

# All the Shining Stars

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Alex climbed up the slide, his converses squeaking against the blue plastic. The sun was starting to set behind the unruly forest of pine trees, its fiery colours leaking into the sky. I took a breath, tasting the crisp thin air. I tasted pine and light rain, clear and sharp on my senses.

"Come on!" Alex's voice jerked me back into motion, chasing after him. He grabbed my forearms and hauled me up the slide, laughing as he spilt his Monster. The edges of his outline faded into the playground, as the focus of the Earth had been turned down until everything blended together, smoother than fresh paint. I put my can down on the rough planks beneath me, and soon my phone, playing Spotify shuffle, joined it. Alex turned around, the fluffed curls of his hair bouncing slightly before resting above his eyes.

"What song is this?" he asked. I shrugged.

"It came up on my recommendation."

"I like it," he said, grinning. A smile beckoned the tips of my mouth.

"You like all music," I told him.

"That is *not* true," he retorted. I didn't reply, raising my eyebrows. He laughed.

"Fine, fine! But I really like this one."

He picked up my phone and restarted the song, before taking a running leap off the playground tower. I took a sip of a drink, listening. I wasn't really paying attention to the lyrics, but it was some sort of love song. Steady percussion, complicated baseline, a simple melody that brought everything together in a fluid harmony. The parts all wove together better than the threads of a shirt, each note backing up the next as they snaked through my eardrums in perfect synchronisation. Yeah, it was a good song.

The bark skittered under my feet as I landed beside Alex, who'd started dancing. His ebony locks flew around his face in a frenzy as he jumped, swinging his arms and head; he looked a little silly but in the most beautifully confident way possible. I snapped out of my trance of watching him when my hand felt suddenly warm. I looked down to see it clasped in Alex's. He was still dancing, but his eyes were looking directly at me. God, his eyes. They looked like they contained the fire of a million stars, a sparkling blue colour. They were clearer than the sky, deeper than the ocean.

"Dance with me." All I could do was shout and laugh as Alex spun me around the playground. He was actually a really good dance partner when he wanted to be, and he was strong. He picked me up, I pushed on his shoulders as he spun me around over his head. The dusk breeze whistled around my head as I whirled around. I closed my eyes, listening to the music. Alex didn't put me down, and I didn't argue. I wanted to spin around up here forever, safe in his strong arms.

Me and Alex were the only people in the whole world. I felt free.

"Shit!" Alex yelled below me. I laughed as his arms collapsed, leaving both of us in a muddled heap on the bark. *I still feel it. Nothing changed once he put me down.* It felt like my head was about to burst from the dizziness, but *I still felt it.*

"Sorry about that," Alex said. My eyes found his face. I couldn't help but stare, analysing every detail. His caramel skin dotted with adorable little freckles, the acne on cheeks that he'd complained about since we were 13, his warm grin accompanied with a set of dimples. And his eyes. I couldn't get enough of that boy's eyes. I wished that one day I would be able to look into his eyes for hours, making out every speck of sparkling silver and every shade of blue.

"Why?" I asked eventually.

"Because I dropped you."

"It's fine." He smiled, turning his head to the sky. I followed his gaze, watching the pastel sky fade into twilight, stars blinking into existence. They looked like tiny pinpricks in the sky's vast blanket, reminding everyone of the light to come. Bark ran down my back as I sat up, crossing my legs and looking at the sky. Dusk purple slowly faded into blue at the corners, the inky night spreading across the sky. Alex sat up too, watching me. The music had stopped, probably thanks to my phone dying. Now all I could hear was my heartbeat, thumping to its own percussion rhythm.

"Hey, Alex."

He turned to face me, eyes glowing.

"Yeah?" He asked. I had no idea what I was doing. But something about this night had loosened the bolts I'd locked around myself.

His face was lit up in the dawning moonlight, highlighting every feature of his face. He was wearing that dopey, innocent grin that hid behind it one that held the answers of the universe. Something inside me unlocked.

"I love you."

Everything about his face changed in that split second. I saw his eyes widen, his grinning mouth opened in surprise or shock, and watched the clocks work in his head. "Cameron." His voice wavered, but it was calm and warm. His hand cupped the side of my face. When I looked at him, he wore that smile, the one that unravelled me completely.

"Yes?"

"I've loved you since the day I saw you on the bridge." I don't know which one of us leaned in first, but when our lips met, there were no fireworks. No exploding suns in my chest. It stayed completely silent. His lips were soft and warm, and I felt his hand run through my hair as I held onto him. There we were, standing in the middle of the playground at night under the starlight. I could hear nothing but the conjoined beating of our heartbeats. Intertwined, free, together. Forever.