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Samantha Katlyn Herbst
sherbst@eagles.bridgewater.edu

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A Reality Not of This World

By *Samantha Katlyn Herbst*

“Get your head out of the clouds. You need to spend time on the ground so you can make friends and grow.”

Staring at my therapist, I almost laughed. Though I was barely five, I wanted nothing to do with the world and spent hours lost within my mind. The only time I wasn't in my head was when I was reading, or when I was playing with my only friend. Just like me, he rarely spent time with his feet on the ground. We were the outcasts in our kindergarten class, but we really didn't care and carried on. When he went to a neighboring school, however, we rarely spent time on earth.

“Alright, I get you don't want to talk much, but come on, kid. You've got to work with me here.” Still, I refused to respond. “They told me you had difficulty socializing with your peers, and that you barely speak.”

Staring at him, I laughed. “I'd rather read.”

He took his head. “Katlyn, you can't be reading in class when your classmates are in the middle of learning. You have to be listening and doing classwork.”

“I already finished it.” I spoke defiantly. Mrs. Slack already treated me like I wasn't worth it. She made me sit there and stare at the board when I was done. He wasn't going to force me to do the same.

He crossed his arms. “That wasn't what Mrs. Slack told your parents.” He sighed when I refused to answer. “Why are you lying?”

At that, I hissed. “She lies. She put me in the back of the back at a small table all by myself. She hates me.”

Blinking, he looked amazed. After all, that was the most I ever spoke to him. “No one hates you, Katlyn. That's all in your head.”

I hugged my puppy against my chest. The one Nana and John called Dodo. The one I had yet to name. The therapist watched as I hugged my only comfort. Why he was my only comfort was unknown to me. But when I noticed his reaction, I cringed. Puppy was mine. He couldn't judge me over something as trivial as my stuffed animal. Puppy was mine, and I loved Puppy for what he did for me.

“Yes, she does.” I said.

Sighing, my therapist shook his head. “I can't help you if you don't help me.”

On the way home, I stared out the window. In my head, I envisioned monsters dragging the damsel in distress to a foreign land where she waits for her knight-in-shining armor to answer her plea. Yet I envisioned myself as the monster. That was how most adults and some of my classmates saw me anyway. So I viewed myself the way most people did. Then my daydreams moved on to my nightmares; being chased down the street to my death; a flying human sent to kidnap me, among other terrors. Yet, the only thing that was firmly planted in reality anymore were my fingers, that gingerly petted Puppy's ears. He didn't force me back into the world of humans though; he was the only one who was genuinely kind.

Mommy's car stopped in front of the house and she opened the door for me. Even still, I didn't see her, but only the world I lived in; though my body reacted naturally on auto-pilot, I would wonder how I got places once my visualized reality would shatter. She knew I was far away from her world. Even though she worried I would run into something, or make it in the world, I seemed to avoid such things.

At dinner, I was silent, like I always was. While I ate, I dreamed of my fantasy world, one which would later fill the pages of my first series (“The Lost Ages Saga”). My world, filled with magic, and hidden civilizations both on this world and far from its reaches, and undiscovered planets and universes.

Even though I five, I barely cared about anything outside my realms of reverie. Going outside was useless most of the time since I read instead and refused to speak to most of my classmates. Reality wasn't *real* to me. Nothing outside my mind was real. Almost.

Reading wasn't my only escape from the nightmare I believed I was living. All I did was listen to music; I used it to dive further and further into my fantasy worlds, and would often stay submerged for hours at a time. I listened to it while I read as well. After all, I did *borrow* my parents' CDs from time to time. Music was a piece of me, just as much as reading was, even if I didn't realize it at the time.

"Alright. Repeat back your vowels to me." My therapist spoke them slowly and evenly, as if I was stupid. Unlike what he clearly thought, I wasn't an idiot. I was reading novels for goodness sakes! I just had difficulty speaking. It was true that I had some trouble with certain words, but I could say the vowels. It was *words* that I couldn't say, not *letters*. Just because I had trouble speaking English and socializing did not mean I was dumb. After all, I knew what *he* was doing. A speech therapist who had to get around a girl's mental block wasn't good.

"Why aren't you repeating your vowels?"

Staring at him, I crossed my arms. "It's stupid."

"It's stupid?" He repeated, before shaking his head at me. He knew he wasn't going to find a way around it. "I can't help you, Katlyn, unless you do what I ask. You need to learn how to speak correctly, but I can't teach you how to unless you listen. And you can't use your Asperger's as an excuse."

Glaring at him, I shook my head. I was five, for crying out loud! How was I supposed to know what Asperger's was? That name was tossed around many times at home; a name as familiar sounding yet so foreign in meaning. In my mind, it implied stupidity, judging by the way some people treated me. Yet, I knew I wasn't stupid. I wasn't the brightest kid on the planet, but I sure wasn't the stupidest. The word seemed strange and unrecognizable to the ear, making me believe many things that were false.

As the years passed by, I became more and more secluded with those outside my family circle. My friend and his mom were the only other people I talked to by then. Even before, I had few friends, and the ones I made were superficial. We would play together and have few laughs, but we would lose contact within a year. Even then, I wasn't planted in reality. Most of my childhood was like a cloud. It wasn't a bad childhood; after all, my parents loved and treated me well, but there was something wrong. I didn't know it at the time, but I needed a sense of belonging. Something that would renew my spirits; something that would renew my faith in humanity.

On the day my mother took me to church for the first time in my memory, I didn't know what to expect. It was the first time I really felt human. Though it would take years, I eventually fully converted to Catholicism, which awakened my sense of reality and belief. Though I still had a dream world, I was finally able to make real friends on real plane of existence; I was in control of the so called "Asperger's".

I needed a religion.