

Your Heartbeat

Your Heartbeat

By : storyofmylife

Lauren and Jayson's story continues...but is it what you expect?



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Your Heartbeat : Chapter 1

Preface

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As I drove down the interstate; not daring to look back for fear of turning around, I listened intently to the silence. It disturbed me. Even when he had been with me; in total silence it didn't feel like this. This was an empty, eerie kind of silence. The kind you get when you know something's not right. I turned the radio on and tried to get into the upbeat hip-hop song that I actually used to like. Still, my little green Mustang felt empty. Frustrated, I turned the radio off and took a deep breath to steady myself. I wouldn't lose it, I wouldn't cry. But then, I was pulling over and leaning my head against the steering wheel. Sobs came, heavy and loud as I cried. My head was pounding and my nose was running. Still, the tears wouldn't stop, because, in that moment, I realized why the silence wasn't welcome: it was missing his heartbeat.

Chapter 2

I heard the familiar honking of a horn and ran outside, my duffel bag swinging on my shoulder.

"Hey!" I said enthusiastically as I sat down next to him.

Jayson smiled, "Hey," he said as he leaned over to kiss me.

We pulled away from my house in his red pickup truck and headed to school. Today was going to be a rather uneventful day. A chemistry test and talking with Sophia about her birthday plans, but after school was soccer practice, that, I was looking forward to.

It was mine and Jayson's senior year of high school and both the boy's and girl's soccer team had made it to state this year, with a lot of hard work and devotion from the whole team, captains especially.

Soccer was our passion; both of us loved it and had pushed our teams extra hard this year. As a result, we were doing better than everyone expected and the local paper had even done an article about us.

Jayson and I went everywhere together. We had our teams practice together often and wherever one of us was, the other was, we'd have it no other way.

We had been best friends ever since we were seven, when the Purple Panthers soccer team picked us both. We had excellent skills even then, and were placed as forwards, which is where we still prefer to play.

Now our school was all psyched for the big game in a few weeks and our teams were working harder than ever. This was our last year of soccer for the Cheetah's and we were going to show everyone what we had.

The day passed in a blur of papers and assignments and soon we were onto the field.

"Warm-up time!" I yelled out to the teams. Jayson and I had decided to do a half hour of warm-up together today before his team would go off to the other field so we could work on our offense.

The kids shuffled their feet anxiously as I explained the warm-ups, "We want hard work today. No slacking or we will double everything! I want you running ten suicides; give it all you've got. Start from the end line and go to the goalie box, then back, then to midcourt, then back, then to the other goalie box, then back, then to the other end line, then back. Ready, Go!"

Jayson and I took off running with our teams, we stayed behind our slowest players yelling encouragement the whole time, "That's it, four more!" I screamed to Maddie as she struggled to make it halfway through the suicides. Finally, we all finished and Jayson took over.

"Now I want you all to stretch out your legs," Jayson instructed as we sat down and touched our toes.

Jayson went on to list a few more warm-ups, "Squats, sit ups, push-ups, leg lifts, star jumps, mountain climbers, and step over's."

When we were all loosened up and breathing hard Jayson instructed his team to jog out to the other field. He turned to me and kissed me on the forehead before going.

"Aw," rang out the girl's on my team.

My face flushed, they did this every time, "Alright, alright," I said.

They laughed and we huddled together. I explained to them a new play I wanted to try and instructed the girls to go out on to the field while Greta and I watched.

Greta was the assistant captain and we got along pretty well. We balanced each other out and made sure the other one didn't get too much playing time.

We knew who our best players were, Maddie in the goalie box, Ali and Samantha as defenders, and so on.

Soon we had our starting line-up decided and split it up.

She took the starters to work them together. I took our second string. We mixed it up for the last half hour of practice as well. After three hours of soccer, we were done for the day.

"Go Team!" we shouted, our hands together as we ended the practice. It had been a good one and Jayson now sat in his truck waiting for me. His practice had ended five minutes earlier and he watched me as I walked over to him.

"Looks good," he said to me as I got in.

"Thanks, I was worried about that offensive move at the end, but it's alright, you think?"

"Definitely," he smiled.

I leaned over to hug him and he said, "So, where to?"

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I paused, "Well, it is Friday so somewhere fun, but first, to my house so I can shower."

"Alright," he said.

Five minutes later I unlocked my front door and ran upstairs. I knew he had clothes too, and would jump in the shower when I was done. Dad and mom had been on vacation this past week, mom having quit the PTA after Emi got to junior high and dad taking a break from farming for a few years. They were, in a sense, "retiring". They had plans to go many places and see many things; right now they were in Washington D.C. to go sight-seeing. Emi was staying with Bella and Mason.

I washed up quickly and wrapped a towel around me. I walked to my room and saw Jayson sitting on my floor, "I'm done," I said. He nodded and got up. Seconds later I heard the water running again.

I slipped on a pair of jean shorts and a purple v neck. I clasped a long, beaded black necklace on my neck and took out my black boots. I pulled my long brownish hair into a ponytail and sat on my bed.

Jayson came out of the bathroom five minutes later shaking his shaggy hair. He was in plaid shorts and a blue tee shirt. His blonde hair was over his eyes and he flipped it out.

"Hey," I said, standing up to kiss him.

He kissed me back, "Hey there,"

I grabbed his upper arms with my hands to pull him closer. We kissed for a long time; his breathing uneven and his hands unpredictable until I pulled away, "Let's go," I said.

Chapter 3

As Friday came we pushed our teams extra hard. We knew that after this week was over, we only had one more week to perfect our plays.

"Run, run, RUN!" I screamed at Maddie as she struggled to make it down the field.

She panted as she made it to the goalie box, "I am running,"

I sighed, "I know, but if you are goalie you have to improve your agility,"

It was the end of practice on Friday and while Greta had the rest of my team, Maddie and I were concentrating on her important role as goalie. She was an excellent one, but speed was a problem.

She tossed her short brown hair out of her eyes and set her face with determination, "Tell me what I need to do, I'll work on it this weekend."

I smiled, "That's the way to be,"

Just then, Jayson came up, tired from his practice he hugged me and said, "Working on speed issues, are we?"

"Just a little bit, why? You have any suggestions?"

He smiled, "I might."

"Well spit it out, I'm having problems here!" Maddie said.

He laughed, "Alright, alright. You are concentrating on distance, running the field and probably miles otherwise, correct?"

"Sure," Maddie agreed.

"Well, all the area you really have to cover is this little box," he said, pointing to the faded white paint lines, "so if I were you I'd be working on shuffling my feet, getting from here to there fast. And I'd work with someone firing their shots into the box, then you can concentrate on what really matters, stopping the ball."

Maddie smiled, "Thanks! I'll have Markus work with me on it this weekend,"

With that she jogged off, "Thanks for that dear," I said hugging him.

"Mhm, no problem," he said, his head buried in my hair.

"So, mom and dad are still out of town and Bella invited us over to dinner, you up for it?"

"Of course," he said.

He dropped me off at home to shower and get ready and promised to be back in two hours. I walked into the silent house and jumped in the shower. It was a nice night, so I wore a black and white flowing skirt and a white tee shirt. My shoes were silver and matched my earrings Mason had gotten me. I glanced out longingly to the driveway, my green Mustang, Mason's sweet sixteen present for me, sat there, almost completely undriven. Mom and dad had wanted me to keep it nice for college. Having a brother who made music for a living was rewarding. Still, I really wanted to drive it, so when Jayson got there, two hours later, I begged.

"Please, please, please!" I said, giving him my cutest smile.

He sighed, "Alright, just don't wreck it or your dad will hate me,"

I shrieked with excitement, "Thank you!"

I sat in the driver's seat and turned the key. I slowly backed out and got onto the main road as Jayson reached for his seatbelt.

"What's that for?" I asked.

He laughed, "Don't get mad hon. but you're driving scares me."

I shrugged, simply happy to be driving. All too soon we were at Mason and Bella's apartment.

We walked up the three flights of stairs to make it to their door. I knew that they were looking at houses, waiting to get settled before they had kids, still the apartment bugged me, it was too small for them.

"Lauren!" Bella exclaimed, hugging me.

I smiled, "Hey, how are you?"

"Oh, great. Emi's been having a good time with us, and Mason and her are making tacos right now,"

"Sounds interesting," I said and she laughed.

Her and Jayson exchanged "hello's" and soon we were all in the living room chatting. Finally, Mason and Emi announced the tacos were done.

"Let's eat," Bella said, clapping her hands together once.

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We all sat at the dinner table and shoveled food onto our plates, then Mason cleared his throat and we all bowed our heads to pray, "Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for this day you have given us. For the wonderful people we are surrounded by, and the food you provided us with. Amen"

Mason and Bella had become rather religious since the wedding. Bella had been eager to share her faith with Mason and Mason had been eager to learn. Jayson went to church every Sunday as well, and tried every week to get me to come too. I assured him I would, just not yet.

The food was great and Emi sat silently through the meal. When we were done eating, I took her aside, "Hey Emi, what's wrong?"

"Nothing," she said, shuffling her feet to the side.

I sighed, "Emi, you can't lie to me, you know it doesn't work,"

A tear ran down her face, "It really is nothing, just that, we went to the pool the other day and I had to wear a tee shirt over my swimsuit because it doesn't fit anymore,"

"Oh Emi," I said, hugging her, "It's alright."

"No, it's not! I weighed myself Lauren." She whispered, "I'm five foot four inches and I weigh a hundred and eighty pounds,"

I felt increasingly sorry for my sister; she was always super skinny, in dance lessons and constantly moving. But now her metabolism was slowing down and she had quit dance. Food was her new love and it showed. I hugged her closer, "This summer I'll help you. When you get to high school next year, you won't look the same," I reassured her.

"Promise?" she asked.

"Yeah," I said, smiling.

The rest of the night went well and soon Jayson and I were saying our "goodbyes."

In the car as we were driving away, I turned the radio off. Jayson went to turn it back on but I stopped him.

"But we need music," he complained.

"No we don't" I said.

"You do this all the time!"

I smiled, "Want to know a secret?" I asked.

He looked at me, "Sure,"

"Alright, sometimes I turn the radio off so I can hear your heartbeat better."

He smiled at me, "I love you."

Chapter 4

Sunday morning woke me with my cell phone ringing. I flipped it open, knowing the person before he said a word, "Hey Jayson," I said.

"Lauren! Glad you're up. We are getting ready for church, want to come?"

I sighed, "No thanks, it's not that I don't want to, but with soccer and all, I'm just really tired. Maybe next time,"

"Alright," he said. And that was the thing about him; he never pushed me to go with him; even though I had only gone on Christmas Eve for the last two years.

It wasn't that I didn't believe in God, I just wanted to put it off for a little bit. Religion could wait, soccer tournaments couldn't.

I stayed in my pajamas all day and relaxed. The next five days would be extremely challenging. Then the tournament on Saturday, when it was over a load would be taken off mine and Jayson's shoulders and we could enjoy the last couple months of high school in peace.

The week was blurring by and by Wednesday I had totally forgotten mom and dad would be back home.

Soccer practice was over after three hours of hard work. Thursday would be a four hour practice and Friday was going to be a half hour practice, but with strict instructions to eat healthy and go to bed early.

I walked in the front door to hear voices, "Lauren! Honey, we're home!" mom exclaimed.

I hugged her, "Missed you two. How was vacation?"

"Oh just amazing," mom gushed.

Dad ruffled my hair, "It was fun, a great place I'll tell you,"

Emi walked out of the living room, a cookie in her hand and said, "I baked dinner tonight too!"

"Emi, that's great," I said encouragingly. I knew that as much as eating was a problem of hers, depression was bad too, and any activity she enjoyed I should support.

"How's Jayson doing?" mom asked. Her and dad had always loved Jayson and expected we'd be together eventually.

"Oh good, busy with soccer like me," I said.

"Well, we look forward to your tournament." Mom smiled.

"Yeah, and after it ends, I'll be going to Jayson's to catch the second half of his," I said, to avoid confusion later when I took off right after my game.

Mom looked at me questioningly and I quickly explained, "But when his games over our teams are celebrating together, so don't worry, I'll be with the girls,"

As much as they loved Jayson, mom was always worried I spent too much time with him. She frequently invited my soccer girlfriends over to "balance out" my friendships. I didn't mind, but I had to be with Jayson almost always. I loved him.

Thursday came and I was proud of my team, they gave it everything they had and I knew they wanted to win just as much as I did.

"Maddie, way to be!" I yelled from across the field.

She smiled, "Thanks Lauren! I listened to your Lover over there; he's smarter than he looks,"

I laughed; her humor was always what our team needed to keep us from being too intense. After an excruciating four hours of soccer we all collapsed onto the field and wearily cooled down. We headed to our cars, tired but accomplished. We were confident that Saturday would be a good day; we were giving it a hundred percent.

Jayson's team looked good too, he wasn't as confident, but that was just his nature, I knew that on game day he'd be more pumped up than any of them. He was being cynical right now, and hoping for third place.

"Jayson, hope for number one," I sighed.

He smiled slightly, "But I don't want to be disappointed,"

I shook my head at him and left him in silence, the only sound in the car was our hearts beating fast from soccer practice, and in perfect sync with one another.

Chapter 5

Friday after practice was Sophia's birthday party. She had gotten to her senior year last year without enough credits so; since she really had no future plans and most of her friends were my age anyway, she decided to come back one more year. She was young for her grade anyway, and this was her eighteenth birthday. She still partied harder than almost anyone I knew but I promised I'd stop by for a little bit before it got too wild. I had the excuse of my tournament the next morning to assure me I'd be home by eight oh clock. Jayson wasn't going; his team was hanging out for a few hours to make sure they were eating right and to keep them away from Soph's party.

I was going to the party to get my girl's to leave by eight, and to make sure they didn't drink.

"You take the left, I'll take the right," I said, motioning to the big living room where people were dancing. It was now seven forty-five, and Greta and my job as ushering the team out was beginning.

"Maddie!" I yelled, as I spotted her, "Breath check,"

She breathed heavily in my face and I coughed, "That smells *awful!*" I exclaimed.

She laughed, "But not like alcohol, which is the purpose of the test."

I laughed and she headed out the door.

The party really was awesome, if I had still been my old self, this would have been the best night ever. Lights, smoke machines, and beer lined every wall. All the furniture was pushed off to the side making her extravagant living room even bigger. Probably a hundred kids danced and I saw couples sneaking up stairs, I felt bad for them, knowing that many would regret it later. Suddenly I spotted Samantha by one of the many alcohol tables.

"Samantha, what the hell?" I yelled, walking to her.

"I didn't take any," she protested.

I sighed, frustrated, "I hope not."

"I didn't" she whined.

"Breath," I said, motioning for her to come closer.

Her heavy stale breath settled over me. I grabbed her arm and dragged her outside. Greta was waiting in her car patiently for me while I went and looked for Samantha. She looked irritated at us now, as I pulled the weary Sam to her car.

"I didn't take any!" she screamed, kicking me.

"Not then, but you did earlier."

"Did NOT!"

Greta pulled Samantha the rest of the way in the car and forced her to breathe on her too, "You did," she stated.

Samantha sulked in the backseat, still denying it.

"Fine Sam, let's take you to the police station and have them test you."

"No!" she all but shouted, and that was the end of that argument.

Now I turned around to look at her and said, "Samantha, you can't do that. Especially before tournament, we've worked so hard, it's not fair to anyone, especially you."

Greta spoke up then, "Your playing time tomorrow will be cut in half."

This caused Samantha to cry and we drove her home in silence.

It was a good thing we had a strong team, because Samantha's position would need to be replaced for five minutes that were supposed to belong to her.

I fell in bed that night exhausted but excited, the next day would be awesome, I could feel my blood pumping hard already.

Chapter 6

It was a perfect morning; the dew was on the green grass and I was wide awake at six in the morning and jogging around our house in my warm-up uniform, waiting anxiously for the day's events.

At six forty-five Jayson pulled up and I hopped in with him. We were all meeting at our school at seven and then the girl's would go to their tournament and the boy's would stay and practice for a bit. They played an hour later than us, but at a different field.

"You excited?" Jayson asked grinning.

I nodded and kissed him.

We pulled into the high school parking lot ten minutes early and he turned off his car. As his hand reached for the handle, I stopped him.

"Come here for a second," I said softly.

He leaned towards me and I whispered in his ear, "For good luck," then I breathed heavily into his ear in a way that made him shiver. My lips slowly moved down to his neck and then up to his lips. His mouth was hungrily on mine and I smiled knowing I had done well.

"Enough now, if you win...there will be more," I teased.

He sighed but smiled, "Is that bribery Miss Lauren?"

"Possibly," I laughed, hopping out of the car.

As I headed towards me team he called after me, "Hey Lauren!"

"Yeah?" I asked, squinting in the sun to see him.

He smiled, "I love you,"

"I love you too" I said, and with that, I jogged off to my team where Greta was leading them in stretches.

"Ladies, are you excited?" I yelled.

A chorus of "yeah's" rang out as I helped Greta lead them in warm-ups. We stretched and did a team meeting. We reviewed our plays and worked on defense, at nine in the morning, we piled into our cars to head to the biggest game of our lives.

Maddie and I rode with Greta. I couldn't contain my excitement and was bouncing all over the car. Even Greta, who normally was the collected one of us two, was singing along with the radio and let us roll down our windows and scream. Needless to say, we were pumped.

The field was freshly painted and the other team was already doing laps around it. The game started at nine forty five and we had a half hour to get totally ready. We did some final stretching before I called them into the huddle.

"This is the biggest game of our lives," I began as the girls circled around me, "We need to give it EVERYTHING. Every ounce of energy you have I want you to put into this game. We didn't make it this far for nothing and neither did the other team, they are going to play hard, and we just need to play harder." I looked around at them, their faces were set in determination and their heads nodded with everything I said. I knew we were ready, I knew it.

Greta jumped in, "When you're on the bench, we still need your energy, yell and scream until you can't talk anymore. We are a team!" With that, everyone put their hands in, on the count of three we all yelled, "TEAM!" and then went to get our water bottles.

Greta and I were in at the beginning of the game, and it was intense. I felt my blood pumping hard as I scored the first goal and the crowd went wild. I heard mom whistle somewhere out there but was too into the game to look. By the end of the first quarter we were up, five to nothing. We took this lead to put our second string in. They played hard and gave it everything they had. After a couple minutes, we put Maddie back in to be goalie. Still, by the end of the second quarter it was five to seven; in our favour. During half time, Greta instructed me to go back in, "You keep them together out there and you know it! They listen to you, plus you are the best player on our team," I eagerly went back onto the field and helped my girl's. I assisted to them four times and made two shots myself. Our defense had never been better and by the end of the third quarter the score was five to thirteen; in our favour.

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Now we were getting tired, on the benches we sat, towels dripping with sweat, empty water bottles everywhere. Our breathing was heavy and I wanted to collapse, this had been the most intense day of my life. Still, I stood up, "One more quarter! Give it all you've got, let's not make this a close game, let's blow them away." I said.

I wasn't planning on playing the fourth quarter, I stood on the side and coached with all my might, Greta played well and Maddie only let a few goals by. I was sweating just as much on the sidelines as I was in the actual game. I counted down with the crowd at the five seconds remaining mark and then rushed out to my team to celebrate as the announcer said, "That was one hell of a game, with the end score being seven to fifteen."

I couldn't believe it, we had won. Tears streamed down my face as my teammates picked me up and cheered. Someone poured a pitcher of water on my head and balloons were everywhere. My parents came out and they had never looked so proud, "Lauren, oh honey," mom said, sniffing as she did so. I hugged them both, along with Bella, Mason, and Emi, before I asked, "What time is it?"

Mason looked at his watch and said, "Eleven fifteen,"

"Shoot, I gotta run!" I yelled, making my way across the parking lot. Bella had driven my car here for me and I hopped in and hit the gas. Jayson's game was already halfway through and I didn't want to miss the end of it.

Chapter 7

I pulled into the gravel parking lot of the high school Jayson was playing at and slammed on my brakes. I jumped out of the car and sprinted towards the field, throwing my admission money at the PTA mom as I ran through the gate. I brushed my hair back and stood on the side to watch the last five minutes of Jayson's game. His team was losing by one goal. I found my hoarse voice and began screaming with all I had left.

"Get the ball!" I screamed as Jayson ran towards it.

I couldn't help my competitive side coming out right now, "Go! Go! Go!"

Jayson was dribbling it towards their goal now. The goalie looked seriously worried, I was guessing from the look of pure determination on Jayson's face, and watched in awe as the ball arched perfectly out of his reach and into the goal.

Yes!

I was jumping up and down and yelling my heart out now, not caring that the people next to me had moved after giving me an annoyed look. I wanted Jayson to win.

His teammate, Ryan, got the ball and, with his incredible speed, whipped it into the box before anyone had time to respond.

I went wild, "Yes! You got it! You can do it! A minute left."

All they had to do was play some kick ass defense and they would have this game won.

They were all sweating, all working hard.

I saw everything from the sidelines, everything all at once. I knew what was happening before it happened. I saw everything fall into place in an unfortunate way. I began screaming again, but it seemed no one heard me. I saw it happen, and couldn't prevent it, it was the worst thing in the world.

Jayson was running towards their player, he didn't see how close he was to the goalie box, didn't take into consideration the wet, dew covered, grass. Didn't think he'd have to stop, and probably couldn't have even if he tried, he was too into the game, into what he had to do.

He slid across the grass, no one paid attention to it at first, kids fall in soccer all the time. But I knew it would be bad, I saw how he would hit.

Then his head hit the side of the goalie box with a thud. Everything stopped and they looked towards Jayson.

But I was running, at full speed towards him. I knelt down beside him.

"Call 911!" I screamed.

I heard sirens in the distance and knelt next to him. I gently placed my hand on his heart and breathed a sigh of relief as I felt his heart beating normally.

Chapter 8

"I'm fine!" Jayson protested, as the medics put him on a stretcher.

They looked down at him, "We are aware, but this is routine, just let us take you to the hospital."

Jayson sighed loudly in protest.

"Can I ride with him?" I asked the nice looking male medic.

He shook his head, "I'm sorry Miss, but that's not possible. Get in touch with his family, and you can follow us if you'd like,"

I knew better than to argue with him, and he really did look sorry. I simply nodded and got into my car. My hands were shaking so badly and beads of sweat lined my forehead. I was worried for Jayson, even though I knew he'd be fine. I felt a nagging in my chest that he wasn't out of danger.

I started my car and pulled out behind the ambulance. The beautiful day and all our accomplishments seemed minor in comparison to Jayson's injury. My knuckles were white as they gripped the steering wheel. We were on a pretty straight road. There were a few turns, but nothing too terrible. My eyes were blurred with tears and I had to keep blinking to see straight.

I began to let my mind wander, I thought about Jayson and I and all we had been through. This day would go down in our history. We would look back on this day and smile and cry together. That thought comforted me. Suddenly I sat up a little straighter in my seat. I looked around; the road was empty except for the ambulance in front of me, so why was I so worried? Suddenly, I heard it. The distinct sound of a semi horn blaring; we were getting to a corner and suddenly I slammed on my brakes. Why wasn't the ambulance stopping? What were they thinking? Of course, they couldn't hear the horn, they didn't hear the danger, and if I wouldn't have been so afraid of things I probably wouldn't have stopped. The semi horn could mean anything, but I felt it meant danger.

I took out my phone and dialed Jayson's number, it went straight to voicemail. I jumped out of my car and ran towards the ambulance, waving my arms and screaming. Stop, oh God, please stop. But they didn't, they swerved a second too late. The semi had lost control on the corner when a deer ran out in front of it. The driver swerved instinctively, right into the ambulance. I stood there, on the side of the road and watched the world stop. The impact of the semi hitting the ambulance was immediate. I saw glass flying but that didn't stop me from running towards the accident. The red and blue ambulance lights were sparkling in tiny pieces all over the highway. Pieces of the ambulance were scattered everywhere. I looked around helplessly. It was over, the accident was done. I saw the truck driver walk out of the semi, on his cell phone. I heard him talking to a nine one one operator. I ran towards the ambulance. The nice medic that I had talked to earlier, the driver, and the young nurse; I saw them all. Bloody and disfigured, I knew instantly they were dead. But there was only one person I wanted to see at the moment, and that was Jayson.

I found him on the side of the road; he had flown out the window. I ran to him and knelt beside him.

"Jayson," I whispered urgently as I turned his face towards me. I looked into his eyes and knew instinctively. He was dead.

I buried my head into his chest and sobbed.

I looked up at the sky and screamed. I screamed for a long time, my lungs went dry and I was choking on my sobs, but still I screamed.

"Why?" I asked, as I set my hand over his heart, "Why?"

His chest didn't move there was no heartbeat; never again would there be one. This realization caused more tears.

"You left me!" I screamed at him, then I broke down again, "You left me," I whispered.

The truck driver looked uneasily at me and took a step back towards his truck, "I called the hospital, they're on their way." He said.

I nodded. I was angry at him, angry at the world. What did Jayson do to deserve this?

I stood up, but my head was light from crying, I fell into the ditch as the world went black.

Chapter 9

I woke up to a sterile white room. I knew immediately where I was, just not why I was there. I heard a heart monitor next to me, beeping in time with my heart, and found an IV stuck in my arm.

I sat up, or attempted to, and was overwhelmed by my headache. Dizziness overtook me and I laid back down fast.

"Honey, are you awake?" I saw mom's worried face look down at me. I knew I should answer her, give her some relief, but I couldn't. I simply drifted back to unconsciousness. I still wasn't sure why I was in the hospital, but I didn't want to think about it, soon, sleep came my way.

Then I saw it, in a flash it was over, headlights, horns blaring, bloodied, severed bodies. All these things came to me in my dream and when I woke up; I no longer felt my cursed headache.

I didn't feel anything. I was screaming. Screaming. Screaming. Screaming. I wouldn't stop for anything. The nurse came in, then another. A doctor in a white lab coat came in, still I kept screaming. Wordless screams that meant nothing to anyone but me. And I didn't even know what they meant to me, except that if I didn't scream I thought I would die.

My heart ached, a real, physical ache, and I wanted to rip it out. Nothing had ever been more painful than this; I could feel it throbbing wildly under my skin and clawed helplessly at it. I saw my mom and dad standing in the background as nurses and doctors surrounded my trying to ease me out of my tantrum. Mom's face was tear streaked and dad had an arm around her. Emi was in a recliner chair in the corner looking terrified and Bella and Mason stood in the doorway, panic evident on their faces. I saw all these people, people that loved me and that I loved, and I knew, somewhere deep inside, I knew, that I should be calm for them. They needed reassurance, who knows how long I had been in the hospital.

Finally I managed to scream a word instead of just a scream. When the word came out, it didn't stop, it seemed as if my whole being depended on this, like I thought if I said it long enough I could fix the past, but I couldn't. Still that didn't stop me.

"Jayson!" my voice rang out, helpless and full of fear.

At this, Bella began sobbing loudly; I looked at the doctor who stared at me with wild eyes, like I was insane. I screamed at him again, "Jayson! Jayson! Jayson!" but each scream seemed more unsure until I was sinking to my arms, cradling myself, and whispering it, "Jayson? Oh, Jayson?"

The doctor and nurses left me; I figured they knew nothing could be done. They might have medicine for about anything else, but nothing would heal my broken heart. My mom came over and sat tentatively on the corner of the crisp hospital bed.

"Lauren, please honey, are you alright?"

I sobbed.

My mom whipped a tear from her cheek and then used her shirt sleeve to take away my falling tears, "Lauren, say something?"

I sniffed, "How long have I been here?"

She sighed, "Four days,"

I nodded, "Where's Jayson?"

My dad cleared his throat, "Lauren, they buried Jayson two days ago."

The room went dead silent. Nobody said anything.

My eyes began to water again, "He died, didn't he?"

Mom nodded wordlessly.

I sobbed loudly and heavily.

"He didn't deserve it, he was..... why him? Anyone but him, me, take me, please, please..."

I was crying into the pillow, rocking back and forth.

Why did Jayson have to die? Why him?

Emi walked forward, "Lauren, he loved you." She said simply.

I looked up at her, my hair was stuck to my face and my eyes were puffy and red.

"I know." I said.

Your Heartbeat

One by one my family trickled out of the room, I needed to be alone and they sensed it. I was surprised at my ability to stop my tear flow. I stood up and walked to the front desk "I'd like to go home now." I told the receptionist. She glanced up at me, "I don't know if that-" I cut her off, "I'm leaving. Thank you; goodbye." I walked out the door of the hospital and no one came after me. I didn't have to ask where Jayson was buried; there was only one cemetery in our town. I walked slowly to it. The sun was setting and it was chilly. Goosebumps covered my arms as I walked towards the green grass. I scanned my eyes over the field and saw a fresh patch of dirt. I walked to it and read the engraving silently.

*Here lies Jayson Parker Matthews
May his heart find rest
And his soul find peace
As he travels to the place
Where he deserves to be
Loved by all
As he loved all
Rest in Peace Jayson
1988-2009*

I rested my head on the cold stone and cried softly. Jayson was here, I hadn't gotten to say goodbye. I missed him. Oh God, I missed him. I didn't know what to do, but I remembered when Jayson was upset, he'd get silent. He said he was praying. So I gave it a try, "Dear God, tell Jayson I love him. I don't know why you had to take such a young innocent person. It ruined my life. Don't you see this? Why? What was the point? I love Jayson. You took him from me! How could you?" I stood up, I didn't know if God heard me, or was happy with the way I was handling the situation, but I personally didn't care at the moment. I was angry at the world. No one deserved this.

Chapter 10

My anger began to wear off as I went home. Now I was left with emptiness, it was nagging at my soul and I felt awful. I walked into my house and collapsed onto my bed.

I wasn't tired, I found. I lay there and looked up at my ceiling. I had slept for four days though, no wonder I wasn't tired. Mom and dad were downstairs; I could hear their murmured voices drifting towards me. Emi was not home as far as I knew; I briefly wondered where she was.

I stayed in bed for two days straight. I did absolutely nothing. I stared at the ceiling and was thankful I was a senior and school was out for me. Mom came up once with food but it lay there, untouched and old, after a day and a half.

I woke up on the second day of my room confinement and opened the blinds. It was a gray, cloudless day, and it was drizzling lightly. I saw my green little car parked in the driveway and decided to take a drive. I hopped in and immediately went dizzy.

This exact spot was where I had witnessed Jayson's death, from this seat. I shook my head and backed out. I drove around town once and then went back home.

Our town disgusted me, it was small and perfect and no one seemed to be mourning Jayson but me. How could they? How could people get over him? A park bench with his name on it wasn't remembering him; people would sit on it and never know who Jayson was. It angered me, these days I seemed more emotional than normal.

When I walked inside our house, no one was home. This was typical, mom and dad were out a lot and especially now that I was here, like a zombie. I looked out at our town from our living room window. I couldn't stay here. I couldn't do it. Jayson's memory would haunt me forever. I'd never forget him, but I couldn't just stay here. No, no, no.

I walked up to my room and glanced at the clock; it was twelve thirty in the afternoon. Mom and dad wouldn't be here till seven at least. That gave me time. I sat down at my desk and picked up a pen.

Dear mom and dad,

Don't worry, I am fine. I'm old enough now to do my own thing, and this is what I want. I am leaving, I am safe, I am alright. I'll get in touch with you sometime; I always know where to find you. Please don't come looking for me, you won't find me. Don't worry yourselves either, it'll all be okay.

Love, Lauren

I sighed heavily; it was short and to the point. Now they'd know I was safe at least. I wasn't planning on keeping in touch with them really, but I knew it would be easier on them if they thought that I would.

Next I wrote to Emi:

Hey little sis,

Don't worry about me, if you even are. Jayson meant the world to me, and now he's gone. I need space from this town, I'm sure you know the feeling.

Love you lots, Lauren

That one was easy to write, Emi and I weren't really close. I doubt it would even phase her much that I was gone. This next letter would be the hardest.

My hand was shaking as I picked up the pen a third time, I had to do this. But I was so scared.

Bella and Mason,

I love you two so much. You have helped me through the toughest times. Unfortunately, this time I am on my own. I'm not little anymore; I don't need to ask for your help. I'll do this one on my own, but I won't ever forget you two. Stay amazing. Keep Emi out of trouble.

I love you.

Lauren

I cried softly as I sealed the three letters in envelopes. I set them gently on my bed knowing they'd get where they needed to be.

Next I took my duffle bag and suitcase and filled them with items. All my loose money, my important papers, photos, memoirs, clothes, toiletries, and my cell phone and charger. I piled all this stuff into the back of my

Your Heartbeat

car and got in.

I needed to make three stops before I left town.

The first one would be the easiest.

I stopped at the bank and walked inside. I saw a tall blonde working behind the counter and walked up to it. I didn't recognize her which was good, hopefully she wouldn't ask questions.

"I need all my savings drawn out and I need the papers on my car." I stated.

She blinked and looked up at me, "Alright...your card please?"

I slid her over my bank card and in a matter of minutes I had three thousand dollars in cash sitting in front of me along with a manila envelope of papers labeled "car".

Even though Mason bought me the car, he turned everything over to me. He said what I did with it was my responsibility. I knew it would be safe to have the papers, just in case.

I felt accomplished as I walked out of the bank and stuffed my money in the glove compartment.

Chapter 12

I knocked on Bella and Mason's apartment door and the door swung open immediately.

"Lauren!" Bella screamed as she hugged me.

I smiled, "Hey!" I said.

She put her hands on my shoulders and stepped back, after studying my expression for a moment she said, "How are you?"

I attempted to smile again but failed, "Not so well, I just came by to see what was up is all," I said nonchalantly.

She looked at me and understanding flashed in her eyes, "Oh...well...come in come in. Mason's in the living room, I have to run to the car to get some groceries I left in there," she said.

I walked into the living room and found Mason sitting on the couch watching football, "Hey Little Lauren, how are you?" he asked, turning the television off.

I sighed, "Not well, but what's new with you?"

He leaned in, "Well, Bella and I are going to get a house!" he exclaimed.

"Mason that's wonderful," I said with as much enthusiasm as I could muster.

He hugged me, "Thanks, I hope you get to feeling better. He was a good kid,"

A tear went down my cheek; Mason knew how much I loved him.

"Thanks Mason, I...I have to go. Bye, I love you."

"Love you too Lauren," he said, worry creasing his forehead as I darted out of their house.

Tears were streaming uncontrollably now. I ran into Bella on the apartment stairs.

"Lauren! You're leaving already?!" she asked upset.

I nodded and attempted to keep walking but she grabbed me and held my shoulders firmly in place.

"Lauren, be careful. It's a big world. We love you."

I nodded again and left.

I didn't even think to ask where her groceries were.

I got in the car and breathed in deeply as I turned the key in the ignition and made my way to the last place I needed to go before I could leave; Jayson's grave.

I made it there and sat on a dark wooden bench dedicated to him. It was new and looked nice where it was, I was disgusted that something as tragic as Jayson's death cause people to build a bench in honour of him. He would have wanted something else.

I took out my last piece of light blue stationery and began writing.

Dearest Jayson,

I miss you so much. You left me, why did you do that? Life cannot go on without you. Please come back. Your memory will never leave me but sometimes I close my eyes and I see you hurt and bloody, like at the wreck. I can't deal with that Jayson, I'm not one to complain but please, please, come back. I love you, oh; I love you more than you will ever know. Why'd you leave? You were too young, much too young. You didn't deserve this, I didn't either.

Sometimes I dream about the crash. I see it all so perfectly. Those four days I was in the hospital it's all I saw, I realize that now. I could have stopped it; I had a bad feeling after all. It's all my fault, please forgive me? Your blonde hair and tan arms. The way you smiled and how when you kissed me your mouth was always a little crooked, I'll never forget things like that. Remember that time when we were younger and we were at that party? Do you remember that one night when we made the mistake that almost cost us our lives? Somehow we made it through high school never having sex again, but that one time sure scared me. I'm glad though, glad that my first and only time was with you.

I'll never love anyone the way I do you. Ever. Rest easy Jayson, I'll always be here. I wish I could tell you I'll be strong and go on fulfilling my life dreams, but they don't matter so much now that you're not here. I am going away...I am not sure how long I will be gone, but this town has nothing but bad memories. No one understands what I am going through. This town doesn't want our tainted story in their books. Am I being unfair to our little town? I can see you right now shaking your head and telling me that I need to open my

Your Heartbeat

mind some. But the bottom line is that I can't stay here. I need to start a new life.

It's a nice day out today, really. I wish you were down here with me, we'd be together I know. But are we still together, even though you're gone?

There's a bluebird singing in the tree. It would be pretty except it's too damn happy. No one can be happy when you're gone. Jayson, oh Jayson.

I'll miss you forever darling. My only thing to live for is the realization that someday we will be together again. I'll leave this town, but I'll take God with me, I know that's what you would have wanted.

I'm thinking about selling my car once I get to wherever I'm going. Every time I get in it I have awful flashbacks.

Ever wonder why people think that benches are the best way to remember someone?

Now I am just rambling because this feels like my final goodbye. I didn't get to go to your funeral. I couldn't have seen you like that anyways.

Jayson; all my love forever and eternity.

I'll love you forever,

Lauren

I slowly folded the letter so that it was immaculately in a crisp white envelope I wrote "Jayson" on it in swirly letters and knelt by his grave.

The dirt was still moist and grass hadn't grown over it yet. I dug my fingers into the dirt until I had made a tiny hole. I slid the envelope in it and covered it with dirt. I ran my finger along his name and then stood up. Needless to say, I was crying. Sobbing big heavy tears, I walked slowly back to my car and didn't look back. This was it; I was leaving everything I had ever known.

I turned onto the interstate heading towards the city.

As I drove down the interstate; not daring to look back for fear of turning around, I listened intently to the silence. It disturbed me. Even when he had been with me; in total silence it didn't feel like this. This was an empty, eerie kind of silence. The kind you get when you know something's not right. I turned the radio on and tried to get into the upbeat hip-hop song that I actually used to like. Still, my little green Mustang felt empty. Frustrated, I turned the radio off and took a deep breath to steady myself. I wouldn't lose it, I wouldn't cry. But then, I was pulling over and leaning my head against the steering wheel. Sobs came, heavy and loud as I cried. My head was pounding and my nose was running. Still, the tears wouldn't stop, because, in that moment, I realized why the silence wasn't welcome: it was missing his heartbeat.

Chapter 13

I stopped outside of a big city. Not because I necessarily wanted to, but mainly because I was almost out of gas. I wearily pulled into a gas station and filled my car. Then I parked it on the side of the street and began walking around.

I passed huge department stores and skyscrapers. It was eight oh clock at night which meant I had been driving for some time. Mom, dad, Bella, Mason, and Sophia had all tried calling me but I had hit ignore every time.

It was almost dark outside as I walked, nonchalantly around. I passed many people. They say the city's scary at night, but I found it peaceful. Everything was glowing with neon signs and I realized I needed a place to stay. I wasn't sure if this is where I wanted to "settle" but I knew that I needed a place to rest for the night.

I found a fancy looking, five star hotel and checked in. The lady at the front desk looked at me curiously but asked no questions other than if I wanted a smoking or non smoking room.

I walked quietly up the stairs to my room. I slid the key in and collapsed onto the bed. I hadn't realized how tired I was until just then, but I drifted off into dream land.

I woke up the next morning at eight. I was surprised I had slept so well with all the city noises, but I had. I realized I had left everything in my car and walked out to go find my car. I figured I could drive it back to the hotel and change and shower before noon, which was check out time. I found my car parked outside, right where I had left it. I looked around, I was standing in front of "KidzClub" which looked to be a daycare. Or maybe a party place?

I was obviously wrong on both accounts. I watched a young woman struggle out of the automatic doors with three little kids and her arms filled with bags.

"Mommy, I want ice cream!" one of the little boys whined.

She sighed and gripped his hand tighter. She was pushing the baby girl in a stroller and had the two boys on either side of her. She looked frazzled to say the least.

"No Jason, I told you, not today,"

I froze. I wasn't sure why other than that she had just called him Jason. But I turned around and introduced myself.

"Hi, I'm Lauren" I said to her.

She looked startled but stopped and said, "Steph,"

I smiled, "Your kids are cute,"

She looked down lovingly at them, "Thank you,"

"Where are you headed?" I asked her.

"Oh, to catch a cab. I have to get home for lunch."

I looked her over, she was pretty. Her blonde hair was long and in a braid and she was young, maybe twenty five. I noticed she didn't have a wedding ring.

"I can give you a ride, if you'd like." I said. My confidence was surprising me.

She looked surprised, "You have a car?"

I nodded towards my mustang.

"Well then, thanks." She said.

I opened the trunk and scooted my bags over to make room for Steph's purchases. Then she buckled her kids tightly into the back and got up in front with me.

"Where to?" I asked, backing out.

"It's a suburb, twenty minutes away. Just take that left," she replied.

As we were driving she asked, "So what's a young girl doing in the city with a car?"

I laughed, "What? Do most of you not have cars?" I said.

She smiled, "No, everyone uses the subway or a cab,"

"Figures," I began, "No, I'm just trying out some new things," I said carefully.

"How old are you?" she asked.

"I'll be eighteen next month,"

Your Heartbeat

"Huh," she said. We sat in silence for a few moments. The traffic was beginning to thin and she pointed me to my next turn. Her kids were in the backseat chatting animatedly about dinosaurs.

"So, why'd you stop and talk to me?" she asked.

I hesitated, "I...I heard you call him Jason. That was my boyfriend's name...he's dead now," I said.

She nodded and said, "I'm sorry to hear that. My husband died last year. Left me with these three, it's hard, you know? Getting by and all."

"Yeah," I said softly.

We pulled up slowly to her house. It was new and looked really nice. Two stories' and a big backyard with a swing set.

"Come in," she instructed me.

I smiled and grabbed her bags.

The inside of her house was even more magnificent than the outside. The ceilings were high and as she showed me around, I counted eight bedrooms.

"So, the four of you live here alone?" I asked, sipping the hot chocolate she had made.

"Yep, Mark made a lot of money and we are doing just fine, financially. Plus my parents are plenty rich. I shouldn't have to work, that's their philosophy. But I write for a parenting magazine. It gets to be hard, with these three. And plus, keeping the house clean and taking care of the puppy we just got, I can't handle much more."

I nodded sympathetically.

"Now what about you?" she asked.

I set my mug down slowly, "Well....After Jayson died I couldn't stay in my town. So I left...I suppose you could say I ran away. I've only just gotten here last night."

"What are your plans? For work and living?" she asked interested.

I hesitated, "I...I don't really know. I guess...I'll have to get a job. I don't have too much money. And I was planning on selling the car..."

She looked at me carefully for a minute, then bit her lip, "Well Lauren, I have a proposition."

"Yes?" I asked.

"What if, I employed you to watch Ellie, Jason, and Brett? You'd be like their nanny. I'd expect you to watch them and take care of them. That basically means that I want them up by eight and asleep by nine. I want them bathed and taken care of. I want one activity a day at least. I want you to feed them too. I also would want you to take care of Princeton, our puppy. Also, you'd have to keep the house clean. I'd give you Saturday off. Sunday, I'd expect you to go to church with us. I'd watch my kids....two hours a day that you could have as free time or time to clean and watch Princeton. What do you say?"

I stared, open mouthed at her, "Are you serious?"

"Well, yes. Oh, and I'd pay you...a hundred dollars a week. I know it's not much, but I'll let you live here and eat our food."

"Yes! I accept!" I said excitedly.

"Good, now I like you, but if you aren't doing a good job, I will fire you."

I smiled, "Don't worry,"

"Oh, and one more thing Lauren,"

"Yeah?" I asked.

"Keep the car, it'll come in handy."

Chapter 14

I practically ran out to my car to carry my stuff in. Steph had showed me my room and it was amazing. I had the turret room at the top of the house. It was small and cozy and the walls were a dark royal purple. I had a decent sized bed and all the furniture was cherry wood.

"Go ahead and get settled then," Steph told me smiling.

This was the last trip I was planning to make to my car, just a final scan to make sure I didn't leave anything in there. I was looking around when I ran my hand under my seat and pulled something out.

I gasped softly as I saw a red diary and a Bible tied together with a ribbon that said "Lauren". I hadn't put this here, and I recognized the handwriting as Bella's.

Suddenly, my mind flashed back to when I had said goodbye and how she had ran out to get groceries. She must have put this in my car instead. I gingerly opened the diary.

On the first page, in Bella's immaculate handwriting was a letter.

Dear Lauren,

I saw the look on your face today and I know all too well that you are planning to run away. So, why you are saying your goodbye to Mason, I am hurrying to write this to you. I had been meaning to give you this diary and Bible a while ago, but things got in the way and I had always postponed it. Now though, I won't. I'm not much for writing letters so I will get to the point. Be careful Lauren, we will all miss you more than you'll ever know. Please come back to visit, you're going to worry your parents sick. Also, I feel like I should leave you with something, so I am telling you what Mason won't know until tonight, I am pregnant. You're going to be an aunt Lauren! I hope you visit occasionally because our child will be missing out if they never meet you. Now, I know you aren't big into writing, but I know you are good at it. This diary is for you to write whatever you want in it. I have one too and I write letters in it. Mostly to God, it's a good way to talk to Him and organize all your thoughts. This is why I included the Bible, read it please Lauren. It will help you more than you will ever know.

I'll stop writing now, be strong. And remember that running away isn't always the answer. But don't think I think you're running away, I believe you know what you're doing.

Love Always,

Bella

I was crying as I folded the letter back up again. I opened the Bible and flipped through the pages. The sun was setting and the wind was picking up, I was shivering, but still I sat out there. I had been there for well over an hour, crying and praying and thinking, when Steph turned on the porch light. She didn't come get me, or say anything; she just turned on the light. I knew she understood I was having trouble leaving my past. Maybe that was it; I didn't have to leave Jayson behind, or anyone for that matter. I was confident I would still visit my family, but I knew I'd never move back.

Chapter 15

"Lauren, I want ice-cream!" Jason yelled.

I laughed, "When we're done,"

I pushed Ellie on the swings as Jason and Brett played tag. We were at the park today and Steph had just called and said she was on her way.

It was a Friday afternoon and the sun was shining. The kids had argued over what to do today, but in the end I had decided on the park.

Princeton was running around and began barking when Steph walked up. She smiled at me and went to go play with the kids. I sat on the bench and took out my diary. I wrote out my prayers to God and then wrote to Jayson.

It was the three month anniversary of the day I had left, I had called mom once to assure her I was alright and it killed me to hear her so worried. I promised I'd come back home sometime soon but I made no references to when.

I didn't know when I wanted to go visit, I didn't call it home anymore, home wasn't what that place was to me. Home was defined differently to everyone; to some people it was a building, a street number, a certain door bell. To others home was where you were at the time, where you slept. Still other people always considered home the place they were born, or maybe where they grew up.

What was home to me? I considered this for a moment. Home wasn't a specific place; home was where I felt wanted and loved. Where I was safe and cared for. Home changed frequently, right now, this park felt like home. I had talked to Bella about this in the last letter I had written her, she had said it sounded scary, to not ever know for sure where home was. I didn't think so, home was where you needed it to be, where you wanted it to be. Home was an ice cream parlor, a department store, a suburban town, a farm house. Home was a soccer field, a small town high school, a gravestone, a certain road. Home was the way he smiled, the picture of him in my back pocket. Home was the taste of the milkshakes from Simon's restaurant, the tree behind our house that shed its leaves in the spring instead of autumn. Home was a moment of sadness, a moment of joy. A letter from Bella with a sonogram picture attached, a school picture of Emi, the feeling you belonged. Home was Brett's sticky fingers intertwined with mine as we crossed the street. Home was my purple turret room, my green car. Home was laughter in the silence, whipping a tear from Ellie's face when she fell. Home was a familiar saying, a sibling, a kid. Home was not knowing what would be there when you got there, but that you'd be accepted no matter what. Home was a stupid bench with his name on it, home was realizing you weren't always right but you didn't have to be wrong either. Home was making mistakes and learning from them.

And as the five of us walked towards the ice cream parlor, hand in hand, a breeze blew over us. I turned my face to the sun and breathed in deeply. Steph had gotten a far off look in her eyes and I lightly touched her hand to let her know I was with her. She smiled at me and blinked back a tear before opening the parlor door. The bells went off and the old lady behind the counter began showing the kids the flavours of ice cream. As their little fingers pointed to the ice cream flavours they wanted; pink for Ellie, blue for Brett, and vanilla for Jason, I exchanged a look with Steph. She hugged me and said, "Thanks for being here, I couldn't do this alone."

I stood there, embraced with Steph, who was becoming more of a sister to me than an employer and closed my eyes. Home was right here, right now, and I would never forget that.

Home was the way I could close my eyes in the midst of the busy city, the silent countryside, the musical night, the bright new morning, and hear his heartbeat.

Chapter 16

Thanks sooooo much for reading this one, along with the other three books i have written in this series.

i know have to do Emi's two books.

but they may or may not be the next things i write, i havent decided yet.

i'm working on a few different things.

=]

thank you SO much, i dont think i can stress that enough.

your comments, reads, encouragement, criticism, everything you did was appreciated.

i hope you enjoyed this one. =]

.love.love.love.hannah.love.love.love.

Your Heartbeat

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