

HOMESICK

by

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I'm an alien. I've been living on Earth for a few years now – eleven, to be precise. I have to say, I don't really like your planet all that much. You humans are not very accepting of others or very concerned with matters outside yourselves. I'd leave now if I could. But my mom says I have to be eighteen before I can move out. I haven't told her I'd be leaving the Solar System. I imagine she wouldn't take it very well.

I've always known I was different. I just never imagined *how* different. I first had taken notice when I was very little. My mom would take me to the park so that I could play with other kids my age. But none of the other kids would ever approach me. I couldn't figure out why they didn't like me. Occasionally, coaxed by my mom, I would approach one of them. But these attempts were never successful. The other kids wouldn't even pretend to be nice. They'd tease me; call me "strange" or "funny-looking." The worst was when they'd avoid me completely. I didn't know how to deal with the rejection. I learned to stay home.

I read books. I learned to prefer their company over things like me. I would still hear them in the park nearby on those long summer days: shouting, playing, having fun. But when I read, for a few moments, I would forget everything: where I was, who I was, and just be.

As I grew older, I got into science fiction stories. I was awed and inspired by their

disregard for the limitations of the real world, limitations I've always found too constricting. This passion led me to studying UFOs, which became an obsession. I knew nothing of my true identity. Still, they seemed to call out to me with their mysteries, begging to be solved. I thought I could. I thought maybe that was my purpose, unaware how close I actually was to my truth.

I had yet to make any friends at school. I thought that other kids would be interested in the same things I was. So I shared my interests with them; I told them about the science fiction stories I'd read, about the truth of UFOs, that we were being visited, that the government doesn't want us to know. They laughed at me. Shunned me.

I tried not to show it, but it made me feel sad. It made me want to stay home more. I felt saddest at night before sleep: alone and in the dark and another day approaching. Then one night my fate seemed to turn on its head. I'll never forget:

I'm inside a starship moving many times the speed of light. I don't feel the ship move; it generates no inertia. I just know. The ship is the most perfect place I can't describe. Next to me are these beautiful beings, an amorphous mass of energy, biology, and technology. They are my family.

"Where are we going?" I ask.

One of them, my real mother, smiles at me and says: "Home."

I knew it wasn't a dream; it was my truth. It was no longer out there. I would wait for them. It wasn't a choice.

It would have been simple. Just fake my way through life until my family came for me. But I made a mistake, a colossal mistake, actually, that no alien is supposed to make: I told someone. Jude was the only real friend I ever had. I met him in school. He was the only kid that would talk to me. I wish he hadn't.

We were at lunch when it happened. I had mashed all my food together and was mixing the contents and pouring milk on top. (We aliens only consume food in semisolid form.)

“What are you doing?” Jude asked.

“You wouldn’t understand.”

I proceeded to scoop up the food with my spork and let it gently slide down my throat.

“Eww!” uttered Jude. “Don’t talk to me!”

He got up to leave. I thought I was going to lose the only real friend I ever had. I was unprepared for that. I thought that if I told him my truth, he’d understand.

“It’s one of my customs,” I finally said.

“One of your customs? Where are you from – Mars?”

“Don’t be silly, Jude. There are no other intelligent civilizations in the Solar System. I’m from another star system entirely.”

“So, you’re an alien?”

“Shh!” I looked around. “It’s my secret. Please don’t tell anyone.”

Jude ate in silence for the rest of lunch. He said no more about the way I was eating my food. I thought that maybe he had understood the seriousness of my situation. He walked ahead of me as we returned to class.

“Thom said he’s an alien!” Jude announced as soon as he was back inside.

I had yet to walk in. I braced myself for what would be my undoing. As I entered the room, I noticed that most of the kids hadn’t paid any attention to Jude. I walked past him, pretending nothing had happened.

But he repeated the phrase, louder this time so everyone could hear: “Thom said he’s an alien!”

All the kids shifted in their seats, all their knees now pointing at me. I stood there counting the seconds. Maybe three. Then the room erupted with laughter. “He’s an alien, all right!” one kid declared. “Straight out of Neptune, even!”

More laughter. Jude felt no shame for what he had done. He just laughed and laughed. I felt their eyes on me like hot lights, their cackles like needles. I started to cry. If I didn’t have all their attention before, I definitely had it now.

“What’s going on?” the teacher asked. “Why are you crying?”

I tried to explain, not giving myself away. I mumbled that I didn’t know. I doubt that I could’ve articulated how I was hurt by betrayal, how I felt shame.

I was lucky no one believed it. I should’ve been able to move on with my secret life. But then I couldn’t go anywhere – well, where people were – without hearing that name, that thing they couldn’t understand, that thing they made bad: “Alien.”

I did the only thing I could: I stayed home. I didn’t even leave my room, except when I had to go to school. I didn’t mind my room so much. It’s not as nice as a starship, sure. Certainly, a lot less amenities. No food fabricator, for instance. But I had everything I would need until my family came: my books, my telescope, and my bed. I even got my mom to bring my dinner to my room. She was resistant at first, but, like all humans, she’s weak-willed. She reasoned I was going through “a phase.” Yeah, a human phase.

I no longer cared for humanity. I certainly wouldn’t be talking to Jude again. I knew I wasn’t actually one of them. I didn’t care what they did with their little planet. *I have a galactic family*, I told myself, *not some primitive planetary one, and they really do care about me*. All I had to do was wait. To stay home and wait. But it wasn’t easy. I questioned. I doubted.

What’s taking them so long? Why haven’t they shown up yet? I know the distance

between stars is vast, but they should've been here by now. Starships are pretty fast, you know. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I'm not special. Only ordinary. Another earthling. Forced to live a life like everyone else. Grow up. Get a job. Marry. Have kids. Grow old. Die.

Anything but that!

I don't know how long it was, maybe a week, maybe two weeks, maybe three. But the long wait was worth it. Time failed to exist when I first saw it. Right there in the night sky. In full view of my bedroom window! Coincidence? I doubt that. It appeared in the form of a white orb. Of course! Who would suspect such a common object in the night sky to be an *extraterrestrial craft*? I don't know how I knew it was them. I just knew. The orb remained motionless, shining above the town like a beautiful beacon of hope among the darkness of humanity.

"Save me!" I shouted. "Take me with you!"

For reasons I have yet to comprehend, my cries were ignored; the orb, like the light at the end of my proverbial tunnel, faded from view, disappearing into the colorless nothingness that has come to symbolize my existence. *Why? Why?*

Maybe they don't like me. Maybe they figure they can just leave me here on this rock and not have to come pick me up. I can't say I would blame them; no one likes me.

What am I supposed to do? I've lost my salvation. Damned to stay on this barren ball of dirt until the end of days.

My mom came rushing into my room then.

"What's wrong, Thom? I heard you yelling."

"They left without me!"

"*Who* left without you?"

“... No one.”

“Thom, is this about aliens?”

“What?! How did you know?”

“You don’t think I know what the other kids have been saying about you?”

“They don’t understand.”

“Understand what?”

“... Never mind.”

“Thom, I want you to understand something: you are *not* an alien, OK? Aliens do *not* exist. It’s all in your head.”

“No, it isn’t! Aliens are real!”

“Thom, do you know how strange that makes you look? Do you want the other kids to continue to make fun of you?”

“I don’t care. I don’t care.”

“What’s wrong with you, Thom? You’ve locked yourself up in this room like the real world doesn’t exist!”

“Nothing’s wrong with me.”

“Then why don’t you go out and live your life?”

“I don’t want to.”

“What’s happened to you, Thom?”

“Nothing has happened to me; I’ve always been like this.”

“Really, so strange?”

I felt hurt. I said the only thing I ever wanted to say to anyone: “I am strange! I’m an alien! I’m an alien!”

It didn't matter if I told her. I could tell her a million times. She'd never believe me. She continued to talk. But I didn't listen; I stood there until she left, which wasn't soon, and closed the door behind her.

So that's how it's going to be, huh? Betrayed by my own "mother"? I guess I should've expected that from a human. But from my real mother, too?

If only I could lie to myself, pretend to be one of them, smile. But I have no love for these weird creatures. The ones I do love do not love me.

I am an alien, if I am anything. If I am anything.

* * *

The sun rises. It goes down. Things happen. I don't ask why anymore. If I close my eyes, I no longer notice. What life's been like since they left me, I can't say – not for sure; I've been here, in my room, as you might have guessed. That I know. But each day feels less real, shorter lived, like seconds, each one identical to the last, each lost to time forever.

Tonight is another night. The sky is filled with pretty little stars. I suppose. I don't really know, or care. I don't look out at the sky anymore. It no longer holds anything for me. Instead, I look in. But there, too, I find absence. I'm sure if I were to look, I'd see them, the stars, teasing me with their distant brightness, fighting against the endless black, only to lose in the end. I lie down in bed and wait for sleep, the beginning and end of a pointless thing.

Then I did it. I don't know why. It was a chance happening, one of those things you do without thinking about it, like picking your nose or biting your nails. Only my reward was infinitely more valuable: I've realized I was wrong! Wrong about everything. Wrong that my cries had been ignored. Wrong that I had been abandoned. No! I had been given a sign: to hang on, that soon I would be free. *Of course!*

I looked out at the sky. And if I hadn't, I would've been blind forever, unable to once again behold the most beautiful object in the universe. Again, I see that shining white orb hovering in the night sky. Almost still. *I know they know I can see them. I know they know I know.* I bite my tongue to prevent a repeat of before.

Before I can decide what to do, the orb starts to descend on a nearby wooded area, disappearing under the canopy. My body begins to move. Before I know it, my shoes are on, a flashlight in my hand. I leave the house without making a noise. (My mom would freak, no doubt.)

I make my way toward the woods, having no idea what to do once I get to my destination. But it doesn't matter; this moment is beyond reason, beyond what I know. But I do know, somehow, that I will know, if not now then, *then*, when I meet them.

I start to get close. I just know. My heart pounds in my chest; I can no longer hear my own footsteps. I reach a small clearing. I stop. And wait. When my flashlight goes out, I know it's them. I'm right.

Before me appears a stunning craft, previously invisible, with a wild array of colored lights: pink, yellow, green, blue. They turn on and off, on and off, faster and faster each time. I think they're trying to impress me. It's working.

I gaze at the pretty lights unable to move, caught somewhere between awe and an epileptic seizure. In the middle of my euphoria, I hear a voice call out to me. It seems to emanate from my own head.

"Hello, Thom."

"... What?"

"You know why we've come?"

“Of course!”

“You’re ready to leave with us?”

“Of course!”

Of course! Of course! A thousand times “Of course!” Just take me with you.

This is the moment I’ve been waiting for my whole life. This is what makes everything make sense: the teasing, the isolation, the searching. I’ve learned to let go of humanity, of this persistent illusion. I do not love my fellow neighbor. I love the stars. I’ve learned never to lose hope in them. Now, I’m ready. I’ve found my family, my belonging, my truth.

“There is just one more thing, Thom.”

“... What?”

“We must leave your body here.”

I understand immediately. My body, being physical, belongs on Earth, but my mind has no such limitation, creating and coloring my world; it belongs to the stars.

I question no more.

Bio: James Noguera is a fiction writer and poet from the Bronx. He received his BA in English from Fordham University and is pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing from City College of New York. He has a few publications online, such as in The WiFiles. He is currently working on his first short novel.