

Flower, Sun, and Wind

A Short Story by Kara Kreter

Once upon a time there was a flower that fell in love with the Sun.

She was the smallest flower on her bush, tucked away alone on the lowest branch and so was farther away from the Sun's warmth than the others.

The first time she saw her sisters gleaming in the light of spring, her heart twinged with yearning. What would it be like to dance under the full warmth of the Sun's benevolent eyes, swaying in the gentle breeze? How their petals glowed under His radiance! She unfurled a little just watching them.

The balm of Spring turned cold, then rainy, then warmed again into the fiercely heated gaze of Summer. One day when she looked up to see her sisters, she saw their petals wilted by late frost and browned by the intense afternoon heat.

She began to understand that her position, low on the hedge and partly obscured by foliage, had protected her all along. Instead of looking up at her sisters in envy, she began to rejoice at the kind, dappled light that gently coaxed her petals open one by one.

Before she even realized what was happening, she found her soul flinging her petals outward into full bloom, radiant with color and perfume. She began to dance on the sheltering breeze, singing a song without words that only flowers know.

A throb of gratitude towards her luminous benefactor radiated from her heart. As thankfulness opened the last petal on the bud of her soul, a fragrance leaked out, a joy that was uniquely hers.

Wind was passing by, herding clouds together for a much needed summer rain, when he found himself drawn up short by an intensely fragrant breeze. There was something different about it, something He'd never quite encountered before.

He read the breeze, tracing its origin and intent, then smiled. Sun was often lonely in His perpetual work of radiance and would welcome this gift: a rare acknowledgement of His loving efforts. He tucked it away in his lungs and sped away.

Sun was busy as usual with plants to grow, seasons to turn, and planets to rein into their places. A visit from his favorite sibling was a happy break. "Ah, Tempest," he said, using his favorite childhood name for his brother, "what brings you to me?"

Wind laughed, as he always did at the nickname. "I have something for you," He said.

Sun sighed, "not more bad news, I hope."

"No." Wind shook his head with a mysterious smile. "Close your eyes."

Sun eyed him skeptically, undoubtedly remembering the many childish pranks of their youth, and Wind laughed. "No really, it's been ages since I dumped stellar debris down your shirt, just trust me."

Sun shook his head with a smile, and with a sigh of surrender, closed his eyes. At first, he sensed nothing. His brow wrinkled and he was about to speak when he felt it, sliding softly across his skin, tickling his nose. Then, a sharp stab of beauty filled his senses, so intense it jolted him upright— a song, a fragrance, a feeling.

Just for a moment, he felt it. For one breath the continuous love that he poured out onto the life of his solar system every day radiated back to him. It paralyzed him. For the first time in countless eons, the Sun rested.

The throne room was completely still except for the single tear that rolled down Sun's face. He felt a cool breeze against his cheek, but by the time he finally caught his breath, his brother was gone. "Who was that," he whispered.

"Father!" Wind blew into the Throne room of the King of the Cosmos like the wild wind his brother had always accused him of being, and dropped to his knees. "Father, I've found her but we must act quickly!"

"Who have you found, my son?" The King's eyes gleamed knowingly and a slight smile touched His lips.

"Her!" Wind jumped to his feet and began pacing. "The one who can answer the Sun's loneliness, I don't know how, but it's true. She's radiated her life into the air, though, and will soon fade away into dust like all flowers do if we don't do something." He stopped and ran his fingers through the silky breeze of his hair, "Father, what can we do?"

The smile on the King's face was encouraging. Of course his father knew what to do, he always did. "What do you have in your hand?" the King said gently.

Wind dropped the single tear he'd collected from his brother's cheek into his father's hand. His father studied it, "ah, I see," he said.

When he said nothing more for several minutes Wind grew impatient. "Well? What do we do?"

The King looked up at him. "This, you can leave in my hands. But as for you, you should go check on your brother."

When Wind arrived back in his brother's domain, he found the solar system in a state he'd never seen before. Planets were wobbling under lackluster gravity, seasons groaned under blistering cold or unseasonable heat, and all life hunkered down in fear of the storms and strange portents tearing through the sky.

He found his brother hunched over on his throne, his head in his hands. Understanding hit Wind like lightning, and with sickening clarity he understood what he'd unknowingly done to his poor brother.

Stars don't love as mortals do. They're binary, meant to order their systems in pairs, and are given to each other by the King himself. A star loves only once and forever.

Long had Sun suffered his fate as a lone star. Never once had he complained, but Wind had often spoken with his father about the lingering sadness behind his brother's eyes. And now, by some strange turn of events, his brother had found his one true pairing.

Wind groaned; of course Sun knew that the breath He'd felt was mortal. Of course he knew that the final breath of the flower's bloom was the beginning of death; he'd tended to growing things hour by hour every day of his life. In one tiny puff, Wind had both given his brother love, and taken away the hope of it forever. "Father," he groaned softly.

Sun looked up when he heard his brother, and gave him a watery smile that crumpled around the edges before faltering completely. "I never asked him, you know," he began.

"I know," Wind said softly.

"You know Father, he never does anything without a reason so I always thought..." his head sagged against his chest as a ragged, strangled moan leaked out. "So why does this feel so cruel?"

Wind fluttered with helpless emotion, but his voice was firm. "I don't know. But I do know that she needs you. Brother, she's fragile, and you're hurting her."

Sun looked out at his planets, eyes tight with pain. He blinked and sighed and with a dull wave of his hands he picked up the reins again. The solar system startled then hummed, relieved to be resuming its normal order of motion.

Wind turned to go but stopped at the sound of his brother's voice.

"I'd like to see her," his voice was quiet. "At least once, and then maybe after that, until..." his voice dropped off then started again, stronger than before. "Can you show me?"

"Yes, I can do that," Wind whispered, then slipped away.

The next day dawned tense over the sky of one tiny flower, from a small bush, at the edge of an unimportant meadow, in a backwater region of a little planet.

It took some time for the flower's locale to come into view, then more time for the Sun's angle of view to be steep enough to allow the brothers to peek over the side of the bush where she grew.

"Where is she?!" a sharp edge tinged Sun's voice as he gazed anxiously at the bush. Nothing could be seen but a flurry of mud-stained leaves and petals on the ground.

Wind sucked in a breath. "Hold on, let me look. She might be hiding behind the leaves somewhere," he threw over his shoulder as he hurtled down towards Earth. Wind ruffled his fingers through the foliage, searching long after the truth was made plain. The storms that had ravaged the planet during the Sun's grief had been too strong; she was gone.

Sun wasn't the same after that. Both he and Wind threw themselves into routine, continuing their work as before, and they never spoke about that terrible day.

As he travelled about the system, however, Wind heard much grumbling about how cold the weather had turned lately. As for the planets, they no longer skipped about in the happy rhythms of gravity, but plodded along like clockwork. Instead of fading gracefully (or colliding contentiously) into one another, seasons now thunked into place with sudden and alarming regularity.

But there was a deeper consequence, one that Wind had a hard time admitting even to himself. He'd come to his father for help, believing that he'd make everything right and he'd done nothing. There was no fixing the situation now; both he and his brother were scarred from their father's inaction. Without trust, the universe had become a very cold place indeed.

Years passed by, and the solar system carried on with rigid regularity. Sun, whose beams had once played peekaboo with the clouds and danced around his subjects with gentle cheer, now meted himself out with ruthless efficiency. No one had any reason to complain about what they received, but the sameness weighed on hearts nonetheless. Food tasted blander, sunsets were less colorful, the changing of the seasons no longer felt hopeful.

Wind still visited Sun, but their visits were always short and Sun never had much to say. When they received the Quincentennial summons to the Congregation of Elemental Forces for the

Laniakean Sector, Wind was saddened when he dropped by Sun's place as usual to pick him up only to discover that he'd already left without him.

The Congregation was packed as usual, and Wind was happily greeted by his counterparts from other galaxies and solar systems. His heart dragged though, as they neared the Great Throne Room of the King. He hadn't been back since the day of Sun's sorrow, and he wasn't looking forward to dealing with his father.

Wind tried to find Sun but was unable to make him out among the throngs. He edged around the crowds, trying to linger at the back, but found himself being pulled along with the crowd and dumped out at the feet of his King.

Without thought and in an instant his knees hit the floor. His heart cracked under the pressure of the love he felt reaching out to him, tears leaking out from his eyes. He'd forgotten how good the warmth of his father's gaze felt, even as it pierced Wind's reasoning and left him bare and helpless at the feet of the King of Everything.

"Wind," his father's voice was gentle, full of sorrowful understanding. "Come here, you are just in time to be a witness."

Wind wiped at his eyes and moved to the front, only to find his brother, Sun, standing next to him, eyes hurting but clear. Wind wasn't the only one whose walls had been broken down by the presence that filled the room with graceful power.

"As you know, every quincennial, I present the latest additions to your region, your brothers and sisters in the work. Today we have a very unique addition to the team, a promotion from the material realms." The room stirred, such promotions were rare. While heaven certainly had occasional promotees from the material realms, most elementals came from the spirit realms.

"Come forward, my Daughter." A small, luminous figure emerged from the crowd, her hair a lovely shade of crimson, her dress aglow with silvery light. Wind thought she looked familiar, but couldn't quite place her. He turned to look at his brother and found him shining intensely as he stared at the beautiful creature that made her way towards the throne and knelt before it.

"Wind, do you recognize your sister? No? Sun?"

The woman rose and looked at Sun, and his brow puckered as though he wanted to say something, but instead he shook his head.

"Many years ago, a living being gave her dying breath to save the heart of one of my beloved sons. She didn't know it at the time, but her love was the joy that was made to rescue him from a life of dutiful drudgery."

"That one is you, beloved Sun, and this is the flower that woke your heart."

Sun stepped forward then, almost seeming to be in a trance. His hand hovered near her cheek, but refused to settle, as though he thought she would disappear if he touched her.

The woman turned her head to nuzzle his hand with her cheek and looked up at him with wide, trusting eyes. Sun wrapped his arms around her and buried his face into her hair, weeping with all the pent up hope he thought had died a long time ago.

Wind looked up at his father in astonishment, “how?! Why didn’t you tell me?”

The King looked at him and smiled, though sadness lingered in his eyes. “Why didn’t you trust me? Why didn’t you ask?”

Wind ducked his head in shame, but then found himself picked up and immersed in a warm, all-encompassing hug. “I just wanted you to come to me. I’ve missed you, my son,” the King’s voice grumbled gently against his hair and Wind could no longer contain himself, he let go and wept in his father’s arms.

It was a day of wild sun flares and a night of fiercely colorful auroras, when Wind swept into Sun’s throne room to find him leaning forward, transfixed, radiating intently.

“Again? I see what’s going on,” Wind tsk’d as he shook his head.

Sun turned a wry smile on him. “I don’t know why you act so surprised every time you catch me watching my wife dance.” Sun closed his eyes and let out another burst of fiery light, “stunning.”

Selene was especially close– at the perihelion of her orbit– as she joyfully circled the assignment she shared with Sun. Wind’s heart swirled in happiness at how vibrantly his brother was shining now that he had both love and purpose burning in his core.

Selene had taken well to life as a moon with its cycles of blooming light and waning rest. Formed from the essence of a flower trapped in a tear of the Sun, and a large rock that had gotten stuck in the planet’s orbit back in the beginning of its formation, she’d been shaped by the King’s hand into something truly lovely. Lit up by her husband’s adoring gaze, she brought hope and a gentle order to the little planet from which she had emerged.

The King had big plans for this glowing blue sphere, he’d said, and he had created the pair of them to nurture and protect it. “Because the two of you know what it means to love,” their father had said at their joining ceremony.

“Yes, I do get all the credit for your marriage, don’t I,” Wind waggled his eyebrows and affected a pose, then spun around the room in laughter, ruffling his brother's hair.

Sun rolled his eyes, then joined him. The moon gleamed with love as she looked on, while from a Throne far away, a father’s heart beat out a rhythm of perfect, joyous love.

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