



# The Universe



"I'm going to win," Beth muttered through gritted teeth, as her eyes burned in pain. They strained to stay open, her pupils staring into the reddening ones of her best friend. Artemis grinned, tears brimmed around her eyes, but still, she did not blink. "How long has it been?" Arty asked, a whisper barely audible. "Dunno?" She replied not daring to look at her watch, "Maybe 40 minutes". Her eyes widened subtly, in disbelief.

"So does that mean we're about 15 minutes from breaking the world record?" Artemis laughed softly, trying not to let her eyes shut, despite the obvious pain. "Yep," Beth answered confidently, bringing her hand up to wipe her forehead, being careful not to cover her vision. Beth's eyes stung and she bit down on her tongue, not wanting to forfeit the competition. The minutes dragged by slowly, almost as if time was mocking them, laughing in their faces. The drumming of an alarm blaring from Beth's phone yanked her back into reality, a sweet sensation of knowing what they had just achieved.

"Did you see that?" Artemis gasped suddenly, seemingly staring right through Beth. "See wh-?" Beth stopped abruptly. A flickering of light tried to catch her attention out of the corner of her eye. "I think we can stop now, we're probably just hallucinating due to lack of blinking," Beth laughed nervously, not truly believing what she had said. Artemis nodded her head and finally let her eyelids drop feeling relief. Beth did the same, blinking repeatedly as if she had been deprived of water. She opened her eyes and suddenly everything seemed wrong. The room seemed to have glitched, like in a video game or scratched DVD when its playing. Scattered around the room were pieces of space. A mixture of torn up bits of stars and planets and even galaxies, looking like shredded bits of paper.

"Are you seeing this?" Beth shouted but her voice sounded far away, not really there. "Yes, what is happening? Why are there weird lines around us?" Arty wheezed, grabbing for her inhaler. Beth blinked, confused by the last part. Lines? She thought. Where? And then she saw them, reality cracking right in front of her. The universe was falling apart, and her mind was going mad at the very thought that this might not be a dream. All of the pieces began to spin and then in one final bang, a hand plucked something small from in front of the girls. The fingers unclasped, and there, floating in its palm was the Earth, literally plucked out of existence. Then everything went black, and she could feel the floor fall from underneath her, existence ripping away, no longer there.

