

## **Wait, Our Brother is an Alien?!** By Kaeleigh Dawson

Nebularis stared out at the vast extraterrestrial landscape before her. Tiny, glittering stars struggled to light up the dark blanket that seemed to swallow up all else. Her eight favorite planets revolved endlessly around the sun, which burned as bright as ever.

It was a good day to be Mother Space.

And as Mother Space, it was her job to look after her beloved universe. She was very proud of it all, for she had taken a lot of care in designing everything, placing all of it exactly to her liking, and she was devoted to the wellbeing of all who lived on the planets in her universe.

Her absolute favorite planet was the Earth, prosperous and fruitful, with a color scheme she was very proud of. A ball of brilliantly blue ocean with some swashes of greenery, complete with little life-forms living underneath the fluffy clouds of white.

The inhabitants, who had dubbed themselves 'humans', were one of the first creations she'd made. They scurried along planet Earth like little bits of space dust. It was so marvelous to watch them run about, that she often found herself sitting there for days at a time, hovering just above their stratosphere. Many Earthly days would seem to pass in the blink of an eye, so it was easy for her to just watch their little lives go by until they came to an end, and were quickly replaced with newborn humans.

In fact, so much of her time was spent caring for and watching over the Earth, she barely noticed that some of her beloved stars began fizzling out, and the other planets within the Milky Way remained void of life.

Except for one: Mars, the red planet.

It was back before Nebularis created the humans, a test species, really. They were large, lead-black, bear-like creatures, covered in fur, with small tufted ears, snail-like antennas on their heads, and a long fanged beak similar to a large bird. She was proud of how they looked. Once you got past all the teeth and their shrill screaming, they were rather adorable.

They loved water, so naturally Nebularis made them a tiny planet that was pretty much covered in it. Mars, like Earth, once had deep pools of blue scattered about its surface, in which its inhabitants thrived. They built vaguely snail shell-shaped caves for themselves out of the hardened sand. It was a quaint little population for a while, but, like any species, it wasn't long before they became territorial. The fights between them often turned deadly. Nebularis would be the one to stop their incessant fighting, but she soon realized how exhausting it was. Making dust storms to scatter the beasts back into their homes all the time really take it out of you.

After much consideration, Nebularis had begun to think of the other planets of hers. Perhaps she could try again on one of them to make a gentler creature--and

maybe a smarter one too. One that could understand how to take care of the resources provided on their beautiful planet. Nebularis looked at the Earth, and she got an idea.

Thus the human race was born. They weren't perfect, but they were better than the violent first attempt. Other animals were soon added to the Earth as well, until the planet was teeming with life and prosperity.

This was all very long ago. Now, it appeared that all the water on Mars had dried up. The blue was gone and only a desolate sandy red planet remained. And the inhabitants—they were gone. Nebularis searched hard, but there was no life to be seen, and their tiny sand homes had been swept away. Saddened by this discovery, she was seconds away from deeming the planet lifeless when she noticed a lump of sand began to shake and rise. Out of the ground came one last furry beast, which yawned and shook itself off, as if it had been asleep under all that sand for ages. The creature looked around curiously, but saw nothing, and no one.

Nebularis furrowed her brow. She regretted leaving the creatures alone for so long. If only she could make more beastly friends, but couldn't quite recall how exactly she made them all those centuries ago. However would she help this poor, lonesome creature?

Then, glancing back at Earth, she got an idea. She scooped the creature up into her large hands, and, with her Mother Space magic and a bit of stardust, she transformed the creature before her. It began to shrink, its fur withdrew, and its paws grew into arms and legs. The beast turned into a human boy. Tanned, a rounded face and body, with kind of pointed ears. He must've been quite young as an alien, because he transferred into a boy in his teens. As for the rest of his appearance, Nebularis wanted to make sure he could blend in with the time period. She believed that the Earthly year was 20-something or other...2019, maybe? Nebularis shrugged, and dressed him accordingly: Dark hair that faded into a neon green at the tips, a dark green sweatshirt, and ripped black jeans.

Mother Space admired her handiwork. He needed a name. What did she used to call these furry creatures? Axelis? Axeilios? It was something with an 'Ax'.

"No matter." She then decided. "Your new earthly name is...Axel. It's simple, and...human-y."

The newly made human stared at her with—five eyes?! *No, that's not right*, Nebularis thought. *Humans only had two eyes. Something must've gone wrong in the transformation.* It had been a long while since she'd had to turn something into something else. Nebularis touched the creature's tiny forehead, and it's hair grew longer, until it completely covered his eyes. Perfect! Now he looked just like a real...wait. The boy still had his black antennas too...well, they made a nice accessory. Surely people wouldn't think *they* were real.

“Now,” Nebularis began, leaning close to the boy in her hands, “can you say my name? I’m sure I gave you the ability to speak...” she said, “I am Mother Space, Nebularis.”

Axel hesitated, then said in a low, growly voice, “Neb...” and stopped.

Nebularis interjected, “You know, that works too. Call me Nebs.”

Nebs then showed the small human his new home planet. “This, young Axel, is the Earth. I need you on your best behavior if this is to be your new home. That means that your true identity must stay hidden. Oh, and no biting. Do you understand?”

Axel nodded. Mother Space smiled, then she looked at her beloved Earth. Now, where to put the creature? The Earth was a big planet, and she knew that, without proper guidance from another human being, the alien boy might get into trouble.

Then, upon spotting the perfect human for the job, she took action...

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Down on earth, a little old woman sat alone in a park, feeding some breadcrumbs to pigeons. Her name was Miss Gladys Harmon, and she had become quite lonesome. Even though Gladys had very sweet grandchildren, they were growing up, and were much too busy to visit her as often as she’d like. If only she had someone to look after, just like the good old days...

Then, just as the old woman closed her eyes, she heard a rather loud thump near her, the pigeons cooing, and the flapping of wings. Looking down at her feet, Gladys saw that the pigeons had all flown away, and in their place was a boy, lying face-first on the pavement.

Gladys couldn’t believe her eyes. She hadn’t seen anyone in the park a few seconds ago...where could this boy have come from? Then, the woman had a realization. “The heavens have answered my prayer!” she exclaimed. The boy, which she now realized was around the same age as her grandchildren as he lifted his head, spit out a pigeon. The bird promptly flew away as the boy sat up, shaking himself off.

Gladys leaned down to get a closer look at the boy. “Goodness, are you alright child?”

The boy looked up. “Uhhh,” He began in a sort of raspy voice, “yeah, I think so.”

“Are you lost? Should I call someone for you?”

He shook his head. Then, his stomach growled.

Gladys held out a shaky hand. “Come with me, child. I’ll give you something to eat. Would you like that?”

The boy nodded briskly. He would like that very much.

The little old woman smiled as the boy grabbed her hand, and she stood up from the bench to help the boy get up. He followed—very slowly—to his feet, leaning onto Gladys. *Poor thing...* The woman thought. She started back towards her apartment

building, but not before chatting with the boy about anything and everything she could think of.

A few minutes later, Axel was devouring the turkey she'd given him from the fridge. She'd found out his name was Axel, and—after he told her once more that he had no one to look after him—she told him he could call her Grandma. He wasn't much for words, but he did seem to have a large appetite at the moment. Gladys decided to let him eat before she asked any more questions.

Then suddenly, the strange stalks that came out of the boy's head twitched, and he turned towards the window. He approached it cautiously, bumping his head on the glass when he got too close, then he looked down. "There are a lot of people."

"Why yes, I suppose there are..." Gladys thought aloud. "Are you from a smaller city then, child?"

"Uh-huh." Axel said. It was hard to tell how he was feeling when half of his face was covered by his hair, but Gladys could see that he was frowning.

The little old woman joined him by the window with a smile. "Don't you worry, you'll be just fine. I'm here if you need me. And so are the pigeons. The pigeons in this city are quite friendly."

About a week went by, and Axel still lived in Gladys's apartment. He was quite helpful around the house, carrying her groceries and grabbing objects for her that were out of her reach.

Even though Gladys gave him permission to sleep in her grandchildren's old room, he seemed perfectly content curling up on the couch to sleep. And, for whatever reason, he seemed to prefer napping during the long afternoons, when the little old woman sat down beside him to watch her favorite programs on TV, rather than at night. Gladys didn't mind a bit, she'd let him relax while she would gently pat his fluffy head of hair.

Not only that, but he liked to listen to her stories too. For so long she had had no one to tell them to. During one of her stories about her grandchildren, Gladys paused, and added, "You should meet my grandchildren; real sweethearts, they are. They might go to the same school as you..." She took a moment to think. She didn't remember the boy ever leaving for school during the week, but she thought she'd ask him anyway: "Do you go to school in this city, child?"

Axel seemed to pause in thought, then shook his head.

"Well, you aren't opposed to the idea of school, are you?"

"I...guess not." He shrugged.

"How nice." She chirped, "I could easily get you enrolled. You can start on Monday. I'm sure you'd have a wonderful time there. After all, who could not like such a sweet boy like you?" Gladys pinched his cheeks.

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Andrew shut his locker, and headed to his next class.

*Two more days 'till the science fair.* The sentence looped on and on in his head ever since he left the chemistry lab. It seems like every time he stepped in or out of there, the feeling of his impending doom grew nearer.

*Calm down Andrew,* he told himself, *you're heading to history. Boring old history.* He thought, finally settling his pounding heartbeat as he walked through the door of his second period class.

Then, just as quickly as he calmed himself, he jumped at the sound of his phone ringing. Loudly. He felt dozens of eyes on his back as he turned and rushed out the door and back into the hall to answer the phone. He sighed once he noticed it was his grandmother calling him.

He reluctantly answered, "Hi grandma."

"Andrew, it's so lovely to hear from you," said the other line, "How are you doing?"

"I'm good--but can you please not call me while I'm in school?"

"What was that? You'll have to speak up, dearie."

Andrew started again, louder, "*Can you please...nevermind.* How are you doing, grandma?"

"Oh, wonderful dearie. I have some exciting news. There's someone I'd like you to meet. He's your new adopted brother. His name is--"

The late bell rang. He had to wrap this up. "That sounds very exciting, grandma--"

"You and Trudy should come over to meet him sometime."

"S-sure, I'll talk to her about it, but we're really busy, you know...ok Grandma, love you, bye.

Andrew then hurried back into the room, avoiding eye contact as he took his seat. He was expecting to hear the start of a lecture or something when the teacher said, "Now that everyone's here, I would like you all to turn your attention to the front to meet our newest student."

He looked up to see a boy at the front of the class. He was somewhat tall, at least compared to the teacher. His hair was black and green, and was much too long to see his eyes. He wore a green hoodie and black jeans to match it. Speaking of matching, what was with the antennas on his head?

"This is Axel Harmon." Announced the teacher.

"Hey." Said Axel, then he was allowed to take his seat. He was across the room from him, but Andrew had a clear view of the guy from where he sat. Andrew wondered if this new kid had similar interests as him. *Most likely not,* he quickly decided. *With the loud hair and the way he sat incorrectly in his chair, he didn't seem like the type.*

Then again, the antennas were really throwing him off. They looked...rubbery. Andrew was quite curious about them. *I mean, obviously they're fake*, he'd tell himself, but then just after that he'd swear he saw them twitch.

Thus went the *entirety* of Andrew's once normal day. He tried his best to pay the new kid no mind, but he just kept spotting Axel doing weird thing after weird thing. He was amazed by things like water fountains and light switches, he didn't know what a phone was—Andrew discovered this when he overheard a girl asking for his number; she took it as satire, but Andrew wasn't so sure—and he sometimes saw him chewing on his own fingers, just to name a few. Not to mention the pictures he drew. He walked past Axel's desk one time, and saw the guy scribbling with crayons. He was drawing what looked to be a large red and blue planet with these strange, black, four-legged creatures dotted all over it. Snails, maybe? He wasn't sure. Andrew said nothing and kept walking. So what if he was a space nerd? He wasn't one Andrew really wanted anything to do with.

Finally, the lunch bell rang. Andrew liked to get his things fast and leave his locker early to avoid the sea of clamoring high schoolers heading to lunch. In what he thought was an empty hallway, he was startled by a sudden "Hey Andy!" from behind. It was his twin sister Trudy, running up to him. He could tell she had something to tell him by the way her eyes sparkled, and her tight curls bounced from side to side.

"Please just call me Andrew, at least at school." He reminded her.

"Right, right." Trudy waved the matter aside, "But have you seen the new kid yet? I love his hair."

"Yeah, but he seems a bit...weird. Did you see the antennae things on his head?"

"He probably just really likes space. I know you like space. He'd probably think your science fair project is really cool; you should show it to him. Maybe we can all be friends!"

Andrew crossed his arms with a huff. Trudy thought so differently than he did. It was sometimes hard for him to believe they were even related, let alone twins.

"Speaking of friends," He said, changing the subject, "Grandma called. She said there was someone at her place that she wanted us to meet. She called him out "new adopted brother"."

"New adopted brother?" Trudy echoed, cocking her head. "What do you think that means?"

"Beats me." Andrew shrugged. "For all we know, she could've gotten a new houseplant or something." His sister laughed.

Suddenly, someone called, "Trudyyy! I need to finish telling you my stoooryyy!"

The twins turned to see Trudy's friends waving her down. Trudy waved back, then quickly said, to Andrew, "Why don't we go see her tomorrow after school? I know she'd love a visit from her favorite grandchildren." And with a wink, she ran off to join her friends before he could respond.

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School seemed to fly by after that, and before he knew it, the day was over. Andrew checked his phone, annoyed to see not even a single new message. He couldn't seem to find Trudy anywhere, and it was time to leave. It wasn't until he did an entire lap around the school that he found her out by the parking lot, watching the skaters do tricks. That was one other noticeable difference between him and his sister. Andrew fell into a clique that most at school called "the nerds", but he liked to think of it as a group of a few other people who shared a love for science like he did. Trudy was more of a floater between groups, but she commonly hung out with the theater kids. Right now, however, she was hanging out with the "skater dudes," as they called themselves. Axel was there too, watching them whizz by on their boards.

Andrew sighed, stopping beside Trudy. "Didn't you get my texts?"

"Huh?" She then took her phone out of her pocket. Sure enough, there were a few unread messages. "Oh yeah. Sorry." She smiled, then turned her attention back toward the skaters. Or—more specifically, towards Axel *watching* the skaters. One of them walked up to him. "Can you ride?"

"Uh--" Axel hesitated. The guy seemed to take it as a yes, because he grinned and shoved the board into Axel's arms. "Alright, show me whatcha got, dude!"

Axel put the skateboard on the ground, got on, and pushed himself into motion. It was a slow, shaky start, but next thing everyone knew, he went down a ramp and had gained so much speed that he was doing loops around the group. It was hard to tell if he knew how to skate or if he was just incredibly well-balanced. Either way, there was no stopping him.

Axel zoomed past the twins. "Look at him go!" Trudy exclaimed. "I wonder if he could teach me how to skateboard?"

Andrew wasn't convinced that he even knew what he was doing, but before he could tell her so, a familiar car horn caught both of their attention. "Dad's waiting in the car, we have to go."

"Fine..." Trudy sighed. She said goodbye to her "skater dude" friends and began to follow him towards the car. "I think we should both properly introduce ourselves to Axel tomorrow."

"What's with you?" Andrew said. "You've never seemed so interested in anyone else new at this school."

"I always make friends with the new kids, but Axel...well, he's just so quiet and stand-offish! I can't figure him out. There's something about him that just seems..."

"Weird?"

"No, not weird, but...*unique*." Trudy snapped her fingers as the word came to her. "I wonder where he's from?"

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The day was Thursday. Tomorrow was the science fair. All of Andrew's preparations for it were complete, and he was pretty confident that he'd do well. It was a relatively normal morning, up until his History class. Andrew was trying his best to focus on the work on his computer, but the loud chatter of a certain group of popular kids kept distracting him. They had formed a loud circle in the center of the room. Some sat on desks, some stood, and a few were even settled down on the floor around the something.

*Or, the someone,* Andrew thought as he caught a glimpse of who was in the center of their circle. It was none other than Axel. Man, Andrew knew he was new and all, but this guy really was the talk of the school right now. Even the popular kids wanted to be seen with him.

Andrew hadn't even realized he had been staring at the group until Axel's head turned sharply in his direction. Even with his eyes covered by bangs, he could tell that he was staring right at him.

Andrew gulped, turning away quickly. *What on Earth was that look for?!* He brushed his sudden feeling of dread away. It was probably just his own imagination. People accidentally make eye contact all the time. That was all that happened.

Suddenly, Axel was standing over his desk. Andrew jumped in surprise.

"I'm Axel." said the boy. Then he peered over Andrew's screen. "What are you doing?"

In truth, he was editing his science fair presentation, but he simply told him, "Typing." and continued to work again. Axel then pressed and held his finger on the 'g' key, resulting in a whole line of 'g's in the middle of Andrew's presentation.

"Stop that!" Andrew pushed his hand away, glaring at Axel as he spammed the 'backspace' key. Either the boy liked the result of pressing the key or the response it got out of Andrew, but next thing Andrew knew, Axel was reaching over again and again to touch the keys of his keyboard, all while Andrew tried his best to keep it away from him. Finally, Andrew just shut the computer altogether. "Why don't you just leave me alone? I'm busy."

At these words, Axel backed off, shrugged, and walked away. Andrew sighed, thinking that weird interaction was over, and opened his computer again.

But it was far from over. For the rest of the day, he caught Axel hovering over him, hanging around him, touching his stuff, and asking him the most imbecile questions imaginable. It was at this time that Andrew noticed that the antennas weren't the only abnormal things about him. He also had pointed ears, and sharp teeth. He couldn't figure out what this guy was, or what his deal with him was, either. Not only that, but when he asked Trudy about him, she said she hadn't noticed anything off about him.

So why was Axel being so strange around him, and apparently *only* him?  
...He wasn't going to eat him, was he?! *No, of course not, that'd be ridiculous,*  
*Andrew,* He reassured himself.

Speaking of eating, lunch was next. He didn't run into Trudy this time, and Axel had gotten distracted with a group of popular kids, so he walked to lunch alone. It was quite a peaceful walk, until someone tapped him on the shoulder. He turned, expecting to see Trudy, but instead saw Axel and a whole gang of popular kids.

"Do you wanna sit with us at lunch?" Axel asked.

The question threw Andrew off guard. He thought of what would happen if he said yes. Before he could respond, the popular kids behind Axel slowly stopped their conversations to hear Andrew's answer, and all of their eyes were on him.

"Uh—sorry, but I can't." He spat just before he sped-walked away from the group.

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That was the last time Andrew interacted with Axel that day. He'd told Trudy all about it as they headed to their grandmother's house, and it was safe to say that she was annoyed with him.

"Well it sounded to me like he was only trying to be friendly. He probably just thought you and your stuff was cool." Trudy crossed her arms.

"But he—I—his teeth were—and his ears, they—oh, just forget it." Andrew dropped the whole matter as they pulled up to the apartments. Andrew couldn't really remember how long it had been since their last visit. A month or two, maybe? Either way, he was anxious to meet this 'new sibling' that was staying at the one place that had always seemed to stay the same, no matter when he visited it.

Andrew knocked on the door. "Grandma? It's us." He called through the door.

"Oh, hello, dearies!" Came the response, "Come in, come in."

Trudy suddenly hopped in front of her brother, opening the door. "Hi grandma! It's so good to see you!" she exclaimed, hugging the little old lady who stood to greet them.

"Yes, it's good to see you too, dear." said Grandma, then she spotted her grandson. "Andrew, look how tall you've gotten!"

"Hi grandma." said Andrew, giving her a small hug and a smile. He listened closely and looked around at the small apartment, but he didn't see or hear anyone else. He did, however, notice a few pieces of paper on the fridge, right beside some family photos. They were very colorful, and they looked familiar...

And then it came to him: they were the very same ones he'd seen Axel drawing at school.

Andrew was in shock. *It couldn't be...could it?*

As if Trudy read his mind, she said, “Say, grandma, where’s the new sibling of ours you were talking about?”

“He’s right here.” Grandma gestured to the couch, where Andrew now noticed a large green lump he’d mistaken for clothes. Trudy peered at it curiously. “Axel, dear, wake up. We have company.” the little old lady called.

The couch lump stirred and rose into the shape of a human being. It shook like a dog, then looked at the twins. “Hey.”

“Axel!” Trudy exclaimed, “You’ve been living with our grandma?” Andrew stood dumbfounded at the sudden turn of events.

Grandma was confused. “Oh, have you all met before?”

“Well, not officially,” chuckled Trudy, then she began, “Hi, I’m Trudy, and this is my brother Andrew—or should I say *our* brother Andrew? How confusing...” she laughed again.

Andrew thought about the first time he saw Axel in his history class. The teacher introduced him as “Axel Harmon”...He hadn’t even thought about the last name similarities between him and his grandma, Gladys Harmon, until that moment.

The “new sibling” got off the couch, and waved at Trudy, who enthusiastically waved back. Then he looked at Andrew and cocked his head. Andrew was still staring back at him, and hadn’t said a single word.

Suddenly Andrew was snapped back out of his thoughts with an elbow in the side from Trudy. He held out his hand. “I’m Andrew—as she said.” Axel hesitated, then took his hand and they shook.

“Now you three get comfortable, I’ll be back with some tea.” Grandma said before shuffling into the kitchen. They all sat down on the floor in a circle. “Tea sounds nice, Grandma,” said Trudy, stretching her arms. “but I’m starving! What about you, Axel? What are you craving?”

Axel hesitated, then said, “*Human flesh.*” revealing his pointy teeth and curling his fingers like claws. Andrew jumped back.

Trudy laughed as she got up to go make a snack. “He’s only kidding, Andy! Boy, if you could see the look on your face.”

“Sure,” Andrew said, “but do you see the look on *his* face??”

“Oh, I’m so glad all of my grandkids are getting along!” said Grandma. “It reminds me of when I was young. I used to annoy the dickens out of your great uncles, but we always had such a laugh about it afterwards.”

Trudy began asking Grandma questions about her past in the kitchen, Andrew stopped paying attention as their voices became too hushed for him to hear.

“Yeah...” added Andrew. He had something to say, and he knew now was as good a time as any to ask. “Speaking of annoying, Axel, can we talk?”

Axel nodded, following Andrew out of the living room, and into the hallway. When it came to tomorrow, he wasn’t about to take any chances. Andrew began slowly, “Look,

I need you to stay as far away from the gym as possible tomorrow. You don't know how hard I've worked on my science fair project until this point, and I need everything to run smoothly, so I would really appreciate it if you just...stayed away. If you want someone to bother, go find Trudy. She loves to bother *me*, so I'm sure you two will get along nicely. Do you understand?"

As he talked, he didn't realize he'd slowly begun looking away from Axel's face. When he looked back, Axel was gnawing on his own arm, then stopped when he noticed Andrew was staring at him. "Hm?"

Andrew sighed at Axel's ignorance, then put an arm on his shoulder and looked into his eyes--or, rather, where he thought his eyes would be. "Just--promise me you won't come to the gym tomorrow?" Axel replied, "Uh, sure."

"Good." That was simpler than Andrew thought it was going to be. He then returned to the living room, where his sister and grandmother had placed a tray of tea and some sandwiches for everyone. He took one of each.

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Andrew fastened his tie into place. It was finally Friday. The day of the science fair was upon him. He'd rehearsed his speech at least 7 times, and he had even practiced answering questions he thought the judges might ask.

Arriving at school, he saw that a lot of the people there—some of which he knew—looked just as nervous as he was.

Andrew went and stood beside his science fair poster board, which was covered in his data, charts, facts, figures, and pictures. It was quite a sight to see, or, at least, he thought so.

After months of work, all that was left to do was wait for the judges. Three came up to him soon enough. They frowned and furrowed their brows upon reading the title of his project: "The probability of Intelligent Life on Mars—Explained by Chemistry", but he had been expecting that. He was sure that he could convince them with the speech he'd prepared.

With a deep breath, Andrew began his presentation, carefully laying out all the information he'd rehearsed. Starting with the introduction, he briefly discussed how, for ages, people have noticed the similarities between Mars and Earth, in both their proximity and chemical makeup, and have theorized of the possibility of life on Mars. He then talked about the traces of chemicals detected on Mars's surface, and how they were similar to the kind found in human blood. He explained how the very specifically shaped and patterned pieces of firmly packed sand that could have possibly been from the homes of some ancient civilization. Finally, he wrapped up with how modern space technology now allows scientists to see that there is nothing living on Mars now, but due to the records they have of the past, it is possible that, at one point, Mars wasn't lifeless.

Every time Andrew looked from one of his charts to the judges, their expressions barely changed. It was worrisome, but Andrew smiled at the fact that one of the hardest parts of the science fair was over: the explanation of his project. The other hard bit was soon to come as he asked, "Are there any questions?"

One of the stern-faced judges spoke up. "I have one."

"Yes ma'am?" Andrew responded.

"What is the meaning behind this boy's antennae's headband? Is this supposed to convince us?"

Andrew was confused, "Antennae...?" He echoed, following the judges' gazes. He then noticed in horror that the person he least wanted to see was standing right next to his project, spinning his miniature model of Mars like a globe.

"Axel?!" He whisper-screamed. Then, remembering he still had judges watching his every move, he let out a nervous laugh. "I'm sorry, I have *no* idea who this is or why he is *ruining my presentation*." He muttered the last bit towards Axel, who finally looked up at him, oblivious to the situation at hand, Andrew grabbed Axel's shoulder, then shot a quick, "Will you excuse us for a moment?" Before pushing him away from his presentation.

Once Andrew thought he was out of earshot of anyone else, he said in a low voice, "*Get out*. I've worked too hard on this to let *you* come in here and mess everything up."

Axel suddenly reached out towards Andrew's project. "Can I have the tiny Mars?"

"No!" Andrew said, a little louder than he should've. "Ever since I met you, you've been nothing but *annoying* and *dense*, and...and even the sight of your face gets on my nerves!" Axel cocked his head at Andrew as he spoke, but didn't say a word. And *that* was the stupid straw that broke the stupid camel's stupid back.

"When will you ever take the hint and just *leave me alone*?!" He yelled, pushing Axel as hard as he could. The boy fell hard onto the gym floor. Heads turned, and some gasped at the sight of Axel on the ground. His hair had fallen out of his face, and he looked up at Andrew with all five of his eyes.

Andrew backed away slowly in shock. He knew that Axel was weird, but this...what *was* this? A five-eyed human being? Was he even *human*?!

Axel looked at Andrew, then at the other people looking at him, then everywhere at once. He stood up, and rubbed his head as his hair fell back into place. His antennas were twitching violently.

Suddenly, Andrew's three judges flew past him and swarmed the mutant boy, amazed. They messed with his hair to take pictures of his five eyes, and pulled on his antennas, all while they flooded him with questions in loud hurried voices. Axel blocked his face, squinting at the camera lights. Andrew saw him look at him, and he swore he heard him growl before he ran out of the room.

The judges watched, then they suddenly all turned to look back at Andrew and his project. Andrew, still a little shaken up, closed his eyes with a sigh. “Well, now that that little fiasco is over, I would like to direct your attention to—”

“Can you tell me everything you know about the boy that was just here? Does he actually have five eyes and antennas?”

Andrew opened his eyes to see only one judge before him, attentively holding a notepad and camera. The other two were running out of the room, no doubt after Axel. Andrew couldn't help but clench his fists. He wanted to tell the judge that he didn't know who that was, but suddenly, screams were heard from outside, followed by one of the worst noises Andrew had ever heard. It sounded like the roar of a dinosaur crossed with the screech of an eagle, and it was followed by a terrifying sight: A large black beast rose its head into the air as it let out its cry, then it took off, and disappeared from everyone's view. Seconds later, a loud *CRASH* shook the ground.

The gym erupted into a panic. Students running in all directions, authorities trying to yell commands, and the air filled with screams. Andrew had frozen in place until Trudy found him minutes later, and forcefully pulled him out of the gym by his arm.

“Come on, Andrew! We gotta get out of here!” Cried Trudy. Andrew tried to respond, “But Axel just ran off *that way...*” but no sound would come out of his mouth.

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The monster was on a rampage. It bit into cars. It left a hole in a building with its tail. It dripped with slime all down the streets. It screeched like mad. It ate whatever it could get its claws on, and it seemed that no one could stop the monster.

But what the terrified town didn't know was that the monster couldn't even stop itself. Everything felt so instinctual, and so freeing. It couldn't think straight; it couldn't think at all. It didn't think twice about what was done or what was to happen next.

It only stopped short upon hearing its Earthly name, “*Axel...*” The voice sounded familiar and warm, but the monster couldn't tell where it came from until a glittering figure appeared before him. Suddenly, they weren't in town anymore. The monster and the figure were in some dark expanse. The shimmering shape formed hands, placing them on the beast's snout. It had a face, and it pressed its forehead to the monster's. The monster knew now who this was.

“Nebbs...”

“Calm down, Axel, please.” Her voice was so soft.

The beast tried to calm itself. It slowly began to feel like an ‘Axel’, then it felt Nebbs's arms wrap around him. “That's it, buddy.”

Before the creature knew it, he'd become Axel again. His fur was gone, and his body was human.

Nebularis pulled him gently out of the hug. "Don't you remember what I said before bringing you to Earth?"

"...No transforming."

"Right."

"But you didn't say anything about not destroying a city and scaring all the people."

"It's implied!" Exclaimed Nebs, no longer sounding soft.

Axel snickered. Then, with some hesitation, Axel said, "Okay, I'm okay now."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

"Alright," smiled Mother Space, as her hands began to glitter, "Please try not to let this happen again. I can't be pulling you out of your dimension on the regular." She snapped her fingers, and everything went dark.

Axel woke up just outside the door to Grandma's apartment. He must've been dropped off by Nebs. He took a deep breath, then knocked.

Grandma was quick to open it. "Axel!" She cried, hugging him tight. "I'm so glad you're alright. I heard that something terrible happened near your school. I was so worried!"

This was Axel's second hug of the day, the first being from Mother Space. He then decided that he really liked hugs.

"What about Andrew and Trudy?" Grandma added suddenly, "Are they alright?"

Axel thought about Trudy, and her sweet smile. He wondered if she was scared when the attack happened. Then he thought about Andrew, the anger he showed towards Axel before, and the terror he showed after he saw his full face. "...They're alright, Grandma."

"What a relief." Responded the little old lady. She looked at Axel again, and suddenly her eyes went wide. "Poor dear, you're shivering! Let me get you a blanket and some nice warm tea. Sit down, child, sit down."

Axel did as he was told, and, a few minutes later, he and Grandma were settled on the couch. As they sipped on tea, Grandma turned on the TV. Instead of her usual shows, she turned on the news. The newscasters quickly spilled out all the information they knew about the monster attack in town earlier. They warned people to stay indoors, and promised to update the public if they learned anything new about the situation.

The more Axel listened, the worse the knot in his stomach grew. So he set his now empty cup on the coffee table, then curled up there on the couch to get some sleep.

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It was Saturday now, one day after the mysterious monster had attacked the city and vanished into thin air. Andrew had gotten word that the loud *CRASH* that the entire school had heard was the sound of a monster tail smacking into the school's garden. It was honestly a relief to him, because no one was in there at the time. Trudy was pretty upset when he told her the news, however. He knew she loved every plant that grew in there like her own children.

Speaking of no one getting hurt, the twins had called their grandmother as soon as they got home yesterday, and they were relieved to find out that both she and Axel were just fine. Then, they hung up with a "love you" and a promise to visit her soon.

Trudy had been awfully quiet that day. She was a lot less...smiley than normal, too. It made Andrew wonder if she had been thinking about the garden all that time. Was it the daisies? Or maybe the carrots?

Finally, while they both were in the kitchen washing dishes after dinner, she gave Andrew a penny for her thoughts.

"Hey Andy?"

"Hm?"

"Everyone from school, and everyone on the news says that yesterday was a *monster* attack, but I think it might've been an *alien* attack. What do you think?"

"An alien?" Andrew hadn't thought about that before. "Why do you think that?"

"I dunno, I just don't think that *that*—" she paused the TV on a frame of the black beast, "—is from anywhere on this planet. Plus, you always sound so smart when you talk about them. I wouldn't be surprised if aliens actually exist."

Andrew rolled his eyes. "My whole presentation is arguing that aliens *existed*, sis. They're all gone now."

"Hm." Trudy huffed, looking back at the frozen image on the TV. "I still think it was an alien."

Just then, Trudy's phone rang in her pocket. "It's Grandma." she told her brother, then she answered, "Hi Grandma!"

Andrew overheard a deep voice on the other end that was definitely not their grandmother.

"Hey Axel!" chirped Trudy, "What's up? ...Sure, we can hang out today. You wanna come over to our place? ...Great! We live at—oh, you already got our address from Grandma? Cool...yeah! See you then! Bye." Then she put her phone away, wiping off one last spoon before she put her towel away. "Yo, Axel said he can come over in a few minutes to hang out with us."

"Interesting." Andrew said. He placed his towel next to Trudy's, then he went to his room, finding a good book to read until their brother arrived.

Axel had said over the phone that he'd be over in a few minutes, but by the time he actually got to their house, it was mostly dark out. He smiled and waved at Trudy, who greeted him right at the door. He then noticed Andrew standing just behind her,

and his smile faded a bit. He approached him slowly. “Andrew, I...I didn’t mean to ruin your important presentation-thing yesterday. To be honest, I didn’t even know which building was the gym until I walked in there and got distracted by your cool tiny Mars.”

“...It’s alright, I guess.” Shrugged Andrew. “I mean, the giant monster would’ve ruined everything anyways, even if you hadn’t shown up, right?” Axel nodded slowly.

“I *still* think it was an alien. Trudy butted in.

“Maybe it was a monster alien?” Axel suggested.

“Maybe...” said Andrew, then he got an idea. “Hey Trudy, we should go to The Hill. It’s dark enough.”

Trudy gasped, “Hey, that’s a great idea! He would love—” her phone went off in her pocket. She frowned at the screen. “Aw, it’s from (friend). I forgot I promised her that I’d sleep over tonight. But you two can still go to The Hill. It should be beautiful out tonight!” She called, running to her room to pack for the night.

Andrew shrugged. “Well, if we want to see anything before it gets too late, we should leave now.” He slipped into a coat that hung by the front door, then gestured for Axel to follow him. So, off they went into the chilly night.

“This is The Hill.” Andrew announced once they had reached and climbed the large, grassy hill on the far outskirts of the city. “Trudy and I found this place when we were little. It’s far enough away from town that, when the sky is clear, you can see tons of stars on top of it. Right now, it’s pretty cloudy, but should clear up in a few minutes.” Andrew then sat down on the grass, and Axel soon followed beside him. As the moments passed in complete and utter silence, Andrew wondered if coming here without Trudy to do most of the talking was even a good idea.

Andrew picked at the grass, then finally said the apology that was on his mind. “Um, at the science fair...I didn’t mean to yell at you the way that I did. I normally don’t blow up like that. I guess the chaos of the week got to me. It was a lot to take in.”

“It’s fine.” Axel shrugged. “I shouldn’t have gotten in your way.”

“Do you wanna just pretend that the whole thing with my presentation didn’t happen?”

“Sure,” Axel agreed, “as long as you forget about me turning into an alien monster and all that.”

“Deal...” Andrew nodded, then he froze. “Wait, what?! You—th-the monster—*you’re* the monster?!”

Axel’s head whipped around to face Andrew, and he quickly got to his feet. Andrew felt his breath become shallow, and he was suddenly very aware of how close he was to the boy. He tried to crawl away, but Axel soon stood above him, so close that Andrew could see his five wide eyes staring down at him. “You didn’t figure that out earlier? Huh.” he said, then he stooped down so close to Andrew’s face that Andrew could hear a growl somewhere deep in Axel’s throat. When he spoke again, his voice

was low and quiet. "I guess that's a good thing. It means you haven't told anybody what I am. You *aren't* going to tell anyone, are you?"

"N-no! I won't! Y-your secret's safe with me." Andrew promised, trembling.

A grin suddenly spread across Axel's face. "That's good." He said, sitting on the grass again. "It's so easy to freak you out, bro."

"Yeah, yeah." Andrew sneered, sitting up. He glanced at the sky, and noticed that a few of the stars were beginning to peak out of the clouds. "Look, here come the stars."

Axel looked up at the night sky too but he didn't say a word. In a matter of minutes, the clouds had been blown away, and the vast blanket of stars was fully visible to the two.

"So, you're an alien, huh?" Asked Andrew after a period of silence. "Where are you from?"

Axel pointed up at space. "There. Mars."

Andrew looked hard at the general direction Axel pointed in, but he couldn't find the red dot. "Can you see it from here?"

"No, but I know it's there."

Andrew couldn't help but smile to himself. "So Trudy was right. There are creatures up there."

"No, there aren't." Axel corrected him."

"What?"

Axel brought his knees up close to his chest. "I was the last one."

"O-oh. That's awful." responded Andrew, unsure what to say. Unfortunately, it seemed that he was right about the life on Mars that no longer existed. Trudy had guessed right that the monster they'd seen was indeed an alien, but she didn't know that the alien was Axel. Andrew intended to keep it that way, for Axel's sake, and for hers, and the sake of anyone else she might've ended up blabbing to. She did tend to gossip.

"One more question," Andrew began. "You figured who I was on your second day of school, didn't you?" When Axel nodded, Andrew asked him, "How?"

"I got a pretty accurate picture of you and Trudy from Grandma. She's a great artist."

Andrew felt a bit ashamed of himself. He didn't even know his grandmother liked art.

Axel continued, "I just assumed *you'd* figured out who *I* was. You looked smart."

"I...don't know if that's a compliment."

As the night grew long, Andrew realized he should probably get back home. He offered to let Axel stay with him for the night, saying he could use his sister's bed while she was away, but Axel declined. "I can find my way back to Grandma's. I like the dark." he said. Then, the two parted ways.

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Axel walked down the empty streets, fairly confident that the sights and scents were getting more and more familiar as he went along. Suddenly, he heard a familiar voice call his name. "Axel..."

He looked around, and did a few circles around himself until the voice elaborated with a giggle, "I'm in your head, silly. You can't see me."

"Neb?"

"Mmm-hmm. I wanted to ask you, how are you liking Earth so far?"

Axel looked up, but it was hard to see Mars from here with all the streetlights and neon signs flickering and flashing above him. He squinted against the glare. "So many colors."

Neb chuckled. "Yes, I suppose there are a lot of colors when compared to your old little red world."

Mother Space fell silent for a moment or two, then sighed and said, "You know, young Axel, you remind me of myself in some ways. Lonely, confused, and afraid that you might make a big mistake without knowing until it's too late. That's why I brought you here. My neglect destroyed your home, so I wanted to give you a new one. I just hope everything works out for you...and I hope that one day, you can forgive me..."

The voice faded away until there was no sound at all. "Neb?" Axel called, but there was no response. It seemed that Axel was alone again.

Just as suddenly as Mother Space had left him, he smelled the strong scent of something tasty. He lifted his nose, following it for a couple blocks to a butcher's shop. Without even thinking, he smashed the window glass with his boot.

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The next morning, Grandma asked Axel to grab some groceries for her. She'd given him what she called a "flip phone", which she or the twins could contact him on if they needed to. He was glad he decided to take it with him, because before he reached the store, he got his very first call. He opened the phone and pressed the green button, which he learned was how to answer calls when the phone started making noises.

"Axel! Axel, are you there?!" It was Trudy's voice.

"Yeah, what's up?"

When she spoke again, Axel noticed that her voice was shaky, and quiet. "I'm glad you're okay. Me, Andrew and Grandma are being detained by some big scary guys with weapons for more information on the alien that we saw at school."

"What?" Axel found himself yelling through the phone.

“T-they said they’re positive that one of us knows something more than they’re confessing, and that they’re gonna find the truth one way or another.”

“Where? Where are you?”

“I’m not sure.” She said. “They split up the three of us, and put us in separate rooms for questioning. Right now I’m in a room alone, and I don’t know when they’re coming back to question me. I-I’m sure that they’ll let us go soon, once they find out we don’t know anything...but...I’m kinda scared.” She let out a nervous laugh.

Axel began to panic. He didn’t know how good Andrew was under intense pressure, but Andrew certainly knew a lot more than nothing about the monster attack. “Stay calm, Trudy. I’ll...figure something out.” After that, Trudy abruptly hung up.

Axel wasn’t sure what it was to be ‘detained’ but it didn’t sound good. He lifted his nose to the air. He’d have to smell out his family’s location. Finally he caught the scents he recognized: dust, lavender and basil leaves. He knew where they were.

He began to sprint towards the smells, but he felt slow on two legs. He got down and raced through town on all fours. He transformed into a beast without even meaning to, but he ran much faster in that form, so he didn’t care.

When he arrived at the building that was covered in strong traces of the familiar scents, he circled it twice to find where each smell was strongest. Trudy and Grandma’s were in the front of the building, and Andrew’s came from near the back. He was careful to pick a spot to ram into where none of his family was, then he backed up, and braced his skull for impact.

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Andrew felt like he was sweating bullets. The man who sat across from him had eyes like daggers, as if he was trying to carve the answers to their questions out of his brain.

“Alright, young man, we’re starting with you.” he said, tapping his clipboard on the counter. “Tell us everything you know about that monster.”

“Well,” Andrew began shakily. He was trying so hard to look relaxed that he forgot to relax his own voice. He cleared his throat. “He attacked my school on Friday—”

Just then, a *BOOM* shook the floor. The man across from Andrew quickly stood up and stormed out of the room. Andrew took the opportunity to slip outside of his own room. He ran down the halls of closed doors calling out, “Grandma! Trudy!”

“We’re over here, Andrew!” Called grandma. He followed her voice around the corner, then ran to hug them. “We have to get out of here.” he said.

“There’s an emergency exit!” Trudy called, pointing towards a door with a red “EMERGENCY EXIT” sign above it. They ran to it, relieved to see the sunlight streaming down on them as they rushed outside. As they ran away from the commotion, they heard an ear-splitting roar that they all had heard before.

"It's the alien!" Cried Trudy, latching onto her brother.

"That it is." said Andrew with a small smile.

Sure enough, the same furry black beast from school and the news had headbutted the building they were in seconds before. It struggled to free its head from the building, then looked in all directions before it caught sight of Grandma and the twins, Andrew noticed it then began to wag its tail. He nodded solemnly back at it

Trudy began dragging Andrew away from the building. "We have to go, Andrew! Work with me, here!"

"S-sorry!" He said, picking up the pace.

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Axel watched as his family escaped, then he focused on fighting off the policemen, who tried to surround him. One of their bullets grazed his face, and he watched one of his eyes go blind. He shook his head vigorously to try and bring it back, but as he did, he felt something else hit his face. He heard it squawk and hit the ground.

It was a pigeon, which now lay dead by his feet.

Suddenly, Axel had forgotten about the fight, and heard Grandma's words, "I'm here if you need me. And so are the pigeons. The pigeons in this city are quite friendly."

And now, he'd killed one without even meaning to.

Unfortunately, while Axel stared at the poor bird, not everyone felt the same remorse. They circled around him and threw ropes around his legs, and he lost his balance and he hit the ground hard. Then, he felt a cold metal band close around his neck, and a terrible shocking sensation came over him until everything faded into black.

Axel awoke surrounded by guards, who hauled him to his feet. He was pulled forward by a rope connected to the shocking thing around his neck. He didn't move, so the man holding the other end of the rope pressed a large button. The shocking sensation immediately returned, and he let out a shriek. When it finally stopped, his rope was yanked on again. This time, he walked.

Axel was so confused about what was going on. His head spun, and one side of his face still stung from where the bullet grazed him. There were tight clamps around his front paws, and a thick metal muzzle over his mouth. He began to think about what to do. *Maybe, Axel thought, if I could transform back into a human, I could get out of these chains. Or I could convince them that they grabbed the wrong kid. But...how do I do that? Come on, think human thoughts, think human thoughts, think human thoughts...* It was no use. Axel was stuck in those chains for the time being.

As he trudged alongside the guards, he began to wonder where exactly he was. He got answer soon enough when they passed up a giant sign on the wall that read, "AREA 51."

By the time that Axel had been shoved into a cell, his chains were removed from his paws, and the muzzle was removed from his mouth. His vision had fully returned, but Axel didn't really care at that point. After all, what good was his vision if he only had four grey walls around him to stare at? And what good was there in not having chains and a muzzle when he was stuck in what felt like a box?

Many dull hours seemed to pass for Axel in that cell. He tried to sleep to pass time, but even he grew tired of sleeping. Finally, a sparkle appeared in the room, which then grew into a figure he'd been longing to see.

"Nebs..." He sighed under his breath.

"Yikes." said Nebs. "Now how did you end up in here?"

Axel didn't say anything.

"What's the matter? Why aren't you talking?"

Axel lifted his head up to show her his new accessory.

"A shock collar?!" She exclaimed, "How dare they?" She snapped her fingers, and the collar clattered to the floor beside them. Axel shook his body. It felt really nice to have it off.

"Can't you break me out of here, Nebs?"

Of course I could, I'm Mother Space." She said. "But I like to avoid divine intervention as much as I can. And I *swore* I remember people saying they were going to raid this place today..." She said, tapping her chin. "Hold on. I'll check outside."

Then Nebula disappeared with a *POOF*. Seconds later, she reappeared, looking disappointed. "Well, things don't always go as planned, I suppose..." she sighed. "No matter, I'll break you out myself—and don't worry, I'll make a fake you that looks asleep so they won't sound the alarm for quite a while." Out of thin air, Mother Space created an almost holographic type replica of the beast. She then snapped her fingers, and she and Axel were floating in space.

"I have a surprise to show you, Axel." said Mother Space to the small creature in her hands. Axel cocked his head. Nebs continued, "For a little while, I've been working on recreating your old species, and I think I know how I did it all those years ago. She turned around, revealing to him the new inhabitants of Mars.

Sure enough, there were other creatures of his own kind. It was hard to see them clearly because of how far away they were, but it was certainly them. Along with the creature's return, Nebs had also brought back some small lakes onto Mars's surface. Axel watched his old planet, now bustling with life, his mouth slightly ajar.

"Isn't it just like you remember?" Nebs asked.

"It is."

Nebularis then brought Axel close to her face with a solemn expression. "How would you feel about returning to Mars?"

Axel didn't say anything. He just kept his eyes fixated on the Red Planet. Nebs went on, "Now, I know it's not Earth, but...I thought this might be for the best. For the safety of Earth, and for *your* safety. It's up to you to decide."

The boy thought hard. He thought about the kind old woman he'd met in the park who showed him nothing but compassion and love. He thought of his skateboarding friends, and his popular friends that he'd made, who liked him even when he did strange things. He thought of the twins, and the friendship they gave him, and how they accepted him as their own sibling.

He thought of the pigeon he'd unwittingly killed.

Suddenly, he had made up his mind.

He nodded. "It's for the best. I want them to be safe."

Mother Space nodded understandingly, and then with a quick kiss on the forehead, he was back on Mars--back home.

Nebs was right, she had successfully recreated Axel's species perfectly. They were just as violent and territorial as he remembered. Teeth snapped, beasts roared at one another, and food--no matter how much there was--was *always* fought over.

Axel's stomach grumbled loudly, which meant it was time for him to join the fray. He spotted three beasts fighting savagely over what his nose told him was a delectable piece of meat.

Axel ran into their midst, and quickly got ahold of the meat, yankin it away from the others. It was surprisingly easy. He was looking forward to devouring it when the three beasts began to sniff him curiously. Their sniffing quickly turned into snarls as they stalked towards him. Axel growled back. One of the beasts then lurched forward, ripping the meat out of Axel's mouth, and tossing it aside. It was then that he realized they weren't fighting for that meat, *he* was the meat.

Axel turned completely around and broke into a sprint. He could hear that the other monsters were close on his tail, so he did the one thing they couldn't--climb. He'd always been slightly smaller than the other beasts, and it was times like this when it came in handy. He quickly scurried on top of a cave. The creatures clawed and snapped, but luckily they were still unable to reach him. They soon lost interest, turning back to fighting over the same chunk of meat from before.

Axel remembered now why he'd buried himself in the sand. These beasts couldn't track scents under the ground.

He wouldn't bury himself again. This wasn't his home anymore.

He called out for Mother Space. Nebs was quick to appear.

"Can we talk?" Asked the beast.

She nodded, picking him up off of Mars and scooping him gently into her hands.

"I changed my mind. I wanna go back to Earth. Please."

Nebs looked a little taken aback. "Is something not how it used to be?"

“No, everything *is* exactly how it used to be. That’s why I’ll never survive there. I know it’s selfish of me, but I want to go back to Earth. Besides what the government says about me, I know I can be good. I can be a good human, right? I’m not a monster, right?”

“Axel...” Nebs gave the poor thing a big hug. He’d been through so much in less than an Earthly week. “Of course you can be good. I said the choice was up to you, didn’t I?” Then, with her Mother Space magic, and a bit of stardust, she transformed the creature before her back into a human boy.

“Now, before you go back to Earth,” Nebs asked slowly, “do you want me to remove your ability to transform? Instead of becoming a monster when you get angry, you can do what most humans do and kick a wall or something.”

Axel shook his head. ‘I like my abilities. I swear, I’ll learn to control them.’

Mother space nodded with a knowing smile. “As you wish. Now, I believe there are some people down on Earth looking for you.”

“Wait!,” Axel exclaimed. Just as she was preparing to send him back. “Will i be able to see you again, Nebs?”

“If you look at the stars, I will be there.” she replied, patting the boy's fluffy head. “Who knows? I've thought about coming down to earth in a physical form once or twice. Perhaps you’ll see me walking down the street sometime.” Nebularis giggled at her own little jest, then sent Axel back down to Earth.

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The next day was a beautiful one on Planet Earth. The sky was blue, the grass was green, and the wind blew gently on the park tree Axel sat under. He stuck a flat slab of stone that he had scrawled on with a sharpie halfway into the ground. He gathered a few wildflowers and weeds and placed them in front of the stone. It was a small grave, and the tombstone read,

“Pigeon.

Sorry I hit you.”

“Hey Axel!” He heard the sound of footsteps run up behind him and slow to a halt as he heard Andrew call his name. “You wanna come play soccer with us? We can teach you how to play.” Trudy leaned over Axel’s shoulder. “What’s that?” she asked, as she and her brother peered at the tiny tombstone curiously.

Axel turned to the twins with a smile. “Sure, I’ll play.”

Trudy grabbed his hand and helped him to his feet. “You’re going to love it! It’s our favorite sport.”

Andrew nodded. Then kicked the ball gently towards Axel, and it bounced against his leg and rolled away.

“Cool.” said Axel, “What’s a ‘sport’?”

