

NOTE FROM DIANE:

I wrote *42 Days as a Space Girl* back when I was experimenting in different fiction genres. The overall feel of it is inspired by the kinds of books I loved while growing up: Beverly Cleary and Judy Blume, stories about being a teen and not fitting in. I swapped manuscripts with another author (a great way to get feedback!) and WDW: her fifteen-year-old was a lot more mature than mine. Turns out I wasn't writing a fifteen-year-old, I was writing a thirteen-year-old, because times have changed since I was that age. I worked on revising it, but my flash drive crashed and the loss of my revisions felt like a sign. Soon after, I started having success with cozy mysteries, but I still love my space girl. Here's a peek.

Enjoy! Xoxo,

Diane



MY CAT IS BRIGHT PURPLE and he's pissed! If I could get him back into the bathtub I could probably turn him into a pale lilac, but if you know anything about cats and water you know that's not going to happen. And considering my arms have been silver since four-thirty yesterday afternoon and no amount of exfoliating has made a bit of difference, my purple cat is the least of my concerns.

“Lisa? Are you upstairs?”

“Yes, Mom, I'm in the bathroom!” I hollered.

“Dinner's almost ready. Donald!” she yelled at the closed door to my dad's laboratory.

I towel-dried Schrödinger and let him loose. He bolted under the bed, and hissed at me when I peered under the bed skirt. I fully expected to find him in the same spot later that night.

I was pretty sure the newly purpled Schrödinger wasn't going to make any surprise appearances before I did, so I braced myself and headed downstairs for what smelled like meatloaf. The phone rang and Mom's voice answered it.

“Lisa! Phone!” she called, louder than necessary, not knowing I was on the other side of the wall. I reached out for the phone and she gasped when she saw my silver hands.

“Lisa! What happened?!” she asked.

“Science project, Mom, don't worry. The teacher said the side effects are only temporary. This probably happened to Dad a thousand times.” I put the phone to my ear.

“Sylvi? I can't talk right now.”

“Lise? What's going on over there?”

“Mom just saw.”

My mom had grabbed my fingertips and was inspecting my skin closely. She rubbed at it with her thumbs.

“This is totally outer-limits!” She proclaimed.

I held the phone at my side and rolled my eyes. “Mom, don’t go all Molly Ringwald on me.”

“Who’s Molly Ringwald?” Sylvi asked through the phone.

“Some actress from my mom’s generation. I think she said stuff like that in one of her movies.”

“Outer Limits is like outer space, right? So that’s gotta be a compliment.”

“Yeah, listen. I’m not a space girl yet.

“I gotta go now, it’s dinnertime. I’ll call you later with details.”

“K. Bye,” we disconnected.

“Lisa, do you want to explain to me why you’re silver?” Mom asked while doling out salad and meatloaf, all made from scratch.

“Sylvi was messing around on an anagram generator—”

She picked up a bowl of mashed potatoes and plopped a scoop onto my dad’s plate. “I hardly think an anagram generator made you silver.”

“No, the non-toxic paint made me silver after the anagram generator made me a space girl.”

She paused in mid-mashed potato scoop, and stared at the plates on the table for a couple of seconds. “I don’t want to hear another word about this until your father comes to the table.” She resumed her mashed potato blopping.

“Fine.”

I set the table and poured myself a glass of fizzy water to go with my meal. “I’ll be right back.” I ran upstairs and scrubbed my silver arms with a rough loofah but nothing changed. Then I tried Mom’s exfoliating scrub but no luck there, either. My forearms were still silver, and now I smelled like apricots.

There was a tap on the bathroom door and my dad’s voice followed. “Lisa? Dinner’s ready.”

“Be right there,” I called. I ran to my bedroom and pulled on a long sleeved T-shirt. When I returned to the kitchen, both of my parents were already sitting at the table. Aside

from the sounds of serving spoons clinking pots and knives cutting through meatloaves, it was quiet. Like the silence before a bomb goes off.

“So, Donald, your daughter seems to think it is normal to come to the dinner table with silver hands.”

“Silver hands, huh? Let me see.”

I held out my hands for his inspection. He looked closely at each of them, pulling the right one within inches of his nose, then released them. “Nothing to be concerned about. I’m sure I’ve done that about a thousand times,” he said, and winked at me. I smiled back and pulled my arms back to my sides. For the duration of dinner I kept one in my lap at all times. My mom tried to act as though it was normal but occasionally I could see the shock on her face. After we finished our meal I stood to clear the table.

“Lisa, sit down. I want to know how this happened.”

“I told you, Mom, Sylvi turned me into a space girl with the anagram generator!” I was getting tired of explaining something that she clearly wasn’t getting. “It could have been worse. I could have been garlic peas!”

“What?” they both asked.

Really, it was pretty simple. I’d been at my best friend Sylvi’s house all morning, the last free day before school started. I’d been away at camp all summer, and had hoped that something exciting was waiting for me in Radon when I came home. But there wasn’t. Being fourteen in Radon, Pennsylvania was just as lame as being thirteen in Radon, Pennsylvania, and that was so not acceptable.

“So I said I wanted to be somebody different for once. And she typed my name into her anagram generator, L-I-S-A-P-G-R-A-C-E, and it came back a space girl.”

My mom raised one eyebrow. My dad went for a second helping of mashed potatoes.

“Okay, first it said ‘garlic peas’, but the second time it said ‘a space girl’.”

“I’m still waiting for the part where you turned silver,” she said.

“That happened later, after she sprayed me with non-toxic paint.”

“Donald, do you hear this?” she asked my dad. I was pretty sure he didn’t hear anything other than the opportunity to have a third helping of mashed potatoes while she stayed preoccupied with my new look but if I wanted him to help me out of this particular situation I was going to need him all hopped up on potassium and butter.

“It was non-toxic paint, Mom. She already emailed the company to find out how to get it off. I'll probably be normal by tomorrow.”

I focused on my dinner. Really, it shouldn't have been that big of a deal. My dad worked in the science division of Neowave, the people responsible for the power plant in our backyard, and for the two large cooling towers that were a permanent art of the view from my bedroom window. His job had something to do with circuits, or frequencies, or something else I didn't understand. What I did understand was that four years ago he made green smoke pour out of our garage. The neighbors stopped saying hello after that.

My mom wasn't exactly standard issue, either. She made new-old dresses and sold them on Ebay. She got the idea after finding a box of vintage patterns at a yard sale. Apparently there was a weird cult of people who wanted to live life in polyester double knit. I'd been the most normal thing about our family for the past fourteen years. I'd even started to think that maybe I was adopted.

“She starts school tomorrow!” she said. “I'm not so sure the timing is right, what with her accident and all,” she said to my father.

“It wasn't an accident, Mom.”

“She'll be fine, Mary,” my dad said.

“She's turning silver!”

“I'm not turning silver, per se,” I offered but no one listened.

“She's a teenager. She's supposed to be silver every once in a while,” my dad said, placing his hand gently on top of my mom's.

“Mom, you're always telling me that it's perfectly normal for a kid my age to go through a phase, and if there was ever anything I wanted to talk to you about I could.”

“Does this have something to do with your hands being silver?”

“Um, yes?”

“You aren't sure?”

“No, I mean yes. I mean, I think I'm going through one of those phases. Self-expression, I think is what you might call it.”

“Oh,” she sighed again. I guess there were other more serious phases that I could have confessed to. “Well, you know you start eighth grade tomorrow and I wouldn't be comfortable keeping you home from school. But you've always been a good student, so I'll call the principal and give him some advance notice about your, um, new look.”

“Really? You could do that?” I perked up. “That would be great, Mom.”

She reached a hand out and placed it on top of my silver hand. “Lisa, just remember, you can tell me anything, okay?”

At that moment, the newly purple Schrödinger appeared next to the doorframe, directly in my dad's line of vision. His eyes got very big.

“Dad,” I started to plead.

“I think calling the school is a good idea.” He said. “She'll be fine, Mary.”

School. Tomorrow. I tipped my head to the side and thought about what I'd done in the past twenty-four hours. Paint myself silver, dye my hair (and my cat, don't ask) purple, and announce online that I'd spent my summer at camp in outer space . . .

“I'll be fine, Mom,” I said, a little bit worried that it was a lie.

So, yeah. Purple hair. Silver arms. A mom who has dinner on the table by six-thirty every night.

My life is so not normal.