

Three Stars

When I was little, you taught me how to find Orion in the night sky. Three stars cuddled against one another. As I grew up, I learned how to connect the stars around them, so that Orion could have legs, arms and even a face. It was the best feeling ever, to trace constellations in the midnight sky, while sitting between the two of you.

Today, I sit beside the red and white bus stop sign, watching the streetlamps draw shadows across the street. It doesn't take me long to find Orion through a gap in the broken bus stop roof, directly above me. An island of three stars. I imagine an explosion of light, a supernova, glitter dust across the sky. I always thought a supernova would be quiet. At least, that's how it was with us, when our stargazing nights became just you and me. You would try to cover me in a blanket to keep away the cold, to take my mind off her. Hot chocolate with marshmallows. Strumming the guitar till I fell asleep.

Sometimes, I watched you stare into the fridge. I saw how you lay on the couch with paperwork strewn in front of you, how you looked at the leaking ceiling and closed your eyes. How the car didn't start in some mornings, how we had to move into the rundown house in the corner of the street because we couldn't afford rent. But I wasn't supposed to notice these things. So that's exactly what I did, pretended that everything was fine. That everything will be like the fairytales that end with everyone living happily ever after.

Nothing lasts forever, I guess.

A few months later, I remember you being hours late from work. I was sitting on my bed, listening to the robotic sound of your voicemail every time I tried to ring you, my mind running in circles, hoping nothing had happened to you. You didn't see me when I opened the door that night. I didn't feel like you saw me ever again either, when you became more and more late after work, staring right through me when I had to wake up in the middle of the night to open the door for you.

There was no more hot chocolate, no more guitar. I used to sit on my bed, stroking my pillow, wishing that you would come into my room and say good night one last time. That we could have one more night of tracing constellations in the sky. That I would disappear into a fairytale. That you would talk with me, instead of locking yourself behind an invisible door.

When the bus arrives, its headlights blinding me, I tug myself and my suitcase into the back seat. The driver nods. From the side windows, I can barely make out our little home, hidden behind the two-storey houses on the street. In a few minutes, you will drive home after work and walk into the silence. Switch on the lights. Will you read the letter? I'll never know. I just hope you'll realise how long I spent trying to turn back. I still dream of Mum, and I still dream of the person you used to be. A person who'd reassure me everything was going to be okay, that healing would come with time. A person who played guitar and smiled, no matter how many things were weighing you down. A person who loved me.

The bus lurches forward, and I wave at our house, at the darkness that surrounds it. At the crumbling pieces of wood and the cracked windows. I turn back, watching the windscreen wipers blot out the red and green from traffic lights. The sign that says *Dunedin 251km*. The silhouette of the Southern Alps. The taste of hot chocolate. Orion's three stars and the raindrops that trickle down the windows onto the dark road.