

The Story of Sol

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. NEW ORLEANS SUBURB - OLD JOE'S HOUSE - SUNSET

A broken violin hangs from a branch of a tree at the end of the yard.

There's no wind, no birdsong; the only sounds are the sad SHOUTS of neighbours somewhere nearby.

Half a TROMBONE NOTE is heard followed by GENTLE SOBBING.

OLD JOE, 75, is slumped on his porch with a trombone in his hand. A huge tree has fallen through the roof of his home.

A few scattered items lie next to him on the porch including a trumpet, a radio, a few books and an old black and white picture of a woman.

Old Joe puts the trombone to his lips. He looks pained as he tries to play it; eventually some long, solemn notes emerge through his tears.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS SUBURB - THE ROAD - SUNSET

A van's tyre is parked on a newspaper, its headline reads: "HER NAME'S KATRINA."

The SHOUTS of the neighbours are clearer and Old Joe's LONG SOLEMN NOTES can barely be heard.

The van door glides open. Two small feet in little yellow shoes emerge. The hem of a red dress is glimpsed as the feet lower down to the road. The door closes as RACHEL, 8, struggles against its weight.

The yellow shoes creep along the edge of the van and hesitate as they reach a crowd of people who are facing the opposite direction. A female REPORTER, 35, is heard:

REPORTER (O.S.)

But, ma'am, please tell me, why didn't you evacuate?

DISTRESSED RESIDENT (O.S.)

Cos this is my home! I'm supposed to be safe here!

The yellow shoes dash past the crowd and enter a garden through a shabby picket fence.

(CONTINUED)

As Rachel skips over books, twigs and wooden panels the SHOUTS around the interview die down and Old Joe's music grows louder.

Rachel stops when she reaches the porch.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS SUBURB - OLD JOE'S HOUSE - SUNSET

Old Joe gently places the trombone on the porch; he's given up. Rachel waits patiently in front of him.

OLD JOE
What's your name, kid?

LITTLE GIRL
(whispers)
Rachel.

Old Joe falls silent.

Behind Rachel the devastation of the neighbourhood can be seen. Several of the homes have completely collapsed and some cars are turned on their sides.

The suburb sits on a small hill that has a view of the New Orleans skyline, none of the lights are on.

Rachel takes a tentative step to leave.

OLD JOE
I'm sorry, sweetheart. Don't go.
I'm jus', I'm just tired that's
all... My name's Joe, folks round
here call me Old Joe. You from
round these parts?

RACHEL
Na-ah.

OLD JOE
Well, are you okay? Is your family
safe?

REPORTER (O.S.)
Rachel! What have I told you about
leaving the van?

The Reporter stomps up the path towards them.

REPORTER
Excuse me, sir, my apologies for my
daughter, she does this all the
time...

(CONTINUED)

The Reporter reaches for Rachel's hand. Rachel pulls away.

REPORTER

...And obviously I couldn't find a babysitter... She just can't mind her own business.

OLD JOE

She's fine, she's keepin' me company.

REPORTER

Even so, Rachel, leave the gentleman alone and wait in the van.

Rachel stomps her foot into the ground and makes a high-pitched moan -- she's about to have a tantrum.

OLD JOE

Excuse me, ma'am, but your daughter really is keeping me company. She's fine here, if you don't mind?

The Reporter sizes up Old Joe then turns her attention to Rachel whose arms are stubbornly crossed.

REPORTER

(at Rachel)

Okay, but you are not to move from this spot, you hear me, young lady? I'll be keeping an eye on you.

(at Old Joe)

Oh, and for your sakes, sir, I wouldn't let her near that trumpet. You folks have been through quite enough already.

And with that, the Reporter walks back towards the crowd. They overhear her speak to the impatient-looking cameraman.

REPORTER

Relax, I found her a babysitter. Hey, set up in front of the tree, the violin will make a great shot!

Rachel and Old Joe exchange a glance. Old Joe picks up the trumpet, fingers the valves, then holds it out to her.

OLD JOE

Do ya wanna play darlin'? I'd love
to hear ya play.

Rachel purses her lips and shakes her head.

As Old Joe places the trumpet back on the porch he notices
an old book.

OLD JOE

Would ya like to hear a story? Do
kids these days like stories?

Rachel's eyes brighten up and she finally smiles.

OLD JOE

Well, get yourself a seat. No, not
on the floor, up here, you need to
see the pictures.

(beat)

See that picture in the
frame? That's my mom, she was a
teacher, she used to tell me this
story years an' years ago. Oh... I
hope this works or--

Old Joe flicks on the radio.

RADIO HOST (O.S.)

... This is God's wrath being
struck down upon the sinners of New
Orleans! It's just the beginning--

Old Joe quickly tunes the radio between channels until
STATIC is heard. He turns down the volume.

The setting sun grabs their attention. They watch its light
create a perfect reflection off the still water that's
flooding homes further down the hill.

OLD JOE

This story is about the sun. Do you
know what the sun's real name
is? It's Sol. S-O-L, Sol. And Sol
is a star just like any other in
the night sky. Just like that one
there.

The sun has almost disappeared. High above the silhouetted
New Orleans skyline there's a single white star. Old Joe
turns the first page.

EXT. SPACE - STELLAR NURSERY

The bright cloud is full of swirling red, blue and green gas. At its centre is a tiny white light. SOL slowly emerges.

OLD JOE (V.O)

Not everyone knows this, but stars are born in enormous clouds. See that little white light? That's her.

RACHEL (V.O)

Sol's a girl?

OLD JOE (V.O)

That's right. And you know what? She's not alone in that cloud. She has nine little planets for company.

Tiny PLANETS appear through the mist. As they circle the tiny star, they suck up the gas that surrounds them.

RACHEL (V.O)

There's eight planets, not nine.

Rachel takes a deep breath.

RACHEL (V.O)

Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune but not Pluto, Pluto's not a planet any more.

OLD JOE (V.O)

Is that right? Things have changed since I was a boy. Anyways, those little planets, as they circled around baby Sol their dancing...

The radio scrolls through channels. A few words from urgent news reports are heard before it settles on some INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC. The volume is gradually turned up.

OLD JOE (V.O)

...their dancing made music! It made music, just like on this here radio. Sol loved watching her little planets dance around her, but she noticed that one planet was silent. Earth didn't make a sound. She didn't mind, though, cos Earth was so pretty.

(CONTINUED)

(beat)

An as Sol listened to the music her little light brightened up until she became a beautiful golden yellow. She was perfectly happy with just her planets for company. But then, one day... pop!

The dancing of the planets and the intense golden light from Sol blows the remaining cloud far away.

OLD JOE (V.O)

Sol's warm golden light blew her nursery away. An' as it faded this strange noise was heard.

The radio again tunes between channels and STATIC is turned up.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS SUBURB - OLD JOE'S HOUSE - TWILIGHT

It's almost pitch-black, there's barely another light in the whole city apart from the cameraman's spotlight. Distant EMERGENCY SIRENS are heard along with the nearby CRIES of the small crowd.

Dozens of bright stars sparkle above New Orleans.

Old Joe lights two candles and places them so Rachel can see the pictures. Rachel has her hands over her ears?

RACHEL

What's that noise?

OLD JOE

It's the sound of chaos. Ya see, what Sol saw were the stars, but they didn't look like they do now.

EXT. CHAOTIC SPACE - SOL SYSTEM

There's chaos as millions of green, blue, yellow and brown stars dance together. They dance in twos, threes, and some in enormous clusters.

OLD JOE (V.O)

Sol saw that she wasn't the only star in the universe. And they were all having a great time makin' their music. Problem was they were all making their music all at

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

OLD JOE (V.O) (cont'd)
once! An so it looked an' sounded
like madness. Worse thing was she
could no longer hear the little
tune of her tiny planets.

A few stars leave gas trails as they whiz by.

OLD JOE (V.O)
You can imagine that Sol was a bit
scared -- it was probably a little
like her first day at school -- but
Sol was no coward, she quickly
herded her little planets towards
her nearest neighbours.

Sol and her planets glide towards a trio of nearby stars.

EXT. CHAOTIC SPACE - CENTAURI SYSTEM

As Sol approaches her neighbours their mad dance becomes
apparent.

Two of the stars, which are about the size of Sol, dance
together in a waltz; a third much smaller star dashes in and
out between them. None of them have any planets.

Some JAZZ music is slowly turned up on the radio.

OLD JOE (V.O)
These three young stars are the
Centauri brothers. An' boy were
those kids pleased to see Sol. They
wanted nothing more than to play
with their new friend and they
started dancing around her.

There's a THUD.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS SUBURB - OLD JOE'S HOUSE - TWILIGHT

Rachel has jumped off the porch and onto the lawn. She
shakes her head to the music. As she twists her hips the hem
of her dress floats around her.

OLD JOE
Do ya enjoy dancin'?

RACHEL
Uh-hum. Mommy was reporting at the
Mardi Gras and I got to dance with
the parade and marching band.

(CONTINUED)

(beat)

But Mommy said I might get hurt cos
I'm small, so I had to watch.

Rachel sits back on the porch, her attention focused on the pictures of the book.

OLD JOE

Oh, I suppose the parades can get a
little chaotic, just like the
Centauri brothers...

EXT. CHAOTIC SPACE - CENTAURI SYSTEM

As the three stars dash around Sol, her planets creep nearer to her and shake.

OLD JOE (V.O)

Sol's planets didn't like dancing
with the Centauries. They were
terrified of the fiery stars cos
they were afraid of gettin' burnt.

(beat)

Sol wanted to stick around with her
new friends, but she saw how scared
her planets were. The Centauries'
lights dimmed as she sulked slowly
back towards her own space.

Sol's light dims as she mopes back to her own space. The JAZZ music is slowly replaced by STATIC and the planets return to normal.

OLD JOE (V.O)

Sol was very disappointed as she
would have loved to dance with the
other stars and make some music,
but she knew if she did that her
planets would get burnt. So she
just sat there and listened to that
horrible sound.

In the background, among the chaos, a star is flashing like a beacon.

OLD JOE (V.O)

But then, in the distance, she sees
somethin'. Sol was so curious she
couldn't help but go explore.

EXT. CHAOTIC SPACE - VEGA SYSTEM

After some searching, the radio settles on some INSTRUMENTAL ROCK MUSIC with a deep beat.

Sol and her planets are among dozens of other similar-looking stars, none of which have any planets.

VEGA, a large orange star, is in the centre of the group. He goes a deep red as he expands then goes white as he shrinks.

The other stars try to imitate his mesmerising dance.

OLD JOE (V.O)

This is Vega, you can probably tell being such a handsome star he's very, very popular. See all those other stars? Those other stars are his fans. Sol could have stayed to watch his hypnotic dance all day, but then Vega wandered over towards her.

(beat)

Vega carries on dancin' right in front of her, kinda like he's trying to encourage her to give it a go, an Sol decides there's no harm in trying.

As if she's breathing, Sol blows herself up then shrinks down, but she can barely do it. She gives it another go. Some of the other stars turn a little red as if jealous at the attention Sol is receiving.

OLD JOE (V.O)

Sol was determined to make some music, so she goes for it an'...

A deep, rude SQUEAK of the trombone is heard.

OLD JOE (V.O)

When Sol blew herself up she managed to burn little Mercury, an' he started racing around Sol on fire!

Vega's fans shake themselves silly and make all sorts of rude noises. A few even imitate Sol and burn what's left of their own planets. Vega stops dancing. Sol turns a little pink as if embarrassed.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS SUBURB - OLD JOE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rachel looks genuinely distressed.

RACHEL

Oh no, was Mercury okay?

OLD JOE

He was. Even after the flames went out Sol was deeply ashamed at what she'd done. An' all the other stars just laughed at her as she ran away.

Old Joe tunes the radio back to the STATIC and flicks through the remaining pages.

OLD JOE

Funny how I still remember this after all those years. I think my mom read me this story cos, like Sol, I wasn't much of a dancer cos of my leg--

Old Joe taps his knee.

OLD JOE

--I think that's why I became a musician. Times were real hard back then, there wasn't much work an' folks didn't get along as well as they do now... But you know what? I think that made the music sound just that little bit sweeter.

EXT. CHAOTIC SPACE - SOL SYSTEM

The planets keep their distance and shake as if they're afraid of Sol.

OLD JOE (V.O)

Once Mercury had calmed down, Sol was looking around desperately to find another star to imitate cos she couldn't stand that horrible noise.

(beat)

Then she saw him... the lonely-looking red star.

A large motionless red star is seen in the distance. Sol and her planets head straight for him.

EXT. CHAOTIC SPACE - BETELGEUSE SYSTEM

Sol is faced with an enormous blood-red star. BETELGEUSE is so big he makes Sol look like a planet. He makes no music; he almost seems to absorb the STATIC from his surroundings.

OLD JOE (V.O)

The red giant's name is Betelgeuse. Sol wondered what he was doing all by himself not makin' any music at all, so she approached him. As she got closer and closer, Betelgeuse made no sign of greeting or introduction, he just sat there.

As Sol approaches the red giant she shakes and makes small jumps as if trying to get his attention.

OLD JOE (V.O)

Sol was certainly a little scared but she was so desperate to make some music that she kept trying to get his attention. And then... out of nowhere...

A deep, menacing GROAN is played on the trombone. The red giant makes a sudden thrust towards her.

OLD JOE (V.O)

Betelgeuse lurched for her! But he wasn't going for her, he was trying to eat her planets! Luckily though, being such a big star meant he was quite slow, and Sol managed to herd her little planets away to safety.

EXT. CHAOTIC SPACE - SOL SYSTEM

Back in her own space with chaos all around, Sol's light slowly flashes as if exhausted. Gradually her light dims.

RACHEL (V.O)

The big meanie!

OLD JOE (V.O)

He certainly was. Sol felt so, so terrible, and she was such a young star and had already been through so much... To Sol it felt like the universe was against her and she began to cry.

(CONTINUED)

The planets are forced to dodge tiny solar flares that radiate from Sol like fiery tears.

OLD JOE (V.O)

Sol knew that if she ever wanted to make music she'd have to lose her planets, which she knew she couldn't do. She thought she was doomed to be the silent star. Her crying got louder an' louder, and it sounded a little like this.

Old Joe repeats the LONG SOLEMN NOTES on his trombone.

Gradually, one by one, the stars nearby stop dancing and remain still. The message seems to spread through all the stars and the STATIC is slowly turned down.

OLD JOE (V.O)

The other stars wondered why a star could be so sad, and they all stopped dancin' to watch her.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS SUBURB - OLD JOE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

OLD JOE

An' they looked just like that.

Old Joe gestures to the stars that have appeared above New Orleans. With the city lights out it looks like somebody has thrown a handful of white dust on the sky.

OLD JOE

I don't remember ever seeing the stars like this.

(beat)

See that band of stars there?
That's the Milky Way, I've not seen it since I was a boy.

RACHEL

What's a Milky Way?

OLD JOE

It's a galaxy... it's like a star city; Sol and her planets live in the suburbs.

For a few moments Rachel and Old Joe just look up. The beauty of the night sky is only disturbed by the noise from the crowd in the street. Old Joe's neighbours are crying, a few are on their knees in front of the camera.

(CONTINUED)

RACHEL

Did Sol do something wrong?

OLD JOE

No, sweetheart. Nobody's perfect, but bad times... they pass by no one, not even the stars. She was just unlucky, and all this--
(gesturing his surroundings)
--it's just the way things is. Besides, bad times, they give us time to grow and reflect.

The SHOUTS from the crowd are getting louder.

RACHEL

So bad times are good?

OLD JOE

They're not good, no, but they're important. It's like... without the darkness, we'd never see the stars.

They're both mesmerised by the sparkling sky. They ignore the argument that is breaking out among several members of the crowd.

RACHEL

Then what happened?

OLD JOE

For the first time ever the Milky Way was silent, and all the stars watched Sol.
(beat)
None of them knew what to do, but then this wonderful music started... It started off real quiet, but gradually got louder and louder and louder! Sol stopped her crying and all the stars remained silent too. None of the stars had ever heard anything like it. Sol soon realised that the music that was charming the whole Milky Way was coming from Earth. Earth was trying to cheer up Sol! An' boy was Sol happy, it made her light shine so golden, and her other planets cheered up and joined in too. And that's the way things have been ever since; all the other stars are giving Sol her chance to shine.

(CONTINUED)

RACHEL

But, but what's Earth's music like?

OLD JOE

Rachel. We make Earth's music. It comes from us, an' if you wanna hear it and keep Sol and the rest of the Milky Way happy, then you'd better get on that trumpet and make some music! Go on now. Go on.

Rachel picks up the trumpet and jumps down from the porch.

She thinks for a few moments before she plays her first, slightly out of tune note. She doesn't play it well, but what she lacks in ability, she makes up in feeling. Rachel plays "THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE."

The crowd in the street go silent. The Reporter drops her microphone and the cameraman swings around so Rachel's in the spotlight.

Old Joe has a smile on his face when he joins in with his trombone. Together, they light up the neighbourhood.

FADE OUT.

THE END