

Years 11 & 12  
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### **It All Happened in a Heartbeat**

I open my eyes, preparing myself for the morning.

Her cheekbone glows from the dawning light, beautiful in its simplicity. I run my fingers over her warm skin, a reminder of how alive we are. How young we are.

We are teenagers. We hold hands in the hallway at school and sneak notes to each other in class. We dream about our future in vivid detail, full of hope as to what it could hold. Neither of us knows what love means, our kisses fuelled by wandering hands and inexperienced tongues, but I know the lines of her face better than anything else. We know each other, and that is all we need.

We grow, as all things do, messily, with anger and frustration and tears. But as she sits there, glass of wine in hand, laughing into the night, I can't help but smile. The way her cheeks flush and the way her eyes sparkle, it feels as if we are the only two people on the planet. I look down into my glass, I know that she is the one.

Our wedding is small, but loud, laughter and shouts of joy echoing from every corner of the room. All I can feel as I stand at the altar is the warmth of her hand enveloped in mine, and the sweet press of her lips on my face. *I do.*

*"You do nothing!"* she screams at me, waving her hands at the piled-up dirty dishes stacked up in the sink of our rotting kitchen. She is tired. I am tired. We both know it is not each other we are angry at, but the bank, the debt, the crushing weight of the tiny house.

Yet she still crawls into our bed and hugs me tight as she strokes my hair. I still make her coffee in the morning. It is a test, and we have passed.

The first one is a surprise, with delighted screams and happy tears at the start, and terrible screams and pain-filled tears at the end. But they both survive and nestle deep into the lining of my heart. Surely it will run out of space for any more love.

I was wrong. We have two more, and it still makes room.

The time goes by so quickly and it's not long before the last kisses us both on the forehead and thanks us for the privilege of receiving our love. I hold her hands. *"Love is not a privilege,"* I say, *"it is a necessity."*

We move into a smaller house. Cozy, not cramped. It brings back memories of our first place.

*"Don't talk about that!"* she says, *"that place was awful!"*

She smiles more now and fills her days reading books and making bread.

She takes up knitting, and I joke that she's getting old. She pretends to disagree, but we both know I'm right. We are both aging and my knees scream every time I bend to remove a weed from our garden.

She gets sick.

She survives.

I get sick.

I survive.

She wears small, oval-shaped glasses now, perched on the top of her nose. The kids in the neighbourhood call us "Gran and Pops". Apparently, we have a "reputation", according to our son. I disagree, of course. The only reason she makes cookies for the school children is to keep them from driving their bikes through my nice flower beds.

So what if I help them fix their punctured tyres? So what if she makes them fresh lemonade every Sunday? That doesn't mean we like the buggers.

Our faces are lined with wrinkles now, and I use a walker to get around. I hear on the news every day about the new generation being lazy, and I shake my head every time. These kids are just growing the way all things do. Messily.

I wake up one morning to the sweet sound of birds chirping. I wake up one morning to the smell of blossoming rose buds. I wake up one morning, the sun peeking over the horizon, its gentle limbs stroking our faces from the window.

I wake up one morning.

She doesn't.

Her cheekbone glows from the dawning light, beautiful in its simplicity. I touch it, her skin cold under my fingers. A reminder of how long we had together, how lucky we were.

I close my eyes.

And let myself slip into the darkness.