

STARSTRUCK

Written by Elizabeth Dwyer

Feature Film / Teen Romcom / Script Stage

Logline: When Kendrick Matthews (consummate Black nerd and high school senior) posts a song and dance YouTube video asking Cassidy Jordan (international supermodel) to prom, the invitation goes viral. Still, Kendrick never dreams Cassidy will say yes... or how much it will upend their lives when she does.

Synopsis: Nerdy - but cute! because romcom - high school senior, Kendrick Matthews (think teen Baratunde Thurston meets Kadeem Hardison as Dwayne Wayne), makes an acapella video with his outsider friends, asking supermodel Cassidy Jordan to prom. The video seems like a really good idea at the time.

NYC. Cassidy (born Chandni Singh) recalls a younger Jameela Jamil. Her family's first and only scandal, Cassidy dropped out of high school and anglicized her name to pursue modeling. At 19, she's one of fashion's most famous faces. But at a fundraiser hosted by her pop superstar BFF Avery Bright, Cassidy falls into an online scandal that threatens her good girl reputation.

Central California. High school. The video now viral, Kendrick's friends Rajit, Jeremy, and Gerbil want to leave it online - girls are suddenly actually speaking to them, as is Rajit's long-time crush Austin. Kendrick disagrees. The reveal of their barbershop quartet, Chord of the Rings, is sufficiently embarrassing, and Kendrick isn't getting dates, he's getting mocked. Only Kendrick's best friend Beatrice "Bea" Brunelli has any real sense. She tells small-minded asshats like Tank (bully Stanley's self-appointed nickname) where to shove it with irresistible flair. Even though she hates the "angry Black girl" stereotype, Bea hates seeing Kendrick picked on even more, because she harbors very secret, very romantic feelings for him.

In NYC, Cassidy's obnoxious, handsome manager/ex-fling, Jimmy Wilder works to fix the leaked video that makes it look like Cassidy snorted heroin at Avery's charity event (spoiler alert, she didn't). Jimmy's solution: Kendrick's viral prom invitation. Jimmy insists saying yes is PR Gold - restore her image! save her career! Later, Cassidy and Avery decompress on the roof. The comfort of Avery's friendship is definitely maybe totally platonic, because the last thing Cassidy needs is to be secretly in love with her best friend.

Looking for release, Kendrick browses hot cosplay girls online. Startled, he realizes one of them is Bea. Just when he decides to... unzip... Bea walks in. Awkward! Driving to Jeremy's for Dungeons & Dragons, they make terrible small talk in Bea's car. They put on Lizzo to fill the silence, which is dumb because Lizzo is obviously singing about sex. Kendrick gets a call from Jimmy, dismisses it as a prank. Then he gets a call from Oxford. His fellowship to attend a new program in partnership with the Sorbonne is in jeopardy, all because of the viral videos (his and Cassidy's). But then Cassidy posts another video accepting Kendrick's invitation. Kendrick faints. Now he has two super great options: Put his fellowship at risk, or be known as the guy who sang-asked Cassidy Jordan to prom and then turned her down when she said yes.

Cassidy's estranged mom Parizad offers a tenuous olive branch, but only if Cass can promise her "confused" sexuality is a thing of the past. Kendrick and Cassidy's arranged, artificial meet-cute feels arranged and artificial. Cassidy lightens the mood with a flour fight, and Kendrick relaxes. The unlikely friends dodge paparazzi and post cute Insta stories, then bond for real over East Indian food and talk a lot about their best friends. Casually scrolling, Kendrick sees Tank mocking him and Cassidy. In an afro wig and gold chains, Tank's friend smears shoe polish on his face. Kendrick tenses. Cassidy wants to call them out on Good Morning America. Kendrick firmly declines. During their scheduled appearance on the show, the two new friends have a sweet make up moment, and on camera it looks like chemistry.

Back in California, Bea watches Kendrick on GMA. When a shy jock named Shane asks Bea to prom, she says yes. Kendrick isn't jealous, why would he be jealous?? He's so not jealous, he gets in a fight with Bea in the food

court at the mall. His parents find out about his compromised fellowship, and insist that he cancel prom. Kendrick's future is more important.

After reading gossip about Avery and Zac Efron, Cassidy spirals. She does shots, almost makes out with Jimmy, and tells Kendrick she can't go to prom. He tries to believe it's for the best, but really he is deeply screwed if Cass doesn't show up. Cassidy has lunch with her parents, forging a tenuous bond. From Kendrick's phone, Bea calls Cassidy to set her straight. She's mad at Kendrick, but will always show up for him. Kendrick gently and firmly tells his parents he can't live his whole life for his future, sometimes he has to live for right now.

Prom night. Avery shows up to surprise Cassidy. It's love, they don't want to hide it! Except... when Cassidy asks Avery to go public, she isn't sure she's ready. At the dance, Tank corners Bea in the hallway and comes on to her. After she tells him off, Tank harasses Bea and Shane on the dance floor. When Kendrick doesn't speak up for her, Bea calls him out. Shane might not be his fight, but what about Bea? Avery and Kendrick hatch a plan. In front of the whole school, Kendrick gives a moving speech about love and showing up for people when they need you. He quotes Spiderman. He sings a revamped version of his Cassidy song, except now it's for "Tiny Bea." It... isn't going well... until Avery Bright appears! With her ukulele! Singing along! Amid the frenzied crowd, Bea joins Kendrick onstage for their first kiss, Avery publicly professes her love for Cassidy, and random people start revealing their secret crushes, deep love for muscle cars, and passion for economic theory.

Packed into the limo, everyone revels in the epic night. Cassidy gets a message from Parizad: maybe reconciling isn't such a good idea. Mid-heartache, Cassidy's Twitter feed floods with love and support. #TeamCassivery! Kendrick gets a call from Oxford - they love his bravery and integrity and his fellowship is safe! Later, all minds are blown when the gang's D&D game is crashed by a Level 22 Rogue Necromancer. Apparently mega-nerds come in all shapes and sizes - even international supermodel.

Writer's Note: As a lifelong romantic comedy devotee, when I discovered films like BETTER THAN CHOCOLATE and THE INCREDIBLY TRUE ADVENTURE OF TWO GIRLS IN LOVE, I felt my growing, gay heart burst with revelation. No matter how much I adored them, none of the romcoms I watched growing up reflected (i.e., normalized) queer love.

STARSTRUCK is a modern-day fairytale where a girl is the prince and everyone gets rescued. It's a movie I want my daughter to see, illuminating the awesome, terrifying, magic of teen romance. It's a movie for my nephews, so they see themselves represented beyond the limited, cliché, and harmful stereotypes of what it means to be a Black boy in this world. STARSTRUCK is a story I could've used when I was young and scared and unsure of myself. A story that tells teenagers from all walks of life that they are vibrant, beautiful, and worthy of love.

Contests: *Semifinalist (Top 8) – ColorCreative / Powderkeg Teen Movie Contest, Semifinalist – Creative Screenwriting Unique Voices*

Comps: TO ALL THE BOYS I'VE LOVED BEFORE | LOVE, SIMON | BOOKSMART

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