

10 Minutes Left in the Stars

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The moon luminesced, displaying its milky glow on the soft, rippling lake. Kayaks and fishing boats simultaneously began to return to shore as the cold midnight neared, signalling the end of the day.

I dug my fingers into the wet grass, as if I held nature's hand. I was too cowardly to hold his hand instead.

"Clay," my best friend George called, "It's getting late. If I stay up too long, I'll be late to the airport tomorrow." He said this with a smile. I knew he didn't want to leave the stars either.

I knew he wanted to stay, but I also knew that he couldn't.

The sky hovered above us like an idyllic painting -- the clouds, soft brushstrokes of grey and white; the stars, tiny splatters of leftover moonlight; and of course, the moon. It was a breathtaking waxing gibbous today. Tomorrow, on George's end, it would be a waning gibbous.

"We won't even get to see the same moon," I croaked, trying to hide the aching in my throat. I turned to George, sharing a painful smile with him. "Or the same stars."

"Just take photos and send them to me, stupid," he said jokingly, releasing a laugh. "Do we have to see the same stars to go stargazing together?"

"That's the thing, George. We won't be together." I said before I could stop myself. It was too late to complain now, yet I still did it. But my best friend was moving back to England tomorrow. Hell, not even tomorrow -- in 6 hours. He has 6 more hours to stay.

But he had only 10 minutes left with me.

George's broad smile faded. "Don't say that," he said in an unsteady voice, "Please don't say that!"

He looked away from the sky above us and fixed his gaze onto me instead. He glared desperately at me, as if asking for something. "Say something else. Anything. Tell me how pretty the stars are, how much you love the moon

phases, tell me how much you love to stargaze... tell me what you want."

What I wanted, he wouldn't give me. What I could've given him, I never did.

My phone screen lit up. 11:55 p.m. 5 minutes.

I had 5 minutes to tell him everything.

"George..." I have to say it. Come on, Clay, you won't have a second chance.

George waited. "We don't have any longer than what we have. 4 minutes, Clay--"

"I love you."

Silence.

Even the previously rustling trees had hushed. The only sounds that were left were the whipping midwinter winds and the faint traffic in the distant city.

George remained quiet as well. I know I shouldn't have done so, but I took that as an invite to say more. "Listen, George. I know I can always send you pictures of the stars on my side. But that's not the point."

The boy that sat next to me froze. His mouth hung open slightly, letting out white breaths of mist, visible against the twilight.

"There's no point in stargazing if you're not next to me. I want to watch the stars with you. Physically by my side," I confessed hesitantly, "I know it's too late. But please, please -- even if you don't mean it..."

"...say you want to be with me too."

As I awaited an answer, two ships passed each other in the moonlit lake.

I had years to tell him.

Why did waiting for the right time feel like a pathetic 10 minutes?