**Forget-Me-Not**

Kelly Martone

Iridescent flecks hummed like a million pulsars in the matte of deep space. The etchings of metallic nebulae in Time’s past were the only ones to rival the endless hills that moved and breathed in air of their own. They oozed like liquid gold tumbling in slow motion, quadrillions of them moving together as one, a force as powerful as a bored sea. Yet, the slightest wisp of a windy breath could generate an avalanche that piled them into a new mountain at her feet.

Calendra scooped up a handful of sparkles and then dropped them like red ants. She clapped her hands together and brushed the ancient dust onto her perpetually dusty pants. Shielding her eyes from the manic sun, she scanned the slip of space between the powdery sky and the curvature of the dunes in the distance. They held their shape like water beneath a frozen lake. Calendra emptied her lungs in a rehearsed calm. Today would be a good day.

Traveling through sand reminded her of a serpentine chasing its tail. It was trudging through honey without the stickiness. It was running in a nightmare, getting nowhere. That was okay because it meant she’d have more time alone. More time alone meant more time in the comfort of herself.

Once she reached the hard, silver building that loomed like a winter virus, “herself” faded into something she didn’t recognize. It seemed that her classmates didn’t recognize her either, although they had known her for many years. To be teased was one thing. To be ignored was to feel her heart rotting from the inside out. Calendra sat in the back of the class like a nebula stuck to its coordinates in space, a dusty mirage, her blue eyes fixed on the darkness of the blackboard.

Mr. Sleuth (or so he was called) stared with his teacher-eyes at the children who all looked the same. They were twinkling stars to him, ready to absorb his energy. “Class,” he said with an air of mystery, “for our science lesson we will be discussing something that may sound fantastical to you. But, I assure you, once upon a time, they were real.”

He picked up a piece of chalk and made five large swooping shapes that connected to a point at the center. Then he drew a long straight line down from the center and two more swooping shapes on each side. “Can anyone tell me what this is?” he asked, dispersing intrigue throughout the room with raw delight. There were a few decent guesses: a beetle, a leaky proton, a sand mill, and a thermometer. Mr. Sleuth chuckled. “This, class, is something called a flower. During the Green Era, things like this grew. They were the blossoms of plants and came in brilliant shades of colors as you’d see in a sunset. Each one was unique and beautiful.”

He stared at his drawing for a little too long and when his attention drifted back to the class, his eyes met Calendra’s as the bell rang. “Calendra,” he said, catching her with his voice before she shuffled through the door. “I want to talk to you.”

“Yes, Mr. Sleuth,” she said politely, looking down at her shoes.

“Calendra, I noticed that you might be interested in the topic we discussed today.”

Without putting her on the spot he continued, “On my way to school today, something caught my eye. I didn’t have time to investigate, but maybe you’d like to? Before you get to the dunes, go down the sand narrows and follow Silt River to the second flagging. You might find something of interest at its base.”

She nodded as her eyes grew brighter. Calendra attempted to quicken her pace. The silvery school building mirrored itself into the haziness of the yellow day until it became an invisible sandy fog. As the second flagging appeared, she noticed something sticking out from the soft mound of sand. This anomaly rose uninvited from the monotone sands, a scar remembrance of battles fought and lost, and a glimmer of the rainbows that could come to pass.

Calendra put it in her pocket and made the long slog home.

After the moon shook off the sand from its glow and the sun lit a new day, Calendra sat at her desk—different. Her classmates surrounded her in an encapsulated bubble of fascination.

Behind her ear, she wore a sprig of folklore that illuminated the room and painted Calendra into focus. Behind her ear, she wore her heart. Mr. Sleuth pushed his paint-stained hands deeper into his pockets.