

# Elysia Rose Jenson

## Alien

**I'd known Paul for 37 years when he told me he was an alien. We were sitting out in the yard, having a beer. He said he had to tell me something, so I said**

- Aw, yeah? Then he said
- Mate, I'm an alien.
- Aw, yup.
- Yeah.

He sorta nodded his head a bit and stared down the neck of his beer, not like he was ashamed or anything, just waiting for me to respond.

- Doesn't surprise me, I said.

Then I laughed, like ho, ho, ho, cause I thought that was a pretty good joke and I didn't really know what else to say. But Paul didn't laugh. He just sat there. So I just sat there, too. After a while I felt like my head was itchy, so I gave it a bit of a scratch. Then I thought there was some lint on my trousers, so I brushed it off, real nice and slow like. Then I thought about how I should probably mow the lawn soon, the back yard was looking a bit of a state.

- You could probably make a crop circle in that grass, I said to Paul, waving my hand at the lawn, but Paul was pretty quiet so I said

- You right, mate?
- Yeah. I jus' didn't know how you were gonna take it, eh?
- Aww, pretty well, mate. Pretty well ... Does Bonny know?
- Yeah. I did meet her on earth though, mate. I weren't faking it, you know, with the romance and stuff. You really did help us out there, in the beginning.

- Did you know youse were gonna tell her then? That you were an alien? Like, at the time?

- Nah.

I let Paul talk to me a bit, about life on his home planet. Sounded pretty all right, a bit regimented an' that. Said they didn't have as good'a food as we did here. That we're lucky there isn't an invasion over our dairy products. Aliens love them dairy products, according to Paul. You don't get great big milk-making cattle anywhere else in the universe. That's why you get them gruesome cattle mutilations. It's the ruddy aliens tryin' ta get cow tissue and build dairy making robots an' the like. He does eat a lot of ice cream, Paul, come to think of it.

My wife came outside then, with three slices of carrot cake she'd made. She always does things up real nice, on a proper tray with little plates and a fork. She's got a fine touch that woman. Can't say I was pleased about the interruption, but can't say I wasn't pleased, either. I wasn't sure what to say to Paul about being an alien and I didn't want to come across all disrespectful, or thick about it. I guess all aliens are super intelligent, but Paul did a real good job of hiding his smarts from me the whole time. Probably thinks I'm real slow, the crafty bugger.

- Ya got any whipped cream, says Paul hopefully.

Carol is peering into our faces, up real close. I think for a second maybe she knows sumthin', sumthin' 'bout Paul and him bein' an alien.

- You boys are starting to look a bit sunburned sitting out here. Let me go get the suncream.

That's Carol for ya. I breathed out like I'd been holdin' my breath and Paul jus' cracked his knuckles in the way he does. Carol tottered off inside and I said to Paul

- You heading back then? That why you're tellin' me?

- Might be, sometime.

Then he looked a bit troubled for a minute.

- Haven't heard anythin' from them in a while though. Thought with me retirin' next year and all that, they might've been sending a ship out.

- Yeah, seems like a good time maybe ...

- An' with Bonny, her heart not bein' so good.

- That why you never had kids then? With bein' an alien an' all?

- Yeah, yeah maybe.

- Probably good, I said to Paul. I mean they wouldn't know their home planet and all that. Would be a bit hard on em, going back and stuff.

Carol came back with some sunscreen and a teacup full of cream for Paul. She smeared the sunscreen on our nose and ears. The cake was pretty good and we had a good ole yarn, the three of us, about the old days back on the coast. Carol was laughing an' Paul was cackling away and I thought, why do things always have to change. Made me think I didn't want Paul to go back to his planet, made me hope them aliens up there have forgot about 'im and then I just felt sad for Paul, that I shouldn't wish for 'im to stay if he was unhappy.

Paul said he had to get going home and Carol was gathering up the plates and that. When she went off inside, I had another second alone with him.

– So, you’ll call me first then. If you’re going off home.

– If I can mate, if I can.

– Yeah, course. Thanks, mate. See ya for the game then, on Tuesday?

– Yup.

– Right.

– See ya.

– See ya, mate.

I s’pose somethin’ ’bout the conversation troubled me a bit. I remember sitting outside for a while, thinkin’ ’bout it. When I went inside, Carol was wiping the bench down and fussing around like she does when she has somethin’ on her mind.

– So, how was Paul today, love? Did he seem all right to you?

– Yeah.

– Bonny says she’s been having some trouble with him recently.

– Nah, he seems all right. Bit depressed maybe.

Carol said Hmmmm, then she hummed and ahead for a bit and she wiped down the top of the cupboard.

– You sure you didn’t notice anything odd?

– Uh...

– Because Bonny really did seem quite concerned.

– Well ...

– You know, she said Paul thinks he’s an Alien.

Carol was doing that thing where she puts her hands on her hips and eyeballs me. She had obviously decided that I knew somethin’, ’bout Paul bein’ an alien, an’ I wasn’t sure I was gunna tell her and I was thinking that might lead to some trouble.

– Bonny’s beside herself with worry. She thinks it’s the onset of dementia. Of course, Paul won’t talk to the doctor about it. Say’s that’s against his mission directive and he’s not supposed to tell anyone.

– Aw, yup.

– Can you believe it? Paul. It’s been going on for months now.

– Uhh ...

– Don’t tell me he hasn’t said anything to you?

She pointed her finger at me like she does, and I jus’ stood there. I din wanna betray my best mate, but Carol was trembling and her eyes looked brightened up and wet. So I put my arms around her and she collapses onto my shoulder and weeps. So I rock her back and forth and think about if I might try those new Marmite flavoured chips they’ve got now.

– You don’t think you’re an alien, do you, love?

– Yeah nah, c’mon, you know I’m not an alien, Carol.

– I just don’t know what I’d do without you.

I kiss Carol on the top of the head and wipe her tears up with the rough pad of my thumb. I dunno what to do in situations like this.

– Shall I make the dinner tonight, eh? You can read that book you got.

– Oh, you. You can’t cook to save yourself.

– Yeah. Just thought I might do that steak on the barbecue. The kids comin’ over?

– Just us, love.

– Right.

I go out and start flippin’ the steaks on the barbie and Carol’s inside reading on her favourite chair and I can’t help it but think a bit about Paul. He must be feeling real lonely. Must feel like he’s the only one on the planet who gets what he’s about. I always thought Paul and me were like brothers, that we always went through stuff together. But if Paul is an alien on the inside, that kinda makes me an alien, too.

I flip the steaks and stare up at the sky. Wonder if Paul can see his planet. Might be able to show me some pretty sweet alien junk he’s got lyin’ around. Maybe we could put a motorbike together, with a better engine or somethin’ like that. Might be able ta teach me a thing or two, now he’s come clean about it. I mean, I believe him and all that, but he’s gotta be able ta prove it. Can’t go defendin’ ’im for bein’ an alien without proof, even if he is my best mate.

I whip my steak off the barbie and squash Carol’s down with the spatula a bit so it cooks faster. She likes her meat pretty well burned.

When I take the steak inside Carol’s calmed down a bit. She’s got her feet tucked up under the couch cushion and Shortland Street on in the background. Got no idea how women can watch TV and read at the same time. I bring her a plate and sit down next to her.

– Here ya go.

– Thanks, love. Looks great.

– I’ll have a chat to Paul tomorrow or somethin’, ask him a few questions. Don’t want you and Bonny worrying ’bout it.

Carol looks pretty relieved when I say that. I’m pretty sure I’ve made her real happy right there. They say it’s the stupid man that don’ ask questions.

I’ve been a stupid man all my life, never good at makin’ decisions. Paul hooked me up with Carol back in the day, got me a job on the coast and then helped me move here when the work dried up. It’s like he’s been watchin’ over me my whole life. But I guess it’s like I never quite got it, like I’m always on the outside not knowin’ what ta do, or what I’m sposed to see. Makes me remember when we were kids how Paul always had this way of lookin’ at the sky like he was waiting for somethin’.