

## Dust and Ice

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On the first warm spring night of the year, Brian and I bring blankets out to the back yard to watch the comet in the northwest sky. Brian has just told me he's thinking of going on a road trip for a while, to dust off his spirit, to stretch his legs a bit. I know not to say anything because he never promised to stay, never billed himself as the settled type.

"There it is, sure enough," he says, as if the astronomers and TV commentators were perpetrating some scam. "Look at that. Imagine that being the inspiration for all those loonies who killed themselves."

"Wow. It's great," I say. "I can see it so clearly." The tail spewing forth from the head. Bits of rock and vapor trailing behind, looking like a white veil. A wedding veil.

"Woo," he says, "I wonder where the mother ship is."

I think I can understand loving someone so much, trusting him so much that I'd follow him anywhere. Brian hasn't asked me to follow him, but I would.

I read about comets, how ancient civilizations saw them as the portent of danger, of angry gods. They signal change, the end of one thing, the beginning of another.

Funny how the comet looks both still and in motion--held in our orbit but fighting to break away. Brian thinks it's beautiful, free-flying. I only see it falling apart. I am Brian's mist, clinging on for dear life, feeling bits of myself break away and turn into mist. He's on the move and I can't hang on much longer. I burrow my face into Brian's shirt and smell his neck. He is my core--I am all dust and ice. We start kissing and soon we both know why we really came out here.

“Hey,” he says, “did you remember. . .?” fingering my breast through my bra.

“Yes,” I lie. My diaphragm is in the bathroom drawer, left there after a split-second decision. I’m tempted to tell him what I’ve done, afraid he’ll notice what’s missing. I count the days in my head and know that my body’s cycle is aligned with the comet, the stars. He nuzzles my neck and says that I’m a schemer, that this was a great idea, a celestial screw, the first outdoor fuck of the year. I feel him hard against my leg. As we squirm out of our jeans, I wonder if this is our last time together.

The air is cold, but he covers me like a blanket, a shower of stars, and we fall to Earth, bits of rock and ice and spatial debris cascading around us. He is my Sun, my Super Nova. I am his moon. I wax and wane at his will.

I don’t know yet, but imagine that we have started our own solar system. That a piece of him broke off to form a new moon, a new life that will comfort me when he’s gone. I’ll be the source of gravity for my moon, allowing it to travel around me gently. It will feel free, knowing I’m there. I’ll protect my lovely, pale moon. Would a baby make Brian stay? Do I have the strength to do this on my own?

He stands up, and his wetness on my thighs chills me. “Let’s go inside,” he says, folding the blankets. I lie there a minute, suddenly shivering, earth-bound, rooted to the soil beneath me. I pull myself up, straighten my clothes, and walk toward the house, hugging myself for warmth, glancing one more time at the heavens.