

## Charlie and Ted the Space Guy

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Young Charlie Williams was a dreamer. His dreams took him to the stars and beyond. Charlie knew many things. Like, for instance, that our very own galaxy, the Milky Way, is just one of billions of other galaxies in the universe.

Charlie had always been fascinated with the Solar System. When he was three, he could tell his parents about the planets and the order in which they revolved around the Sun. Charlie longed to some day meet an actual extraterrestrial.

Charlie constantly scanned the sky for alien spacecraft. He looked through high-powered binoculars that his parents gave him, and through the small wobbly telescope set up in the backyard. Charlie couldn't get a really good look at the night sky, though, because the city lights blocked his view. Charlie was fed up with the light pollution.

When his school let out for the summer, Charlie's family went to visit his Aunt Mary in the country where the stars were too numerous to count.

Long after supper, after the sun had set and the sky was dark, Charlie and his dad pulled up their chairs for some sky watching.

"Dad, I see a UFO. Look! It's right there."

Charlie pointed excitedly to a far corner of the sky. Yes, there was an object traveling steadily on its trajectory.

"Sorry, Charlie. That's a satellite. If you watch long enough, you'll see it come around again. It's so clear out here, we see things that we'd never see at home. Don't give up though. You never know what you'll see out here," Dad said, giving Charlie a little wink.

Hmm, Charlie thought. Not a UFO. But an actual satellite? That was pretty impressive; something he'd certainly never seen before.

Charlie and his dad lay back on their lounge chairs until Charlie's neck felt cramped from looking up for so long.

"Time for bed, Charlie."

"Aw, Dad," Charlie protested, rubbing his eyes. He was really pretty tired, but he felt he had to complain just a little to keep his dad on his toes.

The summer night was cool and Charlie kept the bedroom window open a crack so he could listen to the crickets. He watched as a beautiful pearlescent-gray dragonfly flew in through the window.

"What are you doing in here, little guy?"

Charlie loved insects and bugs of every kind. Well, except for mosquitoes and roaches. He was not fond of them at all. But everything else, he loved.

"What are you still doing awake I might ask," said a small voice.

"Who said that?" Charlie demanded, to no one in particular.

Charlie looked around. He was the only person in the room. He could hear the voices of his parents, aunt and uncle, laughing and talking in the next room. It couldn't have been them.

"I'm right here. You said hello to me before," said the little voice again.

"What the..?"

Charlie focused his eyes and looked at the dragonfly perched on the nightstand next to him. He rubbed his eyes. His dragonfly was actually a tiny spaceship. The door to what would be the driver's side was open, and standing on top of this miniscule craft was an even more miniscule little man. He wasn't dressed like a spaceman though. He was very small, but Charlie could have sworn that the little man was wearing logger's boots, tiny bluejeans, a blue and green flannel shirt, and a red scarf tied around his neck. On the top of his head was perched a pair of aviator goggles. The little man looked like he'd be right at home flying a small airplane.

"Please speak softly or you'll hurt my ears," said the little man.

"Who are you and how can I hear your voice when you're so tiny?" Charlie asked.

"I'm Ted, and you're hearing my thoughts. In fact, I can hear yours too, so let's just talk to each other that way or else I'll lose my hearing completely."

Now, this was all too much for Charlie to handle and he threw questions out at Ted as fast as he could think of them. And Charlie could think of a lot of questions.

"Charlie, you're wearing me out. Remember, I'm a lot smaller than you," Ted said.

Ted had so much to tell Charlie. Like about his planet, for instance.

"I come from Planet Tall Trees. We're part of the Bark Galaxy. We live in a very prime area of real estate, so we have to go on patrols to keep the interlopers out."

Ted explained to Charlie that he'd been watching him while he was out doing his patrols.

"I came to see you tonight because you seem like a pretty nice kid. And I know you really, really want to meet a space guy."

"So you're a space guy?" Asked Charlie.

"Well, sort of, I guess. Our planet isn't too far from here. My colony lives inside the hollow of a giant redwood tree."

This was too much for Charlie.

"How can an entire colony consist of a hollow tree?" Charlie asked.

"Come on now, Charlie. Use that giant human brain of yours. You know about bacteria; right? You've seen how microscopic they are. How many of them do you think could live on the head of a pin?"

Charlie considered this.

"I think I know what you're getting at. So if the head of a pin could hold millions of micro organisms, the inside of a hollow tree could hold billions."

"Now, you're getting it, Charlie. There are worlds around you, pretty much everywhere, that you don't even know about. There are worlds smaller than ours and worlds much larger. Like yours."

Charlie and Ted talked for what seemed like hours. They talked about Ted's family and friends; about the food Ted liked to eat (something Charlie had never heard of but thought it sounded like paste); and what school was like on Planet Tall Trees. Charlie rubbed his eyes. He was so tired, but he didn't want to let go of his new friend.

"Gotta go, Charlie. It was great meeting you."

"When can I see you again?"

"Same time next year. Just leave the window open."

Before he knew it, in the blink of an eye, Ted had climbed back into his craft and flew out the window. Charlie thought he saw Ted give him a little wave.

This was stupendous. Miraculous. Something Charlie would never forget. Not ever. Charlie thought of worlds within worlds. He wondered about the worlds living in his magnolia tree at home and planned to get his magnifying glass out when he got home. That is, if he could find it.

In the morning, Charlie woke up and thought about Ted.

"That was the best dream ever," Charlie thought. He looked over at his nightstand and noticed

what he thought might be a very small pile of redwood dust.

"Until next year," Charlie said, to no one in particular.

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