

Chapter 1 ~

Hi, my name is Jasper and I'm thirteen years old, which wouldn't be a bad thing except that I've been thirteen years old for twenty years now. That's right, you heard me. I'm stuck at thirteen. Don't ask, because I have no clue why or how. No one does, and not for lack of trying to find out.

I didn't even notice at first. Who notices when they're actually getting older and changing? It's only when you look back at old pictures that you say, "Hey, look I've changed a lot." I managed to make it through high school with minimal notice, other than being called "pipsqueak" and "runt" in my final year, because lucky me, I never went through my growth spurt like most kids do during adolescence.

It started to become obvious that something was wrong by the time I graduated, to where my mom brought me to the doctor to find out why I wasn't growing. At first, they thought it must be a nutritional deficiency that was delaying, or "stunting" my growth, as mom put it. I was put on a special diet, but after a year with no apparent change or improvement, they started doing more drastic tests... blood tests, hormonal tests, even CAT scans and MRI's, to see if maybe I had some sort of tumor that was preventing me from growing any older, or if there might be something wrong with my brain.

They went through all the growth hormone deficiencies known to mankind that might be a possible cause of my lack of aging, but I didn't fit into any of those. Other than the fact that I appeared to be perpetually thirteen, I was healthy. My hormones, chromosomes, and you name it, all appeared to be healthy and working normally. So why wasn't I getting any older?

As I said before, don't ask, because I have no clue. But I will tell you something I do know--I'm sick of doctors poking and prodding me. Thank goodness, my dad decided that he was sick of it too, even if it was only because it was costing him a small fortune. Actually, more like several small fortunes.

That being said, it won't surprise you to hear that my life really sucks. My mom

died twelve years ago of cancer. Dad says it's my fault because I got her so stressed out because I "won't f'ing grow up," as he puts it, though without editing the curse word. Who knows? Maybe it was my fault. She was really stressed out, but it's not like I was doing this on purpose, refusing to grow up.

We had to move because people were beginning to notice. I grew up in a small town, and in small towns, everyone knows everyone's business. My mother felt humiliated because of my abnormality, and when we had to move from the town she had grown up in, she just started wasting away. All her family and friends were back there. Hell, all *my* friends were back there, too.

We had to move a lot. Every year or so. My dad took up a truck driving career so that he could work out of anywhere. Dad's depressed and drinks a lot now. We used to have a good life. He had a good job and home, but now we live on the road or out of cheap motels. His wife was gone, and I basically ruined his life--something which he never fails to let me know, both verbally and physically.

Dad was never really abusive to me before my condition became known. He was strict if I did something wrong, as he didn't believe in "sparing the rod." Now he just whales on me for no reason at all, other than I have ruined his life. Well, I suppose that's a reason, but still, it's not really my fault.

I've considered running away. Lots of times. But I'm all my dad has left. As much as he rants and raves and beats on me, I'm pretty sure he still loves me. I'm his only son, after all, and as Dad's not getting any younger, it just doesn't feel right to leave him all alone.

At least those are the excuses that I give myself, but the real reasons are a bit harder to face. For one, I'm terrified of being alone in the world. It's not like I'll ever be able to get a job to take care of myself or marry and have a family. Hell, I haven't even gone fully through puberty. I'm stuck at that awkward edge of squeaky voices and random hard-ons. But more than anything, I'm afraid that "They" will find me. They, being some government agency that had shown up one day at our home before we moved. I heard the agents talking to my parents, saying that I might be holding the key to immortality for the human race and asking if they could take me to do further studies.

My dad chased them off, though, and the next day we moved. Just like that,

leaving everything behind. And we've been on the move ever since. My dad says they'll do all sorts of experiments on me and that I'll never be free if they take me away. I think he's probably right because that's the way it happens in the movies.