
Martian Kid

I was a typical outsider for a twelve-year-old. I had those big floppy ears that looked more like fish fins sticking out of my head than ears. I was shorter than everyone else in my class. I mean really short, so much even my parents thought it was a medical condition. Both my parents are tall. Taller than average actually. In fact, the whole family was tall. It always makes them tease me about not knowing where I came from. It's one of those jokes, as they say, that are 'too true to be good.'

Not to mention I still have my little round baby nose. My school mates have a habit of pushing it like it was some kind of soft button. It doesn't help that I always wear several layers of clothing. That's because I'm always cold. Is it my fault I feel the cold more than anyone else?

My dad is always yelling at me to take off my coat indoors or to take off my hat. He often complains to me that if I didn't spend so much time outside, I wouldn't be so cold all the time. My psychologist says I wear hats to help hide my ears. What he doesn't understand is I wear the hats to keep my big ears from getting frostbite. Still outside is my favorite place to be. The other children don't go outside much, so it's a safe place to be. Besides I love to look at the stars. Once I spent an entire day looking at a brand-new plant. I loved the little struggling green thing. Its tiny leaves, the way it bent over when the wind blew and popped back up again. In some ways I wished I could be more like that one plant. But we actually had a lot in common already. It was green where green wasn't supposed to be. It liked being outside ... even when it would be more protected and warmer inside. We were both millions and millions of miles away from the warmth of the sun.

The other thing my folks don't like too much is that I change my clothes a lot. Because I get so cold all the time, my mother put an extra heater in my room. I like to tuck my undershirts in the space behind the heater. That way they are nice and warm to put on. I take off the cold one I am wearing and put it by the heater and put the warm one on. My father is always encouraging me to stay in my room by the heater if I feel so cold. He especially likes to say that when he sees me heading outside.

'Every other kid is inside playing games,' he'd say, 'You can't drag them away when it is mealtime, but this one,' he'd shake his head, 'You can get him to stay by a game machine.'

My parents, of course, are disappointed with me. Not because I didn't study hard ... well, OK, my dad thinks I should study harder and apply myself more. That doesn't mesh well with the other kids my age who claim I spend way too much time reading books. Don't get me wrong, my parents are very understanding. Except when I get to the part when I tell people I am from another planet. I am the only survivor of a family based expedition that crashed landed here. My mother is fond of explaining to me this is where I belong. 'Home,' my mother always tells me, 'is where people care about you and take care of you.' My father is always complaining, when I say I'm from another world. 'Isn't it comfortable here,' he'd say? He always wants me to look around me, asking, 'see anybody who is better off?' He was also very fond of explaining to me that there was no life on other planets and how everyone knew this. He once took me to a museum and showed me the displays about other worlds. At the station on Venus

he showed me the data on atmospheric pressure and said, 'See on that world the air would squash you like a bug.'

When I explained I still expected others to come after me to affect a rescue, that makes my mother cry. Which, of course, makes my father mad I made mother cry. It's not personal. It's not that I don't like my family, I have to face facts. I can't stay here forever. For a long time, my father indulged me with what he thought was my interest in maps. When he found out I was looking for potential landing sites, he took them all away. That didn't bother me though, I already learned where I needed to go. No, my trouble was I needed to figure out how I was going to get there.

My psychologist says my short stature makes me feel like an outsider, so I have created this story to explain for myself, and to others, why I don't fit in. He says that when I tell people I'm going to be rescued, that's just an expression of my desire to escape being picked on for being different. It seems odd how he clings to the notion I can't possibly be from another world. He stresses the importance of telling the truth. In fact, everyone does this. I try not to tell everyone I'm an off-worlder, but they keep asking me where I am from. I try to stay silent, but that makes them more demanding I answer the question. My psychologist says it's only a phase. It will go away once I have my growth spirt. It's a little late in coming, that's all. He likes to sound supportive, but his tone gives away his real feelings. He has no idea what to do.

My father doesn't understand my behavior either. He's fond of saying 'Trouble already has good eyes, so why wave?'

All this makes me want to spend more time outside. Dad came out with me once. We sat together looking at the stars. It was nice to have him join me. But after a while sitting on the ground outside made him uncomfortable, so we went back inside where there were chairs. After a while, he brought out an inflatable chair for me to sit on. I loved that, I could take it into the house, force warm air into it. I'd take it back outside to sit on it and look at the stars.

Mother says I might become an astronomer. Dad always remarks in a snarky tone that there are more useful professions, like garbage collection. I'm always being sent to specialists to determine what is wrong with me. I frequently tell them a simple DNA test would tell them everything they need to know. They usually laugh at the precocious little kid. It always makes my folks nervous when they take me to these doctors, so I try to be quiet and act normal. I tell them how nice my family is and how comfortable it is living in our house. That makes them smile. But they never have any answers, which only makes my parent more anxious.

The space agency takes a long time to plan a mission. The planets have to be in the right position. It will take a while before anyone comes. I'm sure they are taking more time to plan this one. After all, ours didn't work out so well. Still, I know they are coming. It's a matter of waiting.

Someday a rescue mission will arrive from Earth.