STARCATCHER

 **ALYSON COREY[[1]](#footnote-1)**

In a small village on the edge of nowhere lived a boy, who didn’t know how he came to live there. All he remembered was a hooded figure walking away, fading into the dark. One might wonder why the story centers around such a person. Someone who is small and perhaps insignificant instead of a mighty warrior. This is because despite his sad beginning this little boy had something special about him. He smiled and laughed and always knew how to make someone else feel better, even when he himself was not feeling happy. He always strove to help the other villagers, to pay them back for taking him in. They had all worked together to raise him, the strange child that appeared in their village one particularly rainy day in June.

It was a very memorable day because that night was going to be the first starfall of the season and they had been up in arms about the rain clouds ruining the view of the night sky. The closer it got to the time of the starfall, the more irritated the villagers became, until amongst all the chaos the cry of a baby pierced through all the racket they were making, angry to be woken by all the noise. The villagers turned to one another asking to whom the child belonged, but no one claimed him. They had all put their children to sleep long before. The baby began to wail loader, waiting it seemed to be claimed. The villagers tried all means to quiet him, funny faces, peekaboo, giving him toys, but nothing seemed to work until the chief of the village picked him up out of the wooden washing bin where he was left and tickled the bottoms of his feet. The moment the baby started to laugh the rain clouds blew away revealing the beautiful night sky just as the first starfall began. The villagers stared in wonder at the stars, for in their trying to get the baby to laugh they had forgotten their anger at not being able to see the first starfall. When at last, the starfall was coming to an end and the last star started across the sky it did not follow the same path as the others which came before it. Instead, the star came crashing into the village, a bright ball of light, and landed at the feet of the Chief who stood holding the baby.

“It’s a miracle!” the villagers all cried, looking at the fallen star in shock. No one had heard of a star that actually fell from the heavens despite the name of the event. The Chief bent down and tried to pick up the star, only to find his hand passed right through the star, leaving a warm feeling in his palm. Many others tried as well but encountered the same problem. And so, the night passed with many failed attempts to claim the star until a thought came to the Chief. He set the baby down in front of the star. The villagers were surprised at this and tried to protest, but the chief insisted that the star must have fallen for him, for he chased away the clouds that were covering the night sky. The villagers respected the Chief, so they waited patiently to see what would happen and to the shock of most, the baby picked up the ball of light, just big enough to fill his hand.

“Incredible!” they all exclaimed, amazed by this tiny being with the ability to hold stars in his hand. Everyone in the village wanted to be the one to take care of the baby, so everyone in the village shared in raising him. They all made sure he was fed, clothed, and had a warm place to sleep at night. The boy was a son to all the villagers and a brother to all the village children, but the Chief was the one to name him, Isak, meaning “laughter,” for the night his laugh cleared the clouds so they could see the night sky. It was also the Chief who fashioned him a pouch of leather, so he could carry his star with him wherever he went.

And so, he did. There was never moment when the pouch left his side. For although no one ever knew, there were moments when more stars would appear before the boy. These were the times he was happiest, like the day he saw his first starfall and the time the Chief told him he was like his own son. The stars also appeared whenever he helped someone truly laugh after they had been sad or when someone encouraged him when he was down. Each one that appeared he took and stored safely in his little pouch. As the little boy grew in stature, the pouch filled with stars, each representing a precious moment in the boy’s life. He never would have guessed how important this pocket full of stars would be until the day the darkness came.

 It crawled slowly over the earth, enveloping everything in its path. Many tried to stop it as it claimed more and more land into its mist, but in the end, they were all claimed by the darkness as well. For none that walked into it were ever seen again. They became lost within the dark so thick no light could penetrate within, searching hopelessly for a way out. This darkness had spread through most of the land before the village on the edge of nowhere heard of it. Fear struck their hearts as they searched for what to do. Some wished to find a way to fight it, others to leave to find a new home, and sadly many knew it was useless to run from the dark and said they should stay and wait for it to come. Seeing his family in such discord, greatly saddened the heart of the boy, and he knew he must do something before the darkness could take them all away. The Chief had told him before there was a reason he was given the ability to hold stars and it seemed he had finally found it at last. He opened the pouch and the light from all the stars shone out illuminating the night around him and he started down a path he never thought he would have to take, one that led away from his home.

It was a long road, but he found the dark at last. The darkness spread over the field like a foul cloud. It seemed to speed up as he drew closer, eager to entrap another soul in the confines of its black fog. The boy stood his ground refusing to show fear in the face of the darkness he so wished to vanquish. He took a deep breath, then started off running, leaping directly into the dark. The cold hit him first, disorienting him, but what was worse was the sudden feeling of despair that sank in while all the happiness drained out him. For a moment he was lost in his despair before the pouch at his side shook. Suddenly the boy knew what he needed to do and reached for the pouch, untying it from his belt loop. He held it before him. The boy was sad for he knew setting the stars free probably meant they would not return to him, but in his heart, he understood that light must be free to shine, not stuffed away in a pouch for only him to see. With one swift yank the string of the leather pouch was pulled away releasing the stars.

The stars poured from the opening of the pouch, finding others lost in the darkness and leading them to the edge of the fog. The more people that followed the stars to freedom the smaller the darkness became. The boy could feel it closing in around him, thrashing angry at losing those it had claimed. Soon, the last star flew from the pouch and the last person found his way into the light once again, leaving the boy all alone, lost in the dark. The darkness shook with glee; at least it could keep the insolent child who dared oppose its one purpose to consume all who lived in the light lost within its endless black. With just this one human falling into despair the darkness could start again, slowly consuming the land till all light was finally snuffed out. The boy looked around seeing nothing but black all around, the weight of being all alone crashing down on him. But to the fury of the darkness, the boy did not break down. The boy dared to smile as a tear ran down his face. For every star that flew from the pouch was a memory. All the love he ever received, all the kind words and laughs of his family flashed through his mind as he saw each star pass by. Those times gave him the courage to stand in the dark all alone, completely full of joy because he knew he was loved and those he loved were safe now from the darkness. And as all the times before when he was happiest a star appeared before him, bigger and brighter than all the others. The boy took it in his hand and held it high over his head. The light of the star intensified dispelling the darkness from within. The darkness let out an inaudible shriek as the last bit of the black fog disappeared. The boy collapsed holding the star close to his heart. As his vision faded, a hooded figure walked toward him.

 The boy woke to find himself in a room with a large arched ceiling like a dome and expensive-looking furniture scattered throughout. Glancing around, he could see the breathtaking painting of the night sky decorating the inside of the dome, so realistic it took a few seconds to realize he was actually inside. The boy jumped when the door opened and a lady with hair as dark as night much resembling his own wavy locks, came in the room. She was holding a tray with a bowl of something that smelled rather sweet on it that she set on a near by table.

“Drink this, it will help” she said offering him the bowl. The boy looked at her suspiciously before taking the bowl and smelling its sweet scent once more before downing the liquid in one go. It tasted of herbs and wild honey that he liked to gather with the other kids back in the village. He was the only one who could successfully get the bees to give up their honey without getting stung. Thinking of home brought a small smile to his face. The lady sat quietly with a look of something between pride and sadness, but the boy could not decide which.

“You did so well, my little starcatcher” she whispered at long last, cupping his cheek with one hand, “I’m so sorry I never could come to you before.” Tears came to his eyes as understanding dawned on him.

“You, you’re…” he stammered. The lady nodded silently, tears welling in her golden eyes as well. “You left me, you were wearing a grey cloak…” He pulled away from the lady, not wanting to be there anymore.

“I didn’t have a choice; we knew the darkness was coming and you would be the only one who could stop it. You’re the only starcatcher left in this world; the darkness destroyed all the others. It knew I had you, you weren’t safe with me…”

“So, what?!? You just find the furthest village from anything and dumped me off in the middle of the night like its nothing! You didn’t bother to see me, not even once!”

“I left you in the care of people I knew would love and care for you as I would have! I came to see you every starfall, when the darkness had less power to watch where I was going! It killed me to leave you like that, but I had to keep you safe!” Her tears were flowing freely now down her cheeks and she took the boy’s hands, making the boy turn to look at her. “I loved you so much, but I couldn’t lose you too. I was so proud of you growing up, you remind me off him very much.”

“My father…” the boy whispered. The lady smiled and nodded. The boy let the woman pull him into a hug, “can we live together now? Now that the darkness is gone?”

“Only if you want too” the boy’s mother whispered with hope.

“Okay, but I have one condition.” The next morning, they packed everything the boy’s mother owned in a large cart and set off for a village on the edge of nowhere, where a family waited anxiously for their son to come home safe.

1. Alyson Corey, a student at Mount Aloysius College, tied for second place in the Delta Epsilon Sigma annual short fiction undergraduate national writing competition. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)