Gone to the moon

By Alfie James

If it were true. If this were true. If I were true I'd say -

Squint your eyes and concentrate hard enough and you'll see him. He's up there looking down watching over you. That's what people would tell me when I would ask about him. He's just gone to the Moon and he'll be back soon. When I was younger I'd sit in the garden just looking up to the sky. I'd even reach out my hand and stretch it to the clouds just to see if I could touch the top of the sky and maybe you'd hold out your hand and I'd be able to touch you. Just for a few seconds. Mum would say that you couldn't. That you were too busy. You had an important job. You were up there on a serious mission to look after us and keep us safe. But you never stopped thinking about me. I’d imagine what it would be like to play football in the garden, hide and seek and how you’d spend hours blowing up the paddling pool and then chase me around the garden to throw me into it. I’d picture how you’d help me to build the biggest sandcastle at the beach and then take me on the rides on the pier even though Mum said you were petrified of going on them. How we’d giggle and laugh so much that our tummies would ache. Then you’d buy me a double chocolate 99 ice cream or the biggest bag of candy floss and mum would tell you off for feeding me too much sugar. How you’d tuck me into bed and tell me the best stories of dragons and secret treasure islands and pirates.

Even when I started my first school and was terrified of my first teacher. You know the one. He was bald and had those strange glasses that flopped down his nose and wore them cricket sweaters and trainers even when he wasn't playing cricket. I was only scared because I'd been told about how he would pick children up by their ears and swing then around his head like mini Heli choppers. And sometimes he'd even let them go. They'd go whooshing through the air never to be seen again. If you were here I would have asked you about that because you would have known. You would have told me that I'd think that he was the bestest teacher that I'd ever have by the end of the year. When my friend Tommy and I ended up fighting on the school field at break time and was sent to the head teacher's office to cool off. I imagined you'd be there telling me to calm down. That everything would be alright...and it was in the end. Tommy and I were best friends by the end of lunch break.

If it were true. If this were true. If I were true -

What's the weather like up there? What sort of food do you eat? Do you miss Nando’s and MacDonald’s? Do you have any one to talk to? I had so many questions. So many things I would want to know. Sometimes I would write you a letter. I'd even put an address on it and a stamp and walk up to the top of the estate to post it. I'd wait for you to write me back. But I knew that you couldn't. I doubt the moon had a postman or a post box. You were too busy looking after us and keeping us safe. That's the kind of person that you were. That's why I was never angry that you were never there to teach me to play football, to ride my own bike, or to enter the dad race at sports day. Because you were busy looking after us and keeping us safe. It was a tough job sitting up there on the moon. You were my hero. You were my dad.

If it were true. If this were true. If I were true -

I’d dream about you coming back home. That your mission would be over or that you'd get leave. Do you even get leave on the moon? You would have taken me out and taught me to drive and been patient when I stalled on the hill by the Tesco. You know the one! And I’d drive like an old granny down a sixty mile an hour road and you wouldn't panic. Even with all the other drivers honking their horns and over taking. You'd just laugh about it and not get stressed. You would have taken me for my first proper shave at the Turkish barbers with the barber called Dave and you would have told me how to ask Maise Reynolds out to the prom. You would have been there on my open night when I was the lead for the first time. People would say how I reminded them of how good you were on stage. They'd even say I was better! Sorry Dad. But it would have been true!

Then I started growing up. Started seeing the cracks. Things just changed. You know.

I wish I hadn't started realizing. Wish I hadn't started asking the different questions... upsetting mum. Upsetting Gran and granddad. I wish I hadn't started seeing the tears that were hiding behind the smiles in the photos. Wish I hadn't started piecing together the broken hidden puzzle. Seeing past the fake smiles. Seen how you were so happy, so successful, so popular, so in control, but so sad. How you would beat yourself up every second of the day, how you would second guess everything you said and done. How you never felt good enough. How the world crippled you with its blows and broke you inside.

I started to see the cuts on your body that you would inflict upon yourself every night before you went to bed without even realizing what you were doing. I started to see the invisible scars that you were pretending weren’t true. I started to see the pain and the struggle it took to breathe and to stay alive to face another day.

That’s when I realized it.

You hadn't gone to the moon.

Why couldn't you have listened and believed the I love you's?

Why couldn't you have believed in the hugs?

Why didn't the drugs work? Why did you think they were such a weakness?

Why did you fucking leave?

Why did you go that day knowing that you were never coming back?

Why did you do it?

*(Pause)*

If it were true. If this were true. If I were true -

You'd have known that there was more to live for. That you could love yourself. That other people love you. Even if you weren't perfect. That you weren't the brightest, sexiest guy...that you made mistakes. You would have known that things would get better in the end. There would have been a new, brighter and better day.

You would have known that something like me existed.

You wouldn’t that missed out.

I wouldn't have missed out.

If it were true. If this were true. If I were true.... you’d know...

You are loved.