

“Visitors”

A novelette/novella

Story by T.D. Smith

I.

Visitors

Something was wrong and Maisy knew it. She could sense it in the air. That night the air felt charged, dense, and full of a veritable electric-like energy of foreboding that flickered and fluttered all about. It was almost as if she could taste, or perhaps rather smell it, with all her mind and body at once, hanging around her neighborhood, something elusive and hard to place, yet vibrant and definitively, undeniably present, like damp, fragrant pollen hanging in a heavy, humid blanket of night after a midsummer night’s thunderstorm. It was just a few days before school would let out for the summer. Maisy ought to be excited, happy! Yet, the disturbance in the air made her anxious and a bit nauseous. She wondered what this out-of-placeness she felt, this omen, could mean.

Her parents didn’t seem to notice it at all! When she returned indoors at their beckoning, Maisy witnessed them as they went about their business: clearing the dinner table, loading the dishwasher, and wiping off the kitchen table with a damp cloth. She was somewhat frustrated that they could give a bath and read a bedtime story to their 5-year old daughter without any apparent perturbation or visual evidence on their faces that anything whatsoever was amiss.

Her mother had walked into her daughter’s bedroom smiling like she did every night with Maisy’s evening glass of water she always placed on Maisy’s bedside table, as her father concluded his evening tale and closed the old storybook, just like every night. They had tucked little Maisy in, kissed her goodnight, just like every night. Maisy felt the smoothness of Mommy’s lips followed by the curls of Dad’s beard pressing their prickliness into her forehead just like

every night. They had turned out the light, left the room, and gone downstairs for a spot of T.V. together before bed just like every night.

And Maisy sat there in her room contemplating the day, her classes, her friends, and other little-kid things just like every night, her bedroom completely dark, save the kitty-cat shaped night light in the corner on the wall, which was always the only small, glowing light in the room, just like every night.

Until it wasn't.

At half past 9, a bright white flash erupted from behind Maisy's bedroom window curtains, followed by a bright, bluish-hued, pulsing glow that drifted past her window, grew ever brighter, then increasingly softer, carrying a gentle, low, loud-then-soft hum with it as it moved.

At once alarmed and pleased, Maisy sprang out of bed, both alarmed at the foreboding something she had been sensing all evening suddenly unfolding, and pleased that she had been right to trust her senses. She had *known* everything was not normal about tonight!

Across the wood paneled floor, flying over to the window, and the little girl tore open the curtains, gazing outward into the night, her white silk nightgown fluttering in her self-generated breeze as she strode.

Maisy could not believe her young eyes.

Outside her window, in her neighborhood, Maisy beheld a series of giant metallic saucers, their silvery hulls glinting in the moonlight of the summer's eve, with blinking and pulsating pale, blue lights shimmering, arranged in circles around their bottom sides, hovering and gliding through the night, some 30 feet or so above the rooftops. Maisy counted 4 of them (Maisy was quite young, and 4 was one of the highest numbers she could count to, a fact she was quite proud of as a Kindergartener, so given that fact and the added factor of the dark, there may indeed have been more than 4,) and watched as they slowly and quietly moved and arranged themselves over the tops of several of Maisy's neighbor's homes. The blue lights

glowed incredibly bright, and with a sudden burst, the saucers each emitted a solid photonic beam that slid out of the flying crafts and engulfed the houses with their pale blue lights.

Maisy's eyes widened and her pupils dilated as she watched what happened next.

All time seemed to freeze at the command of the great saucers and their mighty blue beams. A car driving down the street froze in its tracks, the headlights still shining, and engine likely still running. Squinting, Maisy could make out the driver, motionless in the driver's seat. A bat that had been fluttering under a street lamp froze in mid-air. The clouds themselves seemed to pause, even.

Then, the incredulous Maisy witnessed an even stranger sight, and she realized that things had not even begun to become bizarre! Passing straight through their roofs and floating upward and disappearing into the saucers, were several of her neighbors: boys, girls, some older, some younger than herself, as well as several adults. The crafts flicked off their blue lights and hovered there, dark and still in the now late evening.

Maisy tried to run, to scream, to alert her parents, who surely were omnipotent and could do something about such things, but she seemed unable to budge, incapable of any movement, completely paralyzed except for her breathing and heart thudding rapidly in her ribcage. She watched helplessly as the menacing saucers hovered in the air above her neighbors' houses, doing who knew what to her friends and acquaintances for some unknown length of time, until finally the blue lights flicked on again, and the neighbors descended downward on the blue beams, back inside their homes once more.

A flash of light from one of the necks of her neighbor, perhaps a glint of moon or streetlight, and Maisy once again squinted. She could just make out some metallic protuberance, cylindrical, unnatural and not present prior to the abduction, beneath the right earlobes of her descending neighbors.

Once they were returned to their homes, the saucers put out their bright blue beams. The bat's wings instantly began flapping again. The car continued its course down the road. The

clouds blew by, covering the moon, then uncovering it again, as if none of this had ever happened, and upward and away the saucers went, until they were no longer visible in Maisy's vision.

Maisy stood for a few long moments, confused, perplexed, and anxious as she contemplated and struggled to process what her naïve eyes had witnessed. Maybe she was dreaming. Yes, that was it, this was one of those rare, strangely familiar yet alien and vague but incredibly vivid dreams one sometimes has, that while having remarkable substance and recognizable plot and sequence of events, is utterly fantastic and equally as absurd.

Yes, that must be it! She decided, as she slowly trotted back to her bed, climbed under the sheets and blanket, and, having become quite heavy now, closed her eyelids.

"It was all just a weird dream." Maisy told herself in her mind as she drifted to sleep.

It was not all just a weird dream.

As if the previous night's events had not been a sufficient dose of odd and unusual, Maisy's next day at school was arguably exponentially more so.

She arrived at school that morning at a quarter past 7, just like every morning. She ate her breakfast in the school cafeteria with her two friends, Tiffany and Rodrick, just like every morning. When the bell rang, she made her way to Ms. Gray's room and took her place at her desk, and took out her pencil and sharpened it with her plastic pencil sharpener that had the Hello Kitty sticker on its transparent housing for the pencil shavings so that the precocious Kindergartener could begin tracing her Alphabet letters in her workbook early, before her peers began doing so, just like every morning. She then stood for the pledge of allegiance and sat listening to the morning announcements that the school principal, Dr. Allen, spoke through the school's intercom, just like every morning.

That was where any trace of normality and routine ended.

In mid-sentence, while the principal read out the lunch choices of the day, fish nuggets or corn dogs, he suddenly froze. Then, he uttered a word that Maisy did not know and had never heard before, and was seemingly in some tongue not native to Earth. It sounded to Maisy's ears like he said: "Rotisiv."

Once the word had been uttered over the intercom, something happened. A change came over Maisy's peers and the teachers and aides in the classroom. They became still, catatonic for a moment, freezing and dropping whatever tasks they had been doing or conversations they had been holding. Then, all of their skin rapidly faded to a dull gray color, and they looked as if they had been lifted and placed there from an old, pre-technicolor, grayscale film. Next, the students' and school employees' eyes began glowing with a bright, pale-blue hue.

It was then that it dawned on Maisy (to whom none of this happened when she heard the word boom out from the electronic box) that the blue glow was eerily similar, nay *identical*, to that of the mysterious saucers she had witnessed hovering over her neighbor's homes last night, and that the people now affected by this trigger word were the very same who inhabited those houses!

They muttered, the lot of them, in some strange, unknown tongue, and held their arms out in front of them, and began marching, right out the classroom door and into the hallway, until Maisy's classroom was entirely emptied and she was sitting all alone at her desk.

Maisy shrugged, and returned to her workbook (she was, after all, *that* sort of student, and took her education seriously!) and began tracing her letters, A...B...C...D... until she arose to see the sudden, raucous clatter that arisen in the hallway several minutes later.

Mr. Curio, the elderly and wizened custodian of the elementary school, had been sitting in his office that morning on edge. He had felt the same sort of damp, heavy, electric charge in the air the night prior, and knew something ominous yet elusive was bound to unfold shortly. He had

arisen in the night from his small cottage on the edge of town, ridden his motor scooter to the school, unlocked the back door and disarmed the security alarm, then relieved the nighttime custodian of his duties early for the night. He then went to the rooftop of the school with his telescope and aimed it toward where he sensed the greatest disturbance in the natural ebb and flow of the planet was, twisted some focusing knobs, and gazed into it.

When he saw the saucers, he gasped.

Down the rusty old ladder as fast as the rickety old man could muster, down the flight of stairs to the bottom floor once more, around a corner, down a hall, and back into his office, and Mr. Curio rested his hands on the knobs of a wide black plastic box with a green LED light on it, which was no mere transistor radio. He sent out every signal on every wavelength he knew.

Hours passed. No return signals came.

Mr. Curio stepped outside to greet the early dawn light. The busses would be arriving soon, and with it the children. It wouldn't be long until they erected the school colors and the American flag up the flagpole for the day, and it, too, would flutter in the wind and the dawn's early light as his frail figure and tattered custodian's smock now did. He turned and went back inside, returning to his office. He flipped a switch the opposite way on his special radio, sending out a signal instead of searching for incoming ones, dispersing, on all possible friendly wavelengths, it's message quite clearly in a variety of tongues and languages:

STAY AWAY.

At the morning announcements, Mr. Curio stood ready in the hallway, mop in hand. He set the banana yellow wet floor sign down in the middle of the hallway and began mopping. The principal read his morning announcements. Then he suddenly spoke the trigger word.

Mere moments later, teacher's aides and students came pouring out of the classroom, 21B, Ms. Gray's room, their skin a gaunt gray color, their eyes all ablaze and blue.

He had known it. Expected as much.

Mr. Curio braced himself, and made ready in a battle stance, holding his mop like a sparring weapon.

They came at him, first a wave of young students, then a wave of Teacher Aides. The young students slipped and fell on the wet floor, and Mr. Curio easily disabled them completely with a few light whacks of the mop head.

The adults took more effort, but with seemingly little more so, Mr. Curio deftly outmaneuvered their footwork, stepping around them and whacking them to the ground with far more grace, force, and agility than one would expect for a man whose age approximated his own. He seemingly effortlessly toppled the advancing foes.

Then Ms. Gray stepped forward.

She was tall, slender, and coincidentally, no longer a Kindergarten teacher at all, but rather a skinny, spindling being with a bulbous head and large, almond-shaped eyes and tight, dull gray scaly skin. Her arms were long, thin, and had four fingers apiece. She threw her brown wig to the ground, and snarling, advanced on Mr. Curio.

Mr. Curio knew it would take more than his previous gumption to disable this foe. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He called upon an inner energy deep within, concentrating on the resonating frequency of the Earth, and the celestial movement of the surrounding planetary bodies. He became a conduit and channeled that energy.

Opening his eyes, green flames erupted from Mr. Curio's eyes. His muscles swelled and bulged under his janitorial smock. He was now a much taller, younger looking (by at least 10 years or so) and stronger man than he had been moments ago. He dropped his mop to the floor. He wouldn't be needing it.

Ms. Gray (or whatever he or she or it was) lunged forward and swung a fierce four-fingered fist in the direction of Mr. Curio's face. The custodian dodged left, and using the alien's own momentum, clutched its wrist as it went by him and flung it to the ground. The gray alien landed with a thud. Mr. Curio then concentrated. His hands sparked with a crackling green

energy. He cupped his hands together, and shot a great concentrated emerald energy beam forth out of his hands. It arced through the air, struck Ms. Gray, and when it did so, she immediately disintegrated.

Mr. Curio huffed and puffed and deflated to normal old man size, the green energy leaving him and dispersing back into the earth and the surrounding planets.

Turning, the custodian saw the principal, several teachers, and students, one of whom was young Maisy, standing in the hallway, looking at him and the sprawling, toppled pile of bruised and moaning children (who, consequently were no longer gray-hued, and whose eyes had returned to normal) and school employees. The spectators' mouths were agape, some gawking in awe and others in extreme, bewildered disapproval. The principal's brow furrowed and twitched angrily.

"CURIO! HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THIS?!?!" The principal demanded, extending an index finger indicating the pile of students, teachers, and aides.

Mr. Curio smiled and chuckled, then, from seemingly nowhere, produced a toilet plunger with an antenna sticking out of it. Hitting a button, a series of sonic-pulses emitted from its black vulcanized rubber suction cup. The pulses washed over every one of the witnesses and defeated combatants. The children and adults who had attacked him immediately stopped feeling pain. Their bruises, scrapes, contusions, and concussions were immediately remedied. Everyone whom the pulse touched memories' of the last few minutes' events were erased, except for the janitor who wielded the mysterious plunger device.

Well, actually, everyone except for old Mr. Curio and Maisy, that is.

Maisy stood, still in shock and awe, her recollection of these events completely intact, as her classmates, teachers, and principal all returned to their morning routine like none of the odd shenanigans had ever occurred. She hovered in the hallway watching as the crowd dispersed, her eyes fixated still on old Mr. Curio, who apparently was much stronger than he appeared on the surface. She watched as Mr. Curio turned the dial on a locker and opened it, collecting and

then reviving the *real* Ms. Gray, and following a dose of the plunger pulse, sent her on her way back to class. Ms. Gray took the flabbergasted Maisy by the hand and gently led her back to her classroom.

“That’s a day’s work all done, then!” Mr. Curio thought to himself, apparently unaware or unconcerned that he had yet one witness who was evidently immune to the mind wipe.

Maisy did not complete any of her academic exercises that day. She spent a long time sitting, shell-shocked, as she looked around with empty glances at all the children who went about their routines as normal, let a story-time story slip in one of her ears and out the other, didn’t touch her snack, and sat on the bench at recess watching the other children play. That afternoon, however, she drew. Pictures of flying saucers, of aliens, and of a mighty janitorial superhuman fighting his way through legions of her possessed peers with a glowing green mop.

She contemplated the day’s events all that evening and into the night as her head rested against her pillow, and her last thought as she fell asleep to the softly glowing light of her kitty cat night light was of the green, crackling, glowing aura that had surrounded Mr. Curio, and his heroic actions that had dispelled the school of whatever evil assailed it.

“What in the world is happening?” Maisy whispered to herself as the sands of sleep softly took her, finally bearing her mind away to dreamland for the night.

II.

Taken

It seemed to Maisy, although she had in fact been asleep for two full hours, that she had scarcely shut her eyes before the blinding light came once again flooding through her window that night at half past 10. It overwhelmed the glow of the kitty-cat night light and subsequently everything else in the room, whiting out Maisy’s vision entirely.

Tonight, the light blazed through the young girl's bedroom window, with far more intensity than the night before, and with it came a loud, rattling roar.

Maisy started awake with a gasp, and her pupils shrank to the tiniest of pebbles as the alien light hit them. She threw both hands over her head and shrank into the bed, fearful that a train was about to crash into her bedroom.

Then, the light stopped, and the roar became a low, dull hum. Maisy's entire bedroom went dark, even the kitty-cat night light.

Glancing over at the alarm clock, Maisy beheld it reading 10:31, and realized that it must have been doing so for far longer than other lengths of a minute she had previously experienced. Everything about her seemed to have frozen, even the glass of water on her nightstand, which Maisy thought to herself she must have knocked over when she awoke so frightfully, was suspended in air mid-fall, droplets of water arrested in the air where moments ago they had previously been flailing and falling.

Maisy had not long to take in all of these strange phenomena, for soon she felt a tugging, as if a rope and hook were pulling her upward from inside her navel. It was a sharp and sudden tug, but then it was over, and she felt herself rising. Glancing downward, Maisy saw her body, still in the bed.

She looked at her hands. They were a dull grayish-blue, and translucent. She rose up and through her house's attic, and then straight into the night air.

Maisy looked all about and saw them: her friends, schoolmates, teachers, neighbors. The same people from the night before and then some were being taken from their homes and elevated up to the shining silvery discs with their shimmering blue lights tonight, and Maisy was among that party.

When her energized body neared the saucer, everything went black.

Maisy was nowhere, disembodied, enveloped in a velvety gray blanket of void. She was unable to breathe or yell or taste or smell, or feel anything in this void. Her consciousness, and

whatever atoms and particles comprised it, were still there, arranged as hers, and as such she was aware of and experiencing all of this. It would have caused an intense nausea for the girl, had she been embodied. It still caused her a deeply unsettling paranoia and anxiety.

Then, as quickly as it had come, this moment of disembodied void-dwelling was over. With a crackle of electric sparks that caused her to uncomfortably tingle all over, as if her entire non-existent body were comprised of her funny bone, there was another bright, white flash and Maisy was inside what she assumed was the interior of one of the great, silver discs.

Her body was back now, in its full corporeal wholeness, and she was lying face up on some sort of table. The table was cold. Around her she could hear echoes, strange humming noises, electric buzzing, and a disconcerting, strange sound, like one metal lightly scraping against another. She could also hear the voices of her fellow humans, but vaguely, and distant.

Glancing around she could see no one else nearby. Maisy felt deeply perturbed and butterflies swirled in her stomach.

Suddenly, a bright light ignited above her. It was bright enough to illuminate her entire body, but did not hurt her eyes.

Then a figure leaned in from somewhere beside the table. It was tall, dark, and spindly. Its lumbering head leaned in close to Maisy's, eclipsing the light above the table. Maisy squinted and the figure's face came into full view and became clear as her eyes focused.

It was a humanoid head, but larger, bulbous, gray skinned and wrinkly (like an elephant's, Maisy thought!). It had huge, wide, amber-toned, almond-shaped eyes that came down diagonally from the top sides of its head to rest beside a beady little nose comprised only of two nostril slits. Maisy thought hard and recognized the being: it was quite similar to whatever alien had disguised itself as Ms. Gray earlier that day.

The thing smiled at Maisy, and a sort of amber-gold light emitted from its eyes. Maisy was breathing hard. She could feel her heart pounding in her chest. A bead of sweat trickled

down her brow, and the butterflies swirled in a crescendoing tempest in her stomach. The alien leaned closer and Maisy could not help but gaze into its eyes.

“Do not be afraid, child.” the smiling gray alien said.

As Maisy looked into the eyes, a sort of energy, full of warmth, encompassed her. She gradually felt her heart slow to a more comfortable pace, and her breathing became easier. This was followed by a deeply pleasing, warm feeling of euphoria. Maisy found herself giggling a bit, despite herself.

“That’s better.” the alien said. Maisy noticed now that the alien was not using its mouth to speak. Its vocal chords didn’t move at all within its neck. (It must be talking to me directly in my head! Maisy thought.) The great almond-shaped eyes had become kaleidoscopes, full of color, shapes, and bending, contorting, twisting pantomimes of reality that danced in front of Maisy’s mind’s eye for her entertainment and comfort. The eyes looked to be growing larger, larger, blocking out everything, until they were a great portal, a gateway into another dimension, from which escape was impossible.

Maisy could not have struggled if she had wanted to; whatever hypnotic spell the alien had cast on her from its eyes was a sufficient anesthetic that had rendered her immobile, in both body and mind.

The parallel reality engulfed Maisy. She was shown things, beautiful nebulas, stars and planets and galaxies far away. The voice of the gray alien spoke to her softly, was her companion on her voyages far and away and across the universe. It told her secrets, of deep energetic powers that permeated the universe, taught her how to use them. It showed her great and powerful civilizations, then zoomed forward in time showing that they were now nothing but ruins, artifacts, and memories, all becoming increasingly lost in the sands of time.

It told Maisy wondrous truths about the nature of reality and the universe.

It told Maisy hideously twisted propaganda about it and its companions’ mission and intentions.

The alien showed Maisy numerous battlegrounds, planets where the silver saucers descended, laying waste to civilization after civilization, all for their just cause. It showed her a resistance, freedom fighters of a great and noble race, but a rebellious, raucous, and unruly one, who fought them and must be defeated at all costs and who had one by one dwindled, and fled the coming wrath of the gray alien fleet. The aliens pursued them across their diaspora, finding them one at a time and terminating them.

A flash of a certain, familiar, wise old man Maisy knew.

Here was one such enemy insurgent!

His aim was to horde all of this particular backwater planet's unknowing precious resources for himself! He must be dealt with, eradicated, and this planet taken into the glorious collective of the Greys! And Maisy, her friends, relatives, teachers, schoolmates were all going to help them.

A slight tingling, an unpleasant, if light, burning accompanied by a buzzing under Maisy's chin next to her ear lobe.

Reaching up, Maisy felt a slight metallic, cold protuberance. She remembered those of her peers and adults that had been controlled at school.

She began to connect the dots.

Smiling, the implantation work complete, the alien stood to its full height and backed away from the table.

Maisy gradually came out of the amber-eyes-induced hallucination, and once again began to feel uneasy, the euphoria leaving her. Her head was foggy, and her extremities felt heavy and uncoordinated, (for the experience had been quite disorienting!) but she could still remember mostly everything she had been told and shown.

Another bright flash and loud roaring hum, and Maisy was wrapped in the dark gray energy blanket in the disembodied void again, and in another flash was a pale blue ghost of herself descending back downward towards her roof.

“You will remember nothing, my dear,” the voice of the Grey said in her mind as she descended, “you will forget everything that transpired on my ship tonight, everything I showed and told you. But when you hear the secret word at school tomorrow, you will awaken and join us in the just fight, and destroy the Curator!”

But Maisy did not forget anything.

She descended back through her roof, her attic, into her room, and down into her bed once more. There was a final bright, white flash, and the saucers were gone. Maisy’s clock turned over to 10:32, the light from the kitty-cat night light burned back to life, and the falling glass crashed to the floor, sending water sprawling all over the carpet.

Maisy rose and retrieved towels from the hallway closet, taking special care not to wake her mother and father. As she knelt soaking up the water with the towels, she thought about everything that had happened. She wondered if any other of the abductees could remember things, were immune to mind wipes, like she seemed to be.

As she finally lay back in her bed again, Maisy contemplated the alien’s words, visions, and stories. She remembered much of what it had taught her about energy and power and the secrets of the universe, even though she was too young to really understand it all. Some of it was fading, but not all. She did, however, remember all of the alien’s speech about the need for conquest, how their just cause was helping purify the galaxy, their mission was necessary and helpful to their neighbors across the stars, and how the Curator, someone Maisy had known her whole life, was a nuisance, and all of the accusations the Greys had made against him. She contemplated it all long and hard until it was almost midnight.

And she knew the alien’s words were full of lies.

III.

A Schoolhouse, Rocked.

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

The electronic beeping of Maisy's parents' alarm clock rang out in the morning air, and it woke Maisy from sleep all the way upstairs in her room.

6:45. Time to get up and ready for school!

Maisy got up, got dressed, ate her breakfast, put the lunch mom had packed in her book bag, kissed her mom and dad goodbye as they left for work, kissed and hugged the dog, locked up, and walked to the bus stop, just like every morning.

But she knew this, like its predecessor, was no normal morning. She knew the aliens were coming back, to attack Mr. Curio at the school this morning. She knew that her friends and teachers had been implanted, would be mind-controlled to attack her friend and mentor to whom she looked up. And Maisy knew that his adversaries were far greater in number this time.

Mr. Curio was in trouble.

Maisy anxiously stepped aboard the bright yellow bus, and as it huffed into motion and set off to the school house, Maisy's brain turned things over, thinking, trying desperately to formulate some sort of plan of action that might help her friend, her fellow schoolmates and town dwellers, and save the world from aliens. She was beginning to feel a rather acute sense of distress over the hopelessness of their situation when the bus finally rolled into the front of the schoolhouse, more so than the average 5-year-old would usually feel.

She had no plan and no idea what to do. So, she quietly and obediently made her way to the cafeteria, and sitting next to Tiffany and Rodrick, (who also both had the trendy new alien implants, she noticed) ate her breakfast, then silently and solemnly strode off down the hall to Ms. Gray's room when the tone sounded.

"I'm afraid we can't reach you in time," a voice buzzed from the special black radio in Mr. Curio's custodian's office. He had been up all night watching events unfold again, and had finally managed to receive a return signal from his allies.

"Besides, it seems they are planning the full-scale invasion today! By the time we got there, we'd be too late, and our cover would be blown. We're slowly amassing a fleet once more, but we can't afford an all-out assault just yet, to be honest. Our resources are simply too thin. Our best bet is to heed your previous communication: STAY AWAY."

"I understand. It's okay. I'll just have to see what I can do here with what I've got, no matter the outcome..." Mr. Curio replied.

"Affirmative. We are terribly sorry, Curator. We wish you the profoundest of fortune in this deathliest endeavor. Best of luck, and remember, even when the stars burn out, their light remains!"

The Curator, or Mr. Curio, nodded, solemnly.

"Thank you."

"You're very welcome. We indeed deeply regret that you will have to go about this fight alone." said the voice from the radio.

Mr. Curio shook his head and smiled.

"I'm not alone."

Maisy sat unsteadily, her palms sweating and trembling as she clutched her pencil, sitting obediently at her desk.

The principal spoke the pledge of allegiance, and the children all stood, placing a hand over their hearts. Then Dr. Allen spoke the word.

"Rotisiv."

The children's skin once again turned gray and their eyes glowed with a dull blue and their arms fell to their sides, under complete control of the Greys.

The tubular metal implant beneath Maisy's ear buzzed, and it tickled her slightly. She felt a buzzing energy protrude from it and fill her entire body, extending all the way out her arms into her fingertips, and all the way down her torso and belly, through her legs, and down into the tips of her toes. She, too turned a hue of gray, and her eyes glowed blue.

With the buzzing, tickling energy and its blue glow came a familiar voice, the one she had encountered on the flying saucer the night before. It whispered now, in her ear, suggesting things.

"Obey, my dear, don't resist it. Everything will be alright, just let me take control of you for a little while, move you, you need not worry about anything at all. Let me take control and I will take care of everything. Join us, now, child, join us!"

Maisy's arms involuntarily rose, as did those of all her classmates, who then began marching. Maisy did not like this feeling at all. She resisted.

Straining and struggling, Maisy dug down deep within her heart and mind and resisted the bidding of the buzzing energy and its disembodied voice with all her might.

Her body took a step forward that she had not told it to make. Maisy fought hard and took another step backward, this time with her own volition. Fighting the electronic implant's urges to move forward, Maisy stood tall and hard and did not budge from her spot a pace away from her desk in Ms. Gray's room, digging her heels into the tiled floor. The children, Teacher, and Aides all passed her, marching zombie-like out into the hallway. The classroom was empty now, except for a standing, struggling little Maisy, who was resisting the aliens' control with every ounce of her being, her fists gripped tight and every muscle tensing.

Maisy closed her eyes and squeezed her hands even tighter and flexed all her muscles at once as hard as she could. She tried her best to imagine some of the things the alien had told her the night before, about energy, channeling it, the universe. She fought and fought and tried her best to harness the power of the planet and the universe around her. The cylindrical metal implant fought back, sending a more powerful, painful current coursing through her.

Maisy screamed.

Then, she did it.

All at once it was as if she had opened a door, a portal, deep within her. A powerful energy came soaring out, and filled Maisy with glowing light. The cylindrical implant immediately sparked and shorted out. The current, its messages, and its demands for movement died instantly, and the smoking metal cylinder plopped uselessly to the ground.

Maisy stood there, alone in the classroom, her body no longer gray, eyes no longer glowing dull grayish blue, but now a deep, bright purple aura surrounded her body, emanating even from her eyes, or perhaps rather her soul *through* her eyes. She looked down and noticed she was hovering an inch above the ground. She could feel energy, power, ability, seemingly endless potential, coursing through her veins, and knew it was hers to control. Pausing for a moment to process this new found phenomenon, and then channeling it further, Maisy smiled to herself.

Mr. Curio stood ready for his coming foes in the hall. He inserted one end of the broomstick into his circular metal ring contraption with the rubber grip bar in the middle, and one end of his mop. Pressing a small button with his thumb, the contraption of broom and mop began to spin, and glow with the man's green energy.

In his other hand, the old man held his plunger. He stood ready like a Spartan warrior of old with sword and shield in hand.

They came.

First pouring out of Ms. Gray's classroom, and then the rest of the Kindergarten hall. Mr. Curio met them, blocking their blows with his plunger, and dispatching them with his own mighty strokes.

A whole line of possessed Kindergarteners with an Aide backing them charged at Mr. Curio. Angling his spinning mop-broom weapon, Curio sent each one of them flying backward in rapid succession.

Then, the First Grade wing came charging in. Mr. Curio took his spinning weapon in one hand and pointed it at the coming First Graders. In his other hand, he aimed the open plunger cup at the Kindergarten aggressors. He pressed a button on the yellow hilt of the plunger, and sent an enormous green blast of energy down the hallway, which incapacitated Kindergartener, Teacher, and Aide alike. Then he spun around and swung the spinning weapon all about, knocking back foe upon foe.

This proved to be an effective strategy for a short time, but the old man soon grew fatigued and found himself sweating and panting heavily. By the time the first wave of 2nd graders fell upon him, he was worried he was nearing the end of his strength. The second graders came down the hall at a run, eager to dispatch their overlords' enemy. An inhuman, gnarled smile sat on the lips of each Second Grade warrior. They soon overwhelmed Curio, and he was backed into a corner. Sweating, huffing, and legs trembling, Mr. Curio frowned.

He could not hold them off for much longer.

"So this is how it ends," he muttered to himself, "pummeled to oblivion by 2nd graders." The old man could not help but chuckle to himself, and the chuckle turned into an all-out laugh. The laugh was no deterrent whatsoever for his enemies, however, and they kept coming at him just as fiercely. Mr. Curio knew that his doom was imminent. All seemed lost.

Then, a bright purple flash illuminated the hallway.

BOOM!

Just when all hope seemed to have evaporated, and a second grader had dared to grab the mop by its ropey side and pull the weapon, which spun down the hall, knocked down a teacher or two, and finally lodged itself into the side of a locker, a bright purple beam filled the fighting space. All of the foes, 2nd graders, Teachers, Aides, 1st graders and Kindergarteners

who had regained consciousness and rejoined the fight, froze, held in place by the purple energy. Then, all at once they were levitated into the air some inches, and smashed against the lockers hard, all sent into an unconscious dream at once, then dropped, where they all sprawled on the floor.

As the dust settled and the purple glow grew dimmer, Mr. Curio saw her, Maisy, smiling satisfactorily at her handiwork, eyes all aglow, and her entire body emblazoned with a purple light, and hovering off the ground some few inches.

Mr. Curio smiled the biggest and widest smile he had in years.

The girl floated over to him, staying only an inch or two off the school hall floor, and took him by the hand, helping him back to his feet from where he had been bracing himself against the wall in the corner.

They looked at each other, locking eyes.

A stream of knowledge, unseen, but communicated silently and invisibly between them, flowed from one to the other and back.

Visions came, and knowledge, in flashes.

Maisy learned.

Maisy remembered.

Unlike those of the Greys, these visions were not lies.

Memories, visions, and knowledge came to Maisy in flashes.

Flashes of a small spaceship crash-landing, some 5 years prior, and Mr. Curio finding a baby girl inside. Flashes of Mr. Curio taking the baby girl to a family whom he knew would take good care of her. Flashes of planets and stars and battles far away, a people being persecuted and destroyed, pursued in a great space war across the stars that raged throughout the galaxy.

A flash where a familiar looking young woman who glowed purple fought silver discs alongside a younger version of a friendly old man who glowed green. A flash to another, earlier time. The man was injured, falling. Then he was limping to a ship, the planet collapsing around

him. In another flash he was flying across the stars, and eventually found a suitable, habitable, if remote planet, home. Another flash and the man was weeping in his janitorial office. He thought he was the only one left in the universe. The next flash in particular made Maisy gasp. Aliens, the Greys, marching down the main street of her town triumphantly. A younger, mightier Mr. Curio fighting them, conquering them, then Mr. Curio hauling a giant plunger cup into the middle of town with a bulldozer, and wiping the memories of everyone, even a version of herself who could not have been older than 2, and her parents (why had it worked on her *that time?*) of those events.

Maisy remembered. She knew things now, like exactly who and what she was.

She knew they had to be stopped, that she alone could help Mr. Curio, the Curator, not only of this Elementary School, but of the entire planet. And she knew she had the power to do it.

Hand in hand, Mr. Curio and Maisy dashed through the 4th grade hall, and then the 5th grade hall. Together they easily overcame all their possessed friends and allies, knocking them back, overpowering them and disabling their implants that controlled them. When they came to the end of the 5th grade hall, they were fairly sure they had defeated everyone they needed to.

Then he stepped out of the shadows.

Dr. Allen, the principal.

“Dr. Allen,” spoke Curio, “Or should I say, Dr. Alien?”

The gray alien shed his human mask, and, still wearing his gray business suit, clenched his four-fingered fists. Weapons shimmered and swirled, then solidified out of nowhere. The tall, spindly, gray man with dark almond eyes now held a long spear and a narrow shield.

He and Mr. Curio fell at each other. Curio fought gallantly, blocking each blow the alien man threw at him, and getting in some hard knocks on his alien foe, too. Eventually, though, already tired beyond that which such earthly years as his normally allowed, Curio took a hard hit from the bottom of Dr. Alien’s staff to the stomach, and, wind knocked from his ribs, fell down.

Downward the finishing blow came, the spearhead glowing dull blue and electrified, plunging to take of the Curator's head. The gray man shrieked a war cry on an invisible, mental wavelength that did not require use of a physical voice.

CLANG!

The spearhead was met with another, shimmering purple blade, held by Maisy. Maisy's eyes grew brighter and brighter, until

BOOM! She knocked back Dr. Alien, (who would have quite a nasty bruise on his gray skull later, and Maisy wondered precisely what color and shade an alien bruise would be) who dropped his weapons, against a locker with a huge outburst of purple energy that emanated from her body suddenly, and the back of his head struck the metal surface hard.

Disarmed, disoriented, and cornered, Dr. Alien looked up at the sharp point of Maisy's blade disapprovingly.

"You." said the gray man. "I might have known. We thought Curio was merely protecting the resources and energy of this planet. We had no idea he has harboring something much more precious."

"It's over. Give it up and leave this planet for good." Curio, who had staggered over to them said.

The visitor laughed. "I don't think so. I'll leave, sure, but if we can't have this planet and its power, no one can!"

Then the Grey pressed a button on his armband, and there was a bright flash, followed by a bluish gray beam encompassing him, and with a swirl and shimmer, he disappeared, being beamed up to some saucer above. Maisy's sword hit the ground with a clink where the man had lain some seconds before, passing through the remnants of the teleportation beam and the killing opportunity his sudden transportation prevented.

Maisy and Curio exchanged their second glance of the morning. This time it was a worried one.

“Quickly,” Curio implored, “We must get to the top of the school at once! When Dr. Alien reaches the mother ship, he’ll unleash a blast that will turn the planet to rubble!”

Maisy cocked her head to one side.

“Why the rooftop?”

Curio smiled.

“I keep a small ship stashed up there, just for emergency purposes such as these!”

Then Maisy and Mr. Curio dashed off down the hallway, to a closet door inside which was a ladder on the adjacent wall that led to the roof of the school, all in a mad frenzy to get to the spaceship and intercept the alien Mothership.

IV

Playing Among the Stars

The duo deftly darted across the rooftop, around the large, box-shaped air conditioning unit in the roof’s center, past a parabolic, concrete satellite dish, and stopped abruptly beside an old, brick chimney that had long fallen out of use.

Mr. Curio pressed a series of bricks in sequence, and the side of the chimney began to rotate and slide, and move out of the way, revealing a small, round space pod (that seemed eerily familiar to Maisy) inside. Curio pressed a button on his watch and the pod glowed with life and hummed, before beginning to hover in the air and slowly float out of the cavity, listing its way toward them. It set itself down once more at their feet, and with a hiss of rushing air, its translucent dome opened, and a ramp descended for the two heroes.

They walked swiftly up the ramp. Curio assumed the pilot’s station, and Maisy took the copilot seat directly behind him. The domed lid shut tightly, the ramp retreated, and, with the push of a few buttons and pull of the throttle and joystick, Mr. Curio made the craft rise.

The two friends shot into space with alarming speed, and barely any sound. As they rose, Maisy peered out and saw the Earth sprawled out beneath her, with all its greenery, water, mountains, and life.

Exiting the atmosphere, Maisy felt her weight leave her. Her long, black hair spread out and hung in the air of the cockpit weightlessly, and her arms rose up involuntarily beside her torso. They passed several articles of space junk, one of which bounced off their force field with a ka-chink! Maisy marveled at the sprawling, majestic field of glimmering, glittering stars surrounding their craft. It was beautiful and absolutely took her breath away.

Then, the moment of solace and awe had passed, and they saw them: the saucers, an entire fleet of them. Maisy could not count how many there were, even with her newly remembered knowledge of the past and regained ability to count enormous quantities, but she was quite sure there were far more than four.

“Which one is the mother ship?” Maisy asked.

“None of them are,” Mr. Curio responded, frowning. “It must be cloaked.”

Their small craft entered the midst of the blockade of silver saucers, and they ducked and weaved and spun, avoiding the bright bluish gray plasma bolts that erupted from the silver alien crafts, bent toward their destruction. Curio was an ace pilot, and avoided every one of the bolts of enemy weapons fire.

Clearing the brigade, Curio steered their small craft toward a small satellite roughly the size of a backyard shed. It was shaped like a rectangular prism with a series of antennae jutting from both sides of it, some pointed toward Earth, the others toward deep space.

“They’re chasing us!” Maisy exclaimed.

“Yep, but don’t worry, we’re much faster,” Curio consoled, pushing the throttle to its max.

He whipped the craft around the satellite once, then touched down. An extendable tunnel protruded from the belly of their spacecraft, connecting with a round docking hole on the side of the satellite.

“What are we doing? Why are we landing here?” Maisy asked.

“We need to find the mothership, and de-cloak it. And I need to get a message out.”

Curio opened a hatch on the floor of the ship, and climbed down a ladder. Maisy followed. The metallic segments of the satellite’s dock door slid open, and they climbed down another ladder, touching down on the floor of the interior of the tiny Earth-orbiting object. Maisy was surprised to find that there was artificial gravity here, and felt her weight return to her. The pair walked down a very short corridor into a control room.

Curio approached a console that had a radar screen, and with the flick of a switch, he sent out a pulse from the satellite that resembled a red, growing circle emanating from their location on the radar, and which hit each one of the many dots representing the saucers. Finally, behind the group of quickly approaching dots, once the red circle hit its location, one dot far larger than any of the others, roughly the size of a quarter on the screen, flickered into existence.

“There you are!” Curio said with a smile. He then pulled a lever, twisted a joystick, and pulled a trigger. There was a groan from the interior of the satellite, and outside on the viewer, Maisy beheld a bright green beam firing outward from the satellite. It traversed empty space, flew between the saucers, and then it hit something invisible. The impact caused a series of electric arcs in the area it had hit. Gradually, flickering and shuddering, the mothership came into view.

It was massive, easily five times the size of the other saucers, only beneath it protruded squid-like appendages, great, long, twisting metal tentacles. At its top was a giant antenna. The way the mothership wriggled as it moved ever closer to them made it appear like some sort of living creature, a fearsome space beast.

“They’re getting closer...” Maisy warned.

“Hold on!” Curio snapped back.

Flipping some switches, he commenced a long-range scan. The view screen swirled and zoomed its view through space, until a tiny, orange planet with rainbow rings appeared. He zoomed in further. There were a few people there and a little bit of activity, but not many ships.

"They've sent out the fleet," Curio said, frowning. "The base is almost empty!"

He shut off the long-range scanner. Then, he typed out a message on a keypad, "ALIVE, SOS, ALIVE, SOS," coded it with a secret frequency, hit send, then awaited a response.

Nothing.

Suddenly, a clatter of static and buzzing emitted from the speakers of the communications panel. An evil cackle echoed off the metallic walls of the satellite's interior.

"Stupid move, Curator!" spoke the voice of Dr. Alien. "We traced your scan. Now we know the location of your friends' base! Once we destroy you, we'll go directly to those coordinates and finish off your puny armada once and for all!"

The saucers were on them then. Silver discs filled their view of space and the Earth on the viewer, followed by the long shadow of the mother ship that fell across the view, causing darkness to fall in the cabin.

The long, spindly tentacles sprawled apart. Their tips flickered with arcing energy. Each tip fired a burst of lightning like energy some distance in front of the mothership, which combined and grew into a ball. The death weapon was charging, and would soon be hurled at Maisy and the Curator, destroying both the satellite, themselves, and finally the Earth, respectively, in a single fell swoop.

Maisy's heart fluttered.

Curio hung his head and sighed.

The saucers grew nearer, nearer. The ball of dull blue electricity grew larger.

Their doom was near.

Then, a green flashing light blipped on and off on the dashboard.

A reply!

Without warning, several explosions, orange-yellowish balls of fire and gas, billowed from out of several of the saucers, and they went lopsided in their trajectories. A slew of other spaceships popped into view from nowhere, dropping from light speed. A million green, yellow, red, and purple streaks of light flew forth from them, striking the enemy saucers and knocking the mothership's tentacles all about. The death-ball of energy dissipated.

"We're here! Glad you survived the fight down there, Curio!" a friendly voice crackled over the comm.

"Me too!" Curio replied, excitedly.

"We'll proceed with an all-out assault on the saucers, then."

"Why the sudden change of heart?"

"What can I say, you and the girl's success on the surface inspired us. Bought us enough time to get here, too. And hell, it's as good a day to die as any other! We've amassed all the cruisers we're going to, and let's face it, we're going to have to make a final stand eventually. Why not right here, right now?"

"Alright then, we'll take care of the mothership, if you guys draw the other craft away."

"Deal."

Curio fired retro rockets with the touch of several buttons, angling the satellite at the mothership.

"What are you doing?" Maisy inquired.

"Aiming. If we launch the satellite and hit the mothership at just the right spot in her exhaust port at just the right time..."

"Boom?" asked Maisy, fanning her fingers out to simulate an explosion.

"Bingo!"

When the trajectory was set, Curio punched several more keys. An electronic voice announced that the self-destruct sequence was set.

“If I’ve timed this right, the satellite should go up right as it hits the port,” Curio explained, “And we’ll be safely on our way back down to Earth in our pod.”

Maisy smiled, nodding.

The evil voice broke out over the cockpit again, cackling over the comm.

“Wrong! A noble endeavor, Curator, but I’m afraid it just wasn’t enough!”

A bright white flash followed by a blue beam that encompassed Maisy and Curio, who both gasped. Maisy felt a tugging and lifting sensation in her navel as the teleportation sequence began. Curio turned to try to push Maisy out of the beam, but it was too late. One moment they saw their bodies beneath them in the control center as they floated in an out-of-body-experience, then blackness, a flash, and they were aboard the mothership, on its bridge, full of tall, thin, gangly Greys with their dark, almond eyes, and directly in front of Dr. Alien, who still wore bits and pieces of the gray suit he had donned in the elementary school.

On the ship’s view screen, Maisy and Curio watched as a single blue beam from one of the ship’s tentacles knocked the satellite off its course and away from the mothership they now stood aboard.

“You failed, Curator. Ha! And some Curator you were, letting down this entire planet and its people, which we will soon blow up and then mine, salvaging whatever leftover energy we can. Not only that, but you even unwittingly gave up the location of the last remnants of your friends! You have failed miserably, and now both you and the girl will die.”

“Maisy, Curio, help!” a weak human voice called out from the corner of the bridge. Glancing over, Maisy saw the *real* Dr. Allen, her school principal, in a cage, wires and tubes stuck all over him and into him.

The evil Dr. Alien smiled.

“Ah, humans! Such wonderful conduits for the inherent energy of their world. Ironic, isn’t it? We’re using the poor school principal here to siphon that energy, which we will ultimately use to destroy his planet!”

"I don't think so!" Curio shouted, and powering up and glowing green, he charged at Dr. Alien.

They collided and fought. Curio got in several good blows, but Dr. Alien fought back fiercely. He produced a blue blade of energy, and when Curio leapt past him at one interval, he swung down hard, severing a leg. Curio screamed and fell to the floor, nursing a cauterized stump that used to be a limb. Maisy gasped.

The alien smiled evilly, his lips spreading and revealing sharp, pointed teeth.

He slowly advanced on Maisy.

Maisy was unperturbed.

Or, rather, she was not afraid of the advancing evil alien. She was, in fact, quite angry, rattled, and tired of these aliens' intrusion upon her world and life. She focused and produced her own blade of glowing, bright purple energy, and began glowing bright and hot all over her body, her eyes flaring purple, the energy coursing through and spilling out of her. Her adversary dropped his grin.

"Uh-oh." said Dr. Alien.

With a single swing of her energy sword, Maisy knocked him back, across the room, and into a wall, which burst open revealing circuitry and wiring. Dr. Alien was slow to rise from this attack. Once he regained his wits and balance, angered, he leapt into the air, swinging his blade upward mid jump, then bringing it down, howling a loud, telepathic howl, for the killing blow.

Maisy raised both hands and let out an enormous blast of fiery, purple energy. It knocked back Dr. Alien, who, wailing mentally, (which Maisy could hear in her mind, and while an unpleasant, unsettling experience, at once brought with it some satisfaction for her) could not resist the intensity of her power, and realizing he was quickly withering away, he stopped resisting it. He writhed, wriggled, and finally, brutally wounded and partially disintegrated, fell to the floor. He exhaled a small puff of smoke. The blast continued onward and hit the ceiling of

the bridge, puncturing the ship's hull and continuing in an arc outward into space, where it struck and disabled an enemy saucer that was about to blow up an allied cruiser.

All the aliens on the bridge let out an ear-piercing shriek, the first sound Maisy had ever heard the Greys make with their actual mouths. Several of them were sucked into the air and out into the cold of space. Dr. Alien pulled himself across the floor as quickly as he could on one arm, gripping whatever vents and grooves in the floor he could wrap his long alien fingers around, finally gripping the captain's chair tightly.

Maisy felt herself being tugged toward space, too. In a swift series of movements, she powered up again, flaring purple, and to her amazement, pushed completely off the floor of the bridge and took flight. She flew to Curio, and threw him over her shoulder. She flew to her school principal, peeled back the ribs of the cage, ripped the wires and tubes out of him, and slung him over her other shoulder. She looked around quickly, and pulled an alien first aid kit (how she could read their script and comprehend it, she was not quite sure, and things were happening so quickly she decided not to think about it) and gripped it tightly in her hand. Then, with a leap, she exited the bridge.

She was out in the vacuum of space now, somehow breathing and sustaining her life and the life of her friends with her purple energy. She looked around.

The star battle was raging. Several saucers had been destroyed, hanging uselessly in space their bodies twisted, smoking, metal wreckage. Many of the allies' ships had been reduced to space junk, too, and it appeared that their numbers were dwindling. The whole scene was a complicated, frustrated mess. She was about to distress, when out of the corner of her eye, Maisy found what she was looking for.

She took a self-propelled dive, and landed on the side of the satellite. She strode across its surface, and opened the cockpit of the space pod she and Curio had arrived in, placing the med kit, Curio, and Dr. Allen inside. Then, closing the pod, she lifted it with a soft purple glow that protruded from her fingertips, and sent it descending slowly, safely to Earth.

After that, Maisy launched herself off of the satellite. She turned about to face it. Gripping it with purple energy, she spun it several times, pulled it over her head, then threw it with all her might at the mothership.

The object's thrusters ignited and it flew ever faster and struck true, crashing through the open wound in the bridge, and crashing through deck after deck, until it reached the core. A panel inside the satellite blinked out warnings to no one and read "3...2...1..."

BOOM!

The satellite exploded, sending a massive amount of energy outward in a circle. The circle of fire hit the mothership's core, setting off a chain reaction. The entire ship buckled, then roared into flames, bursting asunder.

Just to be sure, Maisy concentrated all her energy, and fired her purple blast out of her palms again, this time more intensely and brighter than ever, adding to the intensity of the explosion. She focused, and her beam bounced off the mothership, into and out of another saucer, then another, and another, until each one of the enemy ships were space rubble.

Only a small saucer, tinier than the rest, escaped, flying out from the wreckage of the mothership just before its last remnants disintegrated. Squinting, Maisy thought she could just make out the silhouette and possibly the scowling face of a familiar suit-wearing Grey peering out at the stars and the wreckage of his once great fleet. She pondered it for a moment, hands tingling with the glow, then decided against it. She would let him go. For now.

A friendly cruiser approached her. Its airlock opened and she was greeted by humanoids in variously colored jumpsuits who cheered and hugged her and picked her up and tossed her into the air. She was their hero! They gave Maisy a meal, healed whatever few wounds she had, and then landed their ship and let Maisy out, back on familiar ground and her home, before ascending back into the cloudless blue sky and disappearing.

Maisy walked toward the small space pod that had landed gently in the schoolyard.

V.

Back Again

Mr. Curio stood beside Maisy on one human leg and one mechanical one. (The alien first-aid kit had really come in handy!) They had healed the last of her schoolmates, and, having replaced the space pod atop the school, had assembled everyone in the front lawn with the help of the *real* Dr. Allen.

“Up here, now! Say cheese!” Curio insisted, getting everyone to look at the giant plunger, whose odd antenna jutted outward from its center.

It had been a very weird day, full of strange happenings, and the students, faculty and staff did not question why they felt such fatigue, why their heads hurt so bad, or even why their janitor was taking a school picture of everyone on the front lawn, using a massive plunger with an antenna to do so, for that matter! Curio closed his eyes, as did Maisy, and he clicked the button.

FLASH!

Everyone’s memories were reset, and simultaneously, Maisy’s world had been reset back to its default, too.

She walked next to her friend as she slowly made her way back through the dispersing crowd to class.

“What about the ones who are Greys?” she asked.

“Oh, don’t worry about that,” said Curio, consolingly, “a lot of people around here are and have been for ages! Some of them were sleeper agents, others were enemy combatants I neutralized. After so many battles and so many memory wipes, they don’t remember. And besides, what difference does it make? The Greys can be very civilized, after all, with proper leadership, when they’re not bent on ruling the cosmos!”

There was a brief silence between them and Maisy took a few long moments to process the Curator’s words.

"Thanks for grabbing the first-aid kit, by the way. I'm grateful. You saved my life and my mobility!" Curio said, knocking a fist against his metal leg, which made a tinkling sound.

"No problem." said Maisy, smiling.

"Oh, before I forget, take this!" Mr. Curio said, and he handed her a small, black box. A glass screen lit up when Maisy touched it.

"What is it?"

"Interstellar Communicator. Now that you're part of bigger things, I figured you might need one. My frequency is already programmed in. Just hit the green app on the home screen!"

"Okay!" Maisy said, delightedly, as she pocketed the device.

"Well, I guess it's goodbye for now, Maisy. I'll see you later. Take care, and don't blow your cover as a Kindergartener!"

"Later."

Then the two of them parted ways, Mr. Curio the Curator turning down the hallway that led to his custodian's office, and Maisy heading on toward Ms. Gray's classroom. She enjoyed the rest of the day pretending to be a normal Kindergartener, reviewing her shapes, numbers, letters, and colors. It was, after all, a much simpler time for a child. She even got to finger paint! She made a large portrait of a purple girl flying toward a large, silver disc with tentacles.

On the bus ride home, Maisy sat in her normal seat, the wind blowing her black hair backward and all about through the open window on the big, yellow bus. She had learned about numbers and letters and shapes. She had learned the secrets of the universe, harnessed a cosmic energy, and wielded it to her will. Maisy had also single-handedly saved planet Earth from an alien invasion. It was all in a day's work for a Kindergartener. No big deal.

She ate dinner with her mom and dad that night, and they let her stay up a little extra late to watch cartoon reruns on television with them. (Tomorrow was the last day of school, after all, so why not?) Maisy took special pleasure in their company tonight after all she had been through.

Later that same night, Maisy stirred in her sleep. She awoke and looked all about, expecting to see a flash, dull blue glows, or hints of glimmering silver. She did not. Arising and walking to the window, she saw nothing but a clear, starry night sky and nearly full moon, empty of any flying saucers.

But she knew that one was nearby.

Tiptoeing down the stairs, putting on her jacket over her white silk nightgown, and taking special care not to stir the dog or wake her parents, Maisy slipped outside. She strode into her backyard and gazed upwards.

As if on cue, there was a flash and a humming, and she felt the warm wind of the tiny saucer as it flew over her. It descended gently downward without a sound, finally landing softly in the grass. A ramp opened up and three tall, gangly Greys with bulbous heads and dark eyes descended. One of them wore tattered remnants of a business suit and now had an eyepatch and mechanical appendages and patches where previously flesh and bone had been.

“Back so soon?” Maisy asked, taking up a disapproving posture, her fists tucked firmly and confidently into her hips.

“But of course, little Maisy!” Dr. Alien said, telepathically. “We have never encountered one of your kind with such...power. We are intrigued and very impressed. We had to come back to give you an offer.”

“Oh, so you’re using my *name* now, are you? And what offer?”

“Your abilities, your strength, with training could bring you much glory. You could rule the stars, even be empress of our star empire one day! My offer is to join us, and let me train you, dear girl. We can give you this planet, and others like it, to rule as your very own!”

The alien extended his one remaining natural arm, long and thin, with its four spindly fingers outstretched.

Maisy thought about his offer, but didn't even need to consider it. She was disgusted by the invitation, and unpleasantly surprised, disgusted even, by the alien's gumption after being beaten so badly in the battle.

"No." said Maisy, coldly. Then, leaning defiantly toward the alien on her tiptoes, "Now you listen here. I don't want *anything* from you. Except for one thing. Leave. Get away from this planet, and never come back. And know that it's under *my* protection. Should you ever choose to return, you'll have to deal with *me*. If I were you, I would get as far away from here as fast as I could, while I still can."

The aliens stood dumbfounded for a moment, profoundly disturbed that someone so little could speak with such eloquence or hold such clout. Then, Dr. Alien grimaced and leaned in to meet Maisy in her power posture and looked at her threateningly, the tips of his sharp teeth just showing.

Maisy stood firm and undaunted, and, clenching her fists tighter, flared her eyes with a bright purple light. When he saw it, Dr. Alien flinched and immediately retracted, visibly gulping.

The facade was broken.

"O-okay," Dr. Alien stammered, "whatever you say. We'll go! We won't be back! I promise."

"Good." Maisy's eyes returned to normal.

The visitors quickly clambered back up the ramp into their ship and the airlock slid shut. With a hum the craft lifted from the ground and rose into the air, flying back up into the sky, the blackness of space rushing to greet it.

Maisy stood there, her hair and nightgown fluttering slightly in the gentle Summer night's breeze, watching the saucer as it grew steadily further away. As it ascended and the soft glow of the bright, big moon gently glinted off its hull, Maisy could feel the dense, cautionary electric energy that had permeated the air in previous nights warning her of evil dissipate.

She remained there, watching them leave, determined to stay put until they were entirely gone. She looked ever upward, watching the craft slide gracefully into the night sky, growing ever tinier and increasingly insignificant, until it was so small that it seemed to be only one of the vast many stars, one tiny speck in an ocean of such miniscule bright dots. Eventually the disc was gone, fading forever into the velvety blanket of night, never to visit again.

Everything was right now, and Maisy knew it.

It was only then that Maisy returned inside her house and finally laid her head down to sleep, and did so peacefully, and restfully, and with a youthful, contented smile on her lips.

THE END

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