

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a bright pink long-sleeved top and dark pants, is running away from the camera. She is in a crime scene at night, with yellow police tape stretched across the background. The scene is lit with blue and purple lights, creating a dramatic and urgent atmosphere. The background is blurred, showing city lights and a traffic light.

**LYNETTE
EASON**

**WHEN A
HEART
STOPS**

D E A D L Y R E U N I O N S

Books by Lynette Eason

WOMEN OF JUSTICE SERIES

Too Close to Home

Don't Look Back

A Killer Among Us

EBOOK SHORTS

Gone in a Flash

DEADLY REUNIONS

When the Smoke Clears

When a Heart Stops

DEADLY REUNIONS

BOOK 2

WHEN A
**HEART
STOPS**

A NOVEL

LYNETTE EASON



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To my wonderful family and friends.
I couldn't do this without you.

And to Jesus Christ,
my Lord and Savior—
and my reason for writing.
I pray people see you on every page!



1

TUESDAY, 2:40 A.M.

If she moved, would she die? Serena Hopkins kept her eyes shut and lay as still as possible in the king-size bed, doing her best to keep her breathing even.

Which was becoming more impossible by the second.

As her fear increased, so did the rate of her heartbeat and respirations.

Was he still there?

A slight rustle to her left answered that question. A sliver of moonlight through her window cut a path across the room, allowing enough light for her to see shadows.

A drawer slid open, then closed with a light click.

She opened her eyes into a narrow squint. How did he get in? Where was Yoda, her golden retriever?

Terror made her shudder.

The figure at her dresser paused. Looked around. She felt his gaze land on her.

What should she do? Move and draw attention to herself? Continue to pretend to be asleep?

Please, Lord, please.

Her cell phone lay on the end table, could she grab it fast enough and dial?

Not a chance.

Another chill slid through her. Why hadn't her home alarm gone off? The tremble started in her hands and quickly spread.

No! She couldn't move. Curling her fingers into fists, she did her best to still them.

Her eyes moved back to the figure. His attention had moved from her to another drawer. What was he looking for? How much longer would he look, and if he didn't find what he wanted, would he turn to her? Wake her? Threaten her? Worse? Her mind registered the slender, lanky build of the intruder.

He went for the next drawer. Slid it open. He turned to look over his shoulder at her and she slammed her eyes shut.

Serena's heart thudded in her chest. Surely he could hear it. *See* it. Was he still watching her? She let her eyes crack. No, his focus was on the drawer in front of him. Slowly, inch by inch, never taking her gaze from the person's back, she slid her hand toward the end table.

The drawer slid shut. A whispered curse brushed her ears. He hadn't found what he was looking for. He knelt. She heard a popping sound and froze. His knees. Somehow that simple sound demoted him from terrifying monster to dangerous human.

A low, almost nonexistent grunt filtered to her.

Her fingers brushed the phone on the edge of the nightstand. The phone teetered.

No! It couldn't fall.

Straining, nearly strangling on the need to keep her breathing even when she wanted to gasp in huge gulps of air, she managed to snag the phone with her thumb and forefinger.

She pulled it toward her, slowly, painstakingly silent, until finally, she had it under the covers with her.

Now what?

Would the touch screen light up the room even under the cover of the blanket?

She had to chance it.

And she had to light the screen so she could see the numbers. Right now, she wished she had a phone with buttons one could just feel and know exactly what number it was.

There was one button on this phone she could find by touch. The one that would light the screen. But if she hit the numbers, the rest of the touch pad would make noise. If she'd left the phone on ring instead of vibrate.

She couldn't remember.

Panic nearly smothered her.

He was in the closet. Maybe he wouldn't hear it.

Maybe.

She pressed.

Not a sound. Squinting, still watching his back as he searched, she suppressed a relieved sigh when he never paused.

The phone was on vibrate.

Thank you, Lord.

Her intruder disappeared farther into her walk-in closet.

Now was her chance.

Fingers still wrapped around the phone, Serena pushed back the covers as silently as possible and swung her legs off the edge of the bed closest to the door. She finished dialing 9-1-1 and pressed Send, keeping her hand over the screen to minimize the light.

Even as the phone rang and the 9-1-1 operator picked up, Serena was moving toward the open bedroom door. Her bare feet never made a sound on the hardwood floors.

But she couldn't speak into the phone yet.

She slipped out of the bedroom and into the hall. Her goal was the back door to the garage.

And then she heard him curse.

"Serena, where are you?"

The silky-smooth low voice shot new terror through her as she used a precious second to debate her next move. Getting out of the house was no longer an option. He would be on her before she got the dead bolt turned.

Footsteps—terrifying, unhurried footsteps—came her way. “I’ll find you. You can’t be far.”

She spun on her heel and hurried as silently as possible to the spare bedroom. Hopefully, he would expect her to make a run for one of the doors that led outside.

Serena closed and locked the bedroom door and turned to answer the operator, who was asking, “. . . Is someone there? What’s your emergency?”

Serena held the phone to her lips and whispered, “104 Bennett Drive. Someone’s in my house.”

Her foot kicked something soft. And warm.

“Yoda,” she whispered. Grief welled up in her as she placed her hand on Yoda’s chest. And felt a beating heart.

Relief replaced the grief, but she didn’t have time to do more than offer the unconscious animal a soft pat. She tossed the phone on the bed, the operator still talking. Hurrying toward the closet, she flipped on the light and blinked as her eyes adjusted to the sudden brightness.

Serena pulled out a locked box.

And froze as the bedroom doorknob rattled.

“Serena, I know you’re in there. Give it up, honey. If you just give me what I want, I’ll leave you alone.”

Sure he would. Fingers shaking, she went to the nightstand, opened the drawer, and pulled out the key.

It took three tries, but she finally managed to get the box open.

“I’m running out of patience, Serena. Open the door or I’ll kick it in.” He did sound irritated. And that made her blood churn. She was an irritant to him. A mere bother.

She had no doubt that if he got his hands on her, she was dead.

How long would it take for the cops to arrive?

A few minutes at least.

“Serena!”

It just registered that he knew her name. So this wasn’t some random break-in.

Still, she refused to answer him.

Her fingers worked the magazine into the Glock 17. Her father’s gun. The one he insisted she learn how to shoot and handle as well as any police officer.

Her palm racked the slide at the top and the round chambered. The semiautomatic pistol felt comfortable, reassuring. Some of her terror dissipated. Enough that her hands steadied.

Now all she had to do was pull the trigger as many times as it took. Surely seventeen bullets would do the trick. “I have a weapon!” she hollered. “And if you come through that door, I’ll use it!”

A pause. Then a low laugh. “Sure you do, Serena.”

Gripping the gun with both hands, she lifted the pistol and fired.

The bullet slammed into the door.

She heard a scream, another curse.

Then the sound of sirens filled her ears. Seconds later, through the window, flashing blue lights filled the room.

“The cops are here! Leave now!” she ordered, wishing her voice didn’t tremble with each word.

A loud boom hit her ears and the bedroom door slammed open. His slender frame filled the opening and his malevolent green eyes met hers.

Serena felt a cold chill invade her and knew she was going to have to shoot to kill.

“Please, don’t make me do this,” she whispered.

He lunged toward her and she pulled the trigger for the second time that night.