

The sky above Tildren's Hollow shimmered with a strange violet hue, a color no one in the sleepy village could explain. It started three nights ago, when a sound like a thousand whispering voices woke the residents from their dreams. By morning, the fields were dotted with odd, spiraling patterns—too precise to be wind, too alien to be human. The villagers whispered of old tales, but Kael, a wiry teenager with a knack for trouble, didn't care for rumors. He wanted answers.

Armed with a flashlight and a rusted wrench, Kael slipped out after curfew, heading toward the hollow where the strangest markings lay. The air there buzzed, thick with a static that made his hair stand on end. In the center of the spiral sat a thing—a craft, maybe, though it didn't look like any ship he'd imagined. It was a jagged sphere of shifting colors, like oil on water, hovering an inch above the grass. Kael's breath caught as a seam split open, spilling light, and out stepped *them*.

They were tall, their bodies like liquid glass, refracting the moonlight into prisms. Their heads were featureless, save for two glowing orbs where eyes might be. Kael froze, expecting a laser or a probe, but instead, one raised a limb—more tendril than arm—and traced a shape in the air. The ground beneath it rippled, sprouting a tiny, perfect flower. The alien tilted its head, as if waiting.

Kael's fear melted into curiosity. He knelt, plucked the flower, and held it up. The alien's orbs pulsed brighter. Another stepped forward, its voice a hum that vibrated in Kael's chest. "We seek," it said, though its words weren't sound—they were *felt*, like a memory he hadn't lived. "Your world sings. We listen."

Kael blinked. "You're... tourists?" The aliens shimmered, a ripple that might've been laughter. They didn't answer, just gestured to the craft. Against every ounce of sense, Kael followed.

Inside, the walls pulsed with light, showing images—planets with rings of fire, oceans that floated in the sky, creatures with wings of smoke. The aliens watched him, their orbs flickering as he gaped. "You've been everywhere," he said. One nodded, its tendril brushing a panel. The craft hummed, lifting off, and Tildren's Hollow shrank below.

They didn't go far—just high enough to see the village as a speck beneath the violet sky. The aliens pointed to the spirals in the fields. "We mark what sings," the voice hummed. "Your world is loud with life." Kael thought of the crickets, the wind, the laughter of his little sister. He grinned. "Guess we're special, huh?"

The craft descended, and they let him out, the seam sealing behind them. As it rose and vanished into the violet, Kael clutched the flower, its petals glowing faintly. The village

would never believe him, but that was fine. He'd heard the song of the stars—and that was enough.