

My brother from Venus

My brother is an alien. He is also a scientist, a star mapper, a plant lover, and makes the best cookies in the universe. So when he made me pinky promise never to tell anybody else, I agreed at once.

We live in a very small town and as far as I know my brother is the only alien here. I asked him if there's any others, and he said he's not sure, that it can be hard to tell, and that not all aliens know each other or even get along. I'm sure there must be some aliens around here from Heaven – that's the planet that the priest at Sunday Mass says we'll go to when we die. I don't think my brother is a fan of that place, though -- whenever I ask him his thoughts on planets or stars, he never ever talks about Heaven. So when I die, I want to go to my brother's home planet.

Since my brother has been alive much longer than me, he is better than me at most things. One thing I am much better at than him, though, is drawing. I have lots of pencils and Crayolas and paints and papers all over my room and I like to stay up past my bedtime with a torch under the covers drawing and coloring and painting anything that comes to mind. Whenever I show him my art my brother frowns at it, in the way that people do when they are impressed at something, and tells me to "keep at it" in his soft, kind, voice. He himself is rubbish at drawing. He says he has "aphantasia", which means he can't imagine pictures in his head. Once I asked him how he navigated his spaceship to Earth if he couldn't see the paths in his head and he told me how you could use numbers in science to keep track of shapes (and he's real good with numbers). I'm rubbish with numbers myself, so one day I will learn how to use shapes to keep track of numbers so I can also do science like he does.

The night I found out he was an alien was one of the nights I was staying up past my bedtime under the sheets. He and Mum were arguing downstairs (as they often did), and sound travels through our house very well, so I heard everything. I waited until I heard my brother go back to his room and tiptoed over there to ask him about it.

“Are you an alien?”

“What?”

“I heard Mum shouting downstairs, said she didn’t want you to be ‘alien-ated’.”

“What? That’s not-” he shook his head, then sighed. “Okay yeah, you got me, I’m an alien.”

It wasn’t until that I realized he’d been crying. Before I knew it, whatever fears I’d been feeling popped like a bubble, and I rushed over to hug him tightly like I always did when he was down. It didn’t matter if he was an alien; he was still the same soft, kind brother who loved science and stars and plants and me.

“Are you from Mars?” I asked.

“Mars?” he laughed. Then thought for a bit. “Mmm... no, actually, I’m from Venus.”

I nodded and continued to clutch him with my head to his chest, and I learned that aliens from Venus have hearts that beat just like people on Earth.

“Promise—no, pinky promise me you won’t tell anyone, yeah? And don’t bring it up with Mum. She knows too, but talking about it makes her sad, so promise me you’ll keep it only to yourself?”

I pinky promised and ended up falling asleep right there in his bed that night.

A lot of things made sense afterwards. He told me how Venus was the hottest planet on the solar system, which explained why he always slept with the fan off, and why he was never scared of the hot oven when baking cookies. Or how I started to notice when he would mess up his human disguise. Sometimes, instead of his normal short hair and long shorts, I'd see him leaving the house with long hair and short skirts late at night past my bedtime. And sometimes he would come back with parts of his skin splotchy and purple, like how some of my drawings used to look when I was still learning to hold the crayons correctly. Sometimes people at Sunday Mass would notice the mistakes and frown at him, the way adults do when they find something weird. I once asked if I could help perfect his disguise to help him protect his secret better, but he said 'we shouldn't talk about it' and shut his door. I understand though, he is rubbish with shapes and drawings, so it only makes sense he gets frustrated about it.

I've been much lonelier since he went to Uni, which he told me is a faraway planet where he can do fancy science he could never do in our small town. Right before he left, I handed him my latest artwork, a painting of the blue and pink plants he has all over his room.

"So you can remember them at Uni," I told him. "I wanted to give you your roses, while you're still here." I don't know why but that made him hug me and cry and cry like I'd never seen before. He told me it was the best painting I'd ever made.

When I feel especially sad and alone these days, I look out my window at the night sky and imagine him out in space, free of his disguises, exploring the universe and making it a kinder, better, softer place, just like he does at home.