

The Martian Child (2007)

Rated PG. Our ratings: V- 6; L-6 ; S/N-1 . Running time: 1 hour 47 min.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.
1 Corinthians 13:4- 8a

Best thing about director MennoYoung Dennis hangs out at Meyjes's new film is theDavid s to see if they are sensitive acting of John Cusackcompatible.

as widower David Gordon and(c) 2007 New Line Cinema young actor Bobby Coleman as the insecure Dennis, the latter abandoned at birth.

They save this story of the wooing of a fearful young orphan from what easily could have become gooey bathos. Cusack's David Gordon, still grieving over the death of his wife, is a good example of the first words of the quotation from the apostle Paul's 13th Chapter of First Corinthians.

The Gordon's had started the process of adopting a child, one that takes so long that even though it has been over a year since his wife has died, the notice of the approval of their request has come through. David's sister Liz (Joan Cusack) says that of course he will turn it down, but David, though inclined to agree, is not so sure. He is intrigued, when he visits the orphanage, by a boy that he cannot see because the lad insists on viewing the world from inside a large packing carton, even when out on the playground. David is a highly successful science fiction writer, so I suspect that the boy's

claim to be from Mars is part of the writer's attraction. Anyway, he decides to proceed with the adoption, and Dennis goes home with him on a trial basis.

The fearful boy does emerge from the shipping carton, but still maintains an invisible box around himself. As they enter his house David tells the anxious boy, "Just think of it as a bigger box." Over the next few days David tries hard to gain the boy's trust and put at bay his anxieties over being abandoned again. At first he plays along with Dennis' claim to be from Mars, sent to earth to study humans and write a report about them. And then after several eerie events, he begins to wonder if the boy's claims might not be true. David is fortunate in that Harlee (Amanda Peet) is often on hand as his best friend to lend a hand with the nervous boy. One of the best scenes occurs when Dennis drops a piece of pottery and is filled with his fear of rejection. David comes to him and the following exchange takes place: David: I don't care about any of that stuff. Look, this is just stuff. " (He throws down a bowl. Then Dennis drops a bowl softly.)

David: Come on! Break it like you mean it! (He throws another bowl onto the floor, and)

Dennis smashes some plates.)

David: Now that! Come on!

It is while they are happily destroying the set of china that the social worker (Richard Schiff) arrives for the interview to see how Dennis is faring. Needless to say, he is not pleased that a child is being encouraged to smash the family China, so added to the question of Dennis's origin, is the threat that the child welfare board might not allow such an eccentrically behaving man gain custody of a disturbed boy.

For Reflection/Discussion

1) What do you think of Dennis's unusual defense? How is David the appropriate person for Dennis? What is at the root of Dennis's fear?

2) What instances do you see of David's love that fits the apostle Paul's description of agape love? How is the incident of the smashing of the dishes a good object lesson? (I have been around children who become almost panic stricken when they break a household object, indicative of parents with values very different from what David is teaching: have you had such experiences?)

3) Of course, David will have to teach (later) Dennis respect for property, but which do you think is more important—to learn to value people more than things, or to respect and care for things?

4) What does David say to give Dennis more confidence when he plays baseball? Have you ever thought that getting three hits out of ten times up at bat was such a good thing? Or did you think instead that striking out seven times out of ten meant failure?

What do you think of David's answer to the anguished question of Dennis, "Why? Why did they leave me?"

5) How does David show that his priorities are in the right order when he meets with his publisher? How did you feel at the end of the film?