

FROM THE TREE

By

Matthew S. Alaniz

EXT. STREET - DAY

JASON (13) rides his skateboard through an idle intersection. He's a simple kid, the T-shirt and jeans type, but not invisible. He's more like a blank canvas ready to absorb some fresh paint. A worn backpack hangs off his shoulder and HIP-HOP pumps out of his head phones.

He hops off the board and cuts through an

OPEN FIELD

with a few small groves of pecan trees scattered about. He stops under a large, sprawling tree, picks up a few pecans, cracks one open and then munches on the nut.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

CHRIS (14) is dressed like a miniature Eminem. His oversized baseball cap shadows his beady little eyes which are currently filled with rage.

He grips a sizeable pocket knife that's pressed firmly against the neck of a helpless KID (13) who, at the moment, fears for his life.

Jason stands a few feet from the action, fidgeting with a wheel on his skateboard.

KID

Tomorrow... I swear to God, Chris!

CHRIS

Check his pockets, Jay!

JASON

He doesn't have it, man!

CHRIS

I'm not askin' you!

Jason rifles through the kid's pockets and pulls out a few crumpled dollar bills and a Jolly Rancher candy.

Chris digs the knife further into the kid's skin.

JASON

He'll get it tomorrow.

(to kid)

Tomorrow, right?

The kid nods and Jason manages to pull Chris away. The knife falls to his side. A drop of blood trickles down the blade.

CHRIS

This is the last time I'm frontin'  
your bitch ass!

The kid quickly runs away. Chris grabs the money.

CHRIS

Four fuckin' dollars! Can you  
believe this bullshit!

They join the parade of STUDENTS walking into school.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

STUDENTS watch MR. ALVAREZ (53) tie one end of a rope to a bowling ball while the opposite end is attached to a rafter in the ceiling.

Mr. A, as some of the kids affectionately call him, is dressed in the usual teacher garb, but his rolled up sleeves and loosened tie reflect his enthusiasm.

MR. A

Yesterday we talked about energy.  
Someone give me a definition.

Mr. A grabs a handful of Jolly Rancher candies from a bowl on his desk. He looks around and then points to ERICA (13) who's sitting in the front row with her hand pointed straight to the ceiling. She's a future heartbreaker with just enough innocence left not to know it.

ERICA

It's like a force, right?

MR. A

Not exactly, but close.

He scans the classroom and spots Jason sitting in the back row staring out the window at a small herd of cattle.

MR. A

Jason, how about you? Tell me about  
energy.

JASON turns his head and stares down the aisle. Without skipping a beat he responds --

JASON

It's the ability to do work.

MR. A  
And what is work?

JASON  
Force times distance.

Mr. A waits for a deeper answer.

JASON  
It's the transfer of energy from  
one thing to another. It's change.

Mr. A beams with pride and tosses him a candy.

MR. A  
Dang, son, you're on a roll, homie!

The students chuckle at Mr. A's attempt at urban slang.

MR. A  
Okay. That brings us to today's  
last topic... the law of  
conservation of energy.

Mr. A grabs a plastic skeleton from the corner of the room  
and places the bowling ball against the tip of its nose.

MR. A  
Jason, come up and help me out.

Jason moves to the front of the class with a certain  
underlying confidence.

MR. A  
The law of conservation of energy  
states that energy cannot be  
created or destroyed. It can only  
be transferred from one object to  
another or, as we're about to see,  
transformed from one kind of energy  
into another.

Mr. A pulls the bowling ball back, away from the skeleton,  
like the pendulum of a clock.

MR. A  
We've already learned about two  
kinds of energy. The ball is  
resting in my hands right now...  
what kind of energy is that?

STUDENTS  
Potential.

MR. A

Now, when I let go and the ball moves, what kind of--

STUDENTS

Kinetic.

Mr. A tosses a clump of Jolly Ranchers across the room.

Students scramble for the candy as it falls from the air like a piñata just burst open.

MR. A

So the potential energy stored in the ball will transform into kinetic energy as it moves and because we said that energy cannot be created or destroyed, the ball shouldn't have enough energy to come back and smash this guy's skull.

The students sit up in their chairs.

MR. A

This guy's already had a rough life, I mean look at him.

Mr. A pushes the skeleton aside.

MR. A

Jason, come over here.

The students heckle Jason as he takes the skeleton's place.

Mr. A adjusts Jason's head before placing the bowling ball against the tip of his nose.

MR. A

Now as long as Jason doesn't move he will be just fine. Remember... we're not creating energy... just transforming it.

(to Jason)

You trust me?

Jason doesn't move an inch but his eyes murmur a "yes."

Mr. A lets go of the ball and the students wait, wide eyed.

The ball returns and stops a hair away from Jason's face.

Most of the kids cheer with the exception of a few who wanted to see the ball do some damage.

MR. A

You see... the law of conservation of energy. Thanks, Jason.

The school bell RINGS.

MR. A

No homework tonight. I'm going easy on you guys, but I want everyone to give me some examples on the law of conservation of energy first thing tomorrow.

(beat)

And don't tell your teachers where you got the candy. I'm tired of all the e-mails.

The students rush out the door. Erica smiles at Jason as they pass each other. Jason grabs his bag and skateboard.

MR. A

Thanks for helping me out with that. You weren't scared were you?

JASON

Nah.

MR. A

I figured. See you later?

Jason nods.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The TEACHER rambles on about the three tiers of American government, but her lesson comes across more like a recipe for three-tier cake. Jason unwraps a Jolly Rancher and pops it in his mouth.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

The school sits peacefully against the bucolic backdrop. Most of the students and teachers have long been gone. Jason rides his skateboard and tries to land several tricks like the pros. Chris sits on the curb and uses his knife to cut ants in half as they crawl between his feet.

CHRIS

You think Erica's fine?

Jason's focus is on the board.

CHRIS

I think that bitch is fine, man. I need to hit that soon...

An older model Chevy Tahoe with aftermarket rims and tinted windows pulls up to the curb. The front passenger window rolls down and LOUD HEAVY METAL MUSIC escapes into the air.

Chris leans into the car. Jason continues on his board, familiar with the goings-on.

I/E. CHEVY TAHOE - CONTINUOUS

Chris pulls out a roll of money --

CHRIS

What up, Damon?

DAMON

Get in the damn car, boy! What's the matter wit' you?

DAMON (31) is a good ol' country boy gone bad. He's covered in cheap, homemade tattoos and even cheaper Gothic type jewelry -- a poor man's Ozzy Osbourne without any of the charm or talent.

Chris gets in the backseat, hands Damon the money. The DRIVER snickers and makes eye contact through the rear view mirror with another LACKEY in the backseat.

DAMON

I said five hundred this time.

CHRIS

C'mon, bro! You know I can't do that. I'm always on time with my shit. Why can't you cut me--

Jason's board slams into the front of the Tahoe. It gets real quiet.

Damon gets out and examines a scratch on the front bumper. He picks up the board and walks toward Jason.

DAMON

Your footing's all wrong, bro. It's all about where your feet are.

Damon sets the board on the ground.

DAMON

You gotta put your back foot on the tail and push down. When the board flips around smash your other foot down on the middle of the board.

Damon performs the trick from a stationary position.

DAMON

Like this...

He does it again and violently smashes his foot through the board, breaking it in half.

DAMON

(to Chris)

Get the hell outta my car!

Jason picks up his broken board. Chris exits the Tahoe.

CHRIS

What about my shit?

Damon nods to the lackey. He shoves something inside the bag and tosses it to Chris.

Damon hops back in the Tahoe.

DAMON

(to Jason)

Don't forget where to put your feet next time.

The Tahoe drives off.

Chris checks the contents of his bag.

CHRIS

Sorry about your board, man.

JASON

Whatever.

CHRIS

You wanna come over? I got all the episodes of Game of Thrones on my computer. Titties and dragons?

JASON

I got shit to do.

Jason walks off toward the school.



INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Jason dawdles into the empty classroom with his broken board and backpack. He sits at a desk in the front row and pulls out a science textbook, a spiral note pad and a pencil.

Mr. A enters with a piece of cake covered in saran wrap.

MR. A  
Sorry, teacher conference. Free  
cake though.

Mr. A sets the cake on his desk and walks to the chalkboard.

MR. A  
Where did we leave off?

Mr. A spots the broken board as Jason flips through notes.

MR. A  
What happened to your board.

JASON  
Mass times acceleration.

Mr. A belts out a laugh.

MR. A  
Good one!  
(beat)  
You pretty good on that thing?

JASON  
I'm okay I guess. I was anyway.

MR. A  
I used to surf.

Jason's eyes are open and alert.

JASON  
No way!

MR. A  
Yeah. It was a long time ago. I  
miss it every once in a while.

JASON  
Why'd you stop?

MR. A  
Age. Responsibilities. I got  
married, had a kid... life I guess.

JASON

That sucks.

MR. A

Not really. Everything has its time and place. I used to be that... now I'm this. Life is a lot like science. One thing turns into another. Kinda like what we learned today.

JASON

So you're just a big ball of potential energy?

Mr. A smirks at Jason's quick wit.

JASON

Tony Hawk is like forty and he still skates. I think if you love something you just keep doing it, right?

MR. A

Those that are fortunate enough to... yes, they keep doing it.

(beat)

Alright. Let's talk about physics.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

The busy swarm of buses, cars, children and faculty has been cleared hours ago.

Mr. A balances his briefcase and piece of cake as he fumbles for his car keys.

MR. A

Your mom picking you up?

JASON

Not today.

I/E. 1969 CHEVY CHEVELLE - DAY

The rumble of 350 horsepower sounds just as classic as the car looks. They zoom past open fields with cows grazing and crops full of unharvested cotton -- not a single high-rise in sight. They pass a small monument with the state of Texas in the center that reads: CITY OF ROSENBERG FOUNDED 1883.

The wind rips through Jason's hair until the car comes to a stop at an empty intersection. Mr. A revs the engine and then peels out leaving a trail of white smoke. He points to the hood and is barely audible over the noise as he yells --

MR. A  
PHYSICS!

EXT. JASON'S HOUSE - DAY

They pull into the driveway of Jason's home which is a little older and could be better taken care of, but it's still standing. Jason hands over the cake that's been on his lap.

MR. A  
Give it to your mom or something.

Jason hops out with his board, bag and cake.

JASON  
Thanks for the ride Mr. A. See ya tomorrow.

MR. A  
Same bat time, same bat channel.

Jason furrows his brow. Mr. Alvarez sighs.

MR. A  
Never mind. Get out.  
(beat)  
You're doing really well, Jason.  
You've come a long way the past  
couple of months. Keep it up okay.  
I'm proud of you, son.

Jason takes in the words, not sure how to respond.

As Mr. A leaves, an old, dirty, white pick-up truck pulls into the driveway. The driver, CHARLIE (31), stares out the window and makes direct eye contact with Mr. A as the passenger, HENRY (30), spits tobacco out the window, narrowly missing the Chevelle. A third man, Luis (28), sits in the cab holding a weathered Winchester deer rifle.

Charlie hops out of the truck. He's fair skinned and ruggedly handsome, but the chronic squint in his eyes makes it hard to see their true color.

CHARLIE  
How ya doin' Jay?

Jason continues to the front door.

CHARLIE

It's rude not to answer your  
elders, boy. Didn't your mama teach  
you better than that?

JASON

No, but she said I should call the  
cops the next time you came by.

CHARLIE

Cops? You gonna call the police on  
me, Jay?

Jason enters his house. Charlie leans against the door jam.

JASON

She's not here.

CHARLIE

Yeah I know. I figured I could wait  
for her. Luis's got his rifle.  
Maybe we can go find some squirrels  
or somethin'?

JASON

I don't hunt.

Charlie smirks and looks at the busted skateboard.

CHARLIE

Yeah, you don't look the type.

Jason forces the screen door shut on Charlie, pulls out his  
cell phone and dials.

CHARLIE

Okay, I'm leavin'. You tell your  
mama I said I love her, okay. You  
do that for me, Jay?

Jason hits "send" on the phone and puts it on "speaker."

PHONE (V.O.)

(muffled)

Sheriff's office...

Charlie chuckles and walks back to his pick-up.

CHARLIE

I'll be seein' you, Jay.

INT. SCHOOL/BOY'S BATHROOM - DAY

Jason, Chris and a few other KIDS are huddled together. Chris unzips his backpack and passes it around. Inside is a large, plastic bag filled with marijuana.

CHRIS

Let's go to my house and I'll hook  
y'all up. Yo, Jason, you want in on  
this, man?

The bell RINGS.

JASON

Maybe later. I got shit to do after  
school.

CHRIS

Bitch, you always got shit to do  
after school! Alright, man, but  
don't be too late. I dunno how long  
this is gonna last.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Jason watches CLASSMATES get on buses and in PARENTS' cars. In the distance, he spots Chris walking and talking with Erica and a few of her GIRLFRIENDS.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Jason walks in and notices a skateboard laying on a desk. It's not new, but it's only slightly used with a few minor scrapes and scratches. A small sticky note attached reads:

"TO THE NEXT TONY HAWK - KEEP DOING IT, JASON!"

He hops on the board and rides to the end of the classroom. His face is lit up like Christmas until he notices a puddle of coffee next to Mr. A's desk. His eyes come up to a hand laying next to a shattered coffee mug on the floor.

He cautiously takes a few steps and finds Mr. A behind his desk lying face up, eyes open and very still.

JASON

Mr. A?

Nothing. Jason is frozen. His eyes race back and forth trying to make sense of what he sees. He bends down onto the spilt coffee and shakes his teacher.

JASON  
 (louder)  
 Mr. A!

The skateboard falls from Jason's hand. He bursts out of the room and runs into the hallway.

In the distance, he POUNDS on a classroom door.

INT. CORNER POCKET BILLIARDS - NIGHT

MICHAEL (28) KNOCKS on the door to an office in the rear of the pool hall. He's a good looking young man with a carefully groomed goatee to hide his baby face. He's not the Brooks Brothers type, but everything he wears looks brand new.

A worn backpack hangs off his shoulder.

EDDIE (O.S.)  
 Come in.

Michael opens the door to the

OFFICE

EDDIE (42), a skinny black man who moves and hollers like a guy twice his size, sits behind a desk watching basketball on a small TV screen. He's not a show off, but something about his style gives him just enough class.

Eddie yells out loud to the players on TV and then to his ASSOCIATE (40), sitting across the desk, who's a significantly larger black man who doesn't need any theatrics or style to get his points across.

EDDIE  
 They do this shit every time!  
 (to associate)  
 You believe this shit?!

Eddie shuts off the TV and throws the remote on the desk. Michael takes a seat in the corner of the room.

EDDIE  
 (to Michael)  
 You watch the game, cuz?

MICHAEL  
 Nah.

EDDIE  
 Bullshit!

Eddie unlocks a combination safe under his desk. He pulls out a couple of ounces of cocaine sealed in plastic and plops them on the desk in front of Michael.

Michael pulls out a roll of money and counts out several hundred dollar bills and hands them to Eddie.

EDDIE  
Everything good, cuz?

MICHAEL  
Same shit, different day.

EDDIE  
Sound like you need a vacation,  
bro?

Michael puts the coke in his bag.

MICHAEL  
Shit, I wouldn't even know where to  
go, man.

Eddie and his Associate lock eyes for a sec.

EDDIE  
I think I do.

Michael perks up.

EDDIE  
You ever been to Austin?

Michael droops in his chair.

MICHAEL  
It's been a minute.

EDDIE  
Nice city. A little weird, but  
that's their slogan or some shit,  
right?

ASSOCIATE  
Keep Austin weird.

EDDIE  
Yeah, that's it. Shit makes sense.  
Anyways, I Met some homeboys there  
a few months back.

(MORE)

EDDIE (CONT'D)

They been askin' about some "good"  
and I think it might be worth  
takin' a trip out there, but now's  
not really a good time for me to be  
travelin' and shit so...

Eddie waits for Michael to answer. He doesn't.

EDDIE

Damn, muthafucka, do I gotta put on  
some Jeopardy music for you? Dress  
up like Alex Tribec and shit?!

MICHAEL

You want me to go?

EDDIE

Ding, ding, ding!  
(to Associate)  
Give this nigga a prize, man!

They share a laugh at Michael's expense.

EDDIE

So, yeah. I want you to go out  
there for me like a whatchu call  
it... like a...

ASSOCIATE

Middleman.

EDDIE

Nah, cuz, it's another word. Shit's  
on the tip a my tongue... like a--

MICHAEL

Liaison?

EDDIE

Yeah! That's it. I knew your egg  
head ass would know what I'm  
talkin' 'bout. So what you think?  
You wanna be my liaison for this  
shit?

Michael doesn't answer. At least not fast enough.

Eddie hums the Jeopardy music.

EDDIE

C'mon, nigga! It ain't that hard a  
question.