

"FREE"

Written By

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FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN BACKYARD - NIGHT

Stars glow against the dark sky.

ROBERT, 18, wearing a Santa Clara Science High School sweatshirt, sits against a tree, stares up at the stars.

A book about "QUANTUM MECHANICS" lies open next to him.

Robert's watch beeps, marking a new hour.

He looks down at his watch, thinks for a moment, then rips it off his wrist and hurls it toward the back of the yard.

TIMMY, 12, Robert's younger brother, approaches him. A small cross dangles from around his neck.

Robert points to a star glowing brightly out on its own.

ROBERT

See that star there?

Timmy cranes his head to see it.

ROBERT

That star could already be dead,
but it would take years before we'd
see it disappear.

TIMMY

Mom needs help catching the bird.

ROBERT

It escaped again?

TIMMY

Yeah. She's in dad's office.

INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

MOM, 40's, has the bird cornered against the wall. One hand holds the open cage, the other guides the bird back into it.

Robert enters.

MOM

I got him.

Mom sets the cage back down on its stand next to a dry-erase board covered with algorithms and equations.

ROBERT
Timmy could've helped you with
this. You didn't need me.

MOM
I know. I wanted you to help me.

ROBERT
He's gonna have to get used to
being the man of the house now.

TIMMY (O.S.)
I will.

Timmy stands at the doorway.

TIMMY
(to Robert)
Are you coming with us to church?

ROBERT
No, I'm gonna stay here and work.

MOM
I thought we could visit your
father afterward and say goodbye.

TIMMY
You should come with us.

ROBERT
Maybe. I'll think about it.

TIMMY
That means no.

INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT - LATER

Robert writes long equations on the dry-erase board.

Timmy sits in his dad's chair with books in front of him.

TIMMY
What time are you leaving tomorrow?

ROBERT
Early. Probably around seven.

TIMMY
How long will you be gone for?

ROBERT
At least four years.

TIMMY
Are you scared?

ROBERT
Not anymore.

Timmy opens a book about time-travel, leafs through it.

TIMMY
You really think time-travel to the
past will ever happen?

ROBERT
Theoretically. "Moore's Law" says
technology makes advances every
eighteen months or so.

TIMMY
Won't that take-

ROBERT
-Thousands of years, I know.

TIMMY
Then why even bother?

ROBERT
I want to at least say I tried.

TIMMY
I don't get it.

ROBERT
You wouldn't want a chance to go
back and right all your wrongs?

TIMMY
I try to do that now.

ROBERT
You wouldn't want to see dad again?

TIMMY
I will one day. In heaven.

Robert turns away, back to his algorithms.

ROBERT
That's as good a theory as any, I
guess.

INT. CAR (PARKED) - NEXT MORNING

The car idles in the driveway as Robert, wearing a Stanford University sweatshirt, sits in the passenger-seat with Timmy in the backseat.

TIMMY

If "Moore's Law" works, wouldn't there be people here now from the future?

ROBERT

Ah, the Fermi Paradox. I've thought about that.

Timmy awaits the answer.

ROBERT

(shrugs nonchalantly)
Maybe the world ends before we reach the technology needed.

TIMMY

You're never going to live here again, are you?

ROBERT

I don't know.

TIMMY

You know everything else, but you don't know that?

ROBERT

Everything's going to be so different when I come back-

TIMMY

It means no.

Timmy removes the cross around his neck, hands it to Robert, who reluctantly accepts it.

Mom exits the house and sits in the driver-seat. She backs the car out of the driveway.

INT. CAR - THAT NIGHT

Mom, teary-eyed, pulls into the driveway with Timmy, now wearing his brother's Stanford University sweatshirt, sitting in the passenger-seat.

Robert is not in the car.

The news plays on the radio:

RADIO BROADCASTER (V.O.)
...In local news, eighteen year-old
Robert McKenna began his ten-year
prison sentence today.

INT. ROBERT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The Santa Clara Science High School sweatshirt lies on the
bed, eventually slides off to the floor.

RADIO BROADCASTER (V.O.)
The national merit scholar plead
guilty last month to three counts
of involuntary manslaughter.

INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Timmy opens the door to the bird-cage, releases the bird to
fly around the room.

RADIO BROADCASTER (V.O.)
He will be eligible for parole
after four years.

EXT. SUBURBAN BACKYARD - NIGHT

Timmy walks around aimlessly.

A beep sounds from a wristwatch.

RADIO BROADCASTER (V.O.)
Mr. McKenna was the cause of a
motor-vehicle accident that claimed
three lives...

Timmy searches, finds the watch in the grass.

The watch has stopped ticking.

Timmy shakes it and the watch comes to life.

He fastens it to his wrist, then walks toward the tree, sees
the "QUANTUM MECHANICS" book on the ground.

INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Mom enters, sees the open, empty bird-cage.

As she searches throughout the room, she sees a picture frame lying face down on the desk. She picks it up.

It's a photo of Robert and his DAD at Stanford University.

RADIO BROADCASTER (V.O.)
...including the death of his
father, Stanford University
Professor, Robert McKenna, Sr.

The bird flies by Mom, lands on the window sill.

She thinks for a moment...

...walks to the window and opens it, releasing the bird to the night.

As Mom closes the window, she sees outside:

EXT. SUBURBAN BACKYARD - NIGHT

The bird flies by Timmy, who sits against a tree, staring up at the night's stars.

One star stands off on its own, shining bright, before it starts to slowly-

FADE OUT.