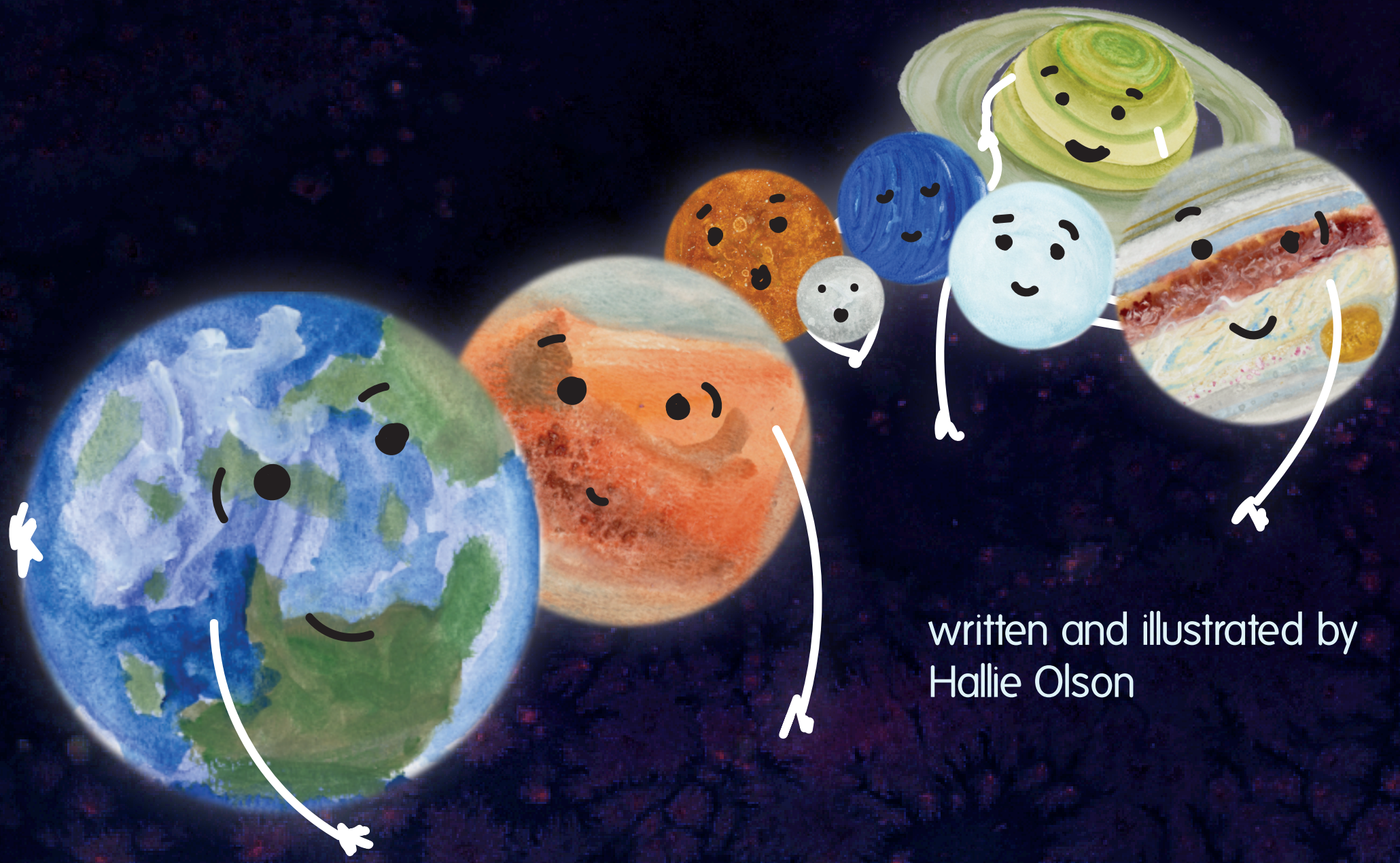
U·N·I·V·E·R·S·E

a story about relationships



written and illustrated by
Hallie Olson

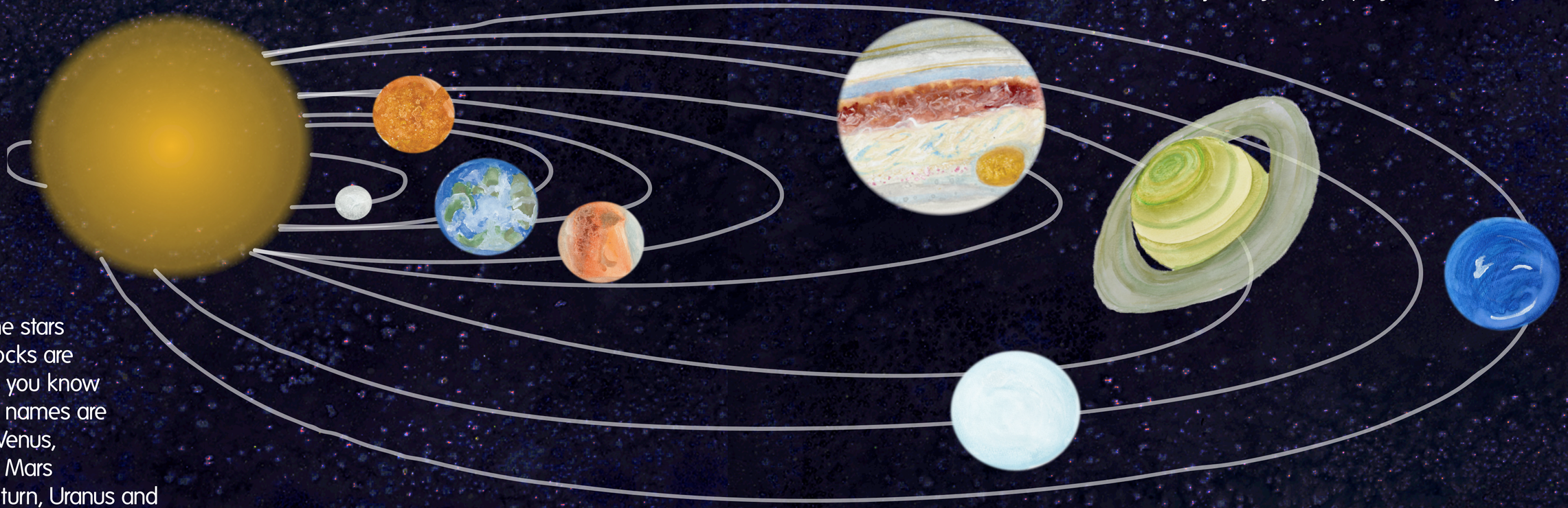
TO:

Soulforce Leadership for inspiring me to dream up this idea

Freestyle Academy for the support and guidance in developing it

Oak Avenue Elementary School for being my galaxy and my sun ❤

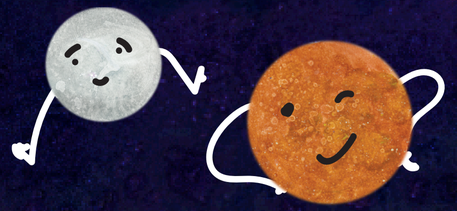
Up high past the sky is a sea of bright stars
That twinkle and shimmer in the deep blue dark...



Dancing and bustling and spinning
around the beaming Sun,
jostling and playing and having fun!

Among the stars
and the rocks are
eight orbs you know
well. Their names are
Mercury, Venus,
Earth and Mars
Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and
Neptune.

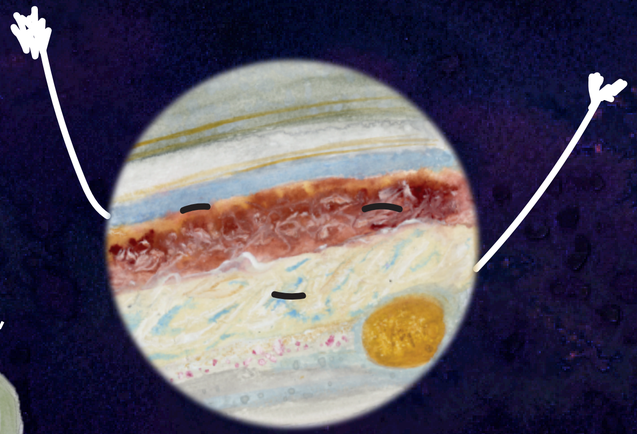
Mercury is the baby,



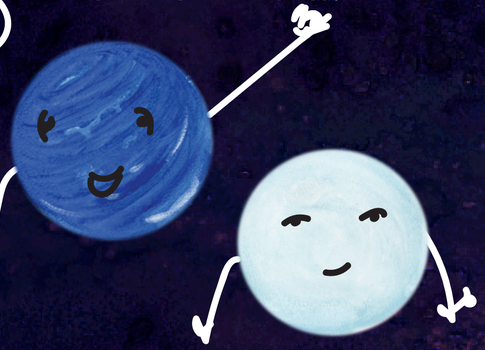
Venus is the hottest one,



next to Saturn's rings who are
next to none.



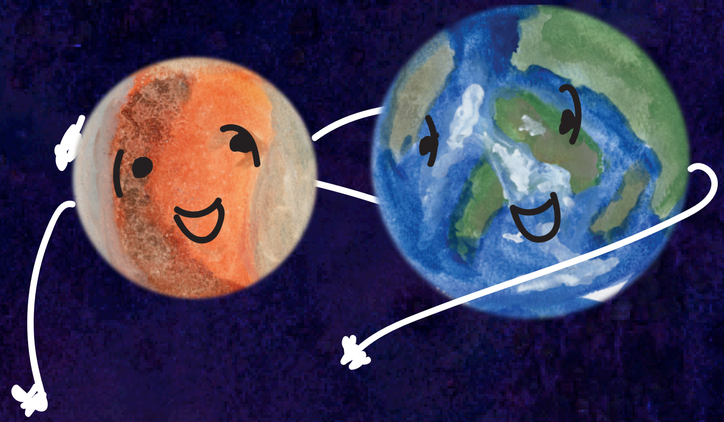
Jupiter spins in fluffy clouds,

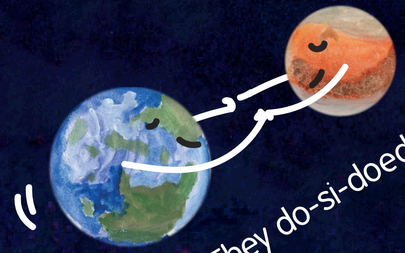


And then at the end sit Uranus and Neptune
The coolest of them all, far away from the sun.

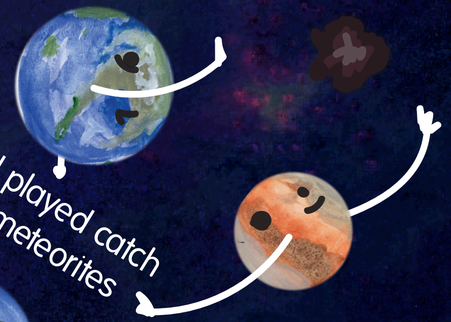
Still two of them were considered the best–
the best of friends that is.
Little humble Mars and bold blue Earth,
closer to each other than the rest...

They did everything together.

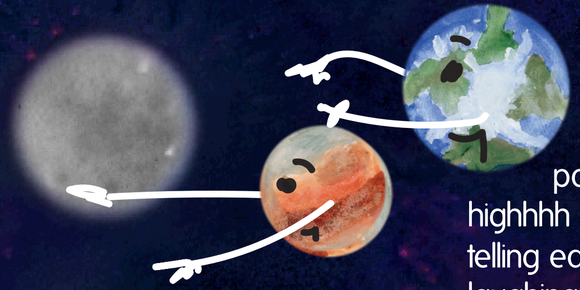




They do-si-doed,



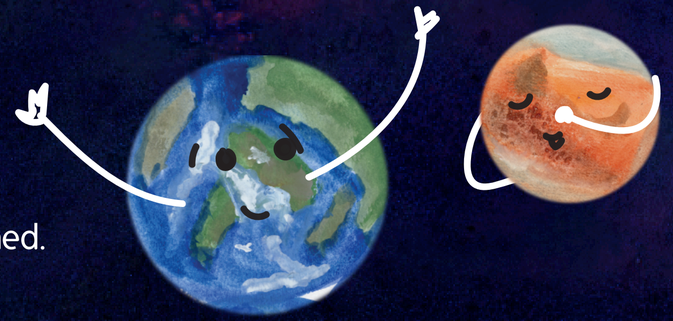
and played catch with meteorites



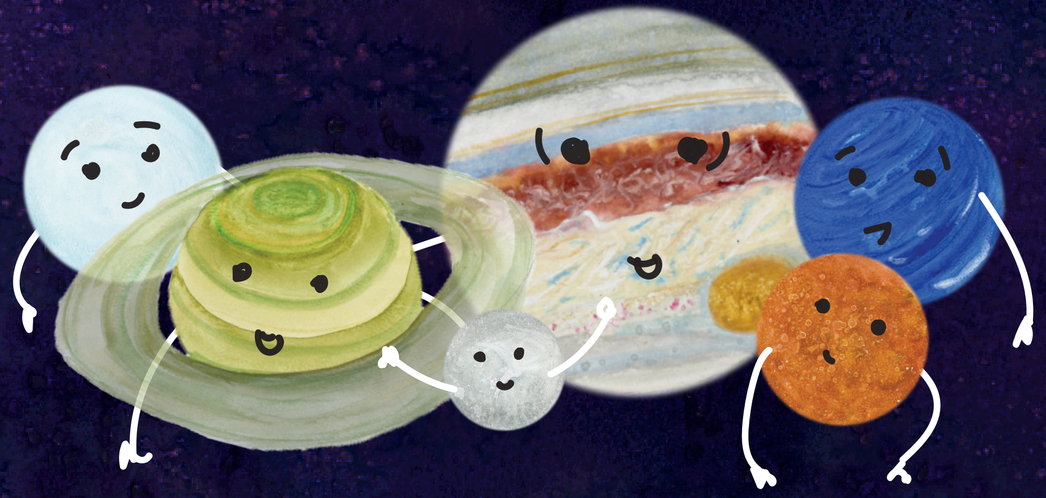
They chased shooting stars past Jupiter, around Saturn, and highhhh above Neptune, telling each other the funniest of jokes, and laughing themselves to sleep every night.

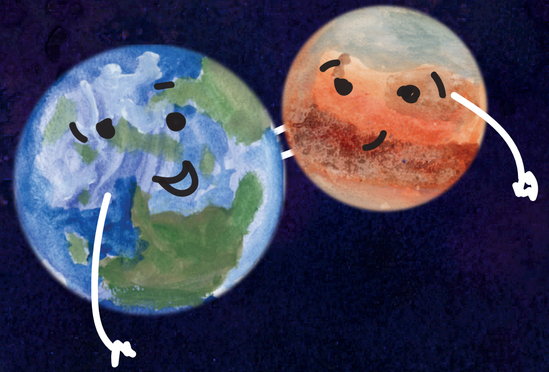
"Mars, I'm glad you're my best friend," Earth gushed.

Mars blushed.



"There go Earth and Mars!" the other planets would say, "How lucky would we be to have friends like that one day."



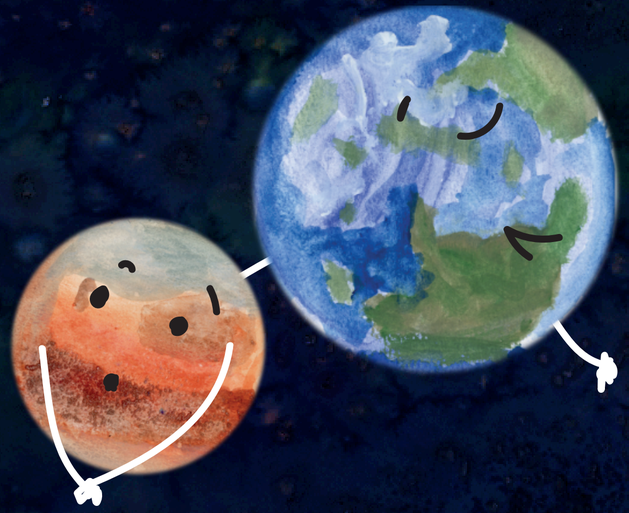


Mars and Earth were passing by and heard the commotion. Mars looked at them with a shy smile. "Earth is the best friend I could have chosen."

And Earth's heart swelled.



But as they day went on, Mars felt that
something was wrong.
Was Earth the only one?



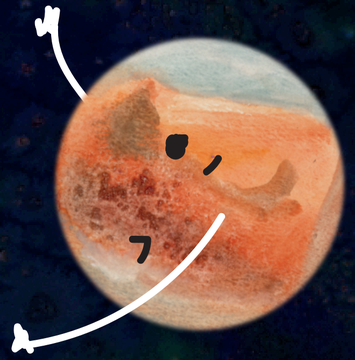
The other planets must
be kind and fun.
Couldn't Mars be friends
with everyone?

So off its orbit Mars spun, off to visit the great wise Sun.

She would know.



"Well why not?" said the Sun,
bright eyed and beaming.
"There are so many planets
worth meeting."

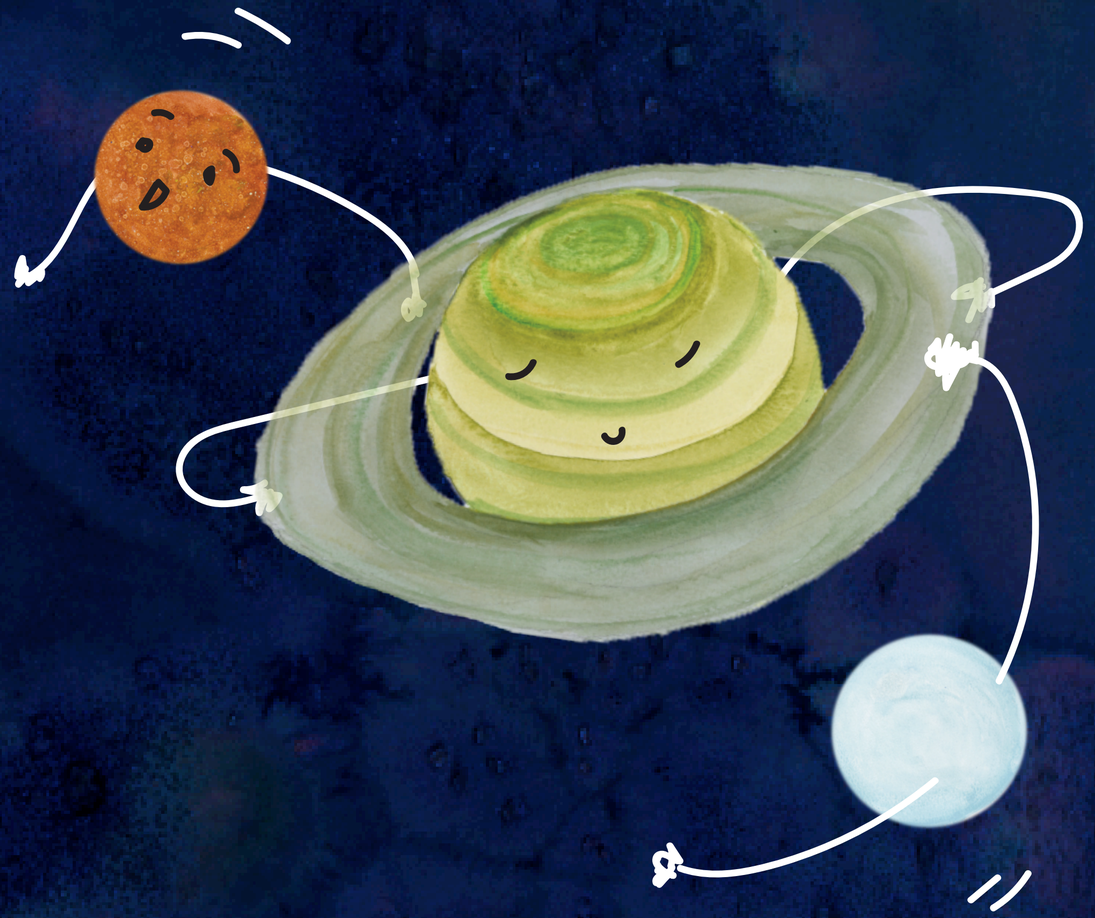


The next day, Mars went to find Earth and play.
Only this time it made a stop along the way.

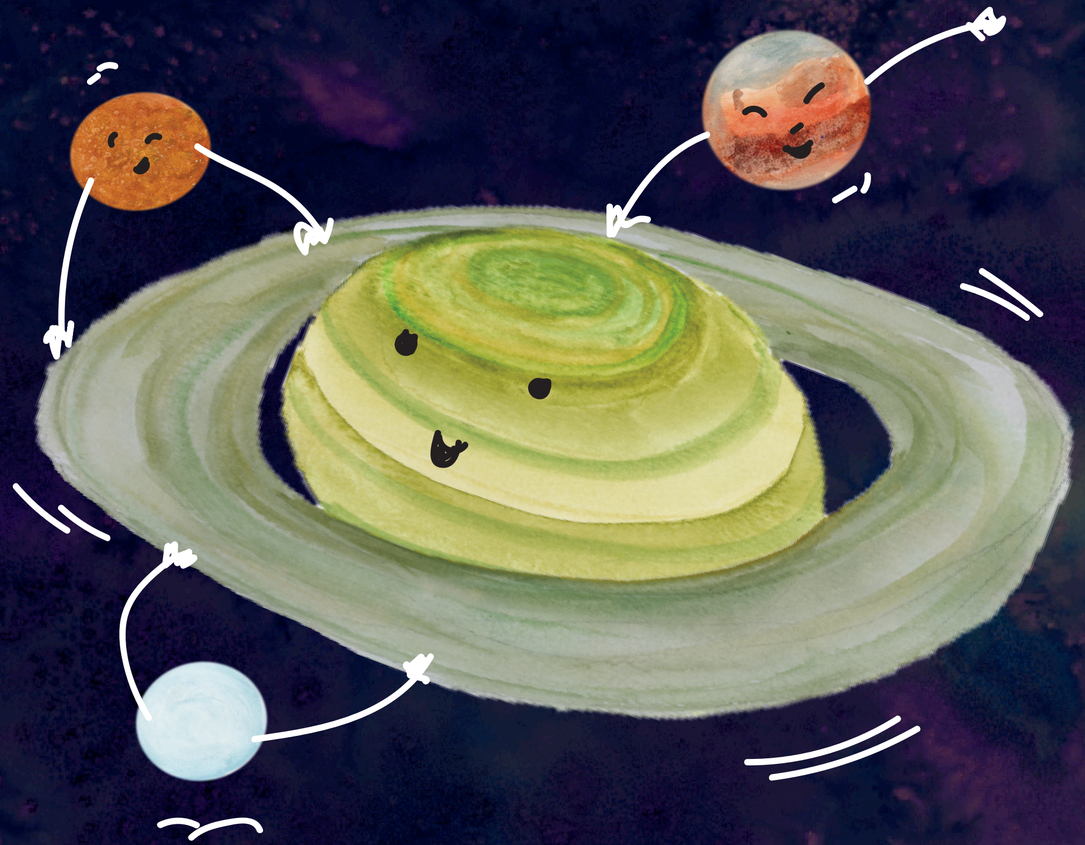
Swinging on Saturn's rings were
Venus and Uranus,
hootin and hollerin and
bumbleing and tumbling.

"That looks fun!" called Mars.
"Mind if I join?"



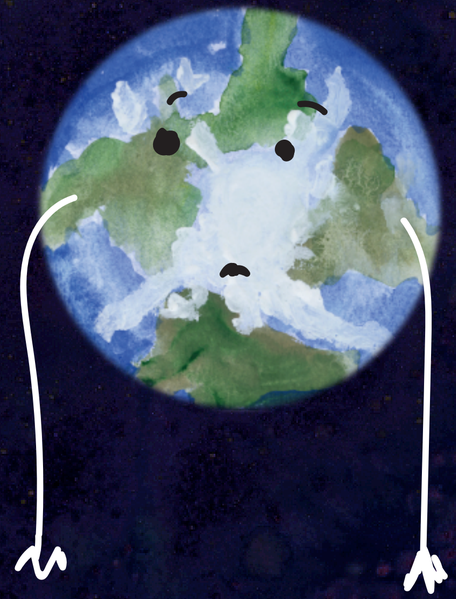


Off they went, a blur of red, blue and yellow,
twisting and turning until they resembled bright sweet tomatoes.



Not far behind Mars lagged Earth, quite distraught.
Where was Mars at this hour? Maybe it forgot?
Until then Earth saw, on Saturn's orbit, three happy friendly planets and a grinning Mars.

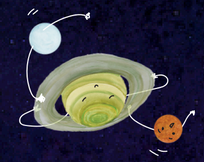
Earth felt as though it was pushed off its axis.



"Hey, Earth!" Mars said gleefully. "Come over, there are rings for us all!"

But Earth left without a peep, without a sound.

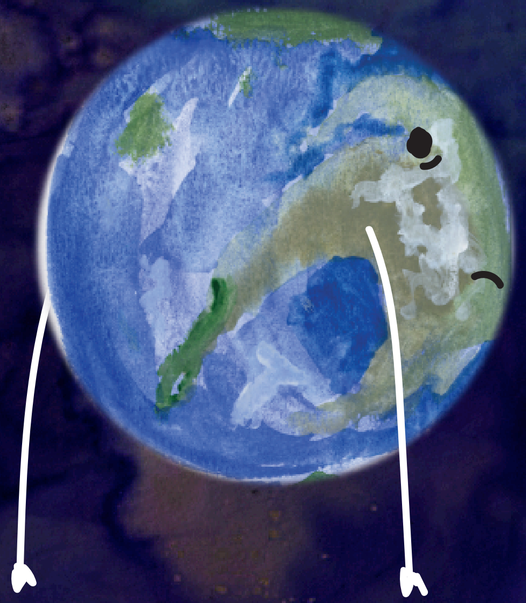




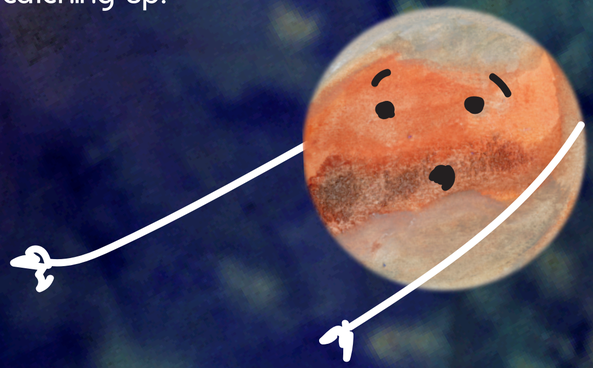


And Mars watched as Earth floated away, disappearing in the background.

Wobbling and toppling slowly out into space,
Earth passed the Sun, who noticed the tears down its face.
"Mars doesn't want me anymore," Earth sniffed.
"Aw Earth that's not true," said the Sun.
"What was Mars' point of view?"



Right then Mars yelled, catching up.
"What's wrong?"
Earth didn't respond.



So to cheer Earth up, Mars offered to play a game of meteorite catch, "Just us."

And Earth felt a little bit better.

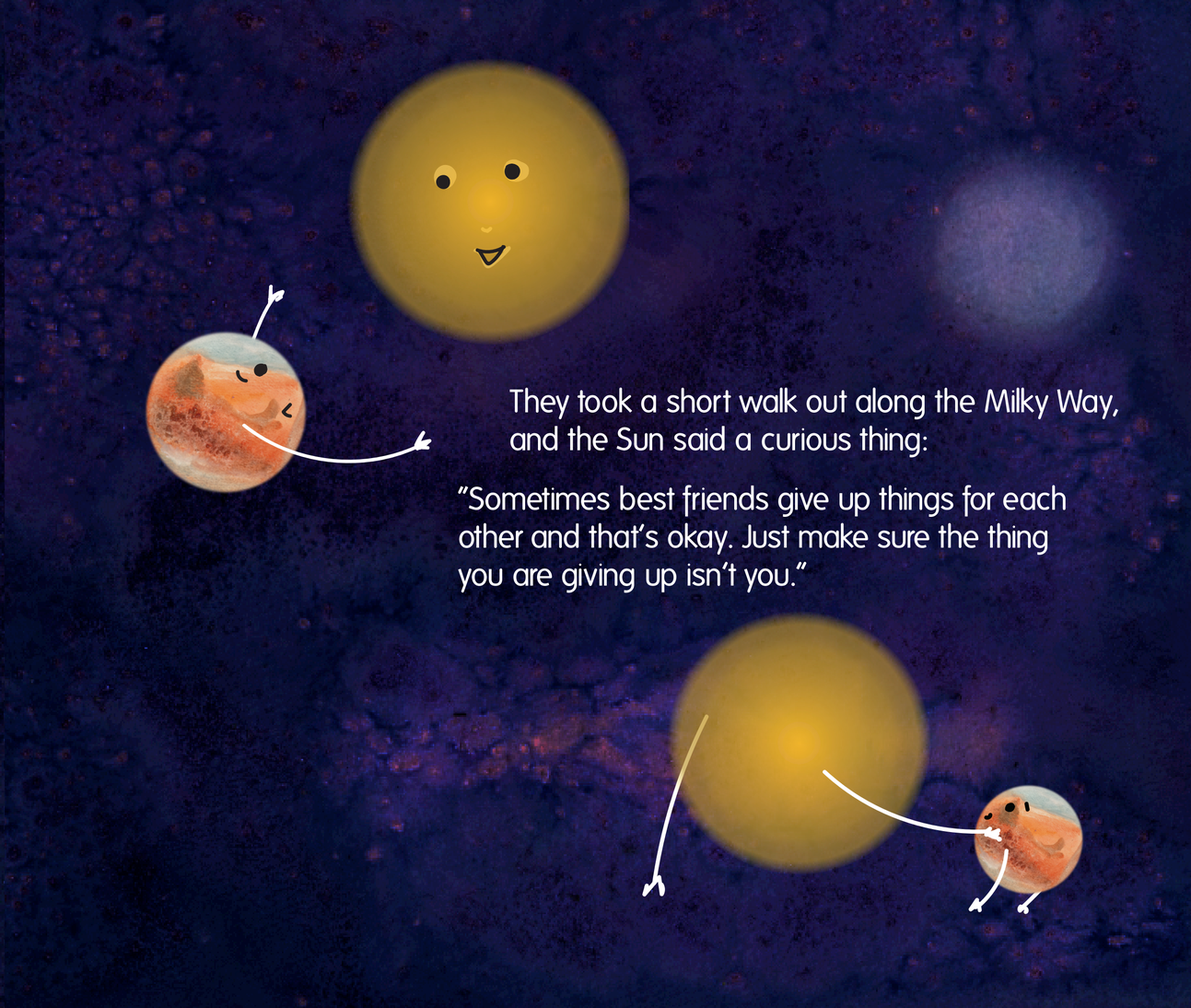




They continued like they had before, catching and chasing and do-si-doing.
But something felt different.
Mars felt distant.

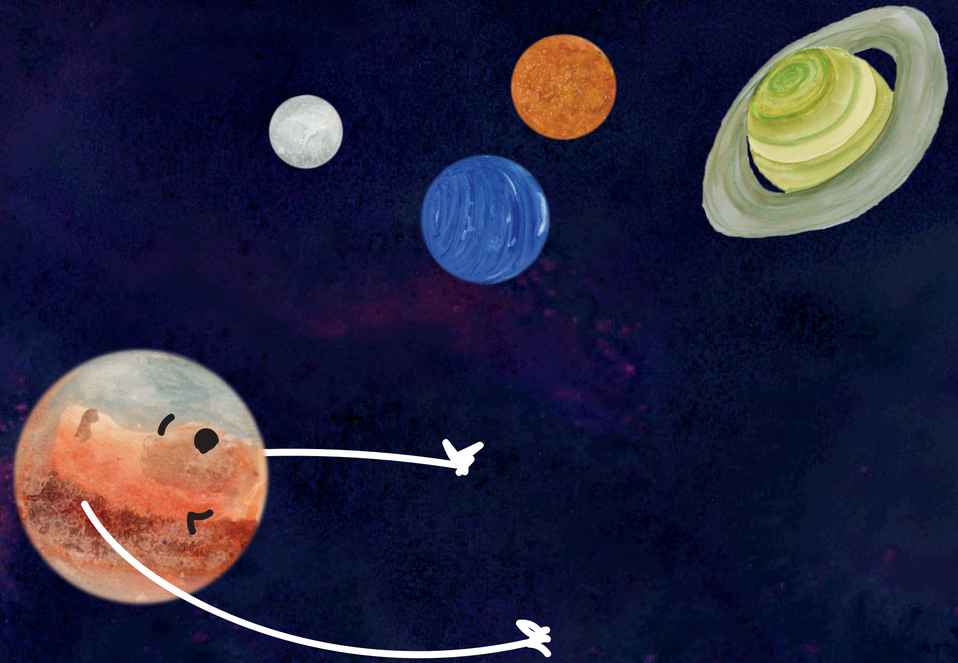
As they chased meteorites above, Mars watched Uranus, Venus and Saturn below, and it felt like a part of them was missing.

When the Sun awoke the next day, it found Mars by its side.
Mars told her all that had happened.
"I see," said the Sun. "How do you feel?"
"Earth is happy," Mars replied.
"But you don't seem very happy."
"Yeah I don't know why," Mars said with a sigh.
"If Earth is happy then why aren't I?"

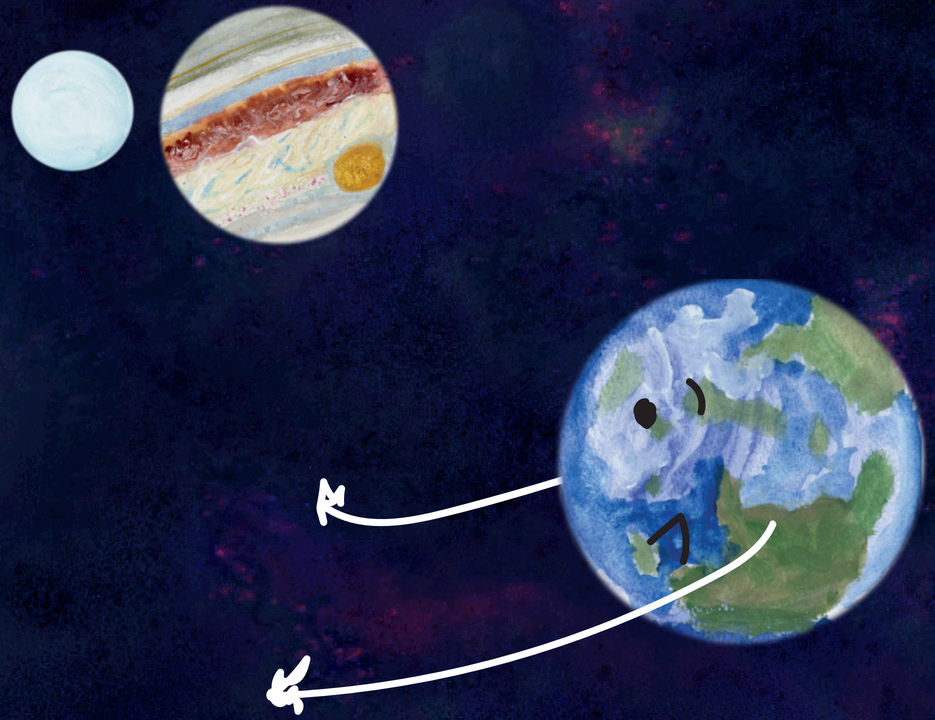


They took a short walk out along the Milky Way, and the Sun said a curious thing:

"Sometimes best friends give up things for each other and that's okay. Just make sure the thing you are giving up isn't you."



So Mars searched far and wide
with a hop in its skip and a skip in its stride,
searching for Earth to tell it the news.



Earth found Mars first, and reached for a hug.
"I'm sorry I walked out on you," Mars said.
"I just wanted to make more friends."

"And I'm sorry I didn't let you," said Earth. "I was just afraid I was going to lose you."



"You will never lose me," said Mars with a smile. "We will always be the best of friends."





Hallie Olson grew up in California and is a rising freshman at Tulane University. She has a passion for visual communication and early childhood education. She pursued these interests in her film class and as the photo editor of her high school's student newspaper. In her free time she enjoys painting, dancing, exploring new places, trying new foods, and working as a swim instructor.

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