

## Beneath the Stars

**Lynn Charles**

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*This contemporary romance has dimension and depth.*

*Beneath the Stars*, Lynn Charles's wonderful contemporary romance novel, connects the dots between unlikely lovers Sid and Eddie as they try to mesh their lives' eccentric orbits. Taking on serious subjects such as grief, progressive fashion, and coparenting, this gay romance is ambitious and satisfying.

On paper, Sid Marneaux and Eddie Garner couldn't be more different. Sid's mixed-race, elegant, cosmopolitan, and snappy. Eddie, a small-town fire chief, dates "dunderheads," and tries to balance his schedule with full-time fatherhood. However, under the surface, they have a lot in common: both men are mourning the deaths of women they loved whose influence they still feel in their daily lives. Eddie sees his best friend in the face of her child, who he's raising. Sid, who runs a couture business for nonbinary people and trans men, hears his mother's voice every time he sits at the sewing machine. Although their initial flirtation is sexy and light, they quickly bond over more substantial things.

Charles is an incredible writer whose storytelling keeps pace with her elegant way with words. In one sentence, she easily sets the scene. As Sid reflects on his father's declining health, he notes, "His stargazing days with his father had gone by the wayside for more important happenings on earth. The few stars he could see through the light pollution meant little to him now." Charles maintains a serious, thoughtful tone throughout *Beneath the Stars*, even during Sid and Eddie's playful courtship. The sex scenes sizzle, and the bad puns are eye-rollingly satisfying, but under it all is a reflective current that makes every action seem significant.

Although things between Eddie and Sid get off to an awkward start, and more than one flashback diverts from the primary story arc, they are an irresistible couple. Adrian, Eddie's biological son, adds a nice subplot that offers plenty of growth opportunities as well as a touch of romantic realism. Making love all night, sure—but forget sleeping in on a school morning. Charles shows that romance can be responsible, too. This contemporary romance has dimension and depth.

CLAIRE FOSTER (LGBTQ+ 2017)

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