

# “Stardust”

BOOOOOOOOM

The shaking ground under my tent startled me awake. The quiet night transitioned to one filled with screams and cries for help.

Emerging from my tent, I saw people were running around, presumably looking for loved ones. Mine had already been taken from me, I thought I had nothing else to lose. More people were shouting to each other, trying to coordinate putting out multiple fires with what little water we had access to.

Why does this nightmare never end? The little joy I experienced earlier that evening, stargazing with Mo, was gone. The silence at the hilltop, our momentary break from the buzzing of drones overhead, had become a distant dream in mere hours. Children crying for their parents, parents shrieking while assuming the worst had happened to their children. I wanted to escape and go back...

“The stars are gorgeous tonight,” I thought aloud.

Mo replied, “you know we’re literally made of that stuff?”

“What?”

“Yea, we’re made up of carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen, among other elements. And that stuff was made in ancient stars from billions of years ago.”

“So me, you, and everyone else on this planet are connected?”

“That’s one way to look at it...”

But I couldn’t go back. Time keeps moving forward. I needed to see if my friend had survived the massacre.

A crater appeared where Mo and other’s tents once stood. I saw a hand sticking out from under the dirt and rubble with a silver ring, Mo’s hand. As I pulled to help my friend out, I fell backward. I was just holding on to his arm, blown off. He was in there somewhere so I dug until parts of his body came into view. First his torso, then his lower body. Shredded by the missile explosion.

All I could look at was the butchered remains of my friend. A piece of my universe taken from me. His stardust returned to the cosmos. But there was little comfort in that. Only pain.