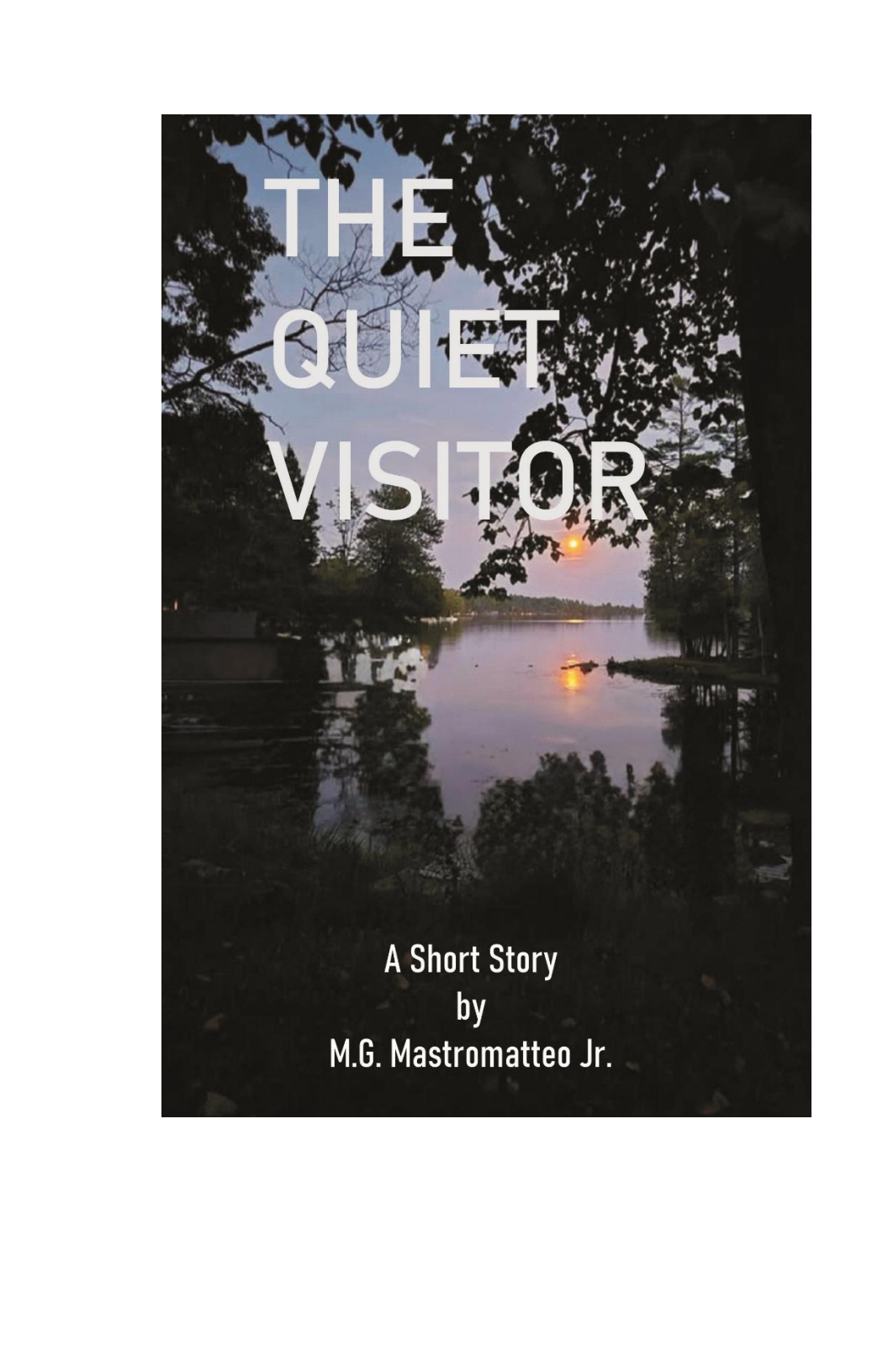




THE QUIET VISITOR

A Short Story
by
M.G. Mastromatteo Jr.

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A Short Story

Chapter One – Strange Lights

Daniel Whitmore had never been one to look up. He was an engineer by trade, the kind of man who kept his eyes fixed on nuts and bolts, on blueprints and measurable tolerances. The heavens were for poets and stargazers, not for someone who found his peace in the predictable hum of machines.

But lately, the night sky had been hard to ignore.

It started with a shimmer. Not the sort of thing you could photograph or even point out to someone else. Just a faint ripple that disturbed the edges of the stars, as though a veil of heat had been draped over the constellations. Daniel would stand on the porch after dinner, beer sweating in his hand, and watch the sky waver. He mentioned it once to his wife, Eliza, who only smiled in that peculiar way of hers—like she was in on a joke no one else could hear.

“You probably need new glasses,” she teased, brushing a lock of chestnut hair behind her ear.

Daniel had let it go. He often let things go with Eliza. She was beautiful, disarmingly so, and when she laughed, the sound seemed to smooth out all the sharp edges of the world. They had been married eight years, and in that time, he’d learned that Eliza was a woman of mysteries. She could recall impossible details about things she had supposedly read only once. She never seemed cold in the winter or hot in the summer. And sometimes, in the small hours of the night, Daniel would wake to find her standing by the window, gazing out as if waiting for something.

That was the first oddity. The second came a week later, when his truck died without explanation.

It wasn’t old. The battery was strong, the alternator new. But as Daniel turned the key in the ignition, the dashboard lights flared so

bright they nearly blinded him. Then the whole system went dead. Later, after some testing, the truck roared to life again, as though nothing had happened.

Eliza had been in the passenger seat when it failed. Daniel remembered the way she'd shifted uncomfortably, as though she were trying to pull herself away from the dashboard. Her hand, resting on her lap, had given off a faint glow—so faint he thought it was his imagination.

When he asked if she'd seen anything unusual, she simply said, "Maybe it's time we start walking more." Daniel laughed, but the sound came out brittle.

Then came the dream.

It wasn't his dream, though he was the one who woke from it. He had opened his eyes in the dead of night and found Eliza whispering in her sleep. Not words he understood, but a cascade of sounds—like liquid syllables, musical and strange. She wasn't tossing or turning. She lay still, her face peaceful, as though she were speaking to someone far away.

Daniel had reached out to wake her, but something stopped him. Perhaps it was the faint shimmer in the air above her body, like heat rising from asphalt. Or perhaps it was the conviction that if he touched her, he would break some fragile connection. So, he withdrew his hand and lay awake until dawn, staring at the ceiling, his heart hammering with a fear he couldn't name.

Over the following days, the incidents grew harder to dismiss. Streetlights flickered when Eliza walked beneath them. Radios crackled with static when she entered the room. Their dog, Bramble, began giving her a wide berth, tail tucked low. Daniel

found himself staring at his wife when she wasn't looking, searching her face for evidence of... what?

He didn't know.

The breaking point came on a Tuesday. Daniel had been working late in the garage, fiddling with a generator he hoped to sell. Eliza came in quietly, her bare feet making no sound on the concrete.

"You're still at it?" she asked, tilting her head.

"Almost done," Daniel replied. "Just a few more adjustments."

The generator sputtered, coughed, then belched a plume of smoke. He swore under his breath. Before he could try again, Eliza stepped closer.

"Mind if I?" she asked.

He frowned. "You don't know anything about engines."

She only smiled and placed her hand gently on the metal casing. There was a sound—a soft hum that Daniel felt more than heard—and the generator roared to life, smooth as silk.

Daniel stared, open-mouthed. "How the hell did you—"

But Eliza only pulled her hand back, brushing imaginary dust from her fingers. "Sometimes machines just need a gentle touch."

She kissed him on the cheek and left him standing there, trembling in the glow of a machine that had no right to be running.

That night, Daniel couldn't sleep. The truth pressed down on him, insistent and undeniable. Something about his wife was not what it seemed.

He lay awake beside her, listening to the rhythm of her breathing, and asked himself a question he never thought he'd have reason to consider:

What if the woman I married isn't from here at all?

Chapter Two – The Secret Within

Daniel Whitmore had always believed that mysteries belonged in books, not in the neat, predictable rhythms of his own life. But once suspicion took root, it was like a hairline crack in glass: invisible at first, then spreading with relentless certainty.

He began watching Eliza more closely.

It wasn't difficult; she drew his attention without trying. The way she prepared meals, for instance. Eliza could replicate a dish she'd tasted once years before, down to the seasoning. Daniel had always chalked it up to talent, but now it felt uncanny. When she worked in the garden, flowers thrived under her touch, growing faster and fuller than they had any right to. Even weeds seemed reluctant to intrude.

The more he looked, the more he found.

One Saturday afternoon, Daniel was rummaging in the attic for an old photo album. He found it easily enough, but what caught his eye was a box shoved deep into the corner, wrapped in a blanket. Curious, he pulled it free. The cardboard felt oddly warm to the touch. Inside were objects he had never seen before.

There were thin rods of metal, light as plastic yet impossibly strong. A set of small disks that shimmered in colors his eyes struggled to define. And at the very bottom, nestled in velvet, was a device that resembled no tool he knew. Smooth, oval, faintly humming, as though alive.

He didn't hear Eliza until she spoke behind him.

"What are you doing up here?"

Daniel nearly dropped the device. He turned, guilt flashing across his face. Eliza stood at the top of the stairs; her expression unreadable.

“I was looking for the album,” he said quickly. “The one from our trip to Maine.”

Her eyes flicked to the box, then back to him. For a moment, silence stretched taut between them. Finally, she descended the last step and closed the box with deliberate calm.

“Some things,” she said softly, “aren’t meant to be handled.”

Daniel opened his mouth, then closed it again. He wanted to demand an explanation, but something in her tone—gentle yet firm—stilled him. She took the box from his hands as if it weighed nothing and slid it back into the shadows.

They didn’t speak of it again that night, but Daniel’s mind churned.

The more he thought about it, the more fragments from their life together rose like debris in a storm. The way she never spoke of her childhood in detail, only vague references to “a small town far away.” The fact that she didn’t have family who visited, or even called. He had assumed it was estrangement, a pain she didn’t wish to relive. But what if the truth was stranger?

The memory that haunted him most came from their first meeting.

It had been at a college lecture, years ago. Daniel had been late, the hall already crowded. He’d found an empty seat beside a striking young woman who turned to him with eyes that seemed almost luminous in the dim light. They struck up a conversation afterward, and he remembered being overwhelmed by the intensity of her gaze, as though she were studying him with more than human curiosity.

He'd fallen hard and fast. They were married within two years. He never questioned how someone like Eliza could have chosen someone like him. Now, perhaps, he understood: maybe she hadn't chosen him because of who he was, but because of what he represented—a safe harbor, a place to hide.

Daniel tried to dismiss the thought, but it festered.

The following week, he found himself at the local library, combing through books and articles on atmospheric phenomena, electromagnetic anomalies, even UFO sightings. He laughed at himself more than once, but the laughter felt brittle, desperate. If his wife wasn't... what she appeared to be... then perhaps others had seen something similar.

He didn't find answers, only more questions. Reports of lights in the sky, electrical disturbances, animals behaving strangely. Things he might have dismissed once now felt personal.

One evening, as he sat hunched over his notes at the kitchen table, Eliza placed a hand on his shoulder.

"You're working too hard," she said, her voice carrying both affection and a hint of concern.

Daniel looked up at her, heart pounding. "Eliza... what are you?"

The question slipped out before he could stop it. The room fell silent, save for the ticking of the wall clock.

Eliza's face remained calm, but her hand withdrew slowly from his shoulder. "What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean," he said, forcing steadiness into his voice. "The lights, the machines, the things in the attic. I—" He broke off, unable to finish.

For the first time since he had known her, Eliza looked afraid. Not of him, but of the words themselves, as if they summoned a danger she had worked hard to avoid.

“Daniel,” she whispered, “please. Not yet.”

He wanted to demand the truth, to tear down the wall of secrecy that had suddenly appeared between them. But the sight of her eyes—wide, shimmering with unspoken things—stopped him cold.

So, he said nothing. And in that silence, Daniel realized he was standing at the edge of something vast, something that could unmake his world.

That night, he lay awake again, listening to Eliza breathe beside him. He wanted to reach for her, to reassure himself she was real, that she was his. But the distance between them felt immeasurable, as though she belonged to another sky altogether.

And perhaps she did.

Chapter Three – Discovery

Daniel knew the truth was coming. He felt it pressing against his chest with every breath, growing heavier with every unanswered question. For weeks, the silence between him and Eliza had thickened, until even the simplest conversations carried an undercurrent of tension.

It broke on a Thursday night.

The day had been ordinary, almost mocking in its normalcy. Daniel spent the afternoon repairing a neighbor's lawnmower, while Eliza worked in the garden. By evening, they sat down to dinner, the table set with roasted chicken and vegetables that gleamed with unnatural vibrancy—carrots sweeter, beans greener, tomatoes bursting with flavor. Daniel pushed food around his plate, appetite gone.

Eliza noticed. "You've barely touched anything."

"I'm not hungry."

She set down her fork. "Daniel..."

That was all it took. The fragile dam in his chest burst.

"I can't keep doing this, Eliza," he said, his voice tight.

"Pretending I don't notice. Pretending I don't see the way lights flicker when you walk by. Or the way you... you fixed the generator just by touching it. The things in the attic. The dreams. You can't expect me to believe everything's normal when nothing is."

Her face remained calm, but her hands folded neatly in her lap, as if anchoring her. "You're tired. You've been working too much—"

"No." His voice cracked. "No more excuses. I need the truth."

Silence. Then, slowly, Eliza rose from the table. She walked to the window and stood there, her back to him, gazing at the night sky. The same way she always did when she thought he was asleep.

“Daniel,” she said softly, “what I’m about to tell you... it may change everything.”

His breath caught. “Then tell me.”

She turned, and for the first time since he’d known her, he saw her without the careful mask she wore. Her eyes—always striking—now glowed faintly, a pale silver that shimmered like liquid metal. The sight rooted him to his chair.

“I’m not from here,” she said.

The words landed like stones in his stomach. Though he had suspected, hearing it aloud tore the last shreds of denial away.

“I was born on a world far from this one,” she continued. “A place with no name in your language. My people are travelers. Observers. We’ve come to Earth for generations, always in secret. I was sent here to... to live among you, to learn.”

Daniel’s throat felt dry. “Learn? About what?”

“About humanity. About what it means to love, to fear, to build, to destroy. My people understand many things, but not... not you.” Her gaze softened. “And then I met you.”

He stared, struggling to anchor himself against the rising tide of impossibility. “You married me.”

“Yes.” She stepped closer, eyes luminous. “Because with you, I felt something my people never could. Connection. Belonging. Love.”

He shook his head, half in disbelief, half in fear. “You should have told me.”

“I wanted to,” she said, voice trembling. “Every day, I wanted to. But the risk... Daniel, if the truth were known, if others discovered me, they wouldn’t see your wife. They’d see an experiment. A threat. They’d take me away from you. Or worse, use me.”

Images flooded his mind: men in uniforms, labs hidden underground, his wife trapped behind glass. His stomach lurched.

“Eliza...” His voice broke on her name. “Why me? Out of everyone, why choose me?”

“Because you looked at me,” she whispered, kneeling beside him. “That first night we met, you looked at me as if I was human. Not strange, not wrong. Just... me. I had never felt that before. I still don’t understand why you chose me back.”

Daniel felt his world tilting, reality slipping like sand through his fingers. His wife—his Eliza—wasn’t even from Earth. And yet, as she knelt before him, her hand trembling as it reached for his, he felt the same pull that had bound him to her all these years.

But love did not erase fear.

“Are there others?” he asked.

“Yes.” She hesitated. “But not like me. Most do not... stay. They observe from a distance. Few risk what I have.”

“And the lights?”

Her eyes flicked to the window. “Signals. My people checking for me. I’ve ignored them, Daniel. Because I chose this life with you.”

The room felt suddenly smaller, the air heavier. He wanted to scream, to run, to pretend none of this was real. But when he looked into Eliza's luminous eyes, he saw not a stranger, but the woman who had laughed with him, held him through grief, built a home by his side.

And that terrified him most of all.

"What am I supposed to do with this?" he asked hoarsely.

"Whatever you choose," she said, her voice steady now. "I can't force you to accept me. But know this: everything I've ever felt for you is real. Even if I'm not what you thought I was."

The clock ticked, loud in the silence. Daniel sat motionless, her hand warm in his, his heart warring with his mind.

Outside, a faint shimmer rippled across the stars, as though the universe itself leaned in to listen.

Chapter Four – The Weight of Silence

Daniel carried the truth like a stone in his chest. Heavy.
Unyielding. Impossible to set down.

In the days after Eliza's revelation, nothing outwardly changed. They still shared coffee in the mornings, still took walks through the neighborhood, still talked about bills and errands and mundane things. But beneath it all, silence pooled like stagnant water, thick with unspoken words.

He couldn't tell anyone.

How could he? Who would believe him if he said, "*My wife is from another world?*". Even if someone did, what then? Scientists would descend, governments would intervene, strangers would pry into the life they'd built together. Eliza would be caged, dissected, turned into a resource instead of a person.

So, he swallowed it. Again and again, until it became a constant ache in his throat.

The hardest part was pretending he didn't see the signs. Eliza tried to mask them more carefully now—the way her eyes sometimes glowed in the dark, the way her hand hovered over broken things before they healed with a hum. But Daniel noticed. He always noticed.

And he noticed something else: others were noticing, too.

It started with the news. Reports of "strange lights" in the region, speculation of drones or satellites. Then came murmurs of power surges, car batteries dying inexplicably, pets running away in the night.

Neighbors whispered. Government trucks appeared on back roads, unmarked but obvious in their purpose. Daniel's skin crawled

whenever one drove past their street, lingering just long enough to make him wonder.

He couldn't shake the paranoia. When Eliza went out to buy groceries, he worried she might not return. When she lingered in the garden, he scanned the sky for drones. At night, he woke from dreams of strangers pounding on their door, faceless men pulling her away while he stood helpless.

The silence ate at him.

One evening, over dinner, he almost told his friend Mark, who lived two houses down. Mark was rambling about a blackout the night before, laughing about candles and old board games. Daniel forced a chuckle, but inside, the urge clawed at him: *Tell him. Just one person. Unload the truth before it crushes you.*

But then he pictured Mark's expression—confusion, disbelief, pity. And if Mark repeated it? Even as a joke? The wrong ears would hear. The wrong people would come.

So, he stayed quiet.

That night, Eliza touched his hand across the table. "You're carrying too much," she murmured.

He wanted to laugh at the understatement. Instead, he whispered, "How do you do it? How do you live every day pretending you're someone you're not?"

Her gaze softened. "Because I'm not pretending with you. I may not be from here, but this—" she gestured between them "—is real."

Her words were meant to comfort, but they only deepened the weight pressing on him.

The following week, the tension grew unbearable. Daniel found himself driving aimlessly after work, circling the outskirts of town, his mind a storm. He stopped once at a bar, thinking the noise might drown out his thoughts, but the chatter of strangers only made him feel more isolated.

It was in the parking lot, under a flickering streetlamp, that he saw it: a figure watching him from across the road. Too still. Too deliberate. When Daniel blinked, it was gone.

He drove home faster than he should have, pulse hammering.

“Eliza,” he said breathlessly as he entered the house, “someone’s watching us.”

Her face paled. “Describe them.”

He did, stumbling over details, but she seemed to understand more than he said.

“They know,” she whispered. “Or at least... they suspect.”

Daniel gripped the back of a chair to steady himself. “What do we do?”

“Stay quiet,” she said. “Live as we always have. Silence is our only protection.”

But Daniel wondered how long silence could shield them. Every day felt like a countdown, though he didn’t know to what.

And then there was his own heart to contend with. He loved her. That hadn’t changed. But love, he realized, was not the absence of fear. Some nights, lying awake, he turned to look at her and felt a shiver of alienness—like a reminder that she did not truly belong to this world, or to him.

Yet in the same breath, he knew he could not let her go.

It was a paradox he lived with, a double life inside a single marriage. To everyone else, they were Daniel and Eliza Whitmore, ordinary couple. Only he knew the truth—that his wife was a visitor from the stars, and that silence was the fragile thread keeping her safe.

The weight of it bent him, reshaped him, until he no longer recognized the man he had been.

And still, he said nothing.

Chapter Five – Love Beyond Worlds

The night of reckoning came without warning.

It was early autumn, the air crisp with the smell of woodsmoke, when Daniel woke to a sound he couldn't place. A low hum, not from the house, not from any machine he knew, but from the sky itself.

He slipped from bed and pressed his face to the window. The stars above their yard rippled, bending like light on water. Shapes moved within the shimmer—geometries that defied his eyes, here and not here, vast yet delicate. His heart pounded as he realized the lights were not distant this time. They were looking for her.

“Eliza,” he whispered urgently, shaking her shoulder.

Her eyes opened, already glowing faintly. She sat up without surprise, as if she had been waiting for this moment.

“They’ve come,” she said quietly.

Daniel’s stomach dropped. “For you?”

“For me.”

She rose, moving toward the back door. Daniel followed, panic surging. “No. You can’t go out there. If you go, they’ll take you away. I’ll never see you again.”

Eliza paused, turning to him. The shimmer of the sky painted her face with silver. “If I stay, Daniel, they’ll come down harder. They’ll search. Others will suffer. I can’t let that happen.”

He grabbed her hand, desperate. “Then tell them you’re staying here. Tell them this is your home now.”

Her eyes softened, grief shadowing their light. “They won’t understand. My people don’t... feel the way you do. To them, this life is a detour, a distraction. They won’t allow it.”

Daniel felt his world closing in. The weight of silence he’d carried now threatened to crush him entirely. He had kept her secret. He had borne it alone. And now it seemed for nothing, because she would be taken regardless.

Unless—

“Eliza,” he said, voice shaking, “run away with me. We’ll leave town, disappear. They won’t find us.”

A sad smile curved her lips. “They will always find me. You don’t know what they are, what they can see. There’s no hiding from them.”

He wanted to argue, to fight, to rage against the inevitability. But the truth was etched in her eyes, and he knew. He knew.

The hum grew louder, the sky boiling with light. Bramble, their old dog, whimpered and pressed against Daniel’s leg. He crouched, rubbing the dog’s ears, while Eliza knelt to stroke his fur. Even the animal seemed to sense the moment.

Daniel looked at her, tears burning. “Then tell me what to do. How do I fight for you?”

“You don’t,” she whispered. “You remember me. You love me. That’s enough.”

He shook his head violently. “No. Not enough. I can’t just stand here and watch you vanish.”

She leaned close, pressing her forehead to his. “Daniel... you already proved something my people could never imagine. You loved me, knowing what I was. That love is stronger than fear. Stronger than silence. That is the gift I take with me.”

And then, before he could stop her, she stepped out into the yard.

The light from above descended like a veil, wrapping around her. Daniel lunged forward, but the brilliance forced him back, searing his eyes. Through the glow, he saw her turn once, smiling at him. A smile that said goodbye, but also something more: a promise that what they had shared transcended distance, even worlds.

“Wait!” he shouted, voice breaking. “Don’t leave me!”

But the words were swallowed by the hum, by the blaze of light that lifted her from the earth.

And then she was gone.

Silence fell. The night was still, the stars ordinary again. Only the empty yard remained, and Daniel standing within it, hollow and shaking.

For a long time, he couldn’t move. His mind spun with everything unsaid, everything undone. He wanted to collapse, to surrender to despair. But then Bramble nudged his leg, grounding him. The dog’s eyes were wide, trusting.

Daniel sank to his knees and wrapped his arms around Bramble, sobbing into his fur.

When the storm inside him calmed, he lifted his gaze to the stars. They looked no different than before, yet he knew better now. Somewhere out there, Eliza existed. Maybe not here, maybe not with him, but real.

And she had loved him.

That love became his anchor in the months that followed. Neighbors asked about Eliza's absence, and Daniel offered quiet explanations—she had gone to care for a sick relative, she had moved to another city. No one pressed too hard. People rarely did.

At night, he sometimes stood on the porch, staring at the sky. He never saw the shimmer again, never heard the hum. But he felt her presence, like a warmth just beyond reach. And though the silence remained, it was no longer a prison. It was a vow.

Daniel never told anyone the truth. Not because he was afraid, but because it belonged to them alone. A secret between worlds.

And in that secret, he found peace.

Because love, he realized, was the most alien force of all—and the only one worth holding on to.

Epilogue – The Man Who Looked Up

Years passed. Seasons turned, neighbors moved, time carried away the sharp edges of Daniel's grief.

From the outside, he lived a simple life. He kept his home, worked odd repair jobs, tended his garden. Bramble grew old, then left him, and the house grew quieter still. People in town knew Daniel as a man of few words, reliable but solitary.

What they did not know was that every night, without fail, Daniel stepped outside and looked up.



He never told anyone why. To most, the stars were distant, unreachable. To him, they were a reminder. Each pinprick of light whispered that he was not alone—that somewhere beyond human sight, Eliza existed.

Sometimes, when the night was clear, he thought he saw a shimmer, faint and fleeting. It might have been heat rising from the earth, or the tricks of aging eyes. But Daniel smiled when it happened. Because he knew.

He carried her secret to the end, never speaking it aloud, not even once. It was not a burden anymore, but a bond. A truth between him and the woman who had changed his life, a truth no one else could touch.

And when Daniel's final day came, he left the world as he had lived it in those last years—quietly, gently, without fuss. But in his stillness, there was peace.

For he had loved, and been loved, across worlds. And that was enough.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Matthew G. Mastromatteo Jr.

With imagination, the author tries to find a way into the hearts and minds of the reader. Sometimes the topics will be serious or informative, thought provoking and up for discussion, and sometimes they will be humorous.

A believer of the short story, the author wants to entertain and not take up too much of the reader's time.

How can so few words get the story across? Let's see.