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Moon Rise

Linaya M. DiNoto

I used to live for the sun. The morning sun to be specific. I was that rare breed of person that never needed an alarm clock and on no occasion could be found sleeping past six a.m. I was consistently conjured awake with the rising sun every day of my life... Or at least before the sun disappeared.

I lived for those cold mornings, the grass still painted with frost, the sun peeking through my curtains, the sky a soft pink during summer and a dull, comforting gray in winter. But most of all I loved the stillness, the uninterrupted routine. I've always enjoyed silence and the sun made it bearable, pleasurable actually. But silence in darkness loses its sense of peace and meditation.

Something about darkness mutates silence into an uncomfortable, creeping creature. Many moons ago, when the sun still lived, I would watch the golden ball of fire patiently striding across the sky before slipping underneath the horizon and I would tuck myself into bed with the promise of another sunrise tomorrow. It was the sun's consistency that I cherished the most, I think.

But I've learned something funny about promises and consistency. They don't really exist. You can build your entire life around a single constant — for example the sun rising — and one day it can simply cease to rise. And you might waste forever waiting for it to rise again, but if it stopped rising in the first place, why would it miraculously choose to pursue its old and long forgotten routine? And let me tell you from experience, if you convince yourself that any part of your life is a guarantee, you are a fool. I was a fool once, so I say this with the utmost respect.

I remember the day the world changed. I awoke without poking or prodding, my body accustomed to its early rising. But when I pulled back the curtains it was dark... Confusion struck me. I must have woken up a bit too early, that was the only plausible explanation. And yet, the alarm clock on my bedside table said 6:30am. I

assumed it was the cheap, drug store clock that was a floozy and not the sun itself. The sun couldn't not rise, that was simply not plausible... Right? It was a Sunday, ironically, and I had no work or commitments, so I waited hours checking outside every couple of minutes, too frightened to leave my house. I called friends and family to assure myself it wasn't my mind that was malfunctioning but in fact the sky.

The entire world waited days, months, and eventually years checking our clocks obsessively, rubbing our eyes, slapping ourselves to see if reality would resettle back into its normal routine. Worldwide, most people were convinced that they were living a long, uncomfortable dream. I was one of those people. I would tell myself every day that it was impossible for the sun to disappear. I can now sheepishly admit I was being naive. Every dark morning I would switch on my TV, the screen buzzing to life:

BREAKING NEWS - THE SUN IS MISSING!

THREE MONTHS AND STILL NO SUN!

AFTER EXTENSIVE TESTING, SCIENTISTS HAVE YET TO REACH ANY CONCLUSIONS
WILL THE SUN EVER RETURN? SOME THINK NOT...

Eventually, the news stopped altogether. What's the point, ya know?

A lot of things crumbled after the sun's unexplained exit, when the endless night took over. Businesses boarded their windows and the stock market crashed. Food started to disappear from stores without replacements, the shelves barren. Politicians ran from their government positions like scared dogs, the very people who were meant to guide us, to lead the crusade on solutions, disappeared with shaking legs.

I survived through this paradigm shift but many others did not. I remember vividly the mass graves placed in every town and city and the silence that infiltrated everything. Birth rates began to plummet, we all lived in fear, confusion, abandonment. Who wants to bring a child into a world with no guarantees, the type of world where the sun can simply disappear?

The dawn of the apocalypse wasn't like they show on TV shows or

movies. It was nothing like anybody could have imagined. Nobody ran through the streets with guns or set buildings on fire. No wars broke out and nobody pillaged. Even those with the most hateful, violent tendencies crawled desperately into hiding. The entire world went still. There was little purpose, little meaning, and absolutely no consistency without the sun.

What we didn't know at that time was this: it was not the apocalypse, the great reckoning. God did not reach down and pluck people up to heaven or set locusts through the land. Eventually, life just continued. It wasn't the end, it was just the start of something new, the birth of the endless night, the death of the sun.

The odd thing is... well, everything about the sun disappearing was odd, but one of the strange parts was it was as if somebody or something pressed the pause button. The moon stayed frozen in a half crescent shape. The stars never moved again, stagnant in their descent across the night sky. The seasons became constant. If it was winter on the day the sun disappeared, it is still winter now. If it was blazing hot, it's still hot and if it was pouring rain, that rain cloud still hovers, dumping an endless supply of water in the exact same spot.

It was storming in New Mexico the day the sun disappeared and the entire state is an inland ocean now. Some people think that in the near future all of the rain oceans scattered around the world will join together and suffocate us in bottomless depths, the oceanic background accompanied by a stark black sky. But that seems unlikely to me. How I look at it, if we can survive the death of our great star, we can survive a little bit of rain. But then again, what do I know? The sun disappeared for heaven's sake! Nobody knows anything anymore and that's the only truth worth believing.

People still aged and died. Plants came and went but they never did stop growing. And eventually, people started laughing again and wandering out from their houses into the darkness. Businesses slowly reopened and the markets re-established. One jar at a time, the grocery stores were dusted and re-stocked... Even war and violence picked up where it left off, scared soldiers running through gunfire in an endlessly pitch black night. Restaurants found new ways to market their menus with tricky little names like the Night-

shade Burger or the Moonshake. Work started back up again, the sky outside my office window always dark, always still.

Scientists ran around in an existential frenzy for years, conducting tests and building telescopes and analyzing plants before they accepted the inevitable. How could a plant live without the sun? How could a raincloud never stop raining? How could the stars and the moon stay completely still? How could the sun disappear? They never did find answers to any of these questions but they somehow concluded that in all likelihood, the sun was never coming back. So science and reason melted away and the philosophers won: there is no way to truly test your reality, to undoubtedly prove the stability of anything. Ever.

Ironically, new religions were born out of this forever darkness, things like 'the church of the holy sun' or on the other end of the spectrum 'the moon whisperers'. And despite nothing being real anymore, people found comfort in the stories and community so churches were built, tall and colorful and surrounded by streetlights to illuminate their signage. People gathered, on whatever holy day of the week the founders decided, and sang songs and worshipped the lost sun or the stillborn stars. Everyone seemed to avoid Sunday though, it quickly became the most despised day of the week.

I think this uncertainty, this melting of all logic and meaning is what hit people the hardest. Like a gut-punch of nonsensical truth. But humans have a wonderful knack for survival and we slowly evolved, learning to live in this sunless world instead of willowing too long in despair. And of course, people started holding hands again, kissing, loving and children were eventually born. These black skied babies played and rode bikes in the dark and heard fairy tales about the daylight, as if it were mere legend from many, many nights ago. They didn't understand that their parents had felt the kiss of sun on their skin, that they had been alive to watch the beauty of sunsets and sunrises. The very people who had made them and took the time to weave these stories of light had watched the moon grow smaller and larger throughout the month and took vacations for the simple purpose of laying under thick, hot rays of light. These were not fairy

tales, but it seemed that way to those who knew nothing but the darkness, the moon children. If you really think about it, children who have never seen the sun or a full moon will one day inherit this earth, the sun becoming nothing more than a shadowed memory.

I never did think that the day before the sun disappeared would be my last morning. Thinking back, I doubt I appreciated it enough. And I still have my alarm clock set for 5:30 am, whatever that means, for the endless beginning of a new night. And I have come to accept a lot of unacceptable realities, but my dreams are still vivid with the freshness of mornings and the warmth of our lost sun. I wonder if one day after I'm dead and gone, a woman will wake to a returned sun rising plump on her doorstep and mourn the never-ending embrace of darkness that once so deeply comforted her with its cold embrace and mutated silence and as a result, our newly built reality will crumble all over again and learn to accept the light the same way we had learned to accept the darkness.