

Eclipsed
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Sun's hair was fire. She was a soft, glimmering beacon of light. A romantic glow in the blackness of the Universe. Her lips melted any majesties who dared steal a kiss. Many moons swam through galaxies in search of her warm embrace. She'd had many lovers— and likewise, many children.

Moon's face was silver-crusted rock. He was a dark and mysterious traveler. Though he had seen many stars on his voyage, it was obvious Sun was different. Elusive as she was, he welcomed her radiance as the single force strong enough to draw him near. His mind played out all kinds of fantasies depicting the possible repercussions of their physical interaction. Hope convinced him if he could touch her heart, together they would shape a love unlike anything seen or felt between two celestial bodies before.

Moon smiled at Sun from a billion miles away. She feared she might burn him if they were to touch, even for just a moment.

"Hello, Sun! You have illuminated my path with your stunning light. I seek only to be yours in the vastness of this night," he called out into space.

"Hmm," she sounded, contemplating behind a seductive smile. "The past moons I've beamed never dared ask to stay. If you were mine, would you? Or would you be afraid?"

"I've seen billions of stars in thousands of galaxies," said Moon. "None have intrigued me more than you, Sun. Believe me."

Sun felt her rays extend towards Moon.

But Moon shrank back at the sight of her eight dancing children, whose orbits nearly clashed with his own.

Sun disguised her disappointment with disgust. "I want a counterpart, not a sliver. Goodbye, Moon."

“Goodbye,” he said, defeated. “I hope to see you again soon.”

Moon continued on his path, sulking at the thought of his craters. Moons were supposed to earn their craters by protecting their loved ones. Moon perceived his, however, as a physical embodiment and constant reminder of his inability to do just that.

His craters were more severe than those of other moons, yet where they carried pride, he held shame. Not being able to save his first star left him full of sorrow and regret.

Moon had been hiding in the darkness for eons. There, he was safe. In isolation, he would never have to bare his scars. It wasn't until he came across Sun that he had even considered the possibility of finding love again.

He knew if he faced the light, he'd be vulnerable. In a star's presence as bright as Sun's, he'd have nowhere to hide.

Sun had wisdom beyond cosmic comprehension. Of all entities that existed in the Universe, only she had the ability to remain still. This advantage allowed her to observe the Milky Way with all-encompassing eyes.

As a mother, she would protect her children at all costs. They were always her priority.

There was no denying Sun was mystified by her secret admirer. Her song echoed like a prayer from her heart, a magic spell cast out into the Universe.

*There's a place in the sun
For a silver boat of love
With the taste of one kiss
I'll find myself eclipsed
Then I'll cradle in my womb
Both my baby and my moon*

Sun's youngest child, Pluto, had been born prematurely with an enlarged heart. He orbited slower than all the other planets. Sun extended her rays to clear his orbital path of debris.

Keep him safe. Keep him warm.

And though she was trying everything in her power to prevent it, he was drifting away from her against his own will.

Pluto's face was tinted a dark shade of red, but his surface remained cold and thin. He was growing weaker by the minute.

"Mommy, I can't breathe," he choked. Cold tears seeped from his eyes and frosted his cheeks.

Sun cradled the baby planet in her rays and rocked him back and forth.

"Am I dying, Mommy?"

"No, honey. You're going to be just fine. I promise. I won't let anything happen to you."

In that moment, though she tried to convince them both otherwise, Sun knew her baby wasn't going to last much longer.

"Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!" called Mercury. "Uranus is playing by the edge of the Milky Way again! I told him to stop but he told me to shut up, again."

"Alright, I'll take care of it. You just go on back into your orbit. Tell Neptune to wake up and come watch Pluto. I'll be right back, okay?"

"Yes, Mommy." Mercury sighed.

Sun's rays stretched across the galaxy and laid a soft, healing glow on Uranus's back.

"Hey, what are you doing all the way over here?"

"I thought if I could catch a star and bring it home, it would make him orbit faster and keep him warm."

"That's sweet of you to think of your little brother, Uranus, but unfortunately, a single star isn't going to be of any help."

"So we're just going to let him die?" Uranus said.

"It's...more complicated than that, sweetie. We'll do everything we can."

Out of the corner of her eye, far off in the distance, Sun spotted Moon. There was something different about him this time. She thought it could be his smile or maybe the way he carried himself. He was brighter than before, but still had an air of mystery about him.

Moon felt her presence, the warmth emanating from her eyes. He stopped for a brief moment, allowing her light to soak into the porous craters on his

surface. As he stood there glowing in the dark, for a second, he remembered how beautiful it was to be in love. He feared that, as he was, he still wouldn't be enough for Sun, and used all of his strength to plunge forward without glancing at her.

Sun kissed Uranus on his cloudy blue marbled cheek and carried him back into his orbit.

When she returned to Pluto, Neptune was weeping by his side.

"Mama, I've been having the most awful dream. I didn't want it to be true. But I fear it is. He's dying, isn't he?"

Sun brushed her golden locks behind her ears and sighed, "I'm...afraid so."

"Mama, we have to do something. There has to be something we can do."

"We have to be here for him. That's what we can and must do. Go get your brothers and sisters, and let us dance."

A colorful rush of celestial bodies came soaring through the cosmos. Their features blended as they whirled around Pluto, laughing and smiling, together as one big happy family.

Suddenly, Saturn's rings brought her to a halt, which in turn, caused the other planets to follow suit.

"What's the matter, sister?" Jupiter asked, concerned.

"Where's Uranus?"

"Oh, no. Not again!" said Mercury.

Sun sighed. "Mercury, hush. Jupiter, I trust you and Saturn to go find him and bring him back. I have to stay here with Pluto. But please, my children, be careful."

Determined this time to bring back a cluster of stars, Uranus had strayed from his orbital path and plunged deep into the depths of the Oort Cloud. Along the edges, beautiful stars painted the galaxy in sparkles of silver and white, unlike any he'd seen back home. For a few moments, he was able to escape from reality and move around outside of his confined orbit in the Solar System. He was mesmerized by the nebulae that surrounded him on all sides. As he approached the very edge of the galaxy, the gravitational tides picked up and Uranus could not escape.

He called out, "Mommy!" but Sun could not hear him.

Likewise, Jupiter and Saturn still trailed too far behind.

“Oh no!” he cried.

Uranus feared he may never see his mother again, nor any of his brothers or sisters. He would cause Sun to lose not only one, but two children.

Overwhelmed with guilt, he tried to process his fate when he saw a black hole emerge in the distance. Within milliseconds, it began to drag bits and pieces of ice and rock inside of it. If he continued moving at this pace, he too was going to be swallowed whole in a matter of minutes. There was no way out.

“Uranus!” Jupiter’s voice echoed. “Where are you?”

“I don’t see him,” said Saturn. “What are we going to tell Mom?”

“We are not going to have to tell Mom anything because we are going to find him. Do you hear me?”

“And if we don’t?”

“Saturn, don’t be ridiculous. Of course we’ll find him. Just keep looking!”

They scouted the areas where Uranus usually played before moving outwards, finally headed in his direction.

“Oh my god, Saturn look!” Jupiter screamed.

Uranus was about to be obliterated by massive chunks of galactic debris.

Just then, Moon, a million miles away, saw him in his peripheral vision. He remembered his own child with his first star. He remembered the loss of love.

“No, I can’t let this happen. Not again,” he cried, hurrying over to stand in the way.

Moon braced himself. The massive debris struck harder than he imagined. His body ached and throbbed with every round of hits. The smaller bits, with more force, whipped his face. He held back his tears as the final blow tore open his craters, widening his already embedded scars. Moon was battered, bruised, and left barely breathing.

As the sisters approached the scene, they noticed Uranus was tilted over on his side.

“He saved me,” Uranus whispered.

His sisters hugged him and rejoiced.

They looked to Moon first, then Uranus, and finally, each other, before agreeing to bring them both back to the Solar System. Though Moon expressed resistance, he was too injured to prevail against the gaseous giants lugging him to safety.

As they neared Sun, her light forced Moon out from the shadows, revealing his fresh wounds and old scars alike. He was humiliated.

And though they tried to correct his tilt, Uranus would spend the rest of his life spinning on his side. Still, he was alive, and that's what mattered most to his mother. She thanked her daughters for their bravery and insisted they return to their orbits. Venus and Mars each covered one of Mercury's ears as they eavesdropped on their Mother's conversation with their brother's savior.

"You saved my son, and for that, I am grateful. I am inclined to ask why, but you stand here before me, nearly all of your past and present pains on display. I won't ask you to become any more vulnerable than you are now. You are free to go."

Moon winced in pain, but managed to whimper the words that had been beaming through him since the moment they met. "I love you."

Sun's hair went up in flames. "What did you say?" she replied in shock.

"You heard me."

"Well, it doesn't matter, because you're leaving. You have to go," she insisted.

Moon faced her and said, "I'm not going anywhere."

He inched closer.

Tears began to well in her eyes. "Don't. I don't want you to get hurt," she said, turning away from him.

"Just look at me."

"I can't," she whispered.

"Mama!" Neptune's voice shrieked in the distance. "It's Pluto!"

Without another word, Sun zoomed over. She watched in horror as her youngest child came to a halt in his orbit.

Sun couldn't speak. She could barely breathe. She remembered the first time she held her baby, the first time she heard him laugh, the last time they spoke...the promise she made but failed to keep; *I won't let anything happen to you.*

She cradled Pluto in her rays for the very last time and sobbed. Her warm tears fell upon him, but he lay cold and lifeless. She examined every inch of her baby before letting him fall through her rays and melt back into space. She wept and she sang. Each breath of air she took between verses, she cherished in the way her baby never again would.

*Thought I'd cradle in my womb
Both my baby and my moon
But my baby gone too soon
My baby gone too soon*

"Mom," Venus called. "Something is happening to Moon!"

Sun shifted her gaze over to the part of the sky where a bright white light glowed in the distance. She thought it could be a star, but to her surprise, it was Moon. This time, his entire body lit up. He was completely exposed. When he caught her gazing upon him, he began to serenade her.

*If there's a place in the sun
For a silver boat of love
With the taste of one kiss
We'll find ourselves eclipsed
Between us there is room
For another love to bloom
If you'll let me, though it may be too soon
I love you and I'd love to be your moon*

Sun was touched by his song but knew it was indeed too soon. "I don't know what to say."

He moved closer to her and whispered, "Then don't say anything."

The two bodies faced one another. As their lips bridged the gap between them, a spark ignited in the center of the Universe. The spark grew bigger until it imploded on itself, forming a solid core, a foundation that their love would

continue to build upon. The attraction between them manifested in the form of blue glistening tides that would flow in harmony, so long as they were both in harmony with each other. A large mass of land emerged from the sea.

The love between Sun and Moon continued to grow. The more compassion they felt for one another, the deeper they loved, allowing the planet's atmosphere to warm and cool as needed. Rocks formed, plants sprouted from the ground, and the surface of the planet grew more and more colorful. Life was born. Their daughter was created out of love. Neither Sun nor Moon had ever seen anything like it.

"She's beautiful," said Moon, "Just like her mother."

Next, there were creatures that roamed the land and swam through the seas in search of their own lovers. The moment Sun and Moon eclipsed signaled to the rest of the Universe that the creation of new life was destiny. Love was the main purpose and mode of creation for all living things. The new planet would be named Earth.

Earth opened her eyes and enchanted her parents with her soft laugh. She reached out with the arms of her atmosphere and tried to play with her mother's golden locks. Sun held her in her rays and Moon watched his two loves. He had finally realized his purpose. He had never felt so full. In fact, he finally understood that he had been full all along.

The light from his lover had allowed him to accept and embrace the moon he always knew he was and had always wanted to be. And together, they created a family.

"Look what we did!" Sun extended her rays in pure joy.

The planets rejoiced at the sight of their new baby sister.

"I like it!" said Mercury as he zoomed around her with excitement.

"Woohoo! We're the same size," Venus cheered.

"Now I have someone to race with!" said Mars.

Jupiter and Saturn admired her from a distance. "Let her breathe, guys!"

Neptune whispered to Uranus, "This is even better than a dream!"

Uranus approached Earth, hesitant. His icy hands were capable of freezing anything he touched. When he held her on each end, the North and South poles were created. She didn't seem to mind.

"Pluto would have loved you," he said, and planted a kiss on her forehead. "I'll show you where your orbit is."

The children went off to sleep, leaving Sun and Moon with a moment to themselves.

"After all this time, I've gotten used to being on my own. I don't know how else to be," Sun confessed. "I'm so sorry."

"Don't be. I fell in love with you for who you are. I'm not expecting anything more. You don't have to commit to anything you're not ready for."

"I'm just scared. I don't want you to come too close because it will just hurt more when you go."

"I was scared too. My craters have controlled me for so long, but the first time I heard your song, I knew I was meant to be with you," Moon replied.

"In the past, when moons left, I let them. I didn't want to admit that I wanted one to stay, and I didn't think there'd come a day when it would happen. But then you came—"

"—and everything changed," they said in unison.

Moon began to shrink, slowly. It was time for him to begin a new journey, a new adventure.

"Will I see you again?" asked Sun.

"Of course. Trust me, this is not goodbye," Moon said with a sparkle in his eye.

Sun trusted that he would return. She held onto his word and then gave him hers.

"I love you too, Moon."