

THE DAY THE SUN GREW TIRED

by

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ne evening, just as the first Stars were beginning to shine, the Sun made a decision as she settled down to sleep. “I’m not going to get up tomorrow,” the Sun said. “I’m tired of working so hard every day.”

Her job was not easy. Every day the Sun got up, then climbed to the top of the sky and back down again, dragging her rays of light behind her. It was especially hard for her to cast shadows. There were so many of them! The Sun had to make a shadow for everything, from people to street signs to every single petal of every single flower. No, it was not an easy job.

When morning was due to begin the next day, the Sun just snuggled further under her bed-covers, and shut her eyes tighter. She dreamed a quiet dream, where the Earth was filled with soft light and there were no shadows to be seen.

“Outrageous!” cried the Moon.

“Who does she think she is?” the Stars protested.

“This sudden darkness will frighten the people on Earth,” the Moon said, “the plants and animals will be frightened, too. What can we do?”

The Stars fell silent, wondering how to sort out the strange problem. Finally the Morning Star spoke up, “Let’s ask our friends to make a storm. People on Earth will see that it is dark and rainy, but they won’t know it’s because the Sun got tired and stayed in bed.”

All agreed this was a fine idea. Together, the Moon and Stars went to their friends, the Clouds, and asked them to pick the thickest and grayest among them to cover up the sky. Then, the Moon and Stars called up the Rain and Thunder, and asked them to prepare a storm. A very nasty, gray, soaking wet storm. So all the creatures on Earth now lived with daily rainstorms, instead of daily sunshine.

In the evenings, the Clouds and Rain would go home, very tired after another day of storming. The Moon and Stars tried their best to shine a little brighter once night came, but the glow of their silvery lights was nothing like the powerful Sun, who was still sleeping. And sleeping. And sleeping.

After a whole month, the Stars, the Moon, the Clouds and the Thunder decided they had had enough. It was time to talk to the Sun and coax her back into shining during the day. They found the Sun still in bed, reading a comic book.

“Dear Sun, our own dear Sun, the Earth is suffering without you,” they began.

“Oh, just let me finish,” the Sun interrupted. “I only have a few pages left.”

The Sun loved reading comics because they were short and she could read them quickly. She never bothered with big, thick books because by the time she got halfway through, her heat would start burning up the pages. The group waited patiently until the Sun put down the comic.

Then the Clouds began again: “With no sunshine during the day no plants can grow, so the people are eating only sardines and canned soups.”

The Thunder spoke next: “Rain has been pouring for so long, it’s starting to wash all the color out of the world. Please won’t you shine for us again? We miss you, and we need you.”

“Pleeeeeeeeeeease!” begged the Moon.

The Stars joined in: “Please please pleeeeeeeeeeeeeeease!”

“Ooooh!” the Sun sighed. “It’s such hard work! And it’s always the same thing, over and over.”

“Think of it like a rhythm,” answered the Moon, “a song of life—and you’re the conductor.”

“Hmmm.... well...” The Sun struggled to find a new excuse, but nothing came to mind. After all, she had enjoyed a nice long month of rest. “Well, all right,” she said.

The Moon and Stars cheered, the Rain wept with relief, and the Thunder clapped.

“But!” the Sun said, “I won’t cast any more shadows. I have to move and adjust them every minute of the day, stretch them long in the morning, squash them at noon, pull them long again in the evening. I’ll shine all day, but NO SHADOWS.”

Everyone was so relieved at the Sun’s return that they agreed to the no-shadow rule.

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Dawn came and the Sun rose with it, strong and bright as ever. Flowers burst open; trees shook themselves dry and bore fruit. Children ran outside and danced in the sunlight. But it didn’t take long for one of them, a girl named Cassie, to notice something was funny. “Look!” yelled Cassie to her friends. “Paul doesn’t have a shadow!”

Everyone stopped their dance, and all eyes turned to look at him.

“You don’t have one either!” Paul yelled back.

“Me either!” cried a chorus of voices.

They wondered if they had forgotten their shadows at home, like they sometimes forgot their hats or jackets. As each boy and girl ran home to check, they saw that nothing had a shadow. Neither trees, bushes, nor the cars parked at the side of the road. Not street signs, dogs, nor garbage cans. Nothing!

So all the shadows had disappeared, but everything else was normal as could be. At least

it seemed that way, at first. Cassie's family went to the beach the next day, happy that the sun was back. But no matter where they stuck their big red beach umbrella, it didn't cast a shadow. "It's too hot," Cassie complained.

"There's no shade anywhere," said her father.

"I think I'm getting a sunburn," said her mother.

There was nothing to do but pack up and walk back to the house.

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Every day after school, Cassie went to visit her mother at work. Her mother was a painter, and her studio was a wonderful mess of paint jars, brushes, ladders and old easels. It was a great place to play before going home.

Cassie's mother wiped her hands on a rag and gave her daughter a kiss. "I was just thinking of you," she said. "Do you remember when the shadows in here used to scare you?"

"You told me stories about them, so I wouldn't be afraid," Cassie said. "But now it's bright in here all the time. No more shadows."

"What was the story I told about the old coat-rack over there?" her mother asked. "It used to have a shadow that looked just like an octopus."

Cassie looked at the coat-rack, and suddenly, an idea popped into her head. She dipped her brush into a dark gob of paint, and right there on the studio floor, she painted the silhouette of a little girl. She stepped onto the feet of the painted shape.

"I've made my own shadow!" Cassie said.

Her mother laughed and painted one for herself. Cassie started on the shadow of the coat-rack next. The two of them went about the room painting in smudges of gray

underneath each jar of paint, and dark patches under the chairs. They painted in all the strange and funny shapes that shadows make. Soon they were out of dark paints, and the room looked just like it did in the days before the Sun grew tired.

Thanks to Cassie's clever idea, her mother had another one: she became a Shadow Painter. She painted in the shadows in people's houses, and the shadows of streetlamps and signs in the neighborhood. There were too many shadows for just one person to paint, so Cassie's mother asked her friends to help. Before long, every painter and illustrator in the city found work as a Shadow Painter.

The Sun peeked through some clouds and frowned when she saw the Shadow Painters. "Who did they think they are? It'll never work," she thought, then slept some more.

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The painted shadows were a big improvement, but they couldn't move with the path of the Sun—everyone knows shadows are different at nine o'clock in the morning, at twelve noon, and different again at six o'clock in the evening. The painted shadows lay in one place, lifeless. For a time, people hired Shadow Erasers as well as Shadow Painters. The Painters would paint a shadow of a building at dawn. The Erasers came five minutes later and washed away the paint. The Painters returned to paint a new shadow, one inch to the left of the original. And so on, all day. It was a lot of trouble. No matter how fast the painters worked, it was impossible to paint a shadow for every single thing, everywhere, at all times of the day. Thankfully, they could rest after the Sun set. Then everyone went inside and turned on their lights. The lamps and light bulbs took care of making the shadows indoors.

Cassie's idea inspired many more ideas for dealing with the lack of shadows. Some were very complicated and didn't catch on as well. But Cassie's friend Paul had a simple, clever idea. Paul missed having his shadow walk with him to the bus stop in the morning. So he

started walking around with his flashlight, holding it above his head as he walked. Other children at school copied the flashlight idea. Some even attached small lamps to their hats. Wearing lamp-hats spread to the children's parents and the parents' friends. Ultra-bright streetlamps were designed that blasted a light brighter than the Sun. The ultra-bright lamps cast shadows on the street, even during the day.

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The ultra-bright lamps did not escape the attention of the Sun. She scowled at them. "Look at all the lamps they need to do the work I used to do, by myself."

A passing Cloud stopped to look down upon the Earth, and agreed. "Those lamps aren't very smart, you know; they can't move the shadows."

The Sun had learned long ago that moving shadows was very important: it helped everyone see that time was passing. As the hours went by, the painted shadows and the lamp-shadows didn't move one bit. When the Sun met the Evening Star in the sky, she snorted and said, "That it should come to hat-lamps!"

"They're trying their best," said the Evening Star. "Can't you see how precious your shadows were to them?"

The Sun turned her back and went to off bed. But she didn't sleep well that night. She had nightmares of monstrously large lamps that swallowed up the world and kicked her out of the sky.

When the Sun awoke the next day, she made a new decision. She decided that shadows were as much a part of her as the bright, warm light she gave. The Sun carefully arranged all her rays of light, and started working on making the day's shadows unforgettable. As she rose higher in the sky, shadows began to stretch out from the houses and street lamps. Shadows followed children as they walked to school. They crept in among the jars of paints

and brushes in the studio where Cassie's mother painted. Every single petal of every single flower sighed with relief when their shadows appeared once more. Everything was familiar again. The people in the cities left their lamp-hats at home. They stared at their true, Sun-made shadows, seeing every shade of gray, every little detail. Who knew that sun-shadows were so delicate and beautiful? And what is light, if there is no shadow?

THE END