

Dream Catcher

Dream Catcher

Cody has driven since daybreak, mashing the gas pedal and crashing the passing lane, posing as the roadway's sole proprietor. His attention to the horizon is tougher to shake than the annoying clatter of a worn brake shoe. The jolt of centerline stripe is a never-ending supply of visual amphetamine needing to be consumed . . . gulp, whip, whiz, gee; rush hour, rolling ninety miles an hour on a stairway to heaven. The highway narrows, signposts blur. Throttled by the draft of an eighteen-wheel freight hauler, the flatbed's engine chokes to a rumbling purr. A lull in oncoming traffic allows Cody to slingshot past the big rig and again the race is on. Cody's euphoric as the twin stacks bellow; "Nobody's going to stop us now!"

Suddenly he yanks the steering wheel and the flatbed lurches right, ramping off the highway. A blackened screech of tire marks his exit. The truck is rolling too fast to negotiate the intersection. Machine and driver shoot onto a frontage road; throttle down, full speed ahead. The southern crossing is a slight detour on his western sojourn. When he reaches a washboard arroyo he realizes his mistake. The way grows rough, fractured pavement bounces Cody mean. The dream catcher hanging from his truck's rear view mirror spins crazily, an erratic dervish without form, whirling then unwinding.

Dream Catcher

A marathon of pounding wears on the driver and his ride. Mile markers surrender to evening shadows. The bright light of oncoming traffic continually punishes Cody. He recognizes the symptoms and knows his illness; white line fever.

Hallucination transforms the truck's interior. The dream catcher made of crude twig suspended by rawhide, stops an apparition clothed in the vestments of a preacher. Cody grudgingly shares the man's surname, but refuses to call him Father. The dark robed minister beseeches him to walk in his footsteps. Cody is mesmerized; the face he sees is a mirror image of his own. The hoop arcs lethargic, side-to-side. A cloud passes through its center and Ellie appears. She does not say a word, just motions for Cody to follow as she journeys westward.

Entering a new state, Cody feels the bite of a breeze spitting from a canyon's mouth. He tugs on the vent window, changing the path of the surging jet stream. Fighting to stay awake, Cody pinches the back of his hands, then screams songs at the windshield, pounding the dashboard with his fists, like a Jerry Lee gone mad. "Goodness, gracious, great balls of fire!"

Crossing the centerline of midnight the flatbed falters. Cody's foot slips from the gas pedal. He is unable to travel any longer. At the summit of a steep grade, Cody gathers in the highway's shoulder. He crawls onto the truck bed for a quick nap.

*

Cody wakes without opening his eyelids, a trick learned as a kid while sleeping three to a bed. Something shakes his truck! "Ed, keep the Winchester on him. He looks like one of them there Native Americans, probably drunker than Billy B. Damned. I'll kick the bumper again. Hmm . . . Dakota plates, better run 'em, could be that renegade they're searching for out of Pine Ridge."

Dream Catcher

Cody stretches. He lies face down on the truck bed, cocooned in a khaki colored blanket. Pushing up, looking over the sideboards, he sees two lawmen, one with a shotgun pointing at his head. Both wear fatigues; badges aglow in an early morning shimmer of sunlight.

"Come out of there, slow like. Get up against the cab!" Dazed by the intrusion, Cody complies. He leans into the truck door, his knuckles white with effort. If he obeys, red welts of authority might not mingle with scars wrought by life in an orphanage. The lesson he learned from a decade of reservation schooling is to keep quiet and gut it out.

"Spread 'em! Ed; looks like the boy's been through this before! You been a bad Injun? Pull out some I.D., easy, boy. She-it, for all I know, he's whiter than ol' Buffalo Bill hisself! Ed; check this out! Look son, if you're needing a place to shut eye, find a rest stop." With that, the deputies load up. Their Bronco crunches back onto the roadbed, snorting, bellowing, leaving Cody standing—mouth agape.

Dusting himself off, Cody straightens, wads the blanket, opens the door of the truck, and throws it on the seat. Yawning, he climbs behind the wheel and starts the engine. The vibration from the Detroit diesel causes the dream catcher to spin slowly as though trying to weave life from a vicarious dependence on man and machine.

Edna Little Bird, Cody's mother, handcrafted the hoop laced with rawhide and feathers. "We are Lakota, not the snake or devil worshipers your father's people claim we are," she explains, the night Cody sits with her. A fever rag shrouds her eyesight. "I am on a path to a new world where all people are one." Her hand searches the headboard, finally locating the web of rawhide, hanging from a bedpost.

“Popular church belief holds that dream catchers are sacrilegious. The Sioux are as craven as Philistines. All of their gods are false.” Cody’s father declared as he drank from the communion stock of mission wine.

Early in marriage, Edna hid the artifacts of her heritage, as death drew near; she gathered and placed them with her children. "This life is not mine." She whispers to Cody. “Grab the ring, it is a safety net, the spirit will only allow good dreams through.”

Cody was eight years old when he kissed his mother for the last time. Two years later, his father vanished before the congregation that backed his ministry could post him to South America. Church elders washed their hands of his half-caste children saying; “These savages are like wild animals. They will never be tamed.”

The engine has idled long enough; William Cody reaches out and steadies the willow hoop. He releases the hand brake, shoves the gear shift into low, and heads west, same direction as Ellie the day she left with Pony Boy Yellow Jacket. Yellow Jacket’s flathead eight never hit on more than seven cylinders and the 52 Ford pickup truck’s cracked tail light worked intermittently. Cody saw the flickering red dot race the setting sun. He didn't know what Ellie saw in Pony Boy, and neither did she.

"Aw hell!" Ellie had said. "He's got some kind a hold on me, but we'll get together one day soon." Then she was off, riding blindly into the sunset. Cody waited on her . . . until her spirit beckoned.