washed-out couch, the writer could hear the springs creaking, a chorus of jeers at his expense. He yawned and ran a throbbing hand through his shaggy, brown hair, desperately in need of a cut. Studying his reflection for just a moment longer, he noticed just how large the bags under his eyes had become; their size almost distracted from the state of his unshaven chin.

He knew it must have been a week since he last left the apartment. He knew he needed to shower off, give himself a nice shave, and feel fresh air wash over his scalp again. His parents must have been calling for days now, but Akira quite preferred the unanswered ring over their disappointed voices. Ignoring them was wrong, he knew that. As a child, he had been raised with a massive amount of respect and admiration towards his parents. Because his father was a groundbreaking neurosurgeon, and his mother a college professor of the arts, they constantly spoiled him with everything he could want, and told him stories of their lives that produced stars in his eyes. Perhaps those memories only served to make communication with them more unbearable for Akira. After all, for a poor author only forty days away from turning thirty, for a failure of a son with no glimmer of hope for success, how could he hope to tell the stories of his life to his parents, who most likely suffered from even associating with him? Of course, they never revealed anything to their son’s face, but Akira could see it the way their mouths always seemed to curl downwards when staring at him. He could just hear it in the way they seemed to fuss over him with the backhandedness of disappointment.

He knew he couldn’t hide from them much longer, any more than he could hide from his own self-care. The excuses were running quite thin. Thus, Akira begrudgingly, and with too much effort than should have been necessary (he really needed to hit the gym more), pushed himself up and walked through the open doorway into his small kitchen. Entirely juxtaposed to the man himself, the kitchen was rather clean, if for no reason other than its infrequent use. The floors and countertops held up a thin layer of dust, but no detectable messes or stains were visible at all. When he placed his hand on the fridge handle, Akira noticed that he could once again see himself in the metallic reflection on the door: sunken eyes, shaggy hair, and all. Closing his eyes and scoffing through the internal nagging and regret that washed over his mind, he threw open the refrigerator door to find a snack for himself. Looking back at him were a half-brown orange, a few yogurt cups just a few days past their expiration date, and the object of his search: a microwavable pasta-bowl.

While he was eating his food, the author glanced at the time shown on the microwave’s clock: 3:42 PM. Great. Not only was it too late for him to start tinkering with his computer in yet another attempt to get it to power on again, but even if he was able to do it quickly, his creativity for the day was nearly spent. Taking another extremely reluctant glance at his reflection, Akira resigned himself to going on a walk around the city. If nothing else, it should give him some inspiration. Tossing his fork into the sink, making a mental note to try to remember to wash it later, he threw a thin jacket over his shoulders and left the apartment.

He hadn’t seen it through the closed window-drapes, but Akira had to admit it really was a nice day outside. The skies were mostly blue with only few fluffy clouds on the horizon; even the tan and gray buildings of the city seemed more saturated with color than usual. The sun shined down, baking the city with a warm, pleasant heat. Even the canal that ran through the city’s center seemed to glow golden, basking in the late-Summer weather. Fall was just around the corner too, evident by the city’s few trees changing colors and the breeze that occasionally ruffled Akira’s coat. All of it forced the man to crack a small, almost peaceful smile. Still, there was a slight tug at the back of his mind, and he couldn’t quite forget the sight of his dark, musty apartment, where everything but the kitchen was filled to the brim with dirt, grime, and a general feeling of destruction in every corner. Quickly, though, he was distracted by the sound of children laughing. Looking over, he saw some sort of party across the street. A father lifted up a sign reading *Welcome The Fall Festival* as his children danced and clapped around him. It wasn’t long before Akira forced himself to keep moving; the last thing he wanted was to be caught staring. Still, he wondered: how could it be that two places, so entirely different from one another, could even exist in the same world?

Just as Akira began to slip away into his own thoughts, his pocket, or rather what was inside the pocket, started vibrating uncontrollably. His phone was ringing up a storm, sending his mind sprawling as he fought to control his surprise. He rarely got calls at all, let alone in the late afternoon (his parents only ever called in the morning). Stopping at his place on the bridge overlooking the canal, Akira raised his cellphone to his ear and pressed the answer button.

“Hello?”

“Hi, is this still Akira’s number? This is Rachel!”

The voice alone was enough to trigger alarm bells in the writer’s mind. Rachel was an ex of his, and this ex in particular happened to have found great success as a lawyer. It was just his luck that they happened to end things on decent terms and had remained friends. All it had done was inform her about his financial situation, and as she was a woman with a big heart, she was always trying to offer him financial assistance. Not that he would ever take it. Akira had too much pride and too much ambition to take such an easy way out. Now she was calling again, and he had only just started to get back into his creative headspace. Needless to say, this was the last time he needed to have yet another conversation about his personal failures. Still, she was a friend, and Akira wouldn’t hang up without having some sort of conversation.

“Hey, Rach. What’s up?”

“Hi Akira! Nothing much, I just wanted to see how you were doing!”

“I’m all good. How’d that case end up going, with the—what was it again—oh right, the ice cream vendor?”

“It went great, thank you *so* much for asking! We actually ended up making a pretty large dent in that massive conglomerate across the city!”

“That’s… that’s great, Rach.”

“Are you sure you’re alright? You know, I am flying over there in a few days for a conference! We could meet up, talk through some things—”

“No. Seriously, that’s fine.”

“Are you sure? I could always—”

“Rach. Drop it.”

“But—”

“Damn it, I said DROP IT.”

Silence on the other end of the phone. As soon as the outburst left his lips his face started burning from the shame of his words. She didn’t deserve that. It wasn’t her fault he was a screw-up with nothing to show for his years of work. It wasn’t her fault that he would leave this Earth without a legacy, or a single achieved dream. He didn’t deserve her, and he certainly didn’t deserve her charity. He quickly muttered “sorry” into the phone and quickly hung up. He sighed in a mix of frustration and exhaustion and decided he would call her back later to make amends. Just then, Akira heard a gruff voice shouting from somewhere behind him.

“MOVE!”

Before he could even turn, a huge man sprinted past him. He was so caught up in the shock of it all that he didn’t notice the second man, hot on the first man’s heels. This man was nowhere near as graceful as the other and slammed into Akira as he rushed past. The author stumbled back and, with a flash of shock and horror, felt his phone slip out of his hand and over the bridge railing. He barely had time to peer over the edge before the device connected with the water below. The splash was small, but it sent ripples across the canal where it had landed. Surprisingly, the writer didn’t moan or complain. He just stared, watching the waves spread out slowly before disappearing across the surface of the water. The phone had made such a small splash. A splash with such a short lifespan, and yet its ripples nearly managed to reach opposite sides of the canal. Akira felt his eyes become wet as he watched his device sink below the depths. If not for the anger and frustration and desperation of losing his expensive connection to his family and friends, then for the fact that a simple cellphone had more of a legacy than he would ever be able to produce.

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Akira was only about three blocks away from home now. With so much on his mind, from composition ideas to planning how he was supposed to pay for a new phone, the author had stayed out much longer than he had originally intended. Although he could no longer tell the exact time, he had to assume it was somewhere around 5:30, as the sun had just started to sink below the high-rise rooftops. The sight of it all was rather beautiful, but it created a new conflict in Akira’s mind. He often thought of reaching out his hands and grasping the sun. As hyperbolic as he was in both his writing and thoughts, he also often thought about how if he ever wished to touch the sun, he must first reach the height of the high-rises. But, like every other luxury in the man’s life, high-rises were nothing but an elusive dream; a goal that existed simply to taunt him, to keep him taking swings at a **piñata that always moved just beyond his reach.**

**Being lost in a reality he could never manifest only caused Akira’s heart to skip a few more beats when he heard a noise behind him. Thudding on the sidewalk pulled his mind back to the present as though the gravity had been drastically increased without warning. This was a relatively quiet part of town, unknown to even the wandering beggars and shady “business” dealers of the city. Which made it all more jaw-dropping when the writer whirled around to see maybe the most eccentric-looking homeless man he’d ever seen in his twelve years of residency. The most-noticeable feature of the guy had to be his stark-white hair. It was slicked back across his scalp and tied back in a long ponytail, but it also extended downwards in a beard that covered most of his face. The beard in particular may have caught Akira so off guard because it extended to the old man’s waist, as if he was trying to cosplay a wise wizard from popular media. Aside from the hair, he also couldn’t help but notice the man’s bizarre outfit, a faded yellow and pink striped jacket, with a blue shirt underneath, a gleam of some sort of necklace around his neck (although Akira couldn’t be more specific due to the massive beard that hid the rest), and gray sweatpants. Oh yeah, and the man had some seriously worn-out, knockoff Birkenstocks. But all the unsettling factors of his appearance were bunk once Akira realized that the old man was shuffling straight towards him.**

**The author groaned. He didn’t have time for this, he had to get home. Regardless, if this really was just some homeless guy asking for money, it’s not as though he had just struck the jackpot targeting the guy who had just lost his phone in a canal. He barely had any cash in his wallet to begin with. Still, the old man seemingly had no knowledge of this, and therefore found no trouble in continuing to move towards him. Once he was within a reasonable distance, he spoke. His voice was surprisingly smooth and put together despite its clear age; it differed greatly from the usual choking rasp of normal beggars.**

**“All right there, son?”**

**Akira, in spite of his surprise at how normal the guy sounded, kept his guard up.**

**“I’m fine man, I’m just heading home for the night.”**

**“Might I have just one moment of your time? If it wouldn’t be too much trouble for a young man to listen to his elder, of course.”**

**Damn. He was persistent.**

**“Listen, man, if you’re looking for money, I’m fresh out, so you’re out of lu- “**

**“It’s not money I speak of, boy. I simply wish for just a moment of your time. In fact, I actually have something of a proposition for you.”**

**If the thought that he was being mugged hadn’t already succeeded in freaking Akira out, this talk of “propositions” nearly made him stumble backward a few steps. However, either out of fear or curiosity, he bought in, although he wanted to punch himself throughout the entire exchange. He folded his arms in an attempt to come across as even slightly more intimidating.**

**“Fine, old-timer. What do you have to offer?” At this, the geezer smiled.**

**“Well, I suppose I should preface my words by telling you that I saw you a few hours ago from afar. It was on a bridge, about a twenty-minute walk from where we are now. You looked somewhat lost, and you also seemed to drop your phone into the river.”**

**“Hey, what were you doing watching me like that?! And anyway, I didn’t drop it, I- “**

**“That’s beside the point. I saw you then, and it just so happens that I’ve found you again now. That doesn’t seem to be coincidental to me. The way you were looking down over the water back then, and the way you looked up at the skyscrapers just now… it seems to me that you’re a person with many dreams. Am I correct in that assumption?”**

**Akira blanched, shocked by this geezer’s blatant admission to stalker-ish behavior.**

**“Why is it any of your business whether- “**

**“Am I correct?”**

**Akira stopped, and thought for a moment, gazing down at his feet. As embarrassed as he was to admit it, it seemed whoever this man was, he had read him like a book.**

**“I guess you could say that.”**

**“But I suppose I should be more specific,” the old man said, a hint of a smile showing underneath his bushy white beard. “It’s quite obvious you’re a man of ambition, and it’s quite obvious from your current state that you aren’t extremely far along in achieving that ambition. So, I suppose my real question is: do you ever have dreams while you’re asleep?”**

**“I mean, I guess I do. Doesn’t everyone? Wait—what are you getting anyway?”**

**“What do you dream about?”**

**“WHAT?”**

**“I believe it was a rather straightforward question.”**

**“Dude, I don’t even know who you are, and now you’re telling me you’ve been stalking me all day, and on top of that you’re asking me to tell you about my dreams? Maybe we should start with an icebreaker? Or names, at least?”**

**The old man seemed remorseful at this outburst, at the very least.**

**“I apologize, it seems I’ve gotten ahead of myself. Well, as for who I am, most of my acquaintances simply refer to me as a Dream Catcher.”**

**“A what-now?” The author had to stop himself from bursting out into laughter at this point.**

**“A Dream Catcher. I suppose it would be more correct to say that I am someone who is quite skilled in the field of—how would you put it—interpreting dreams.”**

**“Interpreting dreams?” Akira’s snickers were quickly replaced with an interested confusion.**

**“Something like that. In its most basic essence, people come to me with the dreams they’ve had, and I can read their thoughts, making sense of their dreams. In certain cases, I am also able to help them figure out the best way in which to respond to them as well. That’s why I approached you. You see son, I believe that I can be of assistance to you.”**

**“Why should I believe you… er— ‘Dream Catcher’?”**

**“Well, for starters, how about you recount one of your recent dreams to me, and I can use it to explain how the process works?”**

**Akira thought about the Dream Catcher’s offer for a moment. Sure, with all the misfortune that had crossed his path today, it was pretty easy to conclude that this guy had to be some sort of trickster, whittling away at Akira’s resolve until he could sell him on some kind of scam. All the same, what if this guy was telling the truth? What if he really could interpret the subconscious? Is there some way in which he could figure out how to make Akira’s dreams into a reality? If so, it was an offer too good to pass up on. And so, against all his better judgement, with alarm bells ringing in his inner ears, Akira began to recount his dream from the previous night.**

***A twitch in the eyelids, followed quickly by a flash of light. Little by little, his senses returned to him. The soft mattress gently caressed his leathery back, creating a safe, cozy warmth inside his chest that spread through his arms, legs, and—wait, a tail? Akira yawned, blinking his eyes a couple of times, just to make sure he wasn’t still dreaming. However, his confirmation only made him more confused. Sure enough, there was a new appendage on his lower back, caught rather painfully between his body and the bed. Shooting up as if he were a rocket, it was then that Akira noticed that his hands were green and scaly, with the yellowed nails of a reptile. He reached up his hands to feel his face, and, moving them around, felt a long muzzle with a number of pointed teeth. Akira’s mind started to race, for he had woken up as a crocodile!***

***Trying to scream only resulted in an unfamiliar sounding roar. The sound flickered, first as though it came from a lion, then morphing into the twittering of a bird, then somewhere in between. Akira clamped his jaws shut tight, afraid that his neighbors would hear him. What would they say if they knew that a reptilian monster had just woken up just one apartment away? He’d surely be done for! Thus, he knew he needed to be quiet, and just go about his day as normal.***

***Flipping his tail so it was no longer caught underneath him, Crocodile Akira used his shorter, stubbier legs to push himself out of bed. Surprisingly, it seemed that he had retained some of his human traits; despite his green, scaly skin and sharp teeth, he still was bipedal. Staggering over to his dresser, he removed his soft blue bathrobe and tugged it over his shoulders. None of his regular clothes seemed like they’d fit a seven-foot-tall reptile, but his human mind still felt a trained need to cover up at least some of his body.***

***After (kind of) getting dressed, Akira decided to begin his writing for the day. Moving over to the old oak desk in the corner of his bedroom, Akira expected himself to reach for the laptop as usual. However, his crocodile body surprised him, crouching past the computer and instead pulling out a drawer full of paper and pencils. With his prey caught between his hands, the author carried his supplies out to the table in his small, sparkling kitchen. He placed the first sheet of paper down and began to write. His hands seemed to move without abandon, as if just the thought of words seemed to move his pencil across the lines. No, even that wasn’t enough to accurately describe the speed of it all. It was almost as if some other entity was moving his hand for him.*** *When it all had stopped, the writing seemed barely legible. All that Akira was able to make out was a title: “Golden Hour.”*

“And then I woke up. That was it,” Akira finished, watching the expression on the Dream Catcher’s face change from an intense state of concentration to one of immense satisfaction.

“I think I understand. Please, just one moment to make sense of it all,” the old man said, in barely a whisper. Akira only stared. The old man closed his eyes and scrunched his face tight, as if he were trying to remember a shopping list that had been forgotten at home. For a few, heart pounding moments, he remained in this state. He very nearly became a statue. Not even an eyebrow twitched. Then, all of a sudden, his eyes shot open, and a smile grew across his bearded face. Akira almost jumped back from the fright of it all.

“I’ve got it. It all makes sense…” the man started.

“What does it mean to you?” Akira asked, for as strange as it was, he was now fully invested in what the geezer had to tell him.

“Well, let’s start from the beginning, shall we? Your dream commenced with you, waking up from a quiet sleep. There are usually many symbolic meanings of this occurrence, but in your case, your act of waking up is representative both of an ideal path, and the beginning of some sort of adventure. Personally, I’m inclined to believe that something in this dream is informing you of a beneficial decision that you could make in your future.” At the mentions of “beneficial decision” and “future,” Akira crossed his arms and leaned forward, almost salivating to hear what the Dream Catcher had to say.

“Next, let’s move on to one of the major aspects of your story: the crocodile persona that overtook your usual form. In many different types of media, crocodiles are commonly characterized with slick and cunning attributes, due to those traits being associated with their unique, stylish shapes and slippery scales. Their sneakiness in water also gives them a cool aspect. But before I go any further, I have just one question for you. Do you have a deep-seated desire to turn into a crocodile?”

“What the—No!” But his outraged cry had no effect whatsoever on the old man. He launched into his next sentence without skipping a single beat.

“Of course, that’s only natural. So why would your dream place you inside the body a crocodile? Maybe, it’s because in order to achieve the success you seek, you must metaphorically become a crocodile? Review your current ignorant, rash personality and slip into the calm, careful, and cunning persona that your dream manifested as the semiaquatic reptile.

The final element is the fact that you chose to ignore your computer and opted for a more traditional style of writing. In your life, there is something that you do that never changes, a tradition you have that you must adhere to no matter the cost. If you change that factor, you may seek the dream you’re looking for. From the way you explained your dream to me, I can only assume that you’re an author. You wrote a poem titled “Golden Hour.” Did you ever write this poem in the real world?”

“No, I don’t believe so.”

“Think hard about it for a moment. Can you picture the words, or any images that might lead you to how the poem goes?”

And so, Akira thought. First, about how ridiculous the man sounded, and then, albeit reluctantly, about this poem that had been written in a dream. For a few seconds, there was absolutely nothing. But then there was a light in the dark. Flashes of images and words and rhetorical devices came flooding into his mind, as though they were only distant memories waiting to be unlocked. Amazed at this man’s apparent magic, Akira stuttered, trying to produce the words to express what he was seeing.

“I- I… I see them!” He exclaimed.

“Then go, and write them down, and follow my advice,” replied the Dream Catcher. “If it brings you the success you seek, then meet me here again, any night. I will be here to assist you. Although, I must warn you, I do not do this for free. I must ask you for a small fee of ten dollars for each dream you wish to be interpreted.”

“If this works, old man, you’ve got yourself a deal!” Gasped Akira, still stunned with wonder. The old man turned on his heels and hobbled off into the night. The author stood watching him for a few more moments until he regained the ability to move his feet. When his feeling returned to him, he hurried home, eager to write the poem of a lifetime.

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“Mr. Lorieman? Are you up? Your breakfast is on the table, and you have your editor’s meeting in a couple of hours.”

“Y-yeah, I’m up, Bill. Go, umm, fetch my laptop for me, will you? I’ve got some things to write down.”

“Right away, sir.” The quick, almost automatic response was followed by light footsteps moving away from the door and down the hall. Akira, still groggy from sleep, rolled over to look up at the ceiling, far above his head. Letting the soft texture of the still-new mattress envelop his form in warmth, the writer let out a long, contented sigh.

It had been six months since that first encounter with the man known as the Dream Catcher. After their exchange, Akira had rushed home and written down that poem that he had seen in his dreams, the one called “Golden Hour.” Instead of using his laptop, he let the ruined brick collect dust while returning to a more traditional method of actually using the notebooks he had stored in his desk drawer. In just a few days, the poem had been published in a number of literary magazines, both due to its technical brilliance and Akira’s newfound, slick charisma. Whatever the Dream Catcher had been able to see in his ridiculous crocodile dream, his advice had worked, and the author knew it would most likely work again. So, he had continued to meet him on the street corner, three blocks away from his house, at 5:30 pm, and discuss his dreams. Whether they were about his poem ideas, getting new pets, or even going on wild fantasy adventures, the Dream Catcher always had something to say. As the wise man got to know him more and more, he would advise him on which business deals to make, which poems to write, and how to write them. If Akira’s dreams were the wardens of his destiny, then the Dream Catcher was the man capable of bringing that destiny from its prison into reality.

It had started with that first poem, soon evolving into novels, squabbles over publishing rights, and eventually morphing into cold, hard cash in his pocket. It had all happened so fast that only two months after he had met the old man, Akira was closing on his high-rise apartment that he’d always wanted. Although it was fantastic in every sense, with a huge master bedroom, three guest rooms, three full and two half bathrooms, a sparkling *and* large kitchen, and a number of other rooms and useful features, the best part had to be the balcony that overlooked the entire city. When he stood upon it, he couldn’t even see the building where he had lived just a few days prior. Aside from the apartment, Akira had also finally been able to buy a new phone and computer, both equipped with much more class and style than his old models. After a few months of mainly using pen-and-paper techniques, he was finally able to perform efficient work on a desktop once more. How had he risen to wealth and fame so quickly? Even he would never truly be able to answer that question, for it is, of course, extremely rare for an author to accumulate so many riches in a matter of months. On the other hand, Akira was more than willing to chalk it up to the magic of the Dream Catcher and nothing more.

With his fame rapidly spreading across the country, it was no wonder that his parent’s calls had increased in frequency. However, Akira only had time in his now-busy schedule to pick up once or twice a month. It seemed to be like that with many of his acquaintances nowadays. He had entirely ceased all communication with Rachel, citing her earlier “rudeness” as one of the main reasons for his silence, and many of his other former friends had also been shafted in exchange for the swelling whale of ambition that had engulfed the author’s mind. He remembered one exchange in particular, where an old friend had angrily called him one morning to tell him off for standing a group of their friends up at a dinner party that they had planned a few days prior. Akira, clouded by the ecstasy of his own success, angrily snapped that his “real friends” would understand why he was so busy and leave him alone. He had forcefully hung up the phone, and that was the last he had heard from any of those people. Good riddance.

Once Akira had finally summoned enough strength to sit up in his bed, he shifted just enough to grab his phone from his mahogany bedside table. Quickly punching in the passcode, he started scrolling through the daily news. Some election scandal here, fraud there, and other, unimportant matters in the lives of a rich man like himself. Suddenly, he stopped scrolling, for one of the local stories had caught his eye. Some article about a man. An extremely familiar man. He pressed on the article to open it, hoping to get a closer look at the figure’s face. Sure enough, it was as Akira suspected: the Dream Catcher’s somber face was displayed in a rather low-resolution image on his phone screen. Curious, the author scrolled down to read the article.

It only took a few minutes for the gasp to occur, and all breath seemed to escape his lungs. He couldn’t feel the air on his skin. He couldn’t taste the morning breath on his tongue. He couldn’t smell the breakfast coming from the other room. All he heard was a faint ringing in his ears, and all he could see were the words “Recently Deceased” displayed on the screen in large, bold lettering. It couldn’t be. It just couldn’t. There was no way that the Dream Catcher, *his* Dream Catcher, was dead. Akira started laughing quietly. It was a sick, demented, ugly laugh, one that should never be allowed to come from any human being, nor any creature known to the universe. Full of fear, delusion, and denial, Akira continued to chuckle as he robotically removed himself from his bed and got dressed. Without a word to any of his servants, without even touching the food that had been prepared for him, the laughing man left his apartment, rode the elevator to the ground floor, and left the building entirely.

He started down the street at a rather slow pace, his laughs still quiet and airy. Gradually though, that walk became a brisk stride, then a jog, then a run, then a full sprint, the cackling growing louder and more horrid as he increased his speed. Akira was no longer thinking, the only image plastered across his brain was the image of the dead man on his phone. No, the living man. Right? RIGHT?! The *living* man who meant so much to him. The *living* man who was the key to his success. The *living* man who, if he were to be lost, so would Akira’s successful streak. The *living* man who was, in his very essence, the border between the author’s comfortable life and his old, pathetic one.

When he reached the familiar street corner, the black lamppost standing tall under the morning sun, he stopped, finally taking a moment to catch his breath. He stayed there, silent, desperate. He received calls, but he didn’t even pick up his phone to decline them. He stood at that lamppost for hours, waiting for the man to appear. Soon, it was noon. 1:00. 3:00. 5:30. Akira still stood. The Dream Catcher never came.

The more time that past, the more distraught the author became. In only a day, his life was crashing down around his ears, and there was nothing he could do or write to soften the blow. His success, his happiness, his life. Finally, realizing that his efforts were in vain, Akira began to walk. His success, his happiness, his life. It wasn’t long before he reached the bridge. His success, his happiness, his life. That same bridge where his first phone had met its demise. His happiness, his life. The bridge where he had been pushed around for the last time. His happiness, his life. The last time he had spoken to one of the only people who ever truly cared about him and his well-being. His life. He took one step. His life. He took another. His life. He was looking over the edge now. His life. He pushed down on the railing and lifted his legs. His life. He was falling. His life. The world became a blur around him. His life. Was he even screaming? If he was, he would never find out. As fast as the feeling of falling had come, it had gone. Along with everything else.

Far above the canal water, if a passerby had happened to see the tragic moment, they would have seen a large splash, sending massive ripples to either side of the channel, sloshing small waves onto the shore. And if this person had seen the body hit the water, he would have seen that it had much more of an impact than any phone ever could.

oOo

Detective Verity knocked on the door to the small apartment, and, as expected, there was no answer. Shifting his hat to block out the sun streaming in through the hallway windows, he then gripped the doorknob with a gloved hand and pulled. Not to his surprise, the knob turned, and, with a light push from the detective, the door creaked open. Of course, the man’s body had been removed weeks ago, but the agency hadn’t had the time or the available resources to send an inspector until today. They had every reason to suspect that this deceased man had something to do with that young author who had committed suicide a month ago. Wiping the sweat off of his forehead with his wrist, Mr. Verity stepped inside the apartment.

Despite the activity of the police who had already swept through the place to remove the body, the apartment was still very musty. With barebones furniture, and strange purple drapes sweeping from the curtain rods above the few windows all the way to the floor, the detective could very much confirm that this apartment had belonged to that man. He was a strange one, indeed. They couldn’t find very many reports of him out in the general public, but a few members of Mr. Lorieman’s staff had mentioned seeing the author converse with the gentleman quite often. Taking a few more moments to inspect the drapes, Verity moved on to the next room.

He found evidence almost at once. On a desk in the corner of the bedroom lay a crisp, white envelope with the seal still unbroken. Turning it over again and again in his hands, he saw that it indeed was addressed to the author, Akira Lorieman, and came from an apparent Michael Racketer. Although the name was unfamiliar to the detective, this Racketer character had to be the same old man that once lived in this apartment. Curiously, Mr. Verity slipped a pocketknife through the seal, careful not to slice any contents of the envelope. To the detective’s shock, as soon as the envelope was opened, money started to overflow over the sides of the pouch; ones, fives, and even twenties all fluttered to the floor as if in a dream-like ballet. Once the chaos had settled, the man noticed that a folded piece of paper sat underneath all of the cash. He quickly removed the sheet, sending more money to the ground in the process, and opened it. It was a letter.

*Dear Akira,*

*I don’t know when you will find the time to read this letter, but when you do, I will most likely be gone from this world. Before I take the final step in my journey on Earth, though, I wish to impart some final thoughts to you.*

*First, I shall begin by revealing my true name, as it is about time that we got to know each other on a true basis: my name is Michael Racketer, and I have been posing as a Dream Catcher for the last few years, hoping to help people in need of some advice. Why would I describe it as posing? You see, I may have misled you into thinking there was some sort of magic behind what I do. The truth is, there is not much magic at all; I cannot read your mind any more than it is possible to fly or to turn invisible. All of my powers simply come from the truth of the universe that is science.*

*When we dream, the stories, or “movies” that we experience are nothing more than the jumbled thoughts and ideas of our minds. In essence, dreams are our brains trying to make sense of all of the information that has been processed in order to better internalize it into our memories. Ultimately, in your case, my boy, my “advice,” such as writing the poem you crafted after our first encounter, was nothing that came from me. Even though I nudged you into remembering what was there, it was already in your own head. All you needed from me were the breadcrumbs that allowed you to follow your own trail.*

*I’m very sorry for misleading you into thinking there was some higher power in my work, but I also want you to know that our time together was not in vain. You’ve become a successful, independent young man, and I know even without my help, you’ll be able to continue achieving all your dreams. Included in the envelope you should have found all the money you ever paid me for interpreting your dreams. Think of it as a small trust fund raised to help you if you’re ever in a tight spot.*

*I’m afraid I don’t have much more time left, so I must wrap this message up quickly. But, Akira, no matter how confused, or startled you might be by my passing, I urge you to take a minute to think it over. To realize that you already know how to be strong without me. I know it may be hard to take at first, but on my end, I can start my eternal rest happily, knowing this: you will be okay.*

*Signed,*

*Michael Racketer*

*AKA “Dream Catcher”*