

# Kilometer

Patrick Devon

**120bpm.**

I have a bomb inside of me. Attached to my heart lay a chip and some wires, all being surveyed by a heart monitor embedded into the watch on my wrist. A quite literal ticking tomb bomb. Anything lower than 55bpm, and I'm what you call a goner. I guess you could say that this is what I deserve. All the gold medals and charity dinners in the world couldn't make up for the things I've done. Yep, this bastard deserves to have his heart given out. If he ever really had one. Oh, the irony. The poetic, beautiful justice of irony. I used to run for the gold. But now I'm simply running for my life.

**115bpm**

"Oh my God! They're perfect!!"

There I was, 10 years old. Mother had just gifted me my first pair of running shoes. Even though I had just turned double digits, I knew just how much it really took to gift me with those. Pops worked day and night selling furniture. Coming home with his messy hair, body smelling of rustic antique, and an unshaken attitude of confirmation that he was right where he needed to be. I knew Pops always expected me to take over the family business, and to be honest, my life might've turned out a lot better if I had. But Mother knew just how much I wanted to feel the earth under my feet. She softened Pops up, and from that day forward he did everything in his power to support my dream.

"I know it's taken a long time, but you finally got them, my little legs." she said, moving the sneaker box away from the birthday cake. Ah yes- the buttery soft whipped cream, fresh cut strawberries, a chocolate cake and some sprinkles. I still recollect the smell- bittersweet felicity with a crunch of messy.

"Not so little anymore," Pops chimed in. I could tell by the way he was looking at me that he was saying I should be ready to work my ass off. Enjoy the cake while it lasts.

I was right in assuming that would be the last piece I'd ever have.

## 109bpm

I was 13 when I started running for competition. Pops overworked me to the bone to keep me in shape. I always hated him for it. But I knew his intentions were good. Pops was the tough love kind of father. I knew he loved me, but he never said it. He would push me to my absolute limit, break me down and then leave me to build myself back up. At times he was more like a coach than a loving dad

“Get your lazy ass up and moving! Chop chop! If you ain’t sweatn’, you ain’t doing fucking squat!” That was his usual morning ritual, or at least something along those lines.

“Pa, I’m tired, I can’t run anymore! Let me catch my breath!”

“You think I give a flying fuck?! Do you think when you get out in the world people are gonna stop and let you take a breath? No! It’s a ruthless dog eat dog world out there boy, and if you ever as to try and catch your breath you’re gonna wind up dead.”

So there I would go, running around the track field for the 18th time. Pops would whistle right in my face as I would pass him. Mother, glazed by the sun, would sit in the stands, unable to watch. She held so much animosity because of the way he would treat me. But still Pops, wearing a sports cap, big black sunglasses, and a shirt so small that his body fat was out getting air, continued to mangle my youthfulness for the art of the sprint. Mother eventually couldn’t even stay to watch anymore. It became too hard for her.

As for me, from that moment on nothing but running ever mattered. All through high school, and even into college, it was all I ever knew. All that I *still* only know.

## 105bpm

“I like her Mom, I really do!” I said, talking to mother on the phone from my dorm room on a crisp December evening. I could feel her glee coming through the line. She had waited my whole life for me to ask her for this kind of advice.

“Darling, you know what you have to do. You’d be a damn fool, not to!”

“I know, I know...I want to, Ma. But I’m not good at talking to girls, you know that.”

“Excuse me young man,” she chimed in, “you clearly have been talking to her if you know you like her. So don’t give me that crap!”

I bit my lip and sat down on my bed, my hand resting on my gray undershirt covered in sweat. I was grateful she couldn't see my dorm room and see how filthy and lunatic it had become. "You got me there, Ma."

"If you don't ask Aubrey out tomorrow, I'm going to come up there and kick your ass."

That made me laugh, and my laughter always made her laugh. So there we both were, laughing at each other from over the line.

"I promise. I will....but it's gotta be good." I looked out the window, snow coming down ever so gently. I couldn't believe he popped into my head. "How....how did Dad do it?"

We never liked talking about him. It always made one or both of us feel a type of way, this sort of uneasy, unwarranted therapeutic subject matter neither one of us wanted to address.

"Well...you know your father. He never beat around the bush. He was straight and direct. No surprise there."

The flashback of me running around the track screamed in my face. "Yea....that sounds like him." I took a beat and sat there for a second. ".....I miss him."

It was something I never said very often. Mother knew that I loved Pops, but my relationship with him wasn't great. It wasn't great for either one of us. They never got divorced, but they weren't ever really happy either. Despite all the bullshit that plagued our relationship with him, our worlds felt pretty empty when he passed on.

"You know, darling....me too. The house is too quiet without him."

"You think.....you think he'd be proud of me?"

"Oh baby....I know he would. And I know he'd be screaming at you right now too. Ask this fine lady out boy, or I'll kick your ass." She said, doing her best impression of him.

"Alright Mom, you've tormented me enough, I'm going to, I promise. I'll ask her to the New Years Eve Party."

"Perfect!" I could hear her clapping.

"Merry Christmas Ma. I love you."

“I love you, my big champion.”

**100bpm**

Life never felt complete until the summer I finally accomplished what I had been working my entire life for. Yet, when they handed me those gold medals, I felt empty. I felt like there was nothing left for me to do. The Olympics were the top of the mountain and life. Marrying Aubrey, fathering Tommy and Luke only felt like additional support to keep my weight on the icy cliff of that mountain. The world knew my name, whether it was from watching the Olympics, buying a box of Wheaties at the supermarket, or doing pathetic “eat right at Subway” commercials that aired every five minutes. Cheap endorsements. Cheap fame. All to me, unnecessary. The world didn’t need people like me as “heroes,” I was the least qualified person out there to be considered one of those. I didn’t need the limelight. I didn’t need the sudden shift of the entire world staring at me like a fish in a tank.

Aubrey knew all of this. She was my anchor, my rock, my soul mate. It’s not often that you get to marry your college sweetheart. But I got very lucky. Aubrey understood me. She knew how I felt. She knew just how shy and undeserving I felt. Staying out of the spotlight and raising our two boys was the best decision I could’ve made, much to the public’s dislike. I poked my head into things from time and time. White House Correspondents Dinners, a Met Gala or two, game show hosting, a few movie caemos. The world didn’t completely forget about me. All of those things served as a reminder to the world that I was still around. They just knew I was home with a family now and respected it.

But then Mother died.

**94bpm**

To call it a downward spiral would be an understatement. More like a goddamn downfall. A complete breakdown of everything I was, and used to be. Running had been everything to me. Running had been the defining aspect of my entire life. I guess that’s why even after I retired from running, I still continued to do it. Aubrey agreed. I’m sure Tommy and Luke did too. How was a man who ran his entire life ever supposed to slow down? I used to run to the finish line. Then I started to run from the things waiting for me at the end of it. And then I lost the important person in my life, the person who birthed me into this world. My best friend. My guardian angel. My whole world. I never knew how to properly grieve, because Mother was truly the first loss I ever faced that deeply affected me. Pops wasn’t like that. Pops was expected, and part of me truly hated him for how he treated me. But not Mother, no. She was my entire world and I lost her. And because of that I began to lose myself. It became adamant that I had a problem.

“You are a real fucking asshole, you know that! Fuck you!” Aubrey shouted at me from across the kitchen.

“Oh, I’M the asshole? I’m the asshole?! Okay! You can play that card all you want, but you would have NOTHING without me!”

“Oh, that's *real* rich coming from you. All you do now is waste our money away on fucking whiskey, you pretentious alcoholic!”

“Well maybe if you weren't so goddamn annoying I wouldn't have to resort to drinking!”

“Fuck off! Just because she’s gone, doesn’t give you an excuse to act like I don’t matter to you. That the boys....*our* boys, don't matter to you.”

“Of course they do.”

“Yea? Well....it doesn’t feel like it. It hasn’t...for a while.”

That was the night we knew that we could never go back to how it was. We needed separation, We needed to be apart. Aubrey and I did love each other dearly. I still do to this day, but....something shifted that night. Our marriage, which had already been hanging by a thread, reached a point of no return.

It was not surprising that within the following weeks, Aubrey filed for divorce. Eventually, the courts said I couldn’t see my kids if I didn’t put down the bottle. That only made me want to go to it more. It felt like the only friend I had. I was lost. Broken. The lowest I could be.

Ok wait. Now that I think about it...killing that woman in the Prius was actually the lowest I’d ever been. Turned everything upside down. Trust my advice when I say this- don’t *ever* drive intoxicated. The fact that I have now forever been labeled a killer for the rest of my life, when in actuality I’d never harm a fly, is some of the most fucked up shit I don’t think I’ll ever be able to wrap my head around.

**88bpm**

I shouldn’t have ever gone out to begin with. Why the hell did someone as fast as me, ever think driving home that late and that impaired was better than trying to run home? Or better yet, just sleep it off? I must’ve been going fast. I remember that it felt so freeing. It felt right. I think I was hoping that deep down I’d be the one who crashed and died. I wanted out. I wanted all of it to go away. But what I got was something far worse.

I swear to God I didn't see her. I swear to God she came out of nowhere. I swear to God I wasn't driving that fast, but they say she died on impact. I killed someone. I...*killed* someone. I took a life. Someone died because of me and that was the moment that everyone- and I mean everyone- turned their back on me. I was on my own. It's hard enough losing everyone you love over something stupid you never meant to do, but having it broadcasted and televised to the entire world is another form of pain I never thought I'd feel.

The world was disgusted, and they wanted me to pay.

**83bpm**

I was used to people watching me on tv. Except there was usually gold around my neck. Not handcuffs around my wrists. I was usually standing on the sidelines of a track field. Not sitting in a courtroom in front of a judge. I usually had happy fans cheering for me as I'd cross the finish line. Not a hungry jury looking at me with betrayal and anger. An icon of a generation. A hero. An inspiration to millions, suddenly pleading into the eyes of the people who used to look up to him, begging for forgiveness.

"I know I've made a terrible mistake. I know the world is disgusted with me. No one is more disgusted with me than myself." I pleaded with them. But it didn't matter. Once you involve an innocent woman whose life was cut short because of your own stupidity, it doesn't matter how many gold medals you've won or how many kids you've inspired. Our day and age is all about legacy. And my legacy was a retired olympic athlete convicted of manslaughter.

The tabloids said I got what I deserved, having to serve 13 years. There were those who thought it should've been the maximum sentence. There were a few crazy drunks who thought I should've gotten off easy. But it didn't matter. The world knew where I would be for the next decade, and that was the moment I stopped caring about anyone.

**80bpm**

I served my full 13 year sentence. Not an ounce of opposition to what that entailed. I didn't want to create more problems for myself. Not that it mattered. My life was ruined anyways. The newfound freedom didn't make that any less true.

Aubrey didn't even let me into the house. I pleaded with her. Begged her to let me see my children, but then Darryl came barreling out of the garage with a Remington and threatened to blow my head off if I didn't leave his family alone.

“You come around here again you pissy old drunk I’ll kill you. Leave my wife and her kids alone and take your medals and shove them up your ass!”

At that moment I wanted to ask who the hell he thought he was talking to me like that. But I didn’t bother. I said nothing to him.

Tommy came outside to reason with Darryl.

“Leave my dad alone, he ain’t hurtin nobody.” It was at that moment I saw that Tommy was growing up to be like me. Minus the manslaughter. Or at least I’d sure hope so. Luke waved from the window, though I could see his mother grabbing his arm away. Darryl stormed back inside. But Tommy, such a good kid. Tommy stood there. He looked at me and offered to drive me home.

“I don’t know where that is anymore, son.” Tommy’s eyes filled with tears.

**77bpm**

Tommy went back inside, got into a pissing match with Aubrey. I could hear him yelling at her, talking about how I was still his father and how I had nowhere to go and no one to turn to and that he wasn’t going to give up on me. It wasn’t long after that he came storming out of the house, heated. He gestured for me to get in his truck and he rolled out of the driveway in rage. Now he was starting to act like Pops.

Tommy was hesitant to say anything to me. He asked me the basic questions. How are you? How long have you been out? What am I going to do now?

I didn’t know what to say. I had no plan, no idea, and as it seemed to appear, not even a home.

I turned the conversation away from me. I didn’t want to talk about me, I wanted to talk about my boy. So I made it about him. Tommy told me he was going to school. He made himself chuckle when he talked about how everyone assumed he’d be going into track and field. Son of a gold medalist going into business? What kind of backwards shenanigans was that? I was proud of him. He admitted that he enjoyed running but found more passion in the business world.

“Ain’t no issue with that”, I said. “You just have to be you.”

Luke on the other hand was a bit more of a hassle. At least that’s what Tommy said. Luke can’t focus enough to do school, so Aubrey had to pull him out and teach him herself. Darryl’s too

hard on him for that. Says he needs to be a man and tackle what life throws at you head on. Tommy tries to stay out of it. Smart.

The Motel on Sickle Street was where Tommy set me up. He told me to wait in the car for a few. I could see him inside. Talking to some hippy looking male. Godknows what they talked about. Probably me.

Tommy came running out into the downpour, trying to cover the rain with his hands. “I don’t know if he’ll keep his word but he told me you could shack up here for half the price, for as long as you need.”

The soaked envelope of cash Tommy gave me nearly broke my heart. “Where the hell did you get all this dough, boy?”

Tommy got all defensive, told me it didn’t matter, and begged me to take it.

“I’m not taking your money son.”

Yes. No.

Yes. No.

Yes. No.

We stood out there in the rain like damn fools.

“Dad, you’re going to take my fucking money and get somewhere dry and warm or I swear to God I’ll just drive away and leave you here in the rain and never look back!”

My hands were trembling as I reluctantly accepted his gratitude. “Why are you being so damn nice to me, boy?” I had to know. If this was the last time I ever saw my son, I had to know.

“Because you are my father, and you have *always*, now more than ever, been my hero.”

He claimed that a true hero was someone who stood by the mistakes that they made, and lived with them, whatever the consequences were. He told me the way I handled myself during the trial, admitting what I did was fucked up and a huge error in judgment, was more courageous than a man who tries to hide behind perfection. And then Tommy drove off. His headlights beaming away into the fog. I stood out in the rain a bit longer. Just in awe of the decent human being that Tommy had turned out to be.



The motel was a crap heap. But it was better than living on the street. Carl, the clerk, Yea, he was a schmuck. Nonetheless. It doesn't matter. What does matter is that I got a ring from the tele. Now who the hell would be calling me? I kind of hoped it was Tommy checking in.

It wasn't.

**72bpm**

Suddenly within just moments I found myself in conversation with a very aggravated but soft spoken man whose name I never knew. It was the most frightening conversation I've ever had in my entire life. Even more terrifying than testifying before the world. More terrifying than getting arrested. More terrifying than prison itself.

He told me I had to go to this address if I wanted to see Tommy get let go. Poor boy got grabbed before he could make it home for supper.

It made me wonder, if I had never gone straight to the house after getting out, would they have still taken him? These people must've had eyes on me the entire time. Fuck. I should've never gone home.

The request was very simple. They wanted me to cooperate. Tommy would be let go, no harm done and no questions asked. I had absolutely nothing to lose and Tommy was probably the only person who loved me at that point. So of course I agreed.

They wanted to punish me. They felt that serving 13 years in the crap house wasn't enough justice for that woman. They wanted me to suffer for the rest of my life, and that was it. That was what they did to me. They cut me open, took a damn microchip and tucked it away somewhere in that heart of mine, attached a few wires to my chest and a heart rate monitor was locked onto my wrist in the form of a watch.

Sick fucks took me into a truck and drove me in the middle of the country side and dumped me on the side of the road. I had no idea if they even kept their end of the bargain. I had no idea where Tommy was. I didn't have the faintest clue of where I even was. But I knew one thing. I knew I had to find my son.

And so, like a boxer coming out of retirement to do one last match, or a baseball player coming out to take one last swing, here I was running again. This time for my life.

**67bpm**

I didn't care that my heart could stop if I ever slowed down long enough. I had lived my life. And the world wouldn't remember fondly when I die anyways. It had never been about that. The only reason I hadn't just given up is because Tommy never gave up on me and I sure as hell wasn't going to give up on him. He was my son Goddamnit! And so I ran. Not as an olympic star, not as a convicted criminal, just as a father.

I've always been a man of instinct and gut feelings, and those feelings were telling me to keep heading down that road. I never stopped. I hardly slowed down. Cars would beam right past me, most of them giving quick glances at the crazy man running next to them. I don't know. Maybe they recognized me.

Time became irrelevant at that point. I don't quite know exactly how long it took me but I made it back into town somehow. It was late at night. The air was cold. But I didn't care. I had to find some sort of food and beverage to re-energize myself. I had been running all that time, you know. I popped into a 24 hour gas station market. By the power of the gods, that pile of money that Tommy gave had slipped the minds of the folks who did this to me. Surprising, I know, but don't question it. It was the universe giving me one final gift, I'd assume.

There was someone outside. I could've sworn he was looking at me, but maybe I was just getting paranoid. It was hard not to be after the shit I went through. But I stood in line to pay for my things, dramatically staring out the window.

I scoffed down an entire bottle of water in one large sip. I was trained never to do that when competing. But I knew I had to keep moving in order to keep my heartrate up.

But that was when I saw them.

The boys. In the truck.

I had not the faintest of ideas where they had come from. Or who they even were. But they certainly had known who I was. They surrounded me like a shark, pushed me against the wall and asked where the money was. I asked them "what money?"

"Don't give me that shit old man. We know you have it, o hand it over!"

Oh my, did my heart rate start to spike significantly at that point. I was terrified. I apologized to the boys. I told him I didn't know what they were talking about.

“He told us that he gave all of the money to you, the old man. The one at the motel. The one who we were told just got a little internal makeover done. Now he still owes for the grams he bought, so you better pay up right now or I’ll kill you!”

My brain couldn't comprehend at the time what they were implying. But looking back now I don't know how I didn't see it coming. Like me, Tommy had turned to an addiction to cope with his problems. But they were just as dangerous as mine. Mine fucked up my liver. His fucked up his brain. I was so blind and so down in my own free will of being out of prison that I never saw Tommy's set up coming. Why on earth would my own son have this done to me? Why on earth would he have gone through all of this? What kind of fucked up monster did my own son turn out to become?

The boys looking for Tommy searched me until they found the cash, and then beat me to a pulp. There was a kinder gentleman who had been leaving just as they all had run away. He offered assistance to me. I told him not to call the police. He didn't like that. I knew it made me look more suspicious, but I didn't want the police to know about Tommy's drug problem. Especially if they recognized his father. Oh, what a trial that would've been.

How had I not seen it coming? How had I not put it together? Tommy, my perfect son, not being perfect in the slightest. Poor bastard probably had such miseries growing up in the shadow of my own mortal sin. It's not hard to understand. I drank. He got high. We both thought those things would help us forget. But it never did. It never does.

It's a reflection of how one fucked up bad choice started a domino effect to everyone in my life. A normal retired olympic winner would've led his son down the right path. Not send him into a spiral. I was even more concerned about Tommy. Despite the fact that he was the one who orchestrated all of these things to happen for me, he was still my son. And I still loved him. I needed him to know that.

**62bpm**

So I searched for him. For days. Sleep was irrelevant. So I bared all the pain I had felt, and just continued to keep moving. By the third day I found myself in the center of town. The place looked so mysterious to me. It had gone through so many changes since I had last been there.

It was quite a beautiful day too. The first time I had seen a good golden sun in about eleven years. I found myself wandering into the middle of the street, amazed by all the new scenery. Suddenly a truck turned right and started heading down the street. It was swerving like crazy as everyone around me started running away in fear.

The truck came beaming down the road, still not slowing down. Police cars behind in pursuit. And that's when I saw it. Tommy was driving that truck. Time slowed down in that instant. I saw Tommy look at me with completely and utter despair. He knew what was about to happen. He knew he had a choice. All I could think about was how he had my face. And as the grill of the truck came barreling into my body, my entire life flashed before my eyes. But it was only the good things. Only the things I wanted to remember. My wedding day. The birth of my children. Winning my first gold. And then I saw Tommy again. I wanted to find a way to tell him that I forgave him. I wanted to tell him I was sorry for fucking up his life. I wanted to tell him that I was going to be ok. I looked back and I saw tears in his eyes. I could tell it hurt him too. I don't think he even realized the irony of the situation.

**59bpm**

I laid there in the street, my head cracked open on the pavement. Tommy looked back. Time continued to be moving at a standstill. It almost appeared as if Tommy was going to come back for me. But he didn't. He mouthed the words I'm sorry and sped on down the road, the sirens blaring. I felt my heart. I laid my hand right upon my chest. I knew any second the ticker was going to go off, and it wouldn't matter whether or not I could be saved or not. My watch started beeping vigorously.

**53bpm**

My heart rate was below the threshold. I couldn't help but chuckle to myself when I realized the damn thing didn't even work.