

LEAP DREAM

Written by

MacKenzie River Foy

324 Demott Ave, Teaneck NJ 07666
(201) 957-6031

EXT. STREET - DAY

A WOMAN, early 20s, teaches her young SON how to ride a bike. He wears a helmet and a nervous grimace, the WOMAN laughs and holds the bike steady. With a wobble, they're off, holding onto each other for safety and comfort.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCULPTURE GARDEN - OVERCAST AFTERNOON

JACKSON, mid 20s, sweating heavily, runs up to the centerpiece of the garden, a metallic tree, panting heavily. He tries to climb it to no avail, he can't get a good grip.

INTERCUT BETWEEN STREET AND GARDEN

SON pedals a few feet solo, WOMAN jogging alongside him. They cheer, surprised and ecstatic. She catches him just as he loses momentum. Proud of themselves, they prepare to try again.

JACKSON jumps at the tree, throwing his body against it hard. He lets out a MUTED CRY. It sounds like he is underwater.

SON pedals alone now, gaining confidence with speed. He laughs, nerves gone. ANGLE ON WOMAN, cheering him on triumphantly. A bead of sweat rolls down her face and she doesn't wipe it.

BUBBLES FLOAT TO THE SURFACE OF A POOL

Fear melts into frustration, JACKSON's clawing at the tree becomes violent. His breath comes more heavily, face frozen in a snarl. He is soaking wet. He wipes sweat from his brow and his hand leaves behind a trail of moisture when it slips from the silver bark.

SON is riding fast now, looking over his shoulder at the WOMAN.

THE SOUND OF THRASHING UNDERWATER, OF DROWNING.

We hear the WOMAN'S SCREAM, SON's head snaps forward, too late. EXTREME CLOSE UP on his eyes, widening. CAR TIRES SCREECH.

ANGLE ON JACKSON'S floating arm. It twitches as his soul returns to his body.

INT. BEDROOM - BIRD'S EYE VIEW - DUSK

JACKSON jumps awake, gradually recognizing his surroundings. He rubs his eyes and groans. His phone BUZZES TWICE, and he pulls it from under his pillow.

Notification from "ZZZ's" reads: "YOUR DREAM WAS VIEWED BY BARDYB_12 AND 10 OTHERS. \$75.50 ADDED TO YOUR ACCOUNT"

JACKSON clicks the notification and his bank statement opens up. With the new earnings, his account has \$95.50 in it.

JACKSON sighs heavily and stares at the ceiling.

JACKSON

(V.O.)

Land, water, air -- everything is expensive. Nightmares have interrupted my dreams as long as I can remember, so I can't even afford to be awake most of the time. The clearer the dreams, the more people watch. The more they watch the more you make.

PAN AROUND the closet-sized room shows that there is barely enough space for the bed, a dresser, and a door. A couple of empty old water bottles perch on the small windowsill, open and hopeful. Beside them is a wilted plant. JACKSON'S COUGHS summon the camera back to him.

Wheezing slightly, he stumbles out of bed and through the doorframe. ANGLE ON his dresser, where a framed picture of a giggling baby boy held by two handsome young fathers leans against a digital clock. A twine necklace with glowing blue stones woven into it also hangs onto the clock. JACKSON snatches the necklace out of the frame before exiting again.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

(bitterly)

If you make enough, you can enjoy all the world has to sell to you. I want to know what it's really like out there eventually...lately I'm just trying to survive.

INT. HALLWAY

JACKSON puts the necklace on as he walks to a pay station at the opposite end of the hall. His gaze lingers on a jug of water sitting outside the door next to the pay station, delivered five minutes ago according to the red time stamp on the cap. He longingly considers taking a sip.

Before he can decide, the door is thrown open and the water is snatched inside. The white woman responsible sends JACKSON a withering glare, as if she knew what he was thinking. JACKSON jumps when she SLAMS the door. Insecurity fits awkwardly on his tall, chubby frame.

He seems apprehensive as he punches in his order: 72 hours of oxygen to room 2H. A red light scans a barcode on the ZZZ app, and a notification alerts him as his account overdrafts. He pockets his phone and rests his forehead on a large window beside him, looking out over the river separating New Jersey from the city. A "ZZZs" billboard suspended over the skyline features a man lounging on a tropical beach and the slogan, "BETTER NIGHTS, BUY BETTER DAYS! ANYONE CAN DO IT."

LANDLORD

Jackson!

JACKSON flinches at the sound of his name, turns around slowly. His LANDLORD, born into wealth but slightly sociopathic, strides down the hall towards him

JACKSON

Mr. Jefferson. What a...uh, pleasure--

LANDLORD

Cut the shit kid, I need your rent by yesterday.

JACKSON

Yeah of course. I hear you, I hear where you're coming from, but I just need a couple more days, or maybe a week--

LANDLORD

No, you know what, no. Not this time. If you can't give me the rent tomorrow I don't want to see you in my building again. I don't care--

JACKSON tries to plead, but LANDLORD speaks over him.

LANDLORD (CONT'D)

I don't care. I'm running a business here, not a halfway home.

LANDLORD walks away, a wheeze to match JACKSONS echoing down the hall behind him. JACKSON watches him leave.

ESTABLISHING SHOT reveals his apartment is above a theatre where the rich line up to view the dreams of others.

Celebrities dressed in ostentatious displays of water abundance walk a red carpet to the entrance, where they are given sleep masks. ANGLE ON water bottle inspired clutches, sponge shoes, and a dress that includes a misting shower head, leaving the actress and surrounding carpet damp. Posters featuring a winged woman flying over a red planet line the walls. Her irises glow a pale blue. The ZZZ logo is omnipresent. Beside the extravagance, a HOMELESS MAN sits, asleep, dwarfed by his chunky NAVY BLUE COAT.

EXT. THEATRE - EVENING

JACKSON emerges from his apartment directly into the crowd of premiere attendees, and pushes through them to drop some change in the homeless man's empty cup. His stare lingers on the bright mood emanating from the theatre, and he touches his necklace compulsively.

ANGLE ON the winged woman's eyes. The blue matches the glow of the stones in JACKSON'S necklace.

A POLICE SIREN WAILS nearby, shaking JACKSON from his reverie. He walks to his bike, hand still touching the necklace. The bike is dope, vintage but still futuristic, solar powered, and well taken care of except some painted over scratches on its frame.

JACKSON (V.O.)

That necklace was the only thing I had from my biological mother. No pictures, no letters, no memories, no explanations, just a necklace. My fathers called it a dreamcatcher. They said it was my mother's way of protecting me as best she could. Obviously it's doing a pretty shit job, but it's reassuring to think that she tried, at least a little bit, to care for me. I wonder what her dreams would look like. If they would have been worth anything.

EXT. STREET

JACKSON unlocks his bike and rides it expertly through the traffic of the road and sidewalk. The ZZZ logo is on everything commercial: ATMs, supermarkets, gas stations. Most people driving are obnoxiously rich, the sidewalks are crowded with the working class. Pedestrians seem to be in a hurry, rushing through errands, dates, and anything else standing between them and sleeping.

They stare at JACKSON with envy as he speeds past them smoothly. His bike light flickers steadily, offering eerie illumination with the help of his necklace's glow. He stops in front of a library.

INT. LIBRARY

JACKSON approaches the circulation desk and slides his ID through a slot in the window. After giving it a cursory look, the LIBRARIAN, elderly but not maternal, smiles blandly at him.

LIBRARIAN

Here for the computer again?

JACKSON

Yes ma'am.

The LIBRARIAN nods and types something into her desktop. A ticket is printed and she hands it to him .

LIBRARIAN

This is the last day its free you know. They start charging Monday.

JACKSON

Great. Thanks.

JACKSON walks briskly down a cavernous hallway, unconcerned with the beauty of the library. He can't help but glance at the water fountain as he passes it, though he knows it's boarded up. Just like every other public water source has been for the past couple months. When he gets to the door he enters his ticket into a slot near the handle. A small screen above it begins a timer for 60 minutes.

INT. COMPUTER ROOM

The computer's holographic projection on the wall softly lights the room. SHOT OF JACKSON TYPING FROM COMPUTER POV.

JACKSON clicks ZZZ webinar 204, "MAKING GOOD DREAMS BETTER" and scans the barcode on his phone to join it. Six panels on-screen show people giving ted-talk style presentations simultaneously. As his cursor hovers over each panel, their sound begins to play.

PANEL 1: UNDERSTANDING THE DREAM
MARKET

What makes dreams good? Perhaps more importantly, what kinds of dreams do consumers want to watch?

(MORE)

PANEL 1: UNDERSTANDING THE DREAM

The answer is two-fold -- clarity and drama. And the record shows that the rich particularly love to consume trauma.

PANEL 3: HISTORY OF ZZZ'S

ZZZ's launched 20 years ago in a Silicon Valley basement, and now we are world wide. We knew that with a dream-based global economy unemployment would be a thing of the past. Everyone sleeps, and everyone dreams, right? Now, everyone wins.

PANEL 5: STRATEGY

We have to invest in ourselves. In our dreams. That doesn't just mean buy a nicer bed, or use dream enhancing psychedelics...although, I'm not discouraging those either.

(canned laughter)

This means putting the time and energy into having cohesive, plot-driven dreams. It's a mental shift as much as a financial shift, and it starts with a spiritual journey. In this land of increasingly limited resources, we have to ask ourselves: what are you willing to sacrifice for your dreams?

JACKSON clicks on panel 5. Shadows dance across his face as he watches, entranced.

EXT. COMPUTER ROOM

CLOSE UP ON ROOM TIMER STRIKING ZERO.

There is a BUZZING NOISE as the door swings open. JACKSON is already packed, walks out as briskly as he entered.

EXT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

JACKSON walks down the stairs to his bike. A HUSTLER, white dude, scruffy as he is lanky, wearing sunglasses is standing next to it, talking into a phone. He notices JACKSON and hangs up.

HUSTLER

What's up g?

JACKSON smiles tightly, and tries to unlock his bike faster.

HUSTLER (CONT'D)
I ain't gonna hurt you man, I'm
finna make you a deal. You look
like you need it.

JACKSON
(dismissive)
How would you know what I need?

JACKSON gets his bike free and starts to walk away.

HUSTLER
Where'd you get that dreamcatcher?

JACKSON stumbles over his bike pedal, but doesn't turn
around.

JACKSON
(as if cursing)
My mother.

The men are contemplative, JACKSON rubbing his leg. When
JACKSON turns around, they both speak.

<p>HUSTLER She dead?</p>	<p>JACKSON (CONT'D) What do you know about dreamcatchers?</p>
------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------

HUSTLER looks at his necklace hungrily. JACKSON tucks it
beneath his shirt and raises his eyebrows for an answer.

HUSTLER
I haven't seen one of those in
decades. You should be careful
wearing that out in public. Your
mom should have told you that
before she...

JACKSON
Right. Guess she forgot to mention.
Do you sell them or buy them or
what?

HUSTLER
Nah man, it's just...those mean
like nothing without summa these.

HUSTLER gestures for him to come closer, pulling a raggedy
box out of his jacket and walking to a bench a few feet away.
JACKSON leans his bike against a nearby mailbox, looking over
HUSTLER'S shoulder from a distance.

Inside, five gel pills sit in a fancy casing. HUSTLER taps the box and wags his eyebrows.

HUSTLER (CONT'D)

You ever heard of a leap dream?

CLOSE UP on the pills reveals a blue diamond imprinted on each. It sparkles, almost like a real diamond. JACKSON, noticing this, creeps closer.

JACKSON

Are these legal?

HUSTLER

Are you asking as a consumer or a cop?

JACKSON

Illegal then.

JACKSON inches closer, deep in thought. He considers the ethics of the situation briefly before being overwhelmed by the possibilities. Good dreams sat right there, a mere transaction away.

EXTREME CLOSE UP ON JACKSON'S EYES. THE SOUND OF THE OCEAN plays softly.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

They're so blue.

(whispering)

Just like the dreamcatcher.

(a beat)

How much for one? Or maybe two?

What do you recom--

Looking up, JACKSON realizes the HUSTLER is gone, and took JACKSON'S BIKE with him. JACKSON smacks the box angrily and the pills scatter across the ground. JACKSON paces, looking around frantically as if an answer might come from the city itself.

A wet prick on his neck -- the first raindrop he'd felt in months -- shakes him from his despair. JACKSON stands face turned to the clouds, basking in the freshness of the water, and the soft, cool breeze that storms carry with them. With a deep breath, he releases his anger and embraces the silver lining: he's got the pills. Realizing they're vulnerable to rain, JACKSON jumps into rescue mode, kneeling to place them back in the box. POLICE SIRENS WAIL softly in the distance.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - LATER

JACKSON walks in from the stairwell, a mixture of sweat and rain adhering his clothes to his body. He cradles the BOX OF PILLS tenderly. As he passes his neighbor's door, it opens, and MS. BEV, mid 50s, cranky to everyone except JACKSON, steps out. She knows what's up. They have a familiar banter, and JACKSON seems at ease around her.

MS. BEV

Isn't it past your bedtime?

JACKSON

The night is young and so am I.
What's your excuse?

MS. BEV

If you must know, I just had a good dream. Several hundred views, not that I'm bragging.

JACKSON

Shit, that's like two grand?

MS. BEV

(nods modestly)

I'm still saving up to get a car, but first, I'm headed to the movies. The trick is to learn from the best dreamers.

JACKSON

Oh that's the trick? Not all that weed you smokin?

MS. BEV CACKLES for a little too long. The edible she took when she woke up is starting to kick in.

MS. BEV

That's my medical business boy, you better mind your own. The pot is for the arthritis, not the mind.

(a beat)

How many hours you gotta sleep tonight?

JACKSON

Like 18, maybe 20 if my views stay where they are. Bought enough air to last me, but Jefferson says if I can't come up with the rent tomorrow I'm out.

MS. BEV
Well shoot.

JACKSON
Plus my bike got jacked.

MS. BEV
Damn...
(a beat)
Where you gonna go?

JACKSON
To the streets if I have to. Like
father like son, I guess.

MS. BEV
(sincerely)
I'm so sorry.

JACKSON shifts uncomfortably. Awkward in his grief.

MS. BEV (CONT'D)
I'm praying for you Jackson.

JACKSON
Right. Thanks Ms. Bev. Enjoy your
movie.

MS. BEV
Sleep well baby.

JACKSON turns and walks into his room, MS. BEV watches him go, unable to hide her pity.

In his room, JACKSON doesn't turn on the light. His bed is illuminated by rectangle of light shining in from the street. He shuffles to the window, retrieves a water bottle, half full from the rain earlier, and takes a pill out of the box. He appraises it for just a moment, noticing again how it glitters even in this low lighting. JACKSON pops it in his mouth and washes it down with the rest of the water.

He flops onto the bed and is asleep in seconds.

EXT. PARK - DAY

KIDS LAUGHING AND CHASING EACH OTHER ON PLAYGROUND.

JACKSON is in a line of kindergarteners for an ice cream truck, unsure how or why he's there. He scans the playground, searching for the answers to questions not yet fully formed.

He sees her, on a bench. It's his mother, TASHA, young like in his first dream. She's wearing an orange prison jumpsuit and she's looking right at him. She smirks when JACKSON notices her, but otherwise she doesn't move.

He floats towards TASHA, perching beside her on the bench and watching the kids play. For a moment this feels normal. JACKSON hands her ice cream he didn't realize he had bought. She smiles gratefully, but when their hands brush in the exchange, searing pain shoots through JACKSON'S body. He doubles over and screams, but no sound comes out. Just the sound of a FAUCET RUNNING.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - THE PAST

EXTREME CLOSE UP ON TASHA. The blue stone necklace is on the counter, and her eyes are glowing to match. PAN DOWN reveals her shirt is wet, and her sleeves are soaked. Her arms are submerged in the sink.

JACKSON stands behind her asking questions, but quickly realizes his voice doesn't work. As his attempts to be heard become more frantic he inches closer, afraid to see what holds his mother in such an intense reverie.

JACKSON
(inaudible)
Mom? What are you doing? Where are
we?

JACKSON finally sees over her shoulder.

OTS SHOT of BABY JACKSON held underwater in a large sink. He is crying, and small bubbles rise to the surface.

CUT TO:

JACKSONS MUTED CRY. JACKSON THRASHING UNDERWATER. We still hear the FAUCET RUNNING.

JACKSON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(audible)
Mom, please. Please, someone stop
her.

BACK TO:

INT. BATHROOM

Suddenly, the door bursts open, two MEDICS rush to remove TASHA and give aid to BABY JACKSON.

BABY JACKSON COUGHS WETLY AND CRIES.

A MEDIC touches the necklace to TASHA'S chest, she inhales sharply as her eyes return to a normal hue. She's shivering slightly. When she notices JACKSON she weakly mouths his name. She seems to be the only one who can see him. JACKSON's mouth shifts to respond, but before he can get out a word A POLICE OFFICER cuffs her and takes her away, half carrying her limp body.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. PARK

JACKSON is sitting on the bench with his mom, who is still in the process of taking the ice cream from him, as if no time had passed. He flinches away from her suddenly, an aftershock of the memory. The ice cream falls to the ground, melting slightly into the pavement. They both stare at it for a moment, then back at each other.

JACKSON WAKES UP, HIS EYES GLOWING BLUE FOR A MOMENT BEFORE FADING.

PHONE BUZZES TWICE. He doesn't reach for it, instead opting to grab the box with 4 remaining pills. He stares at them in wonder, and touches his necklace lightly.

PHONE BUZZES TWICE.

JACKSON tightens his grip and rips the necklace off. He runs out his door.

PHONE BUZZES FOUR TIMES, rapidly. ANGLE ON THE SCREEN. Notifications read "CONGRATULATIONS! YOUR DREAM WAS VIEWED BY NOOKIEBUDR, JREAMJOOSE, and 500 others. \$3,137.50 ADDED TO YOUR ACCOUNT.", "YOU HAVE BEEN UPGRADED TO A SILVER MEMBER! YOU WILL NOW RECIEVE \$8 per view, AND OTHER COOL PERKS.", "WELCOME TO ZZZ PRO! READ MORE ABOUT OUR NEW BUNDLE OFFERS."

JACKSON runs past a coughing LANDLORD, and out the front of the theatre.

EXT. THEATRE

JACKSON hesitates, considering how to get rid of the necklace.

The HOMELESS MAN who usually sleeps outside is awake now, eyes flickering between JACKSON and theatre-goers gracefully ignoring his pleas for spare change. He is GERMAINE, 52, a gaunt shell of what was once a very handsome man. He is dwarfed by the same NAVY BLUE COAT he always wears, though it probably never fit him.

JACKSON finally decides to throw the necklace in the street, but just as a car speeds over it, it appears back in his hand. JACKSON is perplexed. He throws it in the trash, and it appears back on his neck, mended. GERMAINE laughs. JACKSON, hearing him, shoots him a glare. After a moment he turns thoughtful, and walks over.

JACKSON
Take this from me.

GERMAINE
Oh now you want me to take it?

JACKSON
Yeah. Sell it or something.

GERMAINE
Why, bad dreams?

He cackles. JACKSON doesn't laugh.

JACKSON
Dad, you need this.
(silence. Then,)
You sit outside my apartment,
begging, everyday--

GERMAINE reaches out to grab the necklace, sucking his teeth. As he talks it becomes clear he is drunk.

GERMAINE
(coldly)
I sit outside a movie theatre. You just happen to live above it. And I'm working by the way, same as you up in that cozy...(mumbling) And don't call me that anyway...no son of mine would ever leave me out here with no husband no job and no medical. You should have let me sell this when your father...after the accident.

JACKSON

I have nightmares too you know. I can't afford to take care of you, Dad, and I'm sorry. I'm doing my best...

The silence between them is thick, absorbing the sounds of the mid-day city bustle.

GERMAINE

Letting you keep this shit was the biggest mistake of my life. And adopting you was my biggest regret.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - THE LEAP DREAM

OTS SHOT OF THE MEDIC HEALING TASHA REVEALS THAT IT WAS GERMAINE.

SHOT OF HIM ROCKING BABY JACKSON. BABY JACKSON COO'S AS GERMAINE DANGLES NECKLACE OVER HIS FACE.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. THEATRE

JACKSON watches as GERMAINE struggles to his feet. He reaches out to help him but his father pulls away.

GERMAINE

I'm not accepting your apology. But I will accept this.

GERMAINE shuffles away down the street. JACKSON sighs and walks inside.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - BIRD'S EYE VIEW

ANGLE ON JACKSON'S PHONE ON HIS BED, LIT UP WITH NOTIFICATIONS.

JACKSON enters his room. He grabs the box of pills, opening it and staring at them. They glitter mockingly. He takes two this time, dry. His water bottles are empty, forgotten inside the window. His phone is untouched. JACKSON holds the baby picture of him with GERMAINE and his other father, Sean.

Tears well up in his eyes, but before the they can fall he goes into a leap dream.

JACKSON's tears wait, suspended in bright blue eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - DAY

TASHA sitting on the bench. Camera approaches her from the back, then pans around to her as scene changes.

CROSSFADE TO:

INT. PRISON CELL

It's impossible to tell what time of day it is. Gray light illuminates some blurry details, but the space is discomfotingly minimalist, cage-like. There are no doors, no windows. The walls are stone but seem to be rippling. This might be solitary confinement, or maybe there's people lurking in the peripherals of the camera, but it's unclear. Only one person is in focus, TASHA. She sits on a metal bedframe, foot tapping with nervous energy. She wears her orange jumpsuit like battle armor. She's older now (36), and brawny. She looks pissed. When she talks, it sounds like she's underwater.

TASHA

You gave away my necklace?

JACKSON tries to apologize but his voice won't work.

TASHA (CONT'D)

You can't speak here stupid its your leap dream. Why would you give away the only gift I ever gave you? Your trifilin, ungrateful ass don't even know that you can get stuck in a leap dream with no anchor. What's the point of jumping through spacetime if you can't jump back? Nothing. No point. That's what.

JACKSON

(mouthing)

Am I stuck here?

TASHA

At least until the dreamcatcher comes for you.

(MORE)

TASHA (CONT'D)

That shit is passed through our family like trauma boy, you can't just get rid of it. It's anchored to you as much as you are to it.

JACKSON

(mouthing)

So this is real?

TASHA

What?

JACKSON

(mouthing)

Where are you?

TASHA

Federal Correctional Facility.
2035. For narcotics and attempted manslaughter.

JACKSON

Manslaughter?

TASHA

(laughs humorlessly)

Yeah. Tried to kill you.

JACKSON

(hurt)

Yeah. Why?

(angrily, inaudible)

WHY?

JACKSON's voice is clear in shots from JACKSON'S POV, but TASHA still can't hear him. She gets up and circles him, bemused.

TASHA

We not that different you and me.
Both stuck in our dreams. Both stupid.

JACKSON

I am nothing like you.

TASHA

Boy, I told you I can't hear--

JACKSON

Then read my fucking lips! You destroyed the only good thing that's ever happened to you.

(MORE)

JACKSON (CONT'D)

How could you...how do you live
with yourself?

JACKSON gets all up in his mother's face, her calm meeting his fury like waves crashing ashore. He is searching for something in her face, maybe remorse? He doesn't find it, but he realizes that they have the same eyes. It breaks his heart.

TASHA

(insistent)

Like I said, we not that different.

(a beat)

There's no black or white. Only
shades of blue. It can suffocate
you if you let it.

JACKSON'S LIFELESS ARM FLOATING UNDERWATER

TASHA walks back to the metal bedframe. JACKSON wants to follow, but the ground melts into swiftly moving water as the distance between them grows.

AMBIENT UNDERWATER NOISE.

JACKSON stands at the edge, looking between the froth of the rapids and TASHA, who pulls a box from underneath the bed before sitting crosslegged on it. The bedframe begins to float atop the flowing water, casually defying the current. TASHA rummages through the box and pulls out a dreamcatcher of her own, putting it on. She then pulls out a stack of paper and begins writing. She doesn't look up as she speaks.

TASHA (CONT'D)

You decide if you want to hold onto
your guilt, but don't let anger
live here. Forgive me. Let it go
Jackson.

TASHA signs the paper, folds it, and holds it out to JACKSON, inviting him to cross the water. He looks behind him, searching for another way out. In the distance, he sees the metallic silver tree of his nightmares.

JACKSON

(weakly, to TASHA)

Why?

TASHA

So you can sleep easy. When was the
last time you had a good dream?

JACKSON thinks for a moment, his breathing gradually accelerating into hyperventilation. He turns and jumps into the water, gracelessly.

JACKSON WAKES WITH A JOLT, DREAMCATCHER IN HIS HAND. He blinks blearily, hearing a BANG on his door.

LANDLORD

JACKSON! You better have my money right now or I'll let the press in I swear to God. I don't care how famous you think you are now, rent is rent and I --

JACKSON throws the door open.

JACKSON

The press?

CUT TO:

EXT. THEATRE - NEWSCASTER TALKING HEAD

NEWSCASTER

We're here live outside the home of Jackson Walker, the holder of the world record for most popular dream of all time. With over two hundred fifty thousand views, his dream has the ZZZ community hungry to find out what's next from Mr. Walker.

NEWSCASTER keeps talking, JACKSON scurries out the theatre doors, hat on and hood up. No one recognizes him as he weaves through the jumble of cameras, reporters, and curious bystanders. Across the street, his eyes scan the crowd, landing on the place GERMAINE usually sits. It's empty. JACKSON sucks his teeth, and walks off in search.

JACKSON goes to every place he thinks his father might be.

UNDER A BRIDGE WHERE DISPLACED PEOPLE HAVE MADE HOMES FROM TARPS AND BLANKETS AND PATCHES OF GRASS.

A BUS DEPOT.

A HOMELESS SHELTER WITH A LINE EXTENDING OUT THE DOOR AND AROUND THE CORNER. NONE OF THE SLEEPY AND GRUNGY LOOKING PEOPLE IN LINE ARE GERMAINE.

EXT. LIBRARY

Finally he sees GERMAINE'S BLUE COAT. JACKSON runs up to him.

JACKSON

Dad!

The man in the jacket turns around, but it isn't GERMAINE, it's the HUSTLER, drinking from a cold bottle of water.

HUSTLER

My man! Back for more huh?

JACKSON

Where'd you get that jacket?

HUSTLER

Oh you like it? Stole it off some faggy bum who tried to jip me. Sold me a dreamcatcher, then it magically disappeared from my pocket! Anyway I roughed him up, took this vintage piece as reparations or whatever. But it can be for sale if you like--

JACKSON shoves HUSTLER, hard, into the stairs, towering over him. Despite the aggression, the HUSTLER is more concerned with water spilling than JACKSON.

JACKSON

That was my dad you fucking dipshit. Where is he?

The HUSTLER begins laughing, looking around for the bottle cap. They draw the attention of some passerby, but no one stops.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Where the fuck is he? Don't make me fuck you up.

HUSTLER

You not gonna find that fool. He didn't look so great when I was done with him.

He finds the bottle cap and begins to screw it on just as JACKSON lunges towards him. HUSTLER elbows him in the face, dropping the bottle as he shifts from under JACKSON. The water falls from his hands, and rolls across the ground, spilling out most of its contents. They wrestle in the background, the HUSTLER punching the shit out of JACKSON.

When JACKSON realizes he can use his size is to his advantage, he rolls on top of the HUSTLER, choking him out.

JACKSON
(through clenched teeth)
Where...is...he?

HUSTLER
Didn't have much to live for
anyway. He's in a better...a
better..

JACKSON's grip tightens, and the HUSTLER passes out. JACKSON realizes he is crying, and lets his tears fall on the unconscious HUSTLER's face. Frustrated, he punches the HUSTLER in the chest.

JACKSON feels something thick there, and pats the spot again. He peels back the jacket, pulling an envelope weathered from age and grime from GERMAINE's inside pocket. It's stretched out, as if something bulky had been shoved in it at one point.

The envelope is addressed to his old home, where he grew up with GERMAINE and Sean. It's addressed to a younger Jackson Walker. The return address is a federal correctional facility in New Jersey. Trembling, JACKSON opens it and pulls out a letter. He reads it to himself, unmoving except a quiver in his lower lip.

TASHA
(V.O.)
Jackson. Apologies are just words,
and my actions were more
destructive than words can fix. I
don't really know what could
actually make things right for us,
but I want to know what you're
thinking, to start. Will you write
me back when you're old enough to
read this? Your life will be hard,
shit it's already hard, but as long
as you have this dreamcatcher you
can find peace somewhere. I have
one too. When we're both wearing
them, our dreams will run together.
Sharing a subconscious might seem
confusing, like opening your laptop
to find that it's always belonged
to someone else, but it's the
closest we can be to each other
without leap dreaming.

An ambulance car rolls up off camera, it's lights flashing on JACKSON's face. The SIREN is muted, as if underwater. JACKSON is moved off of the HUSTLER's body while he receives emergency care.

TASHA (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

It's better this way. Leap dreams might sound like fun, and maybe they are. But they will suffocate you if you let them. I don't try to live in the past or the future anymore. Last time I took those pills I almost killed you, and rehab still feels like swimming against the current. I keep reminding myself that there's only today, and then tonight, and then today again. And one day, today will be the day I see you, all grown up probably.

He pockets the letter before police cuff him and take him away. His stare is blank, and his body is limp and compliant.

TASHA (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I hope you still look like me when you're a whole ass man! You're the best thing I've ever done, and every night I dream of the day I get to have you back in my life. Sleep safely Jackson. I love you.

ANGLE ON GERMAINE, watching the scene from inside the library window.

INT. LIBRARY

GERMAINE looks even more frail without his coat. It's clear he's been beaten pretty badly, but he's alive. Tears leak out of his eyes and he wipes them away roughly. In his hand he's holding a worn copy (probably the original) of the picture JACKSON kept in his room.

GERMAINE

This ain't my fault Sean. I'm sorry, but it just ain't my fault.

ANGLE ON JACKSON, head bobbing with the movement of the police car as they merge into the roads congested with wealth.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. FEDERAL CORRECTIONS FACILITY - MONTHS LATER

PRISON DOORS CLANGING.

Jackson walks out of a room and is handed a pile of orange and white clothes. He puts them on, two OFFICERS staring at him indifferently. He looks self-conscious, tucking his dreamcatcher under his shirt for safekeeping.

JACKSON

(to the camera)

I never took the last pill. Didn't really have a chance to even if I had wanted. I still don't really understand what a leap dream is, or if they occur naturally at all, but the human brain is full of mysteries. I think of them as little miracles, when I think about them. Which is a lot. Maybe I'll write a book while I'm here. Prison isn't much different from life before the leap dreams after all. Still have to pay for air in here, but there's plenty of time to sleep.

Once dressed, they shuffle him down the hallway. He passes a cafeteria full of women, steel bars forming a long window along the wall. Women are eating and playing cards, docile and sleepy.

JACKSON stops short, catching the stare of a brawny woman who wears her jumpsuit like battle armor. He recognizes her by her necklace. His eyes smile back at him, tearfully. Too far away to hear, she mouths her words to him.

TASHA

(mouthing)

I'm sorry.

JACKSON reads her lips and smiles back, hoping she understands.

JACKSON

(V.O.)

Oh yeah, and after I forgave her,
the nightmares stopped. A dream
come true.

FADE TO BLACK.