“The Lovers’ Eclipse”

(Why We Have a Solar Eclipse)

A Native American Folktale by Kyra Pearson

In the early times, a cheerful and energetic young boy lived in the Catawba tribe. His name was Nunti, which means ‘sun’, as he was born at daylight. He would always come out during day, when the sun would shine and he would feel the warmth on his skin, which was the color of the oak tree. There was also a rabbit who watched Nunti wherever he went. Rabbit was shy but Nunti was quite friendly. “Hello, little friend, I hope you do not fear me,” he told him.

And as the sun set, Nunti would hideaway into his hut for the night. There he admired the most beautiful girl of his tribe, Wicawa Nunti. Calm and gentle, her name meant ‘moon’, as she was born at night. Nunti wanted nothing more but to be beside her, but it was much too dark for him. Every now and then one or the other would smile and wave to the other from the huts or outside, but they never talked to each other. There was a wolf in the bushes who also watched Wicawa Nunti, “I will not bite, I only wish you do the same,” she told him. She left the wolf a piece of bread and returned to her hut.

Years later, Nunti and Wicawa Nunti grew into young adults and still never spoke. Every day, Rabbit watched Nunti and knew of his love for Wicawa Nunti. One day, as the sun rose, Rabbit once again approached Nunti. “Hello old friend. What are you doing here?” Nunti asked. Rabbit hopped, Nunti followed him and went to Wicawa’s hut.

“Nunti, why do you not speak to her?” Rabbit asked him.

Wicawa Nunti would never come out at day, as it was too bright. She would stay inside and weave baskets for her young brothers and sisters. Nunti knew this and still approached her. Wicawa Nunti peered her head out so he would not come inside. “Nunti,” she said. “Is that your name?”

“Wicawa Nunti, why do you not come out? Have you ever wished to feel the warmth of the sun’s sweet beauty on your skin? I have admired you from afar for so long and every day I nearly die knowing that such beauty is awake when everyone else is asleep. Come outside with me and maybe you will not feel so alone.”

As Nunti reached out his hand and Wicawa Nunti reached out hers, she could feel weakness, and hoped his friendship would give her strength. Suddenly, a wildfire struck all the wildlife. A crack in the earth brought Wicawa Nunti to her knees. The earthquake had separated Wicawa Nunti and Nunti permanently. The Catawba people ran over to find that their tribe was now divided. As the night approached, Wicawa Nunti gazed upon the trees as they burned to ashes and the cracks that kept her and Nunti apart. “Dear spirits, why must you keep me from him?” she asked. It was there that Wolf returned to watch the sobbing Wicawa Nunti. Rabbit followed the broken hearted Nunti into his hut, and overheard him speaking as he gazed at the moon. “What can I do spirits? I wish to be with Wicawa Nunti…if you want me to die then I shall die to know that I saw her face for a short time. I do not wish to live like this.”

Nunti’s words were also breaking Rabbit’s heart. “Do not worry, old friend. I shall reunite you with the beautiful Wicawa Nunti. As Rabbit left Nunti’s hut, he took one big hop across the cracks, but fell, dangling for his life. Wolf overheard Rabbit’s cries and grabbed him by the ears, pulling him up with his teeth. Once Rabbit caught a glimpse of Wolf, he pulled away in fear. “Do not eat me! Please spare my life and I’ll make it worth your while!”

Wolf was not planning to eat Rabbit; he actually made him lose his appetite. “That was not very wise, now you are stuck here.”

“I wish to bring Wicawa Nunti to my friend, Nunti.” Wolf looked beyond the cracks and burns of their home. “We shall see the shaman; he is responsible for all changes of Earth. I know this forest inside and out. I know where to find him.” And so Rabbit and Wolf left the Catawba tribe to see the shaman of Earth within the caves.

“Why are you here?” the shaman asked them.

“We wish to know why you stand in the way of true love.” Rabbit replied.

The Shaman looked into the sky as the sun began to rise. “Nunti rises with the sun; Wicawa Nunti rises with the moon. I have been on this earth for centuries; water was made to flow and the seasons were made to change. Night and day were never made to come together.” The shaman then watched a tear fall from Rabbit’s eye. “Tell me, how badly do you wish love for the two?”

Rabbit dried his eye and said, “I wish anything for Nunti and Wicawa Nunti!”As the sun rose that day, the shaman gave Wolf, Rabbit, and the two Lovers what they wanted. It was then that Nunti and Wicawa Nunti both vanished from the Catawba tribe, only to be seen when the moon covered the sun and the two embrace.