

## In the Air Tonight

by John E. Miller

“Robbie...Robbie! Wake up. It’s getting ready to launch!”

As Robert opened his eyes, he saw his Aunt Sally standing in the doorway to his room, wearing what he called her Betty Crocker dress. He knew about Betty Crocker from the plaque his great-great grandmother won in a cook-off contest. The plaque still hung proudly next to the kitchen stove. The woman on the plaque wore a dress that had under skirting and pleats. Robert laughed to himself; it’s 2112 and his Aunt Sally is wearing a light yellow dress that looks like it came from the 1950’s.

The kids at school teased him about his aunt, but he didn’t care. He loves his aunt and uncle and he believes in what they do. His aunt was waking Robert up to watch the shuttle take off with it greatest cargo -- the strays and unwanted animals that were being sent to good homes on the colonized planets. Robert, his Uncle Sam, and his Aunt Sally had been collecting money for this mission. Robert felt that it was a win-win situation. The animals got to live and the people elsewhere got to have pets.

“Come on, sleepy head! You’re going to miss it,” his Aunt leaned over to kiss his forehead.

He waved her away. He loved his Aunt, but at 14 he was too old to have her kissing him.

Robert rolled out of bed, not bothering to change out of his nightclothes, and plopped onto the couch between his Uncle Sam and Hamlet, their big, clumsy mutt. The 39” flat screen was already on. It didn’t bother Robert that he had to stay with his aunt and uncle. His mother and father were in the Space Navy. He could not go with them on their tour of duty because it was not permitted for officers’ children to travel on the tours. As they watched the launch, Robert could not help but think of one day when he would be on a shuttle heading to see his parents.

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A few mornings later, Robert checked his e-mail to see if his parents had written to him. To his surprise, he had two new messages. He looked at the names. One was from his only true friend Timmy and the other was from a person named Mary. A thought flashed in Robert’s mind, “Spam or a virus...Naw that had been outlawed for 100 years...”

He laughed to himself about how the old stories that his grandfather had told him came to mind like that. His aunt and uncle would tell him that they were just spooky stories and weren’t real. He clicked on the e-mail from this person named Mary.

Dear Robert Crystal,

Thank you for sending me a cat. It helps make thing livable on this new planet. It’s called Mobius 9. It has two moons, but the air is breathable and plants seem to like the ground here.

I named the cat 'Robert'. He's a Tom cat, all black with a white spot on top of his head.

Maybe if you get time you could write to me.

Friend (I hope),  
Mary Carver

Robert thought for a moment, "Why not? This way I'll get to know more about the Tom cat and maybe have a new friend". He clicked the Reply button.

Dear Mary Carver,

Sure, I would like to be friends. I can tell you about what is happening on Earth and you can tell me what is happening in space... Well, on the new colony Mobius 9.

Thank you for naming the Tom cat after me, but you didn't have to. How is he doing?

I'm going out today to try and raise money so we can send more animal to you guys.

I have some more e-mails to check, but I will write more later.

Friends (Forever I hope)

Robert Crystal

p.s. You can call me Rob.

Robert hit send and smiled. He sat in a dreamlike state for a moment wondering what Mary and the Tom cat looked like. Then he remembered the other letter from Timmy and opened it. To his surprise, it was an invitation to a birthday party at the pizza arcade place. Robert had eaten pizza from there before, but he was never allowed to go there because his aunt and uncle thought video games were a waste of time. Robert could understand that it was more important to save the animals than to play some dumb game, but it would be nice to go to Timmy's party. Robert decided he'd ask if he could go.

Robert walked into the kitchen and saw his aunt and uncle making animal treats. "Ummm, Sally, Sam, can I go to a birthday party?"

They smiled.

His aunt looked up from the dough she was mixing, "We got the e-mail also. I don't see why not, as long as you don't play those games."

"I would never do that," Robert promised.

"Alright then, you can go. Now why don't you e-mail Timmy back and let him know it's okay. We have to leave soon for the pound."

"Alright." As Robert ran to his room, he could hear his uncle and aunt laugh. Robert could hardly wait until Saturday and the party. On the way to and from the pound, that was all Robert could talk about. His uncle and aunt just listened to him rattling on and smiled.

