

Rosa

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For Rosa's thirteenth birthday her Uncle Jack gave her an educational bank account that would allow her to attend any college in the nation. Not such an unusual gift among the wealthy, but significant in that Rosa was not. Wealthy that is. Nor was Uncle Jack, so far as Rosa knew. And Uncle Jack was not her uncle, strictly speaking. He found

John Kelly

her toddling in the desert after an auto accident left both her parents dead. The local authorities found the wreckage a week after the incident. They determined that the couple had been high at the time of the incident, tagged the bodies as John and Jane Doe and never discovered that a child was with them at the time of their deaths.

Jack was not a person particularly interested in communicating with the local authorities. Strictly speaking, Jack was not a person at all. Jack was a stranded alien whose space ship needed a component that couldn't be produced on earth for a couple hundred years. But Jack was patient. He could wait, and he tried to fill his time with productive hobbies.

Jack lived in a space suit, a significantly more capable space suit than might come to mind for a 21st century earthling. His spacesuit could adopt many shapes and had numerous eccentric capabilities. Most of the time, Jack preferred that it resemble an inoffensive, slightly portly, chubby-cheeked, bald-headed Irish bartender. And that is how Rosa knew her Uncle Jack.

Rosa was burned and bruised in the single car accident. Jack took her to his home, an extension of his spaceship buried

in the New Mexico desert, and repaired her injuries in ways 22nd century physicians would salivate over.

Rosa was just eighteen months old. A label on her small shirt had her name hand printed with a magic marker. His ship's systems easily found what he needed and reproduced them for him. When her distresses were eased and her hunger and thirst vanquished she snuggled into the fuzzy blanket Jack held her in and went to sleep in his arms. He sat with her for two hours while he reviewed his information files and discovered that his database had some gaps when it came to human child raising.

With little to go on, he created a soft cradling nest for her with safeguards against falling or climbing, sensors to monitor her physical state and sounds, added a low constant pulse to simulate the sound of a mother's heartbeat, then left her briefly with his monitors so he could raid the Socorro, New Mexico public library of their books on child rearing, and a few children's books.

When she slept, surrounded by technical nursemaids, he left their home and tuned his suit to other forms. He went to the accident scene before it had been discovered to extract DNA from Rosa's parents looking like a Yeti or Bigfoot. If

anyone saw him by accident, they would be distracted by the form and not pay much attention to what he was doing.

He didn't intend to keep the baby long. But in the days prior to the inter-spy-web, gathering information was not always easy. Rosa became a new hobby to ease his long wait.

He talked to the baby and she chattered back at him. She laughed and spewed parts of words constantly as she learned. His technical interpreter did an excellent job of telling Jack what she was saying, but making sense of it often took good guesses. He read storybooks to her constantly and didn't even mind the extra hygiene chores required every so often.

His ship's systems excelled at making toys and distractions for Rosa and he used them with relish, littering his once tidy domicile with feathers, hats, balls, rattles, stuffed and animated animals and more.

He monitored his many sensor systems during her naps and gathered needed supplies from surrounds near and far. When the government announced an amnesty for illegal aliens he decided to take advantage of it. It enabled him to embark on a journey to citizenship without excessive covert intervention.

Rosa grew six months older and became quite a chatterbox while he strove to uncover the identity of her parents. He

bought a used car when it became apparent that he would have to take Rosa to a day care facility, and delivering one's child to daycare in a spaceship might be indiscrete.

Newspapers kept computerized records, as did police agencies and major hospitals. But in those days of unconnected data, tapping into those individual databases was a lot more work, and often he had to travel. Strapping Rosa into a safety seat/capsule of his own making they ventured out into the night fairly often, Rosa sleeping, Jack driving...
...kinda.

Her parents had been part of a drifter culture and finding them wasn't easy. First his advanced systems isolated and tracked the parent's DNA in effluent discharges near the west coast. Testing police databases for missing persons reports in the area led him to San Francisco. Then checking local hospitals he discovered Rosa's birth records. Once her birth was confirmed, it verified the parents and enabled him to get a birth certificate for her so he could enroll her in daycare.

He didn't want to put her in daycare. But she needed to be among children her own age. He could put her into play scenarios with his computing projectors, but it wasn't the same as having real children to play with.

He debated getting her shots from a 21st century doctor. He'd already immunized her from anything the earth could throw at her, including some current bio-hazards, but needed the vaccinations on record to get her into a daytime early childhood education program. He gave in to the fact that she would eventually have to learn to live in the human world and deal with its issues. She got her shots at a human doctor's office. At least, that's what the record showed... ..when it came time for the needle to actually penetrate he just couldn't allow it and interceded. But he left the doctor happy and Rosa un-poked.

As bold and brazen as she was around their home, her first day at daycare almost broke his non-human circulation pump. She was shy with her new classmates and they with her. She cried and looked for him. He watched from behind one-way glass, barely able to keep himself from rushing in to save her.

On his home world, he would never have been allowed to procreate. None of his peers had or ever would raise a newborn. He wondered what his own race had lost. Even knowing the reasons didn't change the bond he felt with his human child.

Rosa became a fearless ringleader in her daycare group. He watched her every day when he came to pick her up, always

early. She schooled the children around her and they idolized her. He couldn't wait to talk about her day when she came home, but she just wanted to play. When she asked about Scooby-doo he took a firm stance and decided Television could wait until she was back among humans.

Rosa's father had spent most of his college years close to a home in Pittsburgh. Rosa's grandmother lived with a new boyfriend every month. Her grandfather on that side died of alcohol poisoning ten years earlier. The entire family had traits like a pack of wolves, the less noble traits. Jack decided he couldn't trust that side of her family and turned to the mother's side.

Rosa's mother came from a gentler family named Hudson who lived near Houston. Her two aunts and one uncle were all actively searching for their sister. Her mother's parents were small business owners who took great pride in their family and were also involved in searching and worrying about their lost daughter and grand-daughter.

He shared with Rosa what he thought she could understand. At two and a half years old now, she knew that her parents were not alive any more and he thought she knew what that meant. He tried to be as good a mommy substitute

as he could without changing form in front of her, but he knew she needed real human family.

When he decided her maternal grandparents were a good match, he told her about them, showed her pictures and told her they would visit soon, but he had to make preparations first. She was excited about going on a trip.

He enlisted a one woman law firm in Houston to discretely contact the family, inform them about their daughter and granddaughter, and arrange guardianship for them. The family was ecstatic to know Rosa was alive, and agreed to keep the story of her survival quiet when claiming their daughter's remains.

Jack's car was a 1982 Toyota Camry. Red with a silver section across the bottom part, it was a very functional vehicle. His to-do list however, didn't include stopping to refuel, so he replaced the engine with a scaled down version of his ship's drive and connected it to a strong drive train of his own manufacture. He swapped out its suspension system with an auto-compensating magnetic vibration management system and reformed its tires with a strengthened version of the same rubber compound.

When he was done customizing, it floated like a flying carpet over any road and was capable of speeds that would blow off not just its own doors, but its passenger cabin. Oh yeah, it flew too. But other than that it was pretty much just a standard Camry.

Jack met humans often, but preferred his privacy. While exchanging pleasant banter with Rosa's grandparents he evaluated them and found them satisfactory. Rosa played with unfamiliar toys that didn't do anything in the large living room, staying carefully within ten feet of Jack at first. Then she met her first cousin, Sophia, who was only six months older and the two girls disappeared on a treasure hunt through the house.

Jack stole a moment in their memories and took a few seconds to revert a tumor developing in the Grandfather's brain, and re-arrange a weak DNA string to avoid further disruptions. He scanned and immunized the grandmother, who had a hidden vulnerability to what humans called Crohn's disease. There were other minor issues but he decided that he'd just have to trust them to do their job.

They gave Jack and Rosa a tour of the house and her mother's old room, where she'd live, filled with memorabilia. Rosa was fascinated. Jack planted discrete sensors wherever he

could. He'd thought about implanting Rosa with a personal sensor, but rejected the idea as too intrusive.

The family were thankful for his investigations and for his care of their granddaughter but impatient to get on with their lives and get to know their newest family member. Jack extracted a promise that he'd be welcome to visit on occasion, and he promised to keep in touch and let them know when he would drop by.

Their goodbye was tearful, at least for Rosa. It would have been for Jack too, if his suit could cry. It couldn't and neither could the creature inside it, but he did feel pangs of emotional separation. He promised to keep an eye out for her and always take care of her. And he meant it.

The memory of Jack's involvement faded quickly in the Hudson family. They must have misplaced any contact information he'd given them, but their papers were all in order. Their story seemed simple and logical to them. Their daughter died in an auto accident, a Samaritan found their granddaughter and tracked her back to them, they they adopted the child.

Uncle Jack wasn't mentioned often. But he was known and welcome when he showed up at her third birthday party with a large, animated stuffed bear. Rosa squealed with delight at

seeing Jack again and gave him a big hug. She was comfortable and happy with her new family and he felt good about placing her there.

Her grandparents recognized her advanced intelligence and enrolled her in an advanced placement pre-school where she could better develop her abilities.

An older boy cousin habitually pushed around Sophia and other youngsters, but when he picked on Rosa, her stuffed bear turned him upside down and rolled him out of the room. Then he got spanked for lying about the bear.

At five years old Rosa was doing third grade work in English and arithmetic. People were awed by her skills and Uncle Jack had faded to background. They snorted derisively when he sent her a magic eight-ball for her sixth birthday. It gave the usual ambiguous answers to everyone who asked it anything... ..except Rosa. Rosa got specifics.

“Magic eight-ball, what will I be when I grow up?”

“Older,” the eight-ball told Sophia.

“Magic eight-ball what will I be when I grow up?” asked Rosa.

“A Neuro-biologist,” the eight-ball replied.

“What's that?” Sophia asked.

“I don't know yet,” said Rosa, “but it sounds right.”

Family members sometimes tried to find similar gifts in catalogs like the Sharper Image or Neiman Marcus, but rarely came close. Rosa refused to cooperate if they asked her to demonstrate her gifts' unusual characteristics to anyone, and if they looked for the items when Rosa wasn't around they usually couldn't find them. But these details were confusing and usually just allowed to pass without comment.

Jack dropped in occasionally to ensure Rosa remembered him. He never stayed long enough to be annoying, was always gracious, never seemed to age and “things” usually turned for the better after his visits, again things that were too confusing to have discussions about.

On Rosa's tenth birthday Jack showed up in the evening, after her daytime party. Rosa spotted the Camry as it parked.

“Grampa, can I go down to the pizza palace with Uncle Jack and bring back a pizza?” she called.

“Oh, is Jack here? I guess it'll be all right.”

“Honey?” he abdicated the question to his wife.

“Why don't you take Sophia with you dear, her dad won't be here for another hour,” Mrs Hudson said.

“Okay Gram,” said Rosa.

“Sophia, you wanna go?”

Sophia hesitated.

“Uncle Jack's a better driver than your dad. You'll be safe,”
Rosa said.

“Okay. 's better than being left here alone.”

“C'mon,”

The cousins ran down the steps to meet Jack on the walk.

After a brief greeting, they turned and got into the Camry. The seats auto-adjusted and seat belts connected automatically. Sophia was startled and while Rosa hadn't remembered that, she wasn't surprised. She'd last ridden in this vehicle in a baby seat.

“Can we go to the Pizza palace for a pizza to go please, Uncle Jack?” Rosa asked.

“May we...” Jack corrected automatically, “..and yes.”

The car accelerated smoothly and floated serenely along the road. There was no lurch at stop signs or on acceleration. When they reached the Pizza Palace, Rosa suggested they order at the drive-up window.

Sophia, at ten, was all eyes out the window on the shiny lights. Rosa studied the interior of the car, nodding to herself. Jack watched and she met his eyes with a question in hers, but said nothing.

Later in the evening, after pizza and family greetings, Rosa and Jack sat on the front porch. The rest of the family was inside watching some important football game.

“Uncle Jack, you're not like other people,” Rosa said.

“That's true,” Jack said.

“The first time I told Grampa that his Cadillac had a bumpy ride he got mad. I think I was four or five then. I couldn't understand why I thought every car I ever rode in was such a rough ride. But now I know.”

“Yeah, that Camry's got a really smooth ride doesn't it?” said Jack.

“And your seat belts are unreal...,” Rosa said, “...and you don't have a gear lever..., ...and you have instruments on your dashboard that other cars don't...”

“Yes, it's highly customized. Do you like it?” Jack asked. She just looked at him with serious eyes.

“My Teddy bear protected me from Cousin Rollo; your magic eight-ball has never been wrong for me; your music-box puts me to sleep almost instantly whenever I use it and your locket makes my fears go away.

“Nobody I know has anything like any of these things. Every present you give me helps me in some way. How can

you do that?" she asked earnestly, "Where do you find these things?"

"I'm surprised you're asking these questions already," Jack said, "I honestly didn't expect them before you were thirteen. You are an exceptional young woman."

"That isn't an answer," she said, then waited for a real response.

"If I promise to tell you anything you want to know when you turn fourteen, will you hold your questions until then?" Jack asked.

"Why can't I have answers now? I'm smart, I can handle them."

"You are very smart and will only grow more so. But there are biochemical imbalances coming into your life as your body matures. I would prefer that you be past that brief period of imbalance before we delve into the answers you want."

"So it's just your preference?"

"No. Your period of biochemical imbalance will affect your intentions and actions. Regardless of how you feel now, your feelings will be affected more by your adult biochemical balance. It's important to my privacy that you be solidly in control of your thinking when we go into detail."

"Are you an alien?" she asked.

“I’m a naturalized citizen,” he evaded the truth, “as of five years ago.”

“Oh.”

A blue pickup truck with white racing stripes roared up the street toward the house.

“That’s Sophia’s dad,” Rosa said. “I’ll go let her know he’s here. He’s probably drunk.”

The pickup slowed too late, bounced a front wheel over the curb then back down to the street where it would have impacted Jack’s Camry, if the Camry had stayed put. But it moved out of the way as the pickup came to a lurching stop.

Tom Hudson was a big man, college football player and deputy sheriff, but given to drink too much. He half-fell from the cab of the pickup and lurched toward the porch, stopping at the bottom of the step to consider Jack and the steps. First Jack, then the steps, then Jack again.

“How are you. Tom?” Jack asked as he moved down the steps to greet him.

“Ahm..., erp..., Ahm... ...doon great!” Tom slurred out, “Jusht, jusht a lil’ wobbly here.” Tom’s head was bent down, intent on watching the first step closely as he calculated whether to try it or not.

Jack extended his hand into Tom's view and Tom grasped it eagerly, happy to be distracted from the step. He tried to give Jack a he-man squeeze, but couldn't seem to compress Jack's hand at all, and it stayed locked with his. Tom tried to let go and was stumped when he couldn't. He didn't feel the nano-scale injections when they happened.

Jack gave him a rapid oxidizing agent for the alcohol, a more targeted formula aimed at rebalancing the man's out of control endorphins, and a long duration anxiety relief medication. The screen door swung open behind him. The detox agent acted swiftly and as Sophia and Rosa descended the steps Tom's eyes began to focus better and Jack let his hand go.

“Perhaps you could use a cup of coffee, before you drive home,” Jack suggested.

Tom stared at Jack as his mind began working better, “Right,” he said, then repeated it, “Right.”

Grandpa Hudson was at the door. When Tom climbed the steps and asked his father for a cup of coffee, the older man smiled and took his arm, inviting him in. Then he looked back at Jack and gave him a nod as of thanks.

“That's rare,” Sophia said.

“He's got a tough job, Sophia,” Jack said, “Working all day to be strong in front of the lowest kind of people around, then having to come home and be a nice guy dad. It must need a lot of understanding, don't you think?”

“I guess I didn't think about it much,” Sophia said, “I wonder if mom and me could talk to him more.”

“Couldn't hurt,” Rosa said, “C'mon, Sophia, it looks like you'll be here a little longer. Maybe we should call your mom and let her know you guys are okay.”

“Rosa, I'm going to go now. Give my regards to the rest of your family,” Jack said.

“Okay. Thanks for buying the pizza, Uncle Jack. Are you coming to my graduation?”

“June 8th? Got it. I'll be here, wouldn't miss it.”

“It's just middle school,” said Rosa.

“But you're three years early. I can't tell you how proud I am,”

They hugged, and Rosa left to follow her cousin into the house. Jack turned and got into his Camry. He drove smoothly away, not in a hurry, winding out the suburban streets until he came to an area of new construction where the street lighting was as sparse as the population. A dark zone near some scrub brush that hadn't been bulldozed down yet

offered the parking he wanted. He pulled in and switched off the car's lights, checked his monitors to see if anyone was close, then accelerated straight up out of the light.

Rosa was months away from graduating High School on her thirteenth birthday. In addition to the college fund, Jack gave her a charm bracelet with a tiny rocket ship dangling from it. She was just growing into womanhood and it didn't take long for her to notice that when she wore the bracelet she didn't suffer from menstrual cramps and her periods were much more comfortable to deal with.

Enrolled at San Jacinto Community College in her fourteenth year, but living at home, she eagerly anticipated Jack's annual birthday visit. She'd asked for a quiet family get together in the afternoon, and had gone with Sophia to a nice local Italian restaurant for dinner, then straight back home. Sophia was still her best friend, but was just in her first year of High School. They were both attractive and maturing, but Sophia was much more socially active in her peer group.

Rosa, isolated from social interaction of age-equal peers at school, was intensely focused on her education, to the exclusion of many social activities. The differences between

she and Sophia had begun to move them away from each other like trains on separating tracks.

A dark green recent model minivan eased to a Camry-like stop in front of the house and she eyed it suspiciously until Jack came out the driver's door. Then she raced to meet him at the door.

“Uncle Jack! You got a new car,” she accused. She sounded disappointed.

He smiled at her. “Just a new exterior, Rosa. Inside its very much the same as it was before.”

“Do you remember your promise?” she asked.

“To answer your questions on your fourteenth birthday? Yes, but let's go inside and say hello to your grandparents first.”

They went in and after a few banalities, Jack suggested that he'd like to take Rosa for a ride to visit the place she spent her first year. The Hudson's agreed and escorted them out to Jack's newer van.

“Rosa always says my Cadillac rides rough,” Grandpa Hudson said, “Someday you'll have to take me for a ride in your car so I can see why she thinks that.”

“Anytime you like, Mr Hudson. We'll see you in a couple of hours,” Jack said and they got into the van. Jack pulled out

silently and easily into the street and the van looked as though it floated down the street. The Hudsons turned back to their house and promptly forgot anything except that they expected Rosa back in three hours and that was normal.

“Okay, I'm fourteen now, we're alone, so start talking.” she demanded of Jack.

“Let's get to my place first. A lot of the answers you want will be obvious in the ride,” he said.

“Where is your place, Uncle Jack?”

“Near Roswell, New Mexico.”

“But that's...,” she stopped to calculate, “...almost six hundred miles from here.”

He just nodded. He had to drive farther from the Hudson's every time he came, with new developments springing up like weeds around Houston in the last few years. He found a potholed dirt road that led to darkness and turned into it.

He explained what his instruments showed as he stopped the van and turned out its lights. She understood some of their functions, not all. She sucked in her breath as she discovered the van was rising straight up. There was no elevator sensation of heavy and light gravity.

The motion changed from up to forward, again, without inertial cues. The countryside fled by quickly but she couldn't focus on anything closer than miles away, it moved by too fast.

They accelerated rapidly, the engine tearing apart space in front of them and putting it together again behind them. Anything in their flight path was displaced momentarily, then put back where it had been when they passed.

“Staying low keeps me from having to pressurize the interior of the van,” he explained to her, “It makes modifications easier.”

“Doesn't the Air Force see you on radar?” she asked.

“No. We're not really a part of the sky in any one place. Not while we're moving forward. We're kind of like a sewing needle passing through fabric. We move in time but around space.”

“Aren't those the same thing?”

“Yes, and that is why we can manipulate one facet while keeping a grip on the other. “

“I always knew you weren't like other people,” she said, delighting in both the flight and being proved right, “and I'm pretty sure you're not an eccentric scientist like Captain Nemo. That doesn't leave a lot of options does it? You are an alien, aren't you?”

“As I told you before, I'm a naturalized citizen, but I wasn't born on this planet.”

Jack set the guidance to slow and really low as they approached Roswell, finally setting the van down on a deserted stretch of road about ten miles out, driving normally on the highway the rest of the way to his expanding property on Caraboy road.

“Why don't you fly straight there?” Rosa asked.

“My neighbors are ranchers,” he answered, “They often spend nights camped on the open range to avoid long rides between where their herds are grazing and their homes. I've made the mistake of startling them occasionally and if news is slow it makes for excitable reporters snooping around, so now I avoid tracking straight in. I didn't start driving until you were in pre-school and since then, my car turning into my place has just become part of the scenery. The first time I drove back in in this van, one of my neighbors came over just to make sure it wasn't somebody dumping trash. Nice folk.”

“Are you the one who crashed in Roswell in 1947?” she asked.

“Yes. Although technically it was just a bad landing, not a crash.”

“What happened to your ship?” she asked.

“A unexpected malfunction caused it to lose connectivity with my homeworld. The malfunction also broke an aero-flight control which caused the ship to land awkwardly. A recycle bin broke loose and spilled some junk. When people found it they thought it was a crashed UFO.”

They paused on the road while a steel cattle gate opened for them and closed after they passed. The van floated just a bit higher than usual and she guessed they were not actually driving on the path they followed, but just above it. Visibility under the stars was good, she could see mountains rising in the west, just before they descended into a darkness that wrapped them like a cloak.

Shadows within shadows moved past, then lights came up around them. The van sat spotlighted on a stone platform beneath a closed roof.

“I know this place,” Rosa whispered.

“Yes, you do.”

“I remember it as bigger,”

“You were smaller,” Jack said, as he got out of the van. She followed.

“Do you remember where to go?” He asked.

“No... Not remember, but I think I should go... ..there,” she pointed to a section of metal that looked solid, then moved

toward it. As she neared, it opened like a diaphragm in front of her, exposing a large open space with soft lighting, soft walls and floors, with an oval nest form low on the far wall.

A cry of delight escaped her as she went to the nest and crouched over it, touching the interior, its soft-warm sides, and feeling the pulse still beneath it. Animated toys surrounded her as they used to and she picked them up, touching each one. She didn't remember them, but she knew them.

“Bathroom here, if you need it.” Jack gestured and she knew.

“This is our eating and reading area,” he pointed. Next to the nest and play area a comforting fireplace flickered warmth. An easy-chair sat side by side with a diminutive copy of itself facing the fire. On the other side of the larger chair a small work-table and child's straightchair showed where she'd first wielded a coloring crayon.

“I know this place,” she said. “I remember the scent of vanilla. Do you live here?”

“Vanilla is a pleasing odor for both of us. I extended this place just for you, and it remains a pleasant memory for me. Although I spend more time in other parts of the ship, I come here occasionally for internal reflection,”

“What was this?” she pointed to a small stage-like area.

“What do you remember?” he asked.

“Peter Rabbit?” she questioned herself, “Playing doctor?”

Jack nodded, “Peter Rabbit was your favorite story. We projected it onto this stage so you could participate. At first you only wanted to be Flopsy, but later you preferred to play the part of Peter. Then you discovered that the other players would follow your lead and you had all the rabbits come to you with injuries which you would mend for them.”

“What kind of injuries?” she asked.

“Oh, I think your favorite was tomato-head. You often inflicted Peter with that.”

She laughed, not remembering things, but states, images in her head since forever.

“Where do you come from?” she asked.

“I don't believe your scientists have cataloged it yet. It's a world roughly 250 light years distant, slightly nearer the galactic center on this arm.”

“Why didn't you go back home?”

“In interstellar travel you either have to carry along massive amounts of resources, or travel very fast. My ship is not capable of either at the moment. And the ability to reproduce the part I need will not appear on this world for several

hundred more years. My best option is to remain here until then, rather than try to bridge the gap at sub-light speeds.”

“Doesn't showing and telling me all this involve a great deal of risk for you?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Will you steal this memory from me when we go back? Like you take Grandma and Grandpa's memories when you go?”

“No.”

“Why not?” she asked.

“All I have to do for them is divert them from entering memories they deem abnormal. They really don't want to go into those areas and their lives are whole, normal and perfectly acceptable without those memories, even though the memories are still there.

“For you, this was normal in what might have been your most formative year. It has no other “normal” to overlay it. We have remained connected since then and your memories of me are just normal connections for you.”

“In other words, you can't take them away?”

“It would cripple you to do so. Much of your intelligence comes from your ability to mentally flex beyond what people

think of as normal. But I can't claim to have influenced your intelligence, you were born with that ability.”

“What if I tell someone?”

“Do you really think people would accept what you tell them?” he asked.

She shook her head. “No. It's difficult enough to get them to listen to me on subjects they're familiar with. I'd be ostracized even more. At least now they accept me on the same level as an interesting pet.”

“That will change soon enough.”

“Maybe I'll have a tee shirt made with the saying: 'My uncle is an alien'.”

“You should. It would probably be a best seller,” Jack said.

She laughed, “I'm sure it would make me some spending cash, but I have other goals.

“Did you influence me to be a neuro-biologist?” she asked.

“No. You are in charge of your own future. It's just a projection that seems to fit what I know of you.”

“Will you show me what you really look like?” she asked.

“I will always look like this to you.”

“But that's not what you really look like, inside, I mean.”

“No, if you took me apart you'd find lots of the same gooey stuff that's inside you. What do you look like, inside?” he asked her.

“Um. I'm pretty brilliant inside, actually. Much more lustrous than this mundane fourteen year old body looks.”

“I agree. And isn't it more important to know what someone is like on the inside than to see their insides?”

“Yuck, hmm. Well, I've developed a fondness of sorts for my Uncle Jack who looks like you do, so I guess I can live with that. I know that what's inside you is very nice, regardless of where you came from.”

“Thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to see?”

“Can I see your ship?” she asked.

“I can show you a picture,” he said. “Unfortunately the area is under constant surveillance from satellites these days which makes unmasking it a lengthy and complex process.”

He projected an image into the play stage that looked like a small city of connected structures, “This is what it would look like from above with no masking.”

“Sure doesn't look like the starship Enterprise,” she said.

“Aerodynamics aren't a consideration in its structure.”

“Where are we inside it now?” she asked.

“Here,” he indicated and a sizable piece of the structure brightened showing a recognizable representation of the room they were in as well as the car parking bay.

“Anything else?” Jack asked.

“Yes. Can you show me where my dad is buried?” she asked.

“Sure. Let's go back to the van. Would you like a snack or something to drink along the way?”

“No. Let's just drop down into a McDonalds en-route... ...just kidding. Can I drive?”