

ZACHARY AND THE LAWS OF GRAVITY

by  
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FADE IN:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - MORNING

The shadow speckled forehead of ZACHARY SALE (8) wrinkles with inquiry. His eyes are fixed on the sunlit leaves above him. The newspaper lays at his feet in the soggy grass.

Zachary picks up the soaked paper and stares through the beads of water collected on its surface. The droplets begin to dance like molecules underneath a microscope, the newspaper text magnifying underneath.

The HISS of Bunsen burners, the CLINKING of bubbling beakers, the HUM of purified air engulfs Zachary.

Zachary's MOM, Ellen (38), calls through the cracked screen door. She wears her cardigan sweater and frumpy jeans like a uniform and her hair-sprayed curls as a requirement.

MOM

Zachary! Get in here and eat your breakfast, you've got school in twelve minutes.

The SOUNDS ends, breaking his trance.

ZACHARY

Coming--

Zachary turns to run inside, sliding on the grass, his bowled, sandy blond hair bouncing with each step.

INT. HOME - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Stomping through the door, Zachary hands his DAD, David (40), the paper, water splashing on his reserved, collared shirt and tightened neck tie.

DAD

Thanks. Champ.

Dad shakes the beads of water from the paper, brushing water from his chest.

Mom pours a glass of orange juice for Zachary. Eggs are frying in the skillet on the stove.

DAD (CONT'D)

Didn't think it rained last night?

ZACHARY

That's dew, Dad. When the water vapor gets too heavy it sits on the grass 'cause it isn't in the sky yet. It's called condensation. And then, when the sun comes out, it heats up the condensation and that's evaporation. And *then* it rains. And then--

DAD

Okay there Zach, isn't it a little early in the morning for all this?

ZACHARY

No. That's when it happens most. It's the water cycle, Dad. I learned it in science hour.

DAD

Alright then. But it's called *condensation*.

ZACHARY

That's what I said, Dad.

Mom sets four plates on the table. Eggs, toast, and fruit are arranged in thirds around the plate.

MOM

Okay, Mr. Scientist, eat your breakfast, the bus'll be here soon.  
(beat)  
Eve, get in here for breakfast!

Racing around the corner into the kitchen, EVE (13) slings her backpack under her chair and plops down at the table across from Zachary, blowing her hair from her eyes. His science book is next to his plate.

EVE

I'm here. Gosh.

DAD

And good morning.

EVE

A good morning to you, David.

MOM

Eve, please. David, will you say grace?

Zachary, Mom, Dad, and Eve all hold hands around the small kitchen table. They bow their heads.

During the prayer Eve's eyes remain partially open as she stares at Zachary. His right eye squints open to meet hers. Their tongues flick out of their mouths playfully in unison.

DAD

Heavenly Father, thank you for the food in front of us and the hands that hold us. Bless Ellen and bless Eve and bless our Zachary, may his faith and knowledge be forever in balance. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

MOM, EVE, ZACHARY

Amen.

The four scarf their breakfast in silence. Zachary stares at the depiction of Isaac Newton underneath the apple tree on the cover of his science book.

DAD

Zach, no books at the table.

Zachary puts it on the floor next to his chair, still captivated.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Zachary continues to stare at the apple tree on his science book in his first grade class.

The other STUDENTS are all drawing, coloring, cutting, and pasting. His teacher, MISS RODGERS, a spectacled African-American woman with a permanent smile, is standing in front of his table.

MISS RODGERS

Zachary, why aren't you making your self-portrait?

ZACHARY

I'd rather learn science.

MISS RODGERS

Well, science hour is next. So how about you do a quick drawing of yourself first, then you can focus on what we're going to be learning today.

ZACHARY

What? What are we doing today,  
Miss Rodgers?

MISS RODGERS

If you draw for me, maybe we can  
cut a deal.

ZACHARY

Okay, I promise. Now tell me,  
please.

MISS RODGERS

We're going to learn about gravity.

ZACHARY

Gravity. That's easy.

MISS RODGERS

You just wait and see then.

Miss Rodgers walks away as Zachary begins to draw.

He crudely sketches himself as a stick figure underneath a tree. The drawing ANIMATES, an apple falling, hitting stick-figure Zachary in the head, landing at his side.

INT. HOME - FOYER - NIGHT

Dad enters. Zachary snaps off the couch. Dog-earing his science book, he runs to Dad and unleashes.

ZACHARY

Dad, Dad, Dad! I learned about  
gravity today. I didn't think it  
would be too great, but there's all  
this awesome stuff it does, like  
when there's a vacuum in space then  
stuff floats and making a vacuum is  
really hard and also there's a guy  
named Newton who basically invented  
gravity by getting hit in the head  
and--

Out of breath with his hands on his head, Dad cuts him off.

DAD

Well hello to you, too.

Dad rubs Zachary's hair, then walks toward the bedroom.

Zachary fixes his messed hair and returns to the couch next to Eve. Pouting, his arms crossed.

INT. HOME - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

After a moment of silence, Eve grabs Zachary and starts to tickle him. After a short bout:

EVE  
So, how 'bout that gravity?

ZACHARY  
Whatever.

EVE  
Whatever, whatever.  
(beat)  
You know that gravity is pretty  
much the reason for black holes,  
right?

ZACHARY  
Black holes?

From the living room, Mom and Dad can be heard with STIFLED VOICES in the kitchen.

Zachary tries to listen, but Eve snatches back his attention.

EVE  
They have so much gravity that  
nothing can escape them, not even  
light or even time.

Zachary, still somewhat disheartened, stays quiet.

INT. SALE HOME - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

While putting the final touches on dinner:

DAD  
This science obsession is getting  
in the way, Ellen.

MOM  
In the way? Of what?

DAD  
Faith. His faith. Our faith. I--

MOM

We pray, he prays every night,  
church, Sunday school, what do you  
want? It's public school, David.

DAD

I know it's public school. Why so  
often? How am I supposed to deal  
with this? He's in some fantasy  
world I can't get to.

MOM

Deal with?

(beat)

What? An education? He's the one  
that's dealing with this. Why  
don't you just talk to him, David.  
If you're so worried, why don't you  
just talk to him.

Dad shakes his head and walks to the dining room.

INT. HOME - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Zachary holds his science book in his lap. Eve is texting on  
her cell phone.

MOM (O.S.)

Kids. Dinner's ready.

ZACHARY, EVE

Coming.

INT. HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The family is eating spaghetti and meatballs. Zachary is  
sitting on his science book, slurping the noodles from his  
fork. Eve chuckles as one hits his nose.

MOM

So, how was everyone's day?

Silence.

MOM (CONT'D)

Eve?

EVE

Fine.

The clinking of flatware on china.

DAD  
Sounds like it.

Zachary picks up one of the meatballs on his plate and holds it over the mound of spaghetti. The HISS of Bunsen burners, the CLINKING of bubbling beakers, the HUM of purified air engulfs Zachary. When he drops the meatball, it hovers in front of his face.

EVE  
Z learned about gravity today.

The meatball splashes into the spaghetti as Zachary's eyes light up, but then extinguish along with his SOUNDS.

ZACHARY  
I already told 'em.

DAD  
So, Zach. What do you think about all this science?

ZACHARY  
Science is pretty great.

MOM  
Well, of course it is.

DAD  
What if I told you science wasn't perfect. You know, just isn't the only answer.

Zachary doesn't respond. Eve is disgusted.

DAD (CONT'D)  
It's just trying to tell us what we already know. Of course gravity keeps us here, but it's God that doesn't want us to float away.

Zachary nods, attempting to follow along.

MOM  
Well, David, of course God doesn't want us to float away!

EVE  
Yeah, Dad. What else? How about monkeys? How'd God feel about us coming from monkeys?

DAD

Eve, please just keep quiet if you don't have anything faithful to add.

MOM

Honey.

DAD

No. Zach. It's just a question of balance. Just because science is telling us more ways doesn't mean they can't coexist. One doesn't have to replace the other, okay? You just have to keep a balance, Zachary.

Dad looks to Mom for support.

MOM

I'm not getting involved.

ZACHARY

But--

DAD

We are a family of faith. That's that. That's what we know and what we believe. Right?

Zachary jumps down from his seat and runs to his bedroom. The science book falls off of the chair onto the floor.

EVE

Wonderous work, David.

Eve rushes after Zachary, leaving Mom and Dad at the table eating in silence.

INT. HOME - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Zachary reaches his doorway as Eve grabs his shoulder.

EVE

Z, come on?

ZACHARY

No.

EVE

Come on, Zach, talk to me.

Zachary slams the door in Eve's face.

EVE (CONT'D)  
Well then Mr. Attitude. You know  
where I sleep if you wanna chat.

Eve leaves and cranks her music in the room next door.

INT. HOME - ZACHARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Zachary drops a plush soccer ball from the top of his bunk bed. He drops an action figure. Squeezing an Earth stress ball, he drops it. With the THUD, Zachary falls back on his bed.

Staring at the ceiling, a sparse star field FADES IN from the white.

Down the bunk bed ladder, Zachary jumps to his door. Cracking it open, he peers down the darkened hallway. The house is quiet.

INT. HOME - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

As if behind enemy lines, Zachary sprints toward the dining room.

INT. HOME - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stopping at the edge of the table, he bends to look underneath the table.

INT. HOME - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Zachary searches the counter for his science book. Underneath some discarded newspaper, he grabs it and turns back toward his room. Swinging back around, he grabs an apple from the bowl in the center of the kitchen island and races back to his room flipping through the pages of the book.

INT. HOME - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Zachary's door is massive in front of him. Pushing it open, a RUSH OF AIR escapes the compartment. Through the threshold, the door closes with the SUCTION of an air-lock.

INT. HOME - ZACHARY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Inside, the room is sterile. The HISS of Bunsen burners, the CLINKING of bubbling beakers, the HUM of purified air.

Zachary tosses his science book onto the top bunk. Gathering balls, toys, pens, stuffed animals, the apple, books, and a feather, he tosses them onto the top bunk.

Having climbed the ladder, he lines up the items two by two, heavier items paired with lighter. He flips to the dog eared page in his science book with the words

YOU CAN DO IT, TOO!

in bold face type across the page. Underneath the heading are instructions on how to put gravity to the test by dropping items of different mass from a certain height and measuring if they fall at the same rate.

Zachary begins to drop the items from his bed, craning his neck over the edge to watch their descent. Each item SMACKS the floor.

With the apple and feather in his hands his face hardens. Each wall around him FADES into a deeper and deeper star field. Dropping the apple and feather, he watches as they begin to fall. Milliseconds after they leave his hand, they FREEZE, mid-descent.

The ethereal WHIR of space overpowers the previous SOUNDS of the laboratory.

Touching the apple with his index finger, Zachary sends it soaring across the room.

At the edge of his top bunk, Zachary is engulfed in space. Leaping into the center of his room, he floats across his room at the same trajectory of the apple in space.

After a moment, a knock at Zachary's door.

EVE (O.S.)

Z, what are you doing?

The feather, the apple, and Zachary all fall, side by side, to the floor. He lands on his stomach with a CRASH. The star field has receded, now only the AIR CONDITIONING.

EVE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

What was that? Zachary?

The door bursts open.

Zachary shifts from his stomach, goggling at Eve.

EVE (CONT'D)  
Explain yourself floor crawler.

Zachary begins to pile up the dropped items.

EVE (CONT'D)  
You know Dad did this to me, right?  
The whole, "I'm losing control of  
the family you're growing up and  
I'm the big bad dream stomper"  
routine. Yeah. It's old news, Z.  
It's what the parentals do.

After a pause, coyly:

ZACHARY  
I'm experimenting.

EVE  
As in, science and laboratory kinda  
stuff?

Sizing Eve up:

ZACHARY  
Do you want to see?

EVE  
The answer is yes, and I'm ashamed  
you even had to ask.

Zachary's face illuminates. Grabbing the apple off of the floor, the HISS of Bunsen burners, the CLINKING of bubbling beakers, the HUM of purified air.

ZACHARY  
Ok. So we need to get all of this,  
up there. And you've gotta make  
sure you drop everything off at  
just the right time and just  
measure the height and how close  
they are, oh, but first we have to  
close that door.

The SUCTION of an air-lock. The walls around the door FADE into space.

FADE OUT.