

Long After You're Gone

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Baby, I'm not moving on. I love you long after you're gone. For you, for you. You would never sleep alone. I love you long after you're gone. And long after you're gone, gone, gone.

Belated Valentine's Day Challenge by FlanneryChallengesYou



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Anyone who knew Alex would tell you the strongest, most dominant part of him was his heart. Unfortunately, that was also the part of him that was failing.

Alex knew how to care for people, most of the time more than they could ever care for him back. He knew how to laugh, how to not take anything for granted, and how to live each moment like it was his last. Most of all, Alex knew how to love.

He knew how to love me more than I could ever imagine a human being could love another one.

“Hollie,” he called to me on that last day. His smile seemed so fragile. I was afraid that if I looked away for one second, it'd be gone, and he would vanish along with it.

He lifted his hand to my face and I held onto it, sinking into him. “Hmm?”

“Dance with me.”

Tears worked their way up to the corners of my eyes. He was way too weak for that. He knew this.

“Alex...”

“Now, come on,” Slowly, he got up, and started unplugging the tubes keeping him alive. I tried to stop him, but he would have none of that. Alex hated being weak and belittled, and that's exactly what this hospital did to him.

He walked over to me, taking his precious time and wiped a stray tear running down my cheek. Reaching out, Alex grabbed my hand and placed it on his heart. “Please.”

And so we did.

It was winter, one year, three months, and eighteen days earlier. I had not yet known the privilege of having an Alex Watts in my life.

In the corner of my eye, a hand shot slightly upwards. A boy who seemed like he couldn't be that much older than me smiled in my direction. No boy had ever looked at me the way he was before. Letting an opportunity with a boy who smiled like that slip away was unforgivable.

I sat alone in the corner booth, waiting for my always-late friends. The boy was not. He had a massive group of people with him, all laughing and having a good time. I finally withdrew my stare at the same time he stood up and walked towards me.

Quiet music played in the background and all around me, people were either waiting to be served or enjoying a hot meal with their families.

The boy sat down across from me. “What's your name?” was the first thing he said.

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“Hollie, I said, looking around for my friends to come and rescue me. I didn't want him to go away, but I was always braver, more apt to talk to people, especially boys as cute as this one was, with them around.”

“I'm Alex,” He smiled at me before taking two packets of sugar from the bowl to my right and stacking them adjacent to one another, so that they both balanced on each other. “Who are you here with?” he asked me, grabbing a pack of Splenda, and doing the same thing.

“Friends.”

I couldn't take my eyes off his hands. It was so significant what he was doing – building a house of cards, instead with pink and blue sugar packets – but it was an important detail I wanted to remember. The cute boy named Alex with the brown tousled hair and deep, dark eyes playing around with sugar. “A boyfriend?”

I just shook my head. “No.”

“What are you going to order?” He didn't look up from his project.

“I don't know, maybe a burger?” It was the first full sentence I ever spoke to him.

“Dance with me,” he said, finally looking up.

What was a girl to do when an Alex Watts asks her to dance with him in a restaurant full of people definitely not dancing, a slow song playing so low you can barely hear it above all the conversation taking place?

She dances.

I took that moment to breathe him in, to feel him on me, because I knew it would not last for much longer. He would not admit it, and I would not bring it up, but I was practically holding him up as we spun around the room.

We did not say a word, because no word had to be spoken.

“What if I told you not to fall for me?” He smirked down at me as he popped a french fry into his mouth. This was our diner now, and no one could say otherwise. This was our fifth time eating here in two weeks. More or less, I enjoyed his company.

“I would tell you not to fall for me.” I was joking, but also a little serious. I was leaving for college in the fall, and so it would be unfair to not give him warning. He must have meant the same thing.

He just let out a small chuckle and leaned in close. “No emotional attachments,” he told me.

My elbow was propped up on the table, and my head rested in my hand. I smiled at him, something that became easier and easier to do the more I spent time with him. “Okay.”

So, naturally, we fell in love.

Alex slightly pulled away, letting our foreheads touch. “What will you ever do after me, Hollie?” Even in his weakest moments, he found a way to joke around.

I just shrugged. “I don't know.”

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That was why. Alex was dying. It was too late. I already loved him. I already could not walk away. I sat next to him on his bed, where he sat clenching the cushion with both hands.

I nuzzled my face into the crook of his neck and hugged him with everything I had. And then I tilted my head back and I kissed him. And that kiss turned into something more than just a kiss.

â I love you,â I told him.

â Do you?â

I nodded. â Always,â I tried thinking of something I could say that was less cheesey, but there was nothing. There are certain moments that call for certain words. â Even after you're gone.â

He closed his eyes.

I wished I could take his pain away. Make him well again or switch our lives around so that I was the one who was weak, and skinny, and bald, and sick. Hardly anyone would miss me the way that he would be missed. Life is never fair.

â Alex,â I said. â Please put the tubes back on.â

He just shook his head. â If I'm going to die, it's going to be when I say, not when someone decides for me to turn off a machine.â

â Do you want me to go get - ?â

â Shh.â

His breathing was slowing. We both knew I couldn't hold him up any longer. He got back in the hospital bed, but did not replace the tubes.

We just lay there for a few more minutes, talking until he couldn't anymore. And then it was just me.

* * * * *

*Like a drum, baby, don't stop beating. Like a drum my heart never stops beating for you.
And long after you're gone, gone, gone. I love you long after you're gone gone, gone.*

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