

## Escape From Ziatonia

It was a new school year, and I was happily skipping to my first class with Ms. Martinez. As I passed a dead-end corridor, I saw a petite figure with auburn hair and red-rimmed glasses. It was Ms. Martinez. This made no sense. I had class with Ms. Martinez in two minutes! Moving closer, I heard her speaking into an odd device: "Which human girl... I will secure the children... be here at 11:31 am sharp... tractor beam." This was alarming.

I glanced at my watch, and it was 30 seconds until class. Suddenly, Ms. Martinez was gone. Realizing I should be in class, I dashed and barely made it on time. Everything seemed normal until Ms. Martinez left halfway through class, and I swear I saw her glowing green. At lunch, I decided not to tell anyone. It could cause gossip, and that never ends well. When my best friend Elodie sat next to me, my throat burned to tell her, but I didn't. I refuse to start gossip, especially about a teacher. Finally, Elodie spoke up, "Um, Cali, are you okay?" I tried to say, "Yeah, I'm fine," but it came out as "yaminelive."

Before she could say anything, I dashed out of the cafeteria and bumped right into Ms. Martinez. "Cali, are you okay?" she asked and suggested we take a walk. I glanced at my watch. It was 11:30am and class was about to start. As we entered the courtyard, Ms. Martinez firmly placed an arm on my shoulder. Suddenly, her human appearance melted away. A figure emerged... not your average television Martian, if you asked me. She had long straight purple hair, pale green-tinted skin, and an unfriendly face that was eerily smooth, with zero wrinkles. Then everything went black.

When I woke up, I found myself trapped on a foreign planet. The alien that kidnapped me was staring at me. "Let me go!" I yelled. "Not a chance. I am Orion, and you were brought to my planet Ziatonia to help save it. Ziatonia is dying from pollution. We have watched Earth dwellers improve their planet, and thought, who better to fix ours? What do you call yourselves

again? Oomans?" "Humans," I snapped. "Well, human, we know you won the state science fair with your project on clean energy and now we want you to fix our planet." With that Orion walked out and locked the door behind her, leaving me to research. The first thing I did was pull up pictures of oil-blackened oceans, and of dying vegetation and wildlife. It was too heartbreaking.

I spent hours reading and researching, when finally, a young alien boy carrying a tray of glop came into my lab. "No thanks," I said, pushing the tray away. "Call me Lucas," he said, extending a green hand. I recoiled. "A lot to get used to," he shrugged. "Yeah, new planet, new lifeforms, no biggie," I said sarcastically. The next few days were a blur of lunches with Lucas and endless work.

Finally, I had a solution and brought it to Orion. "You have to stop using Ziatonium and switch to solar energy." I said enthusiastically. "No!" she boomed back, "You think we are going to abandon Ziatonium, our most powerful energy source? That is not a solution." I retreated to my lab, only to find Lucas waiting. "I have a way to escape," he said with a sly grin. "But you have to take me with you." "One alien isn't so bad", I thought. Without hesitating further, I agreed to his terms. The next thing I knew, we were at the top of a skyscraper, and I was feeling very nervous.

Before I could reconsider, he jumped off the building, pulling me with him. A wormhole appeared, and we passed right through, landing on my bedroom floor with a hard thump. Lucas hugged me goodbye and set off to explore his new home planet. Exhausted, I fell into a deep sound sleep. The next morning, my dad exclaimed, "Hey Cali, check out this new science article, a new chemical was discovered!" "What is it?" I asked. "Ziatonium!" he said excitedly. My face turned white. The aliens knew I was gone and had no intention of playing nice about it.