

## CHAPTER ONE

### **The New Teacher**

My name is Jennifer Dale. My friends call me Jenny. I'm 16 years old and I live near Boston. My town is beautiful and very green. I live here with my parents and my dog, Fred. I go to school at Jefferson High and I want to become a journalist. In my free time I play volleyball and I listen to "heavy metal" music.

I want to tell you my story.

It was the first day of high school. I was excited. I already knew most of my classmates, but I didn't know my new teachers. I got up, ate my breakfast and went to school. On the street I met my friend, Dana; her house is near mine and we always walk to school together.

"I hope our new teachers are men. And I hope they're handsome!" Dana said. Dana loves talking about boys.

"Yes, I need something new and interesting in my life," I answered.

We arrived at school and went into our classroom. A young man was inside.

"Hello, boys and girls. I'm your new science teacher. My name is Mr Adams. I hope to work well with you this year."

Dana and I looked at Mr. Adams. He was tall and thin. He had blond hair and brown eyes. He seemed friendly.

"We're lucky! I think he's a very handsome teacher!" Dana said to me.

"Yes, he is!" I answered. I looked at him and he looked at me. Our eyes met. "What's your name?" he asked, smiling. "Uh, Jennifer," I answered. I was a little nervous.

He turned to Dana. "And who are you?"

"I'm Dana!" Dana gave him a big, enthusiastic smile. At that moment the noise of an airplane attracted our attention. Everyone in the class looked out of the window, but the sun was in front of us. It bothered our eyes. We turned away from the window. Except Mr Adams. He was at the window and was looking directly at the sun. The sun didn't irritate his eyes!

"Gee!" I thought, "How can he look at it like that?!!"

The airplane then passed and the lesson continued. When the hour finished, another man walked in. This one had black hair and green eyes. His nose was small and pointed, and he had strangely high cheekbones.

"What a weird-looking teacher!" I said to Dana.

"Wow, you're right!" she exclaimed.

The teacher didn't smile and spoke coldly to the class.

"I'm your English teacher. I want you to be on your best behaviour this year. The lesson can begin. And remember, no talking!"

Everyone in class was evidently shocked, but no one said anything. Another

student, Steve, raised his hand.

"What?" asked the new teacher in his cold voice.

"Excuse me, but what's your name?"

"Mr. Stone," he answered. I then noticed that his voice wasn't just cold: it was metallic and monotonous! Dana looked at me with disappointment. She raised her eyebrows. "What's his problem?" she mouthed.

The lesson proceeded. Mr. Stone read a poem from our English Literature book. His voice was weird, very weird. It had no emotion. It was almost robotic!

Someone touched me. It was Dana. "Isn't he horrible?" she whispered. I nodded.

The other teachers we met that morning were Miss Smith, the arts teacher, and Mrs. Ching, who taught math. Both seemed nice. Miss Smith, in particular, was a very cheerful person.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Clues

I always eat lunch at school. That day I ate with Dana and Paul Miller, another friend from my class. Paul was a very intelligent boy. He was always the best in math. His parents were divorced and he lived with his father and his black cat, Apollo. He missed his mother. She lived with another man and didn't want to see Paul. His father was never at home, so Paul was very lonely. He didn't have many friends at school because he was too intellectual. He loved Apollo very much and spent a lot of time with him.

"What do you think about our new teachers?" I asked my friends.

"I think Mr Adams is very sexy!" said Dana.

"Did you see how he looked at the airplane? The sun didn't bother him!" exclaimed Paul. "You're right!" I said. "But did you hear Mr Stone? He speaks like a robot! His voice is cold and metallic!"

"He's unfriendly too!" added Dana. "That's true!" I said.

"Look!" said Paul. "Look what he's eating!" We looked at Mr Stone. He sat away from the other teachers and he didn't have a normal lunch. There was a glass in front of him. It was full of a dense, green liquid. There were some black pills in his hand. He put two of them in the glass. The green liquid started to bubble, and it changed colour: it started to become red! Then he took the glass and drank the mysterious red formula.

I looked at Paul and he looked at me. We were disgusted and frightened. Dana tried to be rational. "Maybe it's a new diet. Maybe that's why he's so thin!" she said. I didn't agree. There was something strange about Mr Stone.

That afternoon and the next day we met our other new teachers. We also had English again. Mr Stone came in and sat down.

"Miller. Paul Miller. Tell me something about yourself."

Paul was surprised. English teachers don't usually ask personal questions!

"Well, Paul? Don't you have anything to say?"

"Uh, well, I enjoy astronomy, I have a cat..." Mr Stone asked everyone to say something about their life and hobbies.

"Maybe he wants to create a relationship with us, but he's such a cold person! How bizarre!" I thought. Then, looking at him more carefully, I noticed something: his eyes weren't green anymore! They seemed a darker, different colour! I raised my hand.

"May I go to the bathroom?" I asked. As I walked towards the door, I looked at Mr Stone's eyes again. I was right! They were yellowish brown. They looked like amber!

## CHAPTER THREE

### Aliens

That afternoon I sat on my bed and thought about my first two days of high school. I wanted to know more about Mr. Stone. I decided to go and visit Paul.

Paul was in front of his computer. He was very interested in astronomy, the occult, and life on other planets.

"Hi, Paul. What are you doing?"

I asked.

"I'm on the Internet. I'm in contact with the International Space Fan Club. Listen to this. Something very important is happening. A comet is passing through the Virgo constellation. There are the right connections for intergalactic meetings! The Earth has been in the Virgo constellation since last week."

"But what are intergalactic meetings?" I asked.

"They're voyages of aliens to our planet. These voyages can happen only in special moments, for example, when a constellation and a comet meet. Aliens can travel to our planet for different reasons. Sometimes they want to study us humans. Some people say that aliens may come to Earth to conquer the planet."

I looked at Paul with a shocked expression. An idea started to form in my mind.

"What's wrong, Jenny?" Paul asked.

"Maybe Mr Stone is an alien!" I exclaimed.

"Gee, aren't you exaggerating? Come on, get real!!"

"Well, his voice doesn't seem human, his eyes change colour, and do you remember the green liquid and the black pills he had for lunch?"

"What do you mean, his eyes change colour?" Paul asked.

"Didn't you notice? Yesterday they were green; today they're amber-coloured!" I answered.

"Even if his eyes change colour, I still don't believe he's an alien."

"But the comet explains everything: it entered the Virgo constellation last week, and Mr Stone is a new teacher. I talked to Dana's brother, Matt. He said that this is Mr Stone's first year at Jefferson High. No one knows where he comes from!" I said.

"Maybe..." Paul's eyes lit up. "Maybe that's why he asked us all those personal questions: he wants to study us!"

"Yes! You see, all clues indicate that he is an alien! So, what can we do?" I asked.

"We can spy on him. Maybe we can follow him to his house. We can see where he lives and what he does at home. However, we must be very careful. He doesn't seem to have emotions. He might get angry if he discovers we suspect him. We'll try to follow him tomorrow, after school, OK?" said Paul.

The next morning before school, I took Fred out for a walk in the park. Fred needs daily exercise, so my parents and I take turns walking the dog.

The park was empty. It was dawn. A lonely bird chirped in the trees. The grass was wet with dew. There was peace all around.

Suddenly, I noticed something, or someone, moving behind the bushes. I got closer to see who, or what, it was.

In the clearing, there was a man. He was looking up and his arms were raised; he bent down and touched the ground. Then he stood straight again, face and hands again directed to the sky. After about a minute, he turned around... It was Mr Stone! Was he communicating with the universe? With his planet? Was he really an alien?

I quickly walked away. Fortunately, Fred didn't bark.

I took my dog home and then met Dana. We walked to school. I wanted to tell her about Mr Stone, but I didn't. It was too difficult. Besides, I couldn't tell her about the afternoon plan, because it was too dangerous for three people to follow the teacher.

During the morning I thought about Mr Stone again and again. I was scared, but also excited.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Too Much Imagination?

When the science class started, Mr. Adams walked in.

"Come on, boys and girls. Today we're going to the science laboratory!" he announced.

In our lab there are some white mice and some hamsters in cages. As Mr Adams passed by their cages, they started to squeal loudly. They were very agitated. Mr Adams laughed. "What's wrong?" he said, speaking to the animals. "I won't eat you!"

Then he gave us some worms. "You must cut them into little pieces. The pieces can live and move independently," he said.

I looked at my worm. It was pale and slimy. I didn't want to cut it up.

"Jennifer. Are you afraid of cutting up your worm?" I looked up. Mr Adams was at my desk. He smiled down at me. "Give me your knife." I thanked him and gave it to him. His arm touched mine. It tickled. An electric shock ran through me and I jumped.

"What's wrong?" asked Mr Adams. He seemed frightened.

"N-Nothing," I answered, trying to smile. He helped me cut up my worm, then walked away. No one else in class had noticed anything. I didn't know what to think. Were all my teachers weird, or was I just too imaginative?

I wrote a note to Paul and told him what had happened.

"Paul!" I whispered. Paul turned and looked at me. I passed the note.

"Excuse me. What are you doing? Paul, what do you have in your hand?" asked Mr Adams. His voice made me freeze. We were in very big trouble.

"N-N-Nothing," said Paul.

"Please listen to the lesson. If I see you again, you must give me the note."

"I'm sorry," answered Paul.

WHEW!! I was so happy that I wanted to laugh.

Obviously, I didn't.

When the bell rang, Mr. Adams called me to his desk. "Oh, no...," I thought.

He smiled. "I'm sorry I scared you; two years ago I had an accident. My left arm is artificial. It's an electric prosthesis and sometimes it can give electric shocks." He seemed a little embarrassed.

I was surprised and sorry; he was so sweet! I thanked him and went to lunch.

"Paul, forget what I wrote," I said, as I sat down at our usual lunch table. I told Paul and Dana about Mr. Adams' electric prosthesis. Then Dana mentioned Mr Stone. Paul and I looked at each other, but we didn't say anything. Besides, after school, Dana had a dance club meeting in the gym, so Paul and I were free.

We finished our chocolate milk and went out to recess. At the door we met Mr

Stone. His head was down; he seemed deep in thought.

"Hi!" Dana said to him.

"Oh. Uh, hi...", he said, surprised, lifting his head. His eyes were green again!

"Wow, that Mr. Stone is really a mystery!" Dana exclaimed.

I still didn't want to tell Dana the whole story, so I changed the subject.

Fortunately, the bell interrupted us. Before entering class at one o'clock, I took Paul aside. I quickly told him about what I had seen in the park.

"Wow... I wonder what we'll see this afternoon!" remarked Paul.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Mr. Stone

When the school day finished, Paul and I hid behind some bushes and watched the school gate. We saw many classes go home, and some teachers. But we didn't see Mr. Stone. The minutes passed. "Maybe he went home by car," I said.

At that moment, through the bushes, we saw a man with black hair and very high cheekbones walk past.

"It's him!" I whispered.

"Wait! He mustn't suspect that we are following him," Paul said.

We waited two minutes. "OK. We can go," I said.

We followed him at a distance and finally we saw him go into a house. It was a pretty, pink, two-story building. There was a lawn in front of it and a big tree on the side.

We crept up to the window and carefully looked inside.

Mr. Stone put his briefcase down and opened the refrigerator. He took out another bottle of that horrible green liquid and put it on the table. Then he went upstairs.

"Now what can we do?" Paul whispered.

"No problem! I can climb the tree!" I said.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course. Don't forget I play volleyball!"

"Be careful!"

I went to the tree. It wasn't very high and it was easy to climb. From my position I could see his room. Mr. Stone was there.

"What's happening?" whispered Paul.

"He's sitting in front of a mirror," I said softly. "His hands are on his head... Oh no!!!"

"What? What?" asked Paul.

The teacher was totally bald, and his head was covered with disgusting, brown warts! I felt sick.

Suddenly I noticed my reflection in Mr. Stone's mirror and Mr. Stone noticed it, too! He brusquely turned around and stared at me. I was paralyzed with fear. My mouth fell open. I was expecting the worst. Instead, Mr. Stone didn't look angry. He actually seemed very sad. He opened the window.

"You students think I'm weird. Come inside. I want to tell you something."

"Uh, Mr. Stone, I'm terribly sorry..., " I started to say. I was extremely embarrassed.

"Don't worry. Since you're here, please come in."

I climbed down the tree. Paul was very nervous.



"Come on, Jenny, let's go away before it's too late!"

"No, Paul. I'm going in."

"But...", I went towards Mr. Stone's front door, so Paul followed. The teacher opened the door and made us sit down in his living room.

"Do you want something to drink?" he asked.

"No, nothing, thank you," I answered.

"W-What are those... warts on your head?" asked Paul, ignoring the look I gave him.

"These warts are the results of a throat tumor. You see, I started smoking as a teenager and I continued until the tumor. Chemotherapy made me lose all of my hair, and I developed these warts.

"You've probably noticed my voice.

Unfortunately, the tumor destroyed my vocal chords. So now I speak with a voice implant.

"The tumor has caused very serious changes in my life. I started to suffer from depression and I still see a psychiatrist. I also moved, hoping to start a better life in a new environment. In fact, I'm from Wisconsin. You see, I'm not married, and the illness has made me very lonely. People don't like illnesses; they stay away from sick people. Sick people bother them."

"Mr Stone, we really feel terrible about our behaviour," I said.

"Yes, we really apologise. We hope you can forgive us," added Paul.

"Don't worry! In a sense, I'm glad this happened. I haven't talked like this to anyone for a long time. You see, I want to be friends with my students. That's why I asked your class so many questions. But it's very hard for me to smile, or be cheerful. Try to understand, if I'm strict or unpleasant."

I smiled at Mr Stone. I was very moved.

"We understand," I said softly.

"May I ask you a question?" said Paul.

"Paul!" I exclaimed.

"It's OK. Ask me anything you want," answered Mr Stone.

"What's that stuff you eat at lunch?"

"Oh... Did that scare you? The green liquid and the black pills are part of my treatment. They include protein and other nutritional substances."

"And why, excuse my curiosity, were your eyes amber-coloured yesterday?"

"Well, I tried some coloured contact lenses. I wanted to do something different. I thought that a new look could make me feel better, but it didn't work."

"Mr Stone?" I began, "I saw you at the park, this morning..."

"Gee, I probably appeared very strange to you, with all those movements!" he said. "My doctor suggested early-morning exercise, in fresh, clean air. You really have watched me these last few days, I must say!"

Paul and I looked at each other. We felt rude and very silly. We were ashamed for being so inconsiderate.

"Well, Mr Stone, we don't know how to thank you for your hospitality and kindness," I said. "We really don't deserve it. Our behaviour..."

"That's enough, that's enough, don't worry. Thank you for your company. I'll see you tomorrow at school. And remember, if you ever want to come and visit me, you're always welcome."

"Thank you very much. We'll come again," said Paul.

Paul and I left Mr Stone's house, and walked home.

"Well, I think we've learned a lesson," Paul said. "We must remember that many people in this world are suffering; many people have problems; and, if they act in strange ways, there are reasons. There isn't an alien behind every bush. There's a person, just like you and me. And maybe this person needs friendship and a helping hand."

I looked at Paul with affection and admiration. His words expressed my own thoughts perfectly. We had let our imagination and superficiality dominate us. This made us forget human feelings and problems. I thought about Mr Adams and his artificial arm. Even in that case I had overreacted with my ridiculous suspicions.

"Hey, Paul," I said. "I want to celebrate! This adventure is over. I feel relieved. Let's go to the "Rainbow" and buy an ice-cream."

"OK, Jenny! Good idea!"

"Let's call Dana, too!" I added, thinking it was the moment to inform her about everything.

"Sure!"

We stopped at Dana's house and invited her.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Thanks to a Missing Watch

We sat down at the "Rainbow" and ordered three sundaes.

"Dana, we have news about Mr. Stone!"

I said.

"Yes, although it's a very long story," Paul added.

We told her everything: the news on the comet and the intergalactic meetings; our plan to spy on Mr. Stone; finally, the teacher's sad story.

Dana's expression went from surprised, to worried, to ashamed, during our tale. "Our class must be much nicer to him!" she said. "But this comet... maybe aliens will come to Earth!"

"Dana, please, I don't even want to hear the word 'alien'!" I exclaimed.

"Let's keep our eyes open for people in need, not for aliens!" Paul added.

"OK, OK, sorry!" said Dana.

From the window of the ice-cream parlor, I noticed that it was already dark. I looked at the time... my watch wasn't on my wrist!

"Oh no! My watch!" I exclaimed. Then I remembered. "I left it in the gym! I took it off at recess, to play volleyball. I must go and get it!"

"But, Jenny, I'm sure that the janitor will find it and put it in a safe place," said Paul.

"I don't trust him. That watch is so important to me. It was a gift from my grandfather. He's dead now, and it's the only thing I have of him. I must go to school immediately!"

"But the school's closed now!" Dana commented.

"No, not today. Mrs. Ching is at school all evening, because she's preparing some math tests. I know because I heard her talking to Miss Smith."

"OK. Well, I'll see you tomorrow then. I have to go home and start my homework," Paul said.

"Me too," Dana added.

We left the "Rainbow" and I went towards Jefferson High. The back door was open. I went in. Our gym is on the ground floor, but I didn't go there directly. Something stopped me. I felt a strange sensation. I didn't know what it was. Something wanted me to climb the stairs and go up to the classrooms.

I felt afraid. The school was dark and silent. I shivered. "Where am I going? Why am I climbing these stairs?" I thought. My heart beat faster and faster. Something terrible was at the top of the stairs - I sensed it - but what? I desperately wanted to run away and return home, but I couldn't. The mysterious force inside me made me go on.

On the third floor I heard a noise.

Someone was moaning! As I passed by the janitor's closet, the sound became louder. Someone needed help! I opened the closet. It was Mrs Ching! The old teacher was on a chair with her hands and feet tied. She was gagged and her eyes were open in terror.

"Mrs Ching!" I whispered. I took the cloth from her mouth.

"Help!" she said. "Someone is doing something wrong, and he, or she, is here now! The person is in disguise!"

"OK, Mrs Ching, stay here. Whoever it is mustn't suspect anything." I put the cloth back in the teacher's mouth and left the closet.

I looked around the second floor. I was terrified. Everything was silent. The long, dark hall was very frightening.

Then I noticed something: a light was on in the computer room!

I crept to the door. Someone inside was working on a computer. I could hear fingers clicking on the keys. Slowly, very slowly, I opened the door. Just a crack. It was Mr Adams! He was typing a kind of code on the screen. Was it a password? Then he took a small, plastic object from his pocket. It looked like a key. He inserted it in the diskette slot. The screen blacked out... It flickered. Then something appeared: it was the face of an alien!!!!

The alien had a green head and big, red eyes. It didn't have hair and it didn't have a nose. Its mouth and ears were very small.

Then Mr Adams put his hands on his head. He was pulling at his hair. It started to come apart! He was taking off his hair, and his face! A green, bald head surfaced: I realised that he was identical to the alien on the screen! He put his "face" on the computer table.

Then the false Mr Adams started talking.

"Klyreg calls base. Klyreg here. Klyreg calls base."

"ALTANK PILLEX, Klyreg. How is your mission proceeding?" said the alien on the screen with a mechanical voice.

"For now everything is OK. But I'm already tired of this mask, and I hate speaking this barbarian language!"

"English is not a barbarian language!" I thought angrily.

"I'm sorry, but your voice implant must stay inside you until the mission has finished. Then we can remove it. Tell me, does anyone suspect you?" said the alien.

"No, I don't think so. I had a small problem with an old math teacher, but I was in disguise, and I tied her up in a closet. So, everything's fine."

"Ha ha! You're wrong! I'm here now!" I thought.

"I hope you're right. Our mission can't fail. The spaceship must come this Friday. We'll land in the old, abandoned airfield. We'll wait for you there. By 9:30 p.m. you must be ready. You must have the two students to take to Mitrax. We can't be late. When the comet leaves the Virgo constellation, we won't be able to travel anymore. The intergalactic doors close on Friday, at midnight," said the alien on the screen.

"I know, I know. Don't worry. I must still choose the two students, but I think I know who I want."

"How will you capture the students? You can't touch them because you're electric."

"Aha! So the story of his prosthesis was a big, fat lie!" I thought.

"On Friday evening there is a family-teachers' meeting. During the meeting I'll leave the other teachers.

While the parents are listening to the teachers, I'll ask the students to come with me. I'll invent an excuse. Then I'll take them to the science lab and I'll spray them with my hypnotizing spray. Once they're hypnotized, they'll do everything I say. They won't be able to think, or rebel. We'll go out of the building by the fire-escape exit and walk to the airfield," said Mr. Adams/Klyreg.

"I'm sure he wants me!" I said to myself.

"Be at the airfield by 9:30 p.m. then, Klyreg. Good luck. ALTANK PILLEX."

"ALTANK PILLEX, Gortz," said Mr. Adams/Klyreg to the alien on the screen. Then he took the key out and the computer screen returned to normal. I silently closed the door and quickly went back to Mrs. Ching.

"I can't tell you anything; it's for your own safety. Just act normally, and no one will hurt you," I said.

"Who..." Mrs. Ching started to ask, but I escaped down the stairs and ran out of the building.

I stopped running when I was far from the school. My watch was still in the gym, but at that point I didn't care.

I had a lot of difficulty sleeping that night. I decided to tell Paul and Dana, but no one else: no one would believe me.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The Plan

The next day, as soon as I arrived at school, I went to the gym to look for my watch.

Fortunately, it was still there. At lunch time I took Dana and Paul to an empty table and started my story. I decided to get to the point immediately.

"Mr. Adams is an alien!" I said.

"No, not again! Are you doing this on purpose? Because if you're not, you have a problem!" Paul exclaimed angrily. "I thought you wanted to stop all this. I thought you were ashamed of your behaviour! First Mr Stone, now Mr. Adams!" he continued, while Dana raised her eyebrows incredulously and suppressed a smile.

"I know I seem crazy...", I said, feeling tears in my eyes.

"But I'm telling you the truth. I saw him with my own eyes! Please listen to me."

I told them everything, from my mysterious sensation to the conversation between Mr Adams/Klyreg and the alien on the computer screen. Both my friends looked terrified and shocked. They finally believed me. "Besides," I added, "do you remember how he looked at the sun? It's incredible!" I continued, "He's green and his name is Klyreg. Other aliens are coming in a spaceship on Friday evening.

They're going to land in the old abandoned airfield near our high school. They want to take two students with them to Mitrax!"

"Mitrax?" asked Paul.

"Yes. It must be the name of their planet."

"This Friday?" added Dana.

"Exactly. During the family-teachers' meeting. He's going to hypnotize them with a spray and take them on his spaceship."

"Today is Thursday! We only have a day to do something!" exclaimed Paul.

"I have an idea!" I said.

"What?" asked my friends.

"We can try to find the hypnotizing spray and take it away from him. It can only be in two places: somewhere in his house, or somewhere in the science lab."

"Good idea! This afternoon after he goes home, we can look for the spray in the lab; if the spray isn't there, tomorrow morning we won't go to school. We'll get into his house in some way and take the spray," added Paul.

"But we don't even know where he lives!" objected Dana.

"Well, we'll find out!" I said.

"So we want to steal his hypnotizing spray. Maybe Matt can help us. He has a key that opens all doors," Dana said. Dana's brother Matt is a policeman.

"Are you sure he'll give it to you? I don't think he'll believe this story," I said.

"Of course not! How can he believe something like this? I obviously have to steal the key."

"I hope he doesn't notice. Stealing a passe-partout from the police is a big crime," Paul commented.

"Yes, but it's the only way to enter where we want.

Don't worry. I'll be careful. Gee, Mr Adams is so friendly and handsome! It's difficult to believe that he's a horrible, green alien!

Well, this afternoon I'll get the key."

"Remember, don't say anything to anyone," I said.

"This is our secret."

"OK. Don't worry."

"I hope everything will be OK," Paul said.

We went to our afternoon classes. I couldn't wait for the day to finish. I was nervous and excited.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Paul's Decision

I constantly thought of the day before. I remembered when he took off his face. Behind that blond hair there was a bald, green head. Behind those brown eyes, two red ones. And behind the nose, nothing! I shivered.

After school, I went with Dana to her house. Paul, instead, stayed at school to make sure that Klyreg went home. When Dana and I arrived at her house, there was no one there.

"I hope Matt didn't take the key with him!" said Dana. We went in. Dana went to her brother's room. I heard her open many drawers. I crossed my fingers.

"Here it is!" Dana exclaimed.

"Oh, great! Now let's go back to school!" I said.

"Wait! My mom will be back soon. I have to leave her a note... I'll tell her I'm at the library," Dana said.

We went back to school. Paul was sitting on the steps.

"Has Klyreg left?" I asked.

"Yes. We can go in," Paul answered.

We went up to the science lab. When we arrived, we noticed that the door was open. Someone was whistling inside.

"Oh no! It's the janitor!" Paul whispered.

"Let's hide in the bathroom!" Dana suggested. "It's already been cleaned, so he won't come in."

We quickly entered the girls' bathroom and hid. After some time the janitor walked away. We heard him go down the stairs.

"OK, now!" Paul said.

We entered the lab and looked around. We opened the chemical cabinet with Matt's passe-partout and examined every container. There weren't any sprays or strange bottles. So we tried the refrigerator.

"What's this?!" I said. Inside the refrigerator there was a spray without a label. It was very difficult to open and it had a bizarre phosphorescence.

"Wow! It's probably Klyreg's hypnotizing spray! But how can we be sure?" Paul asked.

"We have to be sure that it's the right one. An error could be fatal. I have an idea! I can try the spray on my dog, Fred.

Fred hates taking baths and especially eating leftovers. I'll spray him. If he doesn't protest, we have the right spray!" I said.

"Excellent! Please phone me after and tell me the results!"

Paul said.

"I want to know, too!"



Dana added.

We carefully went out of the lab and left the building.

When I arrived home, I prepared a big bath for Fred. "Fred! Freddie!" I called. The dog was in the garden. When he saw me with the big basin full of water, he barked and howled. He ran inside his dog-house.

"Silly dog!" I thought. I took the spray, went to the doghouse and sprayed Fred. Then I called him again and I pointed towards the water in the basin. What a surprise! Fred calmly came out of the dog-house and jumped into the water! After Fred's bath I went to the refrigerator and took out some leftovers. I put them in his dish and gave it to him.

"Food time, Fred!" I said. Fred saw the leftovers and didn't protest. He started eating. It was incredible! I immediately phoned Dana and gave her the good news. Then I phoned Paul. "Hi, Paul. It's me. We have the right spray. Fred has been completely hypnotized."

"Great! Listen, can you come to my house now? I need to talk to you."

There was something strange in his voice.

"Paul, are you OK?" I asked.

"Yes, I'm fine. I'll tell you everything when you arrive, OK?"

Please come. It's important."

I took the bus and arrived at Paul's house. He was alone, as always. He was in his room with his cat, Apollo, in his arms.

"I want to go to Mitrax with Klyreg," Paul said.

"What?!!"

"Yes, I want to go to Mitrax with Klyreg!" Paul repeated.

"Are you kidding? You're crazy!"

"No, I'm not crazy. Look at my life. My mother doesn't love me. She went away and never wants to see me. How do you think I feel? My father is always working. He doesn't care if I'm here or in Timbuktu! He only cares about his young, blonde secretaries. At school everyone thinks I'm strange; you're my only true friend in class. Jenny, I'm not happy here. Try to understand. This world isn't for me. I don't like my life. I want to test my destiny and see what happens to me. Honestly, I really don't think that Klyreg wants to hurt us students."

"How do you know?" I asked angrily, shocked at what he was saying.

"He doesn't give me that impression. I'm sure the aliens just want to study us. I feel I can trust them. Also, you know I love space. I've always been interested in astronomy and alien life. This is a fantastic opportunity to see life on another planet, in another galaxy. This is my dream! This opportunity will never exist again. If aliens come to Earth at the next intergalactic meeting, they certainly won't come to our town again!"

Listening to Paul, I started to understand his point of view. But it was terrible to think that Paul didn't have anyone. No one really cared about him. I was very sad.

"Running away to another planet isn't the right solution to your problems," I

said.

"But I've tried to talk to my father about my problems. I've tried many times. Nothing has changed. Listen, I want to go to Mitrax. I feel it's the right thing for me. Something inside is pushing me to go."

Maybe going to Mitrax was the best thing for Paul, although I still couldn't believe it.

"If you're convinced... But I'll miss you, a lot. I'll never see you again," I said.

"Nothing is forever. You will see me again, I promise."

"Don't make promises you can't keep," I said, with tears in my eyes.

"Believe me, Jenny. Sooner or later, when the next intergalactic door opens, I'll return. And I'll have many new things to tell you!"

"Listen," he continued, "we must organise our plan for tomorrow evening! When Klyreg takes the two students to the science lab, he'll open the refrigerator but he won't find the spray.

"At that point he won't be able to do anything, because he can't touch us. If he touches us, he'll electrocute us," Paul explained.

"Then he won't be able to study us anymore!" I interrupted.

"Exactly. So, when he sees that his mission has failed, the only thing he can do is go to the airfield and leave with his spaceship. He can't stay any longer because he can't miss his spaceship. And the spaceship can't wait for him. I won't come to the family-teachers' meeting; I'll wait for Mr Adams at the airfield."

I sadly looked at Paul. "Good luck. I'll wait for you," I said.

Paul picked up Apollo and gave him to me. "I want you to keep him. Take care of him for me." He came closer to me. For the first time, we kissed. My heart pounded.

"Oh, Paul, thanks for Apollo. Thank you very much." I stroked the black cat and he purred.

## CHAPTER NINE

### Friday Night

I went back home and passed by Dana's house to give her the passe-partout. That night I didn't sleep. I thought about the next day, about Paul's decision, about Klyreg. Apollo mewed in the darkness.

On Friday morning I got up early. I felt very tense. The day proceeded slowly. During the morning the principal came to remind us of the meeting.

"Don't forget that this evening there's the family-teachers' meeting. I hope to see all of you with your parents."

"Sure!" I thought. "And during the meeting one of your teachers will try to kidnap two students and take them to a mysterious planet!"

When the school day finished, I went to the "Rainbow" for some ice-cream with Paul and Dana. Paul told Dana about his decision. She was obviously very surprised and disappointed. Those moments we passed together were very special. I will never forget that last afternoon with Paul. Our friendship seemed stronger than before.

We felt more united because of our separation.

Finally, after dinner, my parents and I walked to school. We sat down in the auditorium and the meeting started. At one point I saw Mr Adams get up and go towards Dana's family. I saw him whisper something to Dana's parents and then to Dana. She got up from her chair and followed him. Together they walked towards Steven's family. Steve is another one of my classmates. I'm sure Klyreg chose him because Paul was absent. In fact I noticed him looking for Paul.

Steve, Dana and Mr Adams left the auditorium. "So he didn't choose me!" I thought. I looked at my watch: 9:05. Twenty-five more minutes. Suddenly I had an irresistible impulse. I wanted to see what was happening. I got up.

"Jenny, where are you going?" my mom asked.

"I'm going to the science lab. Don't worry!" I said, and I quickly walked away. The door of the lab was closed. Inside I heard Mr Adams opening the fridge. I imagined his anger.

"Oh, no!" he exclaimed. "Where is it?"

"Where is what, Klyreg?" Dana asked. "Are you talking about the hypnotizing spray? You lost, Klyreg!" she exclaimed triumphantly.

"W-What? You know...?" Klyreg was shocked.

"What spray? What are you saying?" said Steve, who didn't know anything about it.

"What courage Dana has!" I thought. Mr Adams had the power to electrocute her, if he wanted. It was stupid to make him angry. But in the end, it seems that Paul was right. Klyreg wasn't really a bad alien.

"Well, I don't think you need us anymore!" Dana said. The door opened and she walked out. "Come on, Steve. Everything's OK. Let's go back to the meeting!"

Then Klyreg came out. He seemed confused and helpless. I looked at my watch.

"Klyreg, it's 9:17. Go. Don't miss your spaceship," I said, almost with compassion.

Klyreg looked at me, even more surprised. Then he went to the fire-escape exit and ran away. At that moment I thought of Paul. I followed Klyreg down the fire-escape stairs and out of the building. Our school is very close to the old airfield, so Klyreg and I reached it at 9:24. The spaceship was already there, waiting for Klyreg. Its portal was open, but all the lights were off. The aliens from Mitrax didn't want anyone to see them. Paul was there too. When he saw Klyreg, he ran towards him.

"Klyreg! Listen! I want to come with you! Take me with you! You can study me! I know you won't hurt me!"

Klyreg was literally shocked.

"Come then, Paul. Hurry!" he said, recovering from his amazement.

"Paul!" I shouted.

"Jenny!" He ran to me and we embraced. "This crazy adventure has finally finished. Fortunately everything ended well for everyone," Paul said.

"Think about me sometimes," I said.

"I'll always think of you. And remember, I'll be back!"

"Paul!" Klyreg shouted. He was on the stairs of the spaceship. "The portal is closing!"

"Have fun in Mitrax, you space lover!" I said, laughing and crying at the same time. Paul went up the stairs and the portal closed behind him. The spaceship lights turned on and it silently went up into the dark night sky. I watched it disappear into the blackness. Then I hurried back to school.

My parents were still at the meeting with everyone else. No one seemed to suspect anything. Dana and Steve sat calmly near their parents. I, too, went back to my mother and father, smiling innocently.

Today six months have passed. Everyone at school now knows the truth about Mr. Adams, although not everyone totally believes my story. We have a new science teacher. Her name is Miss Lundberg, and for the moment she seems normal...

Dana and I have been to visit Mr. Stone a few times, and his relationship with our class has really improved. He seems a happier person, and this pleases me a lot.

Steve is now Dana's boyfriend and they make a nice couple.

I still have the hypnotizing spray. I keep it hidden, although sometimes I use it on Fred when he needs a bath! Apollo is now a member of our family. Fred is a little jealous of him, but they're usually friends. I told my parents the entire story. They seem to believe me, especially because no one can find Paul. In the beginning his father looked for him, but he soon stopped worrying.

Sometimes Dana and I talk about Klyreg and our adventure. We remember

Paul. On many evenings, alone in my garden, I look up at the sky and think about him.

"Good night, Paul, wherever you are. See you soon." extremely embarrassed.

"Don't worry. Since you're here, please come in."

I climbed down the tree. Paul was very nervous.

"Come on, Jenny, let's go away before it's too late!"

"No, Paul. I'm going in."

"But...", I went towards Mr. Stone's front door, so Paul followed. The teacher opened the door and made us sit down in his living room.

- THE END -

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