

Defying Gravity

Before walking into class 208, Katie Goodman took a violent sip of black coffee and whispered under her breath one simple word, “smile.” She put on a forced and weary smile as she strode through the threshold.

There was a time when she was high-spirited, full of fire and passion for guiding children. She made it her mission as a teacher to make a difference in their lives. She was one of the few children who never gave up on their dreams to become someone like their earliest role models; she recognized early on that teaching was her true calling. Lately, those firm hands that used to hold chalk with the utmost vigor now just seem unwilling and exhausted.

Students stared at Ms. Goodman silently, and obediently followed their pokerfaced History teacher’s lifeless instructions. Taylor was staring out the dusty window at the cloudy sky when Sam nudged him on the arms signaling for him to pass a note across the room. A large army of dark clouds was creeping in closer and closer. Taylor passed on the note and continued observing the changes in the sky.

Just as Ms. Goodman finished the last paragraph on the Industrial Revolution, the bell rang. Students tumultuously rushed out of the

classroom, the boys headed straight for the basketball court; and the girls strolled in pairs towards the benches under the old oak tree. Taylor stayed glued to his seat as his mind went idly traveling. Before he knew it, everyone else left the classroom except for Ms. Goodman and him. In came sounds of cheerful shouts of vigorous children and sounds of the wind blowing through maple leaves that were unhurriedly changing their color. Ms. Goodman took another sip out of her mug before she began to pick up the textbook and homework assignments. Books in hands, Ms. Goodman noticed the young man with a blank expression who was sitting in the back of the room. She walked towards him, passing the desks and chairs one by one, while Taylor's eyes unremittingly remained fixed to a point in the sky.

She took a seat beside Taylor, and looked in the direction he was facing. "Um.... Hey there. What are you looking at?" "Hi, Ms. Goodman," said Taylor as he looked down arching his eyebrows. He looked up again almost bursting out asking, "Why can't humans fly!" Ms. Goodman was caught in surprise and frankly replied, "That's because of gravity, Taylor. Gravity." "Yes, Ma'am..." said Taylor with a disappointed tone in his voice, "but 'em folks in the old days, they created invention after invention, and what once was never thought of before turned into impossible, then turned from impossible to something as true as can be. They say nothing is impossible. So I reckon we can defy gravity as well, right ma'am?" Ms. Goodman felt amused by a kid so naive, and she patiently told Taylor about the breakthrough made by the Wright brothers nearly a hundred years ago — the reason we have aircrafts nowadays. "Geniuses. In times

of change, geniuses appear. Thanks to their efforts, the impossible eventually become possible,” said Ms. Goodman. Taylor’s eyes lit up in enlightenment. “Ma’am, you reckon I can be one of them geniuses someday?” Ms. Goodman, showing faith and confidence in her student, nodded lightheartedly and assured him of that. Taylor bounced up from his seat bidding farewell to his teacher, and Ms. Goodman went home feeling proud of herself. She has made a difference today.

She walked home in lighter cheerier steps than before, and after a soothing hot bath, she switched the channel to MTV and read a book called *Number 42*. That night, she went to sleep in a smile that widely stretched across her face. She felt alive again.

The next morning she woke up feeling sunrays dancing on the surface of her face. Before walking into class 208, she whispered under her breath, “Katie Goodman, welcome back.” She inhaled deeply and tasted the utmost sweetness in the air. She gracefully swayed through the threshold and greeted the class, “Good morning to you all, isn’t it a perfect day to dive into the fascinating world of modern history?” Delighted and radiant, she was not the old Ms. Goodman students knew anymore. As she looked up from her book, she couldn’t help but notice an odd contrast between her and the students. Every single child in the classroom was expressionless, lifeless even, and the crowded classroom had all but one seat left untaken.

Next week, as the school bell rung, a young substitute teacher introduced himself to the class. “Hello, since Ms. Goodman is unwell at the moment, I will be filling in as your new history teacher until the school can find a new one for you kids.” One of the children asked what happened to Ms. Goodman, but the substitute teacher would not tell. Even though he knew clearly what became of poor Ms. Goodman after school officials informed her of the news about the boy in 208 who attempted to defy gravity, but failed.