

Danny Uncanny

by

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EXT. OUTER SPACE - DAY

Trillions of white dots light up an ocean of blackness.

CONTROLLED BREATHING.

In the distance, Planet Earth comes into view.

The AGENA UNMANNED SPACECRAFT sails by. An ASTRONAUT climbs across it, pulling a cable along with him.

NASALLY CHILD'S VOICE (O.S.)
Wait, I thought he walked on the moon?

INT. SCHOOL, CLASSROOM - DAY

DANNY stands in front of his fifth grade classroom, his lack of confidence at odds with the excitement he has for the material. His ginormous eyes betray the frustration he feels having his presentation interrupted.

Next to him is an easel with collage-style pictures of the Gemini 12 spacecraft and the Agena spacecraft.

DANNY
He *did* walk on the moon, during the Apollo program. But first he went into outer space as part of the Gemini Mission...*idiot*.

MR. RIDER jumps in from the corner of the classroom.

MR. RIDER
Language, Danny! And Paul, don't interrupt when your classmates are presenting.

CHILDREN SNICKER.

Bratty PAUL points his bandaged forearm at Danny, unleashes his nasally voice again--

PAUL
Danny's the one lying about his grandpa walking on the moon!

Danny cocks his arm back, prepares to weaponize the dry-erase marker he was using as a pointer.

DANNY
He DID go to the moon!

Restraint be damned, the marker sails out of Danny's hand.

INT. SCHOOL, PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Paul holds an icepack to a swollen eye. Danny sits one seat away from him, fuming.

PRINCIPAL MAYHEW sits at a large desk, arms folded, glasses resting so far down his nose they seem to be suspended in animation, his three-piece suit just a tad too formal for these proceedings.

PRINCIPAL MAYHEW

Gentlemen...and in this particular case I do use that word generously...no one's going anywhere until I hear some sincere apologies.

PAUL

He's the one who should be apologizing, I didn't even do anything!

DANNY

He called me a liar--

PRINCIPAL MAYHEW

Well, were you lying?

DANNY

What?

Danny's head snaps back toward the principal--whose three-piece suit has been replaced, he's now adorned in a full astronaut space suit.

PRINCIPAL MAYHEW

If your Great-Grandfather *really* went to space, why didn't he bring you back a souvenir?

INT. DANNY'S HOME, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny shoots up in bed like a catapult...it was a dream. His crusty eyes scan the dark bedroom. Light creeps in from beneath the door. He goes to take a sip from the water cup on his night stand--it's empty. In an instant, he's up and doing battle with the light from the hallway as he opens his bedroom door and ventures out for resources.

INT. DANNY'S HOME, HALLWAY TO KITCHEN - NIGHT

His feet streak lightly across the carpeted hallway, slowing as he nears the kitchen, the VOICES he hears grow louder.

He peaks around the corner, sees MOM and DAD at the kitchen table.

INT. DANNY'S HOME, KITCHEN - SAME TIME

MOM, mid-40s, hunched at the table in her night gown like the weight of parenthood is that of a Sisyphean boulder.

DAD, mid-40s, at ease in his open robe and boxer shorts, almost reclining in his chair--to him this is just another adventure in the journey of life.

MOM

Maybe we should pull him out.

DAD

To what end?

MOM

There are other schools...better designed for children with learning issues.

DAD

Are we so certain he has learning issues? *Anger issues*, maybe. But he seems perfectly bright to me.

Dad notices a receding hallway shadow.

INT. DANNY'S HOME, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Danny turns the bathroom sink on, holds his cup under the faucet, fills it, takes a sip.

He turns the sink off as his eyes well up.

INT. DANNY'S HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

Dad turns the sink on, rinses off the frying pan.

Danny sits at the table, pushes scrambled eggs around his plate with a fork. He wears a baseball uniform.

DAD

How old are you turning tomorrow?

DANNY

Eleven.

DAD

Oh yeah, that's right.

Dad turns the sink off, abruptly leaves the kitchen. Danny forces down some eggs he's uninterested in eating.

Dad returns, small box in hand, sits across from Danny.

DAD

I'm not supposed to give this to you til tomorrow.

DANNY

What is it?

Dad slides the box across the table.

DAD

It used to be your Great-Grandpa's.

Danny opens the box, removes the contents.

DAD

It's a--

DANNY

Moon rock. Woh.

DAD

Great-Grandpa Buzz snuck this past NASA after returning from the Apollo 11 mission. He wasn't supposed to, but he found a way to hide it.

Danny lifts the small moon rock from the black box, his hair becomes staticky, his eyes sparkle.

DAD

Your mother will give you your real birthday gift tomorrow. This is just a good luck charm. Whenever you need a little positive energy, just stick this underneath your pillow before you go to bed at night.

Danny grips the moon rock, pushes his chair back, rises.

DANNY
Thanks, dad!

He bolts out of the kitchen.

INT. DANNY'S HOME, BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Danny places the moon rock gently under his pillow.

DAD (O.S.)
Grab your glove, we're gonna be late!

Danny snags his baseball mitt and runs out of the bedroom.

INT. DANNY'S HOME, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny's baseball mitt is on the floor next to his cleats.

The lights are off, he stirs in bed, feet arching then relaxing, his closed eyelids flinch and his cheeks tense...*he's dreaming.*

EXT. THE MOON - NIGHT

Dressed in his little league uniform, Danny takes batting practice. Dad pitches the ball, Danny smacks it into space.

DANNY
Oh...sorry, dad.

Danny's words echo through the blackness of space.

DAD
Don't be sorry, it was a great hit.

DANNY
But now we can't play anymore.

DAD
You've had a lot of time to play.

DANNY
What happens now?

DAD
Responsibilities, I suppose.

Danny steps toward his dad, falls right into a moon crater.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Paul stands on a step stool, makes macaroni and cheese. Danny tries to help but mostly just watches.

PAUL

Can you get the milk? From the fridge?

Danny scoots over to the fridge, pulls open the heavy door with both hands...inside is a brick wall.

Confused, Danny looks back to Paul.

DANNY

It seems there's no milk.

PAUL

That's okay, we don't need it.

Paul reaches across the pot of boiling water for a stirring spoon, burns his arm near the elbow.

PAUL

Ahhh.

Paul grips his burnt arm, pours the Mac n Cheese box into the boiling water, steps down from the stool, rubs the burn.

DANNY

You need a band aid and some Neosporin.

Eyes welling up, Paul nods.

DANNY

Where does your mom keep them?

PAUL

In the drawer by her bed, but I'm not allowed to go in there when she's not home.

DANNY

I'll go in.

PAUL

Are you sure? It might not be safe in there.

DANNY

How bad could it be?

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny pushes open the door of the master bedroom, takes a quarter step into the darkness, looks back at Paul panicking in the kitchen.

Another quarter step...Danny falls, the bedroom door swings shut behind him.

There is no floor to the master bedroom--just murky water which Danny plunges into--the room is PART-SWAMP.

He gasps as he gets his head above the dark green water, takes stock of the swampy surroundings, aquatic vegetation protruding from the more normal bedroom features.

Danny treads water, wide-eyed look on his face...is it terror he feels or is there something sort of cool about this hybrid environment--*something* splashes nearby.

Danny doggy paddles toward the bed. AN ALLIGATOR EMERGES FROM THE WATER.

DANNY

Paul, help!

Danny panics, swims for the bed as fast as he can but the alligator leaps out of the water and onto the bed, juts its horrifying mouth down toward Danny who doubles back and paddles toward the bedroom door--there's Paul! He stands in the doorway, holds a pool skimmer.

PAUL

Grab onto this.

Danny grabs the net of the pool skimmer, Paul pulls him out of the water.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

They pull the door of the master bedroom shut just before the alligator can reach them. Danny's soaking wet, shivering.

PAUL

You shouldn't have gone in there.

DANNY

I...thought you needed a bandaid.

PAUL

It could just wait til tomorrow.

DANNY
What happens tomorrow?

PAUL
My mom will come home--

RING RING RING.

The boys turn and see that the microwave timer is blaring.

PAUL
The Mac n Cheese must be done.

RING RING RING.

INT. DANNY'S HOME, BEDROOM - DAY

RING RING RING. Danny sits up in bed. His alarm clock blares.

He mutes it. A gust of wind reminds him he left his window open last night. Shivering, he gets out of bed, closes it.

Dad pops his head in the doorway.

DAD
How was last night?

Danny arches an eyebrow.

DANNY
Huh?

DAD
Your sleep, how'd you sleep?

DANNY
Oh uh, good.

DAD
Good. Don't forget to make your bed.

Dad leaves. Danny carelessly makes his bed...until it clicks in his mind and he remembers the moon rock. He lifts his pillow, sure enough, there it is. He grabs it, studies it, clutches it...

DANNY
Huhh.

He puts it back down, gently places the pillow atop it and leaves the room.

EXT. DANNY'S HOME, EDGE OF DRIVEWAY - DAY

Dad's in his robe. Danny's got a backpack on, lunchbox in hand. They wait for the school bus.

DANNY

Dad, tell me again about Great-Grandpa Buzz.

DAD

My Grandpa was a brilliant guy, the smartest I ever knew. And not always in an academic sort of way. You know there are other types of intelligence? They don't let just anyone be the second person to walk on the moon.

The school bus appears in the distance.

DAD

When he got back to the space ship, after his first moon walk, he didn't want the other astronauts to know about the rock that he'd picked up.

DANNY

So, what'd he do with it?

DAD

He hid it under his pillow. And he used to tell us that that was when the *real* adventure began.

The bus pulls up a few feet away, Dad herds Danny towards it.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Danny stumbles down the school bus, struggles to find a place to sit, other children uninterested in making room. He spots Paul sitting alone, eyes the empty two-seater across from his classroom nemesis. They hold eye contact for a curious moment, before Danny claims the empty two-seater, studies the bandage on Paul's arm.

DANNY

Hey Paul...what happen to your arm?

PAUL

It's none of your business.

The bus stops, young HERMAN boards.

DANNY

Did you burn yourself?

Herman takes the aisle seat next to Paul, blocking Danny from continuing the conversation.

HERMAN

What's going on?

PAUL

Not much, Danny's just being a freakazoid again.

Danny shifts his body away from them, looks out the window.

INT. SCHOOL, CLASSROOM - DAY

Danny sits at his desk, looks out the window.

MR. RIDER clicks through slides on a projector, shows a series of animals.

MR. RIDER

Can anybody tell me the genus and family this next creature is from?

Mr. Rider clicks a button on his remote, the slide show jumps to a picture of a large ALLIGATOR.

As if connected by telepathy, Danny and Paul lock eyes from across the room.

INT. SCHOOL, CAFETERIA - DAY

Danny wears a paper crown, sits amidst his PEERS who sing happy birthday.

TEACHERS pass out cupcakes. Paper planes fly across the room.

Icing is devoured, sugar rushes engage.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

The yellow school bus transports Danny and his classmates home.

As it pulls up on Danny's street, he fishes a small box out of his bag, stops in front of Paul's seat on his way to the front of the bus.

DANNY

Here.

He presents Paul the box.

PAUL

What is it?

DANNY

There was one cup cake left, I thought you might want it.

PAUL

Why me?

The BUS DRIVER barks from up front.

BUS DRIVER

Move it or lose it, back there!

Paul takes the cup cake, Danny scurries up the aisle.

INT. DANNY'S HOME, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Danny and Dad sit at the kitchen table. Danny holds a stack of comic books tied off with a bow. Dinner plates have been devoured, only scraps left.

Mom enters the kitchen, hands Danny a gift-wrapped book.

MOM

Here, this one's just from me. A little bonus present.

Danny tears off the gift wrapping, reveals a beautiful leather notebook.

DANNY

Wow.

MOM

It's for when you're feeling sad or angry or confused--

DAD

Or excited. Or happy.

MOM

Or if you just feel like writing.

Danny looks down at the leather notebook.

INT. DANNY'S HOME, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny checks that the moon rock is still beneath his pillow. He takes a seat at his desk, opens the leather notebook.

He picks up a pen, touches it to the page...

DANNY

Hmmm.

He scratches his head with the pen, tries again, writes:

DANNY (V.O.)

My parents got me this nice notebook,
but I guess I'm not sure what I'm
supposed to write about.

He chews on the pen, continues:

DANNY (V.O.)

Today was my birthday. I know that
birthdays are supposed to be fun, but
mine just makes me feel weird.

Danny yawns, continues:

DANNY (V.O.)

I gave Paul an extra cupcake. Maybe he
can just eat that instead of making
Mac n Cheese all by himself.

Danny caps the pen, closes the book, slides into bed. Sleep comes for him quickly...His eyes shoot open. Something's off.

He's sinking. Into his mattress. Like quicksand.

He looks around for something to grab--it's too late, he sinks all the way through the mattress, falls...

INT. POT OF MAC N CHEESE - MOMENTS LATER

Danny lands on a giant piece of Mac n Cheese, tries to balance himself, slips right off and lands on another piece.

DANNY

Oh man, oh man, oh man. Help!

The pot of Mac n Cheese whirlpools, Danny spins around the inside like a theme park ride. He looks up, sees a giant Paul stirring the pot with a wooden ladle.

DANNY

It's just a dream, it's just a dream,
it's just a dream.

The ladle flies by--Danny grabs onto it!

DANNY

C'mon, Danny. It's just a dream. This
is where the real adventure begins!

Danny climbs up the giant wooden ladle--

INT. DANNY'S HOME, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Danny climbs up and out of the drain of the kitchen sink. His
parents sit at the kitchen table, oblivious to his emergence.

MOM

Maybe we should pull him out.

DAD

To what end?

MOM

There are schools for kids like him.

DAD

Are we so certain he has learning
issues? Maybe he just doesn't care.

DANNY

No no, I care. I care! Guys, don't
make me switch schools, please! Mom?
Dad? Please!

Danny frantically climbs out of the sink, falls to the floor.
When he clambers to his feet the kitchen is empty.

DANNY

Mom? Dad?

Danny scurries through the house looking for them.

INT. DANNY'S HOME, PARENT'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Danny bursts into his parent's bedroom--it's empty.

Light peaks out from the bottom of the closet, he slides open
the mirrored door, finds a dozen dry cleaning bags hanging in
a row.

Danny looks closer at the bags, sees that within the plastic wrap are two-dimensional copies of **himself and his father**--as if his mother ordered backups from the dry cleaners.

DANNY

What the...

Danny rips open the plastic--

MOM

You weren't supposed to see this.

Mom appears behind Danny, pushes him into the closet and slides the door closed. Danny falls--

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

Dad reaches out, grabs Danny. Dad's in a harness, climbing the side of a mountain. He hoists Danny safely onto a perch.

DAD

Looks like you didn't quite get that harness right.

DANNY

Why didn't you do it for me?

DAD

If I do everything for you, how will you learn?

DANNY

I don't think I'm ready.

DAD

You won't always feel ready. Sometimes you just have to take a chance.

Dad continues to climb. Danny looks up the mountain, reaches out to grab some rock, hoist himself up...but he falls--

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Danny splashes down into the swampy green waters of Paul's parents' bedroom. He emerges from the water coughing, splashing, treading, looks for something to grab ahold of...the bed, he pulls at the comforter, climbs up onto the bed--THE ALLIGATOR IS THERE WAITING FOR HIM.

DANNY

Ahhh!

INT. DANNY'S HOME, BEDROOM - DAY

Danny explodes awake in bed.

DANNY

Ahhhh!!!!

It was all a dream. He tries to control his breathing, gets up, lumbers into the bathroom.

INT. DANNY'S HOME, BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Danny splashes water on his face. His breathing normalizes.

MOM (O.S.)

I hope you're not still sleeping!
You're gonna miss the bus.

Danny leans his head against the bathroom mirror.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Danny leans his head against the window. His eyes flutter, on the verge of falling asleep...until the school bus rolls over a pothole and he bumps his head against the glass.

DANNY

Ow.

He rubs his head--realizes Paul is now sitting next to him.

PAUL

Your grandpa really Buzz Aldrin?

DANNY

Great-grandpa, yeah.

PAUL

That's pretty cool.

INT. SCHOOL, CLASSROOM - DAY

Danny watches Mr. Rider click through animal slides on the projector, his eyes flutter, strain to stay open.

MR. RIDER

The African Forest Elephant, the Black Rhino, the Cross River Gorilla. They're all critically endangered. More common animals too, like the Blue Whale and Bluefin Tuna--

Herman shoots his hand up, doesn't wait to be called on.

HERMAN

Mr. Rider, you taught us that evolution is all about survival of the fittest.

MR. RIDER

I'm glad you were paying attention, Herman.

HERMAN

Well, if the animals you're showing us on these slides are going extinct, why should human beings care? Isn't that just part of evolution?

CHILDREN SNICKER.

MR. RIDER

Alright, alright now. Putting aside for a moment that many--if not all--of these creatures are on the verge of extinction simply because of their interaction with human civilization, be it poaching or overconsumption what have you--I believe we should intervene because as the dominant species on the planet, we have a calling to do better. In simplest terms, Herman, we should help because we can.

The weight of Danny's eyelids increase exponentially...

BUZZ

Guy makes an interesting point.

Danny's eyes pop open.

BUZZ ALDRIN sits at the desk next to him, his space suit barely fits in the chair.

DANNY

Woh, what are you doing here?

BUZZ

What do you *think* I'm doing here? Man, he's pretty boring, isn't he?

DANNY

He's okay. I don't think the subject matter does him much justice.

BUZZ

Science? You kidding? Science is great! I couldn't have gone to the moon if it wasn't for science.

DANNY

That's what my dad says.

BUZZ

Your dad went to the moon?

DANNY

No--

BUZZ

Hey, which one's Paul?

DANNY

Hold on...am I dreaming?

BUZZ

What gave it away?

DANNY

Well, you're--

BUZZ

Don't say it.

DANNY

Dead.

BUZZ

You said it. Did you have to say it?

DANNY

Sorry grandpa.

BUZZ

For the love of outer space and all things molecular, would you call me Buzz please?

DANNY

Sure thing, Buzz.

BUZZ

So, how was last night? Pretty intense wasn't it?

DANNY

You know about last night?

BUZZ

It was *my* moon rock, remember...

DANNY

The moon rock. Right.

BUZZ

I mean, you didn't think you started traveling through dreams cause of *puberty*, did you?

DANNY

No, but...what about the journal? Was that you too?

BUZZ

Believe it or not, kid, there aren't any journals on the moon...just rocks.

DANNY

Before I went to bed, I wrote about my parents. And then I wrote about Paul. And then I visited them in my dreams, except that...I think it was actually *their dreams*...it was almost like--

BUZZ

If you write it, they will come.

DANNY

But that's crazy. Isn't it?

BUZZ

Any crazier than talking to your long-dead great-grandpa spaceman in science class?

DANNY

What?

MR. RIDER

Danny? Danny? Danny?

Danny's eyes snap open--Buzz is gone.

Mr. Rider's projector shows a new foreign animal.

DANNY

Uhhhhh.

MR. RIDER

Please join us on planet earth, Danny.
And maybe try to get some sleep
tonight.

THE BELL RINGS, Danny's classmates pack up their desks.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

A single-file line of students walks onto the school bus,
Danny's at the back.

As he enters, he scans the bus for a place to sit, spots Paul
in a window seat halfway toward the back of the bus.

Danny approaches slowly, like Paul's a deer he doesn't want
to scare away...

HERMAN

Move it, Freakazoid.

Herman storms the bus, pushes Danny out of the way, claims
the aisle seat next to Paul.

Danny finds an empty two-seater near the back, slides in
toward the window, watches the ground move outside the glass
as the buss rolls forward.

BUZZ

That kid's got some bad manners.

Danny saw Buzz's reflection in the window, so he's not
surprised when he turns his head and finds the spaceman in
the aisle seat next to him.

DANNY

Yeah, he's a jerk.

BUZZ

He's probably just self conscious.

DANNY

That's what my dad says...hey, is that
spacesuit comfortable?

BUZZ

Not exactly, bit I can pee in it if I have to go.

DANNY

Wait a second--I'm sleeping again, aren't I?

BUZZ

It would appear so, young explorer. Car rides'll do that to ya...with the motion-sensitive neurons and what not.

DANNY

Sure.

BUZZ

Hey, what's gotcha down? Seems to me you've got a world of adventure to look forward.

DANNY

Yeah, that's exciting and all, great-grandpa Buzz. I'm just not sure what to do with it. How can I help someone if I only talk to them in their dreams?

The bus rolls over a pothole, Danny bumps his head against the window, wakes up--Buzz is gone--his peers stare at him from their seats.

HERMAN

Look at that, the Freakazoid was talking in sleep again!

CHILDREN SNICKER AND LAUGH, Paul doesn't participate.

INT. DANNY'S HOME, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Danny and his parents sit at the kitchen table. It's Chicken Francese and mashed potatoes night.

MOM

So, Eve's mother tells me you guys are learning about endangered species in science class.

Danny nods, stuffs a large spoonful of mashed potatoes into his mouth.

DAD

Endangered species, wow. That's fascinating stuff. You know I just saw something on the news about the Javan Rhinos. Did you know--

DANNY

Yep, we learned about them. They're from an island called Java--it's in Indonesia--and their population is becoming smaller and smaller.

MOM

Why is that?

DANNY

Well, hunting is an issue. I guess they call it poaching, cause it's illegal. But also Mr. Rider says their habitat is dwindling.

DAD

Wow.

DANNY

Yeah, and I guess there's this national park there that's trying to save the Javan Rhinos. Mr. Rider says that humans have the responsibility to help, because we can.

DAD

Sounds like that Mr. Rider is a smart guy.

DANNY

Yeah but what about like, survival of the fittest and all that?

DAD

Natural Selection.

DANNY

Yeah, Charles Darwin.

Mom smiles.

DAD

Well, there's this thing called biodiversity.

DANNY
What's that?

DAD
Your class has learned about the food chain?

DANNY
Yeah, and how the Earth is an ecosystem.

DAD
Right, well animals are the building blocks of that ecosystem. And when they start to disappear, or go *extinct*, the system loses balance.

Danny tries to hide the confused look on his face.

DANNY
Oh.

Mom puts a hand on his shoulder.

MOM
It's also important to help *because we can*. Your teacher's right. Sometimes that's all the reason you need.

DAD
Helping is what makes us human.

Danny thinks about that, shovels some more mashed potatoes into his mouth.

INT. DANNY'S HOME, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny lays in bed, stares at the ceiling. Dad pops his head into the room.

DAD
Hey kiddo.

DANNY
Hey dad.

DAD
Just wanted to tell you that I'm proud of you and that you don't need to worry so much about doing the right thing.

DANNY

I don't?

DAD

No. That's why it's the right thing...it just comes natural.

Dad leaves, closes the door, darkness covers the room.

Danny tosses and turns, can't get comfortable. He rolls to the right, almost hits his head against the wall, rolls back left, gets tangled in his blanket and sheets, rolls harder to untangle himself, falls right off the bed--

EXT. OUTER SPACE - DAY

Trillions of white dots light up an ocean of blackness.

A SPACEMAN floats across it all, the lack of gravity pulling him from a monstrous tangle of sheets and blankets.

It's Danny, wide eyes shining through his spacesuit visor.

He floats across the great black ocean until he reaches a satellite, grabs ahold of the rigid metal, climbs inside.

INT. SATELLITE - MOMENTS LATER

The inside of the satellite looks like the coolest clubhouse a kid could ask for--miniature robots, snacks and soft drinks, video game consoles...Danny floats through it all.

Until he doesn't. He falls...the whole satellite falls.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Danny splashes down in Paul's kitchen, now a flooded swamp much like the master bedroom was. Aquatic vegetation protrudes from the more normal apartment features.

Danny emerges from the swampy waters, coughing.

Paul pops out, a small axe in his left hand. He raises his right index finger to his lips, whispers--

PAUL

Shhhh, there's a poacher.

Paul submerges so that his nose and eyes are just above the surface of the water. Danny follows suit. Paul leads them, wading out of the kitchen and into the living room.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A TOUCAN sits atop a shelf, gawking at the boys. The couch cushions sit just above the swampy water, lily pads have replaced the coffee table.

THRASHING SOUNDS from the bedroom cause the boys to pause in their tracks, exchange a worried glance.

Paul carries on, Danny hesitates.

DANNY

Wait, Paul. We already got the bandaid. We don't need to go in there.

PAUL

I figured it out.

Danny trudges on through the swampy waters.

DANNY

Figured what out?

PAUL

It needs our help.

They reach the door of the master bedroom.

DANNY

What does?

AN ARROW FLIES THROUGH THE AIR, BURROWS INTO THE BEDROOM DOOR, RIGHT BETWEEN DANNY AND PAUL!

PAUL

He's here.

They look back--Mr. Rider is dressed as a poacher, camouflage pants, tan vest, cowboy hat, and a crossbow.

DANNY

What is Mr. Rider doing here?

Mr. Rider loads another arrow into his crossbow.

PAUL

Come on!

Paul pushes open the door to the master bedroom, pulls Danny inside--

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The alligator that menaced them earlier is now caught in a trap over the bed, its limbs and tale tangled in a net, its mouth thrashing around in terror.

PAUL
Help me, quick.

Danny and Paul push the bedroom door closed, Paul locks it.

DANNY
Why's he after us?

PAUL
He doesn't want us to get to that
before him.

Paul points his axe at the tangled alligator.

Mr. Rider pounds on the door from the other side, attempts to bust in.

DANNY
Wait, I don't understand.

Paul approaches the alligator, axe out in front of him.

DANNY
Paul...

Paul raises the axe, swings down--

DANNY
Paul!

Paul slices the net, releases the alligator which dances out of its trap and into the water.

Mr. Rider kicks the bedroom door in.

The alligator leaps through the doorway.

MR. RIDER
Uh oh--

The swamp water whirlpools, Danny gets caught in the current, Paul climbs up onto the bed.

Danny reaches out for Paul's hand, he's too far.

PAUL
I figured it out, Danny.

DANNY
What did you figure out?

PAUL
That I don't need to be afraid.
Thanks.

Danny gets sucked down into the whirlpool--

INT. DANNY'S HOME, BEDROOM - DAY

Danny falls off his bed in a tangle of blankets and sheets.
His ALARM BLARES. Morning light shines through the blinds.

DANNY
What the--

Dad pops his head in the doorway.

DAD
What's going on, did you fall off the
bed?

DANNY
Uhhh, I guess so.

DAD
Scary dream?

DANNY
A little. But I don't think I need to
be afraid.

DAD
You're wise beyond your years, son.

Dad's head disappears behind the door.

Danny rises, checks the status of the moon rock--still safe
under his pillow.

INT. DANNY'S HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

Danny takes a bite out of his waffle.

DANNY
Hey mom--

MOM
Finishing chewing, hun.

Danny chews fast like he might forget what he wants to say, swallows hard.

DANNY
Mom--

He almost chokes, gulps down some orange juice.

MOM
Yes?

DANNY
My classmate, his name is Paul, I think he's home alone a lot after school.

MOM
Is that so?

DANNY
I think. And I was also thinking, maybe we can invite him over for dinner a few nights a week? So he doesn't have to be alone.

MOM
How did I raise the sweetest boy? I'll call his mother.

INT. SCHOOL, CLASSROOM - DAY

Danny stands in front of his fifth grade classroom. He's edging toward confidence, feeling out what life might be like outside his shell.

He stands in front of an easel with a collage of endangered animals pasted together.

DANNY
And while the current situation with the climate is troubling not just for us people, but the animals too, there is reason for hope.

HERMAN
Cause you might stop talking soon?

THE CLASS SNICKERS.

PAUL
Shut up and let him finish.

MR. RIDER
Paul, please don't say shut up.
Herman, please shut up.

MORE SNICKERS.

MR. RIDER
Danny, continue.

DANNY
Uh, um...right, there is reason for hope. The wild panda for instance, has recently been upgraded from endangered to just vulnerable.

MR. RIDER
And how did that happen, Danny?

DANNY
Human intervention.

MR. RIDER
In other words...

DANNY
We decided to help, and now there's more pandas, and they might not become extinct.

INT. SCHOOL, HALLWAY - DAY

Danny waits outside his classroom, rolled up collage in hand.
Paul emerges, trailed by Herman.

DANNY
Uh, hey Paul.

PAUL
What's up?

DANNY
I-I was thinking that you can come over for dinner tonight. You know, if you wanted. And...you know, some other nights too. If you wanted.

Herman throws a jealous arm around Paul.

HERMAN

He's OBVIOUSLY coming to dinner at *my* house from now on. Are parents already talked about it. Let's get out of here, Paul.

They walk away.

HERMAN

This is gonna be so sick, dude.

Paul looks back at Danny.

EXT. THE MOON - NIGHT

Danny swings incredibly slowly on a swing set.

He looks up toward the ground...he's upside down, the swing's chain completely extended upward, barely cutting through the blackness and the lack of gravity.

BUZZ

Pretty scary stuff with that poacher last night.

Danny glances over at the other swing, now occupied by Buzz.

DANNY

Oh, hey Buzz.

BUZZ

Well gee, don't be so excited to see me.

DANNY

No offense or anything, it's just...I like to be alone up here is all.

BUZZ

Alright young traveler, how about I pretend that didn't absolutely just *crush* my feelings and you can pretend like you didn't summon me here cause you wanted to chat.

DANNY

I don't understand, Grandpa Buzz--

BUZZ

Just Buzz.

DANNY

I helped. Or at least, I tried to.
Just because. Because I had the
opportunity to, like the pandas--

BUZZ

Pandas?

DANNY

And Paul didn't even want it.

BUZZ

Just because he didn't say thank you,
doesn't mean he wasn't grateful. And
just because he's not your new best
friend, doesn't mean helping me him
wasn't the right thing to do.

DANNY

I know.

BUZZ

I know you know. Cause you're a smart
guy, or I wouldn't have left you my
moon rock.

DANNY

But you didn't leave me your moon
rock. You left it with my dad. You
never even met me--

BUZZ

Sure I did! I met you in my dreams.

DANNY

Really?

BUZZ

What do you think?

DANNY

I think *your* thoughts are *my* thoughts.
I think I'm talking to myself right
now. On the moon. In my dreams.

BUZZ

Yeah but it sure helps, though.
Doesn't it? Hey, you pack your
parachute?

DANNY

What?

Still upside down on the swing, Danny looks up at the surface of the moon. Buzz jumps, floats to the top of the swing set, detaches the chain, waves at Danny.

BUZZ

Now the real adventure begins.

Danny floats and summersaults through the blackness of space, upside down becomes right side up becomes upside down...directions lose meaning...Danny shuts his eyes.

EXT. THE SKY - DAY

Danny opens his eyes. He calmly parachutes through the sky.

Below him is DREAM CITY. Beautiful glass skyscrapers tower over an urban oasis. It's like a pop art painting of NYC meets Willy Wonka's factory...the possibilities are endless.

Danny smiles wide.

THE END.