

Sugars

written by

Rob Herzog

Chicago, Illinois
robherzog@hotmail.com

FADE IN:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Three boys fidget/goof off/await the start of detention.

Thick-knuckled EDGAR, 15, sparks up a disposable lighter and dangles his detention slip over its flame.

The slip turns yellow-brown from the heat.

Two other boys watch: long-limbed ANTHONY, 16, and JEREMIAH, 15, a sweet-faced kid who sketches zombies in his notebook.

His zombies have bodies like linguine noodles.

ANTHONY
Ain't no one comin'?

The desk for the teacher/detention moderator is empty.

JEREMIAH
Someone might.

ANTHONY
Miss What's-Her-Name quit, so ain't gonna be her.

JEREMIAH
Well, they can't leave Edgar all to his-self 'cause he'll torch the whole damn school.

EDGAR
(blows out his lighter)
You makin' a joke of me?

JEREMIAH
(instantly defensive)
Naw. No. Not me.

Edgar snatches Jeremiah's notebook.

EDGAR
Maybe I'll torch this...

JEREMIAH
Awww...Naw. Please. Those are my best ones.

Edgar re-flicks his lighter and thrusts Jeremiah's notebook close to the flame. The zombies are inches away from burning.

The classroom door swings open...

Into the room shuffles ORV O'DELL, 79. He's ancient, slow, and pink-faced. His brown suit is straight out of 1986. He has a head of thick, white hair and an enthusiastic grin.

Orv lugs an overstuffed briefcase. Its weight throws him slightly off balance.

It takes him forever to move from the door to the desk.

Anthony snickers. Edgar whoops.

Orv writes his name on the blackboard in shaky script. He faces the trio of detention students and smiles.

ORV
Boys, I'm Orv O'Dell.

A silent moment passes and then the kids laugh.

ANTHONY
Orv-oh-old?

ORV
I'm the substitute detention
moderator. It's my first day.

EDGAR
(under his breath)
And your last...

Orv's smile endures--easy and genuine. He holds up his case.

ORV
You'll never guess what I brought
with me today.

ANTHONY
Old man stank.

Orv frees the case latch and presents the contents: dozens of sandwich bags stuffed with white powder.

Amusement slowly turns to awe: the old man seems to have a shitload of drugs.

ORV
(grabs one of the bags)
I'd like to talk with you this
afternoon about this.

EDGAR
Co-caine!

Orv opens the bag and tastes the contents.

ORV

It's sugar.

Bewilderment from the boys.

ORV

I retired from the sugar industry six months ago. I've brought for you several of my old samples: granulated white sugar, brown sugar...raw, superfine, powdered, coarse, cubes, baker's special...I have 40 years of experience with these products.

Orv moves slowly in front of the desk.

ORV

Who wants to try some?

All three boys shout out for a taste. Orv inches closer to them and offers the samples in his case.

Edgar is first. He scoops an excessive amount from one of the baggies. The other two boys take smaller pinches.

ORV

Did you know that there are two sources of sugar: sugar cane and sugar beet?

He sets the case down on the desk and beckons the boys to try more. They oblige, sampling greedily from the bags.

Edgar licks a mound of sugar straight from his palm.

Jeremiah takes advantage of the distraction by swiping his notebook off of Edgar's desk. His zombie drawings are safe.

ORV

Here's another sugar fact for you: Glucose is the simplest form of sugar with a chemical formula of $C_6H_{12}O_6$. Then there is sucrose, a disaccharide.

Jeremiah frowns.

JEREMIAH

Uh, we aren't supposed to be learning stuff in detention, Mr. Oh-Mello. We usually just sit around an' look at our phones.

ORV

Sitting is no good. After I retired, I sat in an empty house and felt sorry for myself. Then I decided to get active again. I volunteered my services to your school as a substitute and a tutor.

(points at Jeremiah)

Now, let's review. The chemical formula for glucose is C6 H2 O6.

JEREMIAH

C6 H2 O6.

ORV

Good work. You're learning.

ANTHONY

(smirking, sarcastic)

Did you invent sugar, Mr. Old-Dell?

ORV

Goodness, no. Sugar is as old as civilization itself. Our ancient ancestors would chew the bitter stalks of sugar cane to get to the sweetness inside.

JEREMIAH

Are you a mad scientist?

ORV

Well, I'm not mad, but I am a scientist. My degrees are in business and chemistry.

JEREMIAH

(blurts)

Do you think a zombie apocalypse could ever really happen?

Edgar and Anthony laugh at the absurd question, but Jeremiah isn't joking around. His sweet face shows no sign of guile.

ORV

Pardon me?

JEREMIAH

Can the dead come to life like they do in the movies and video games?

ORV

No. They cannot.

(he smiles)

But sugar never spoils or rots. It might clump or lose its color, but it will never truly go bad.

Jeremiah's eyes widen. He scrawls the words "Sugar Zombies!" in his notebook.

Orv paces slowly as he continues his lecture.

ORV

The refining process for sugar is complex and fascinating. First of all, the crystals must be separated from the syrup via centrifuge. Non-sugars are removed, followed by boiling and recovery.

Orv lumbers close to Edgar's seat, and Edgar extends one leg in an attempt to trip the old man.

At the last second, however, he pulls his foot back.

ORV

Making sugar is messy--That's what I want you to know. To get to the good stuff, you sometimes have to crawl through the muck.

Edgar extends his leg a second time in Orv's path. Once more, he narrowly pulls it away before the old man can trip. It's a dangerous game of chicken.

Orv has no clue.

JEREMIAH

Are you going to bring sugar to detention every day?

ORV

Yes. Absolutely. Indeed.

JEREMIAH

Then I'm going to get a detention every day from now on.

Orv smiles at Jeremiah, and then he looks down. He struggles for something to say. Finally...

ORV

I can't tell you how much this
means to me to be here with you.

He pulls a small photograph from his suit pocket--a woman.

ORV

My wife...

His voice catches.

ORV

...she would have been so proud.

JEREMIAH

Are you okay, Mr. O?

Orv nods. He grips the photograph tightly.

Jeremiah's soulful eyes connect with the old man. He seems to register that Orv is having an emotional moment.

And then...POW! A bag of sugar flies directly into Jeremiah's face.

White powder covers him. He gasps for breath. His eyes widen with surprise.

Edgar laughs. He holds two sugar bags in his hand--both taken from Orv's case. He flings one of them at Anthony.

Orv stumbles a bit in surprise. He inadvertently knocks his case of sugar to the floor.

The boys look at the fallen case for a second--and then all hell breaks loose.

Edgar takes three bags and flings them straight up into the air. Anthony follows suit, launching two more bags.

Soon the entire room is raining sugar. The boys toss more and more of it into the air. Even Jeremiah throws a few handfuls.

Powders and crystals are everywhere. Brown sugar. Raw sugar. White sugars. Sweeteners.

The effect is somewhat like a fresh snowfall. This is what it must be like to be in a snow globe. It's oddly beautiful.

The kids laugh and dance amid the falling sugar. The entire world seems to slow down in the sweet, beautiful drift.

Orv looks on. He's confused at first, but then he looks with a bit of wonder at the unusual spectacle.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Edgar runs out of the detention room. He is covered in the contents of Orv's case. He whoops and rushes down the hallway until he is out of sight.

Anthony comes out next. He licks the sugar off his lips as he strides off.

Jeremiah leaves the room last. He clutches his drawings of zombies. The term "sugar zombies" is prominently scrawled in his book.

He takes a few steps and then turns back to the detention room.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Orv sits at the desk clutching the photo of his wife. His sugar-covered suit coat is almost as white as his hair.

Jeremiah picks Orv's empty case off the floor and puts it gently on the desk.

He tries to dust off some of the excess sugar, but it is futile.

JEREMIAH

You okay, Mr. O?

Orv looks Jeremiah straight in the eye and nods.

JEREMIAH

You think we can do this again tomorrow?

Orv brushes some sugar off of his shoulder. He takes a long time to answer.

ORV

I'll be back tomorrow, but...

He takes a pinch of sugar and tosses it into the air.

ORV

...I'll bring less sugar and more brooms.

FADE OUT:

THE END.