

Love Songs

By Jamie Campbell

Chapter 1: My Invisible Life

Invisible. That would be the one word to sum up the life of Kaley Thorne. No matter what she did, no matter who she spoke to, no matter what she achieved, she would always just be invisible. She was like a ghost that roamed the corridors of her life, never being seen or heard. Nobody ever remembered her and nobody ever actually cared about her. She didn't exist.

Of course, Kaley Thorne wasn't *actually* invisible, it just felt that way. She was, in actual fact, a living and breathing sixteen year old. She had ten fingers, ten toes, a nose and everything else you would expect to find on a female human. She had long dark hair, blue eyes, glasses, and was average height. She also had a small freckle on her left cheek that often looked like a dab of chocolate. There was just something about her that made people not notice her. They would even bump into her and not apologise, like she was a pesky wall that had jumped out at them.

Kaley was tired of it. She wanted to be seen and she wanted people to take notice. And she made that decision while standing in the middle of the school lunch room at 12:43 p.m. Summoning all her courage, Kaley put one foot in front of the other and moved towards the table. She stood on the seat and waited for people to notice. They didn't. She took a deep breath.

"I am Kaley Thorne and I am here," she yelled at all her fellow students. The lunch room was packed full of people, talking and laughing amongst themselves. They didn't even flinch at the sudden yelling from the invisible girl. Not one person looked at her.

Deflated, Kaley got down and plonked onto the seat. She pulled her lunch closer and started eating. She had tried. She was always trying. It just never worked. Maybe someday people would see her, today obviously wasn't that day. Perhaps it would be tomorrow.

"Were you just standing on the seat or was I imagining things?" Harper, also a sixteen year old that had visibility issues, sat across the

table. She was red headed with sparkling green eyes hidden beneath her fringe.

Harper was one of only two people that actually saw Kaley for who she was and she loved her to bits. They had been friends since they could remember, an unshakable bond that got them through high school. Neither would have survived very long without the other.

“Of course I wasn’t just standing on the seat,” Kaley smiled. “Must have been someone else.”

“Right,” she answered, her voice dripping with sarcasm. *And pigs might fly too.* “So did you hear about Eli and Abigail?”

Kaley shook her head. Eli and Abigail were the ‘it’ couple of their school. They had been together for ages – about three months – and they were always smooching up the corridors. To make things worse, Eli’s locker was right beside Kaley’s. Too many times to count she had tried to get books from her locker only to have Abigail’s perfect body pressed against it. She would always keep walking, they wouldn’t notice her when she politely asked them to move anyway.

“What about Eli and Abigail?”

“They broke up.”

“Really? Finally I get my locker back.”

“They had a big fight this morning in the courtyard, everyone saw,” Harper nodded, a look of knowing on her face. “She cried and everything.”

“Abigail cried? I didn’t know she had tear ducts.”

“Full on sobbing.”

Kaley was impressed the girl had real emotions. She didn’t seem too concerned when she was berating her underlings. She had never spoken a word in her life to Kaley, she never even noticed her enough to berate her too. There were good sides to being invisible sometimes. It meant the mean girls didn’t see you either.

“Oh well,” Kaley shrugged. “I guess life will go on.”

“I wonder who he’ll move on to. Eli is a good catch. He’s on the football team, he’s smart, and his parents are loaded. He’ll probably be snapped up in a second.”

“Not if you want to live. Abigail will kill anyone who comes near him. She will still claim him as her territory.”

“She won’t have a valid claim, they’ve broken up.”

“It doesn’t matter. Nobody will cross Abigail.”

They both nodded in agreement, lamenting the fact that Eli would always be off limits to any of the other girls in the school. It was a pity, but like Kaley said: life goes on. There were far more things to worry about in high school. Boys were only one of the distractions.

Harper stood. "I've got to go to the library before the next class. You want to come with?"

"Sure, why not."

Kaley looked around, thinking that nobody would miss her anyway. Every table held groups of chattering students, all happy and oblivious. It should have been difficult to feel isolated in a room full of people, however Kaley found it easy. If it wasn't for Harper, she may as well not even exist.

It was funny the type of kids that hung out in the library over a lunchbreak. If you stood there long enough, you could identify three different types. The first were the kind that didn't want to be seen there. They would hurry in, look around to make sure they didn't recognise anybody, grab what they needed, and check out just as fast. They were in and out in under two minutes if they weren't caught in the act.

The second type were those that loved the library. They were the ones that volunteered to be student librarians and would spend every spare minute of the day there. They were also the kind that jumped at their own shadows and couldn't make eye contact with you. Despite this, Kaley thought they had a certain attitude to them. Perhaps they were the rebellious ones, defying social conventions by being social outcasts. Something to think about.

The third kind were the ones that were casual visitors. They needed something from the library but were quite content to take their time browsing. They didn't care who saw them there, they only cared about that elusive book they needed for something or other. That was Kaley and Harper. They wandered through the stacks looking for a book on medieval times. Either they were late and all the books had been checked out already, or the school was seriously underfunded and skipped the era entirely. Probably a combination of both.

"There's nothing here," Harper whined.

"You could Google it. You know, like a normal person."

"I like books."

Kaley rolled her eyes and leant against the shelf, conjuring some patience. She checked her phone – no messages. She never got messages unless they were from her mum. Just once she would like to see notification of a million unread messages and missed calls. The popular girls would always have messages, she lamented. Even her mum would have unread messages. The situation was starting to get dire. Surely people would start noticing her soon.

"Aha! Here is it," Harper said happily as she slid out a thick book on the medieval world.

"Can we go now?"

“After I find a book on diseases. I want to look up my symptoms and see what I’ve got.”

“Google it,” Kaley laughed. “There is nothing wrong with you anyway. You really want to be diagnosed by a computer programmer?”

“Fine, let’s go.”

They checked out the book and stepped into the corridors. As they did, the bell rang right over their heads. They headed towards class in opposite directions.

Halfway to her next class, Kaley realised she didn’t have the textbook she needed. It was safely resting in her locker, she had forgotten to get it with all the excitement of the library visit. She could have slapped herself, she took a detour and changed directions. She couldn’t sit through a whole hour of math without having the textbook. No doubt dodgy Mr Spingle would have something to say about it.

Kaley’s locker combination was easy to remember – 13, 3, 17. Thirteen for the number of times she had been left off the morning rollcall, three for the number of teachers who asked who she was when she turned up at their class (at the end of the semester), and seventeen for the number of times her mother had asked her why she wasn’t going to a school function. The numbers were slowly increasing, but it actually reflected a set period of time.

She retrieved her math textbook and closed the locker again as quickly as possible. She didn’t want to have to change the 3 for a 4 when she got to class. She preferred playing it low key when it came to classes, it got her out of doing any extracurricular activities.

As Kaley turned to hurry away, she hit something similar to a brick wall and her books and bag scattered to the ground. She focused her eyes and saw Eli Stone standing there. He had run right into her, or visa-versa. It was probably visa-versa.

“I’m sorry,” Eli apologised, kneeling to the ground to help her throw everything back into her bag.

“It’s okay,” Kaley replied, trying to quickly get the tampons back in her bag without them being noticed. She could feel her face blushing it was so embarrassing.

“You’re late for the math too, right?”

“Yeah, I forgot my book.”

“Me too,” Eli smiled as the last of the contents were back where they should be.

They stood and, as they did, Kaley realised something. Eli had seen her. Probably not when they had collided, but he had helped her and spoken with her. That never happened. Normally when people ran into her they would just keep walking. They would pretend nothing had

happened, the way you do when you trip over a crack on the pavement. But Eli had stopped, he had looked, and he had *seen* her.

Kaley just stared at him, wondering if it could possibly be true. Had Eli, *the* Eli, really spoken with her? Could it be that she really wasn't invisible after all? It was all too much to wish for. She was being silly. She tried to make her body function again.

"You're in my French class too, right?"

"Uh, yeah," Kaley managed to stammer out.

"I'd better get my book and get to class," Eli nodded towards his locker.

"Oh, of course. I'll see you there."

Kaley forced herself to turn around and walk away. She was dazed and confused, a state she quite often found herself in lately. She hurried to class, trying to put all thoughts of Eli out of her mind. He was probably just being polite, or making fun of her. Whatever it was, it was nothing to get all girly about.

Sure, Eli was tall with luscious dark hair and blue eyes that shone like a thousand stars. And when he smiled he had dimples in his cheeks that were adorable. But that only meant he had much prettier and cooler girls after him. It meant he couldn't possibly see her. It was stupid to think otherwise.

* * *

In every television show Kaley had ever seen the parents were always good, wholesome, and sensible. She longed for those kinds of parents. She wanted all the rules, boundaries, and sage advice those teenagers always got. She wanted to be grounded or have privileges taken away. She wanted to have a curfew to break, just once. Yet unfortunately her home life was quite the opposite.

"Hey Mum."

Mrs Georgina Thorne – or Georgie to her friends – looked up from the stove with relief. "Thank goodness you're home. I need your help with the dinner party I'm hosting tonight. Nothing is going right and I just know it's going to be a disaster."

Kaley picked up an apron and slid it over her head. She knew it would be no good protesting. "What do you need me to do?"

"Stir this."

A wooden spoon was placed in her hand and she got to work while Georgie fretted about some other concoction in the pot besides hers. It was kind of funny to watch her. She always stressed over everything she hosted, which was quite often. Mrs Thorne was always hosting a dinner

party or some other type of celebration. She was a social butterfly and knew practically everyone worth knowing.

Kaley often referred to her mother as Mother Barbie. She was tall, blonde, and perfectly put together – just like the doll. She cared about her appearance and worried too much about what other people thought of her. She loved dressing up and going out and was desperate to be a cool mum. Which was all good in theory, but the trouble was she wanted Kaley to be exactly the same. She wanted a daughter she could dress up and show off. What she got was quite the opposite, a daughter who was invisible and didn't really care too much about what other people thought. They shouldn't have stopped at only one child, they really should have tried again to get it right.

"How was your day?" Georgie asked.

"Usual," Kaley replied, except that it wasn't. No matter how hard she tried, she could not expel Eli from her thoughts. She didn't want to tell her mother that story, she would make a big deal out of it. A much bigger deal than what it really was.

"Did you learn anything?"

"Why do parents always ask that question?"

"Answering a question with a question, you're hiding something."

Did she mention her mother was also really clever? Not in academics, but with people. She could read them like a book and it was really annoying. Kaley rarely had anything to hide but it should have been comforting to know that when she did, she would be able to hide it. Not with the super sleuth about.

"I'm not hiding anything," she tried anyway and then remembered her counter-move – distraction. "How did you and Dad meet? I don't think I've ever heard that story."

"We were high school sweethearts. I was the head cheerleader, I could have had any man I wanted. But it was the eye of the science nerd that caught my attention. I needed a tutor and the teacher suggested your father. We locked eyes over a chocolate milkshake and the rest is history," Georgie finished with a dramatic flurry of her hand.

"How did you know you were in love with him?"

"My heart beat faster whenever I thought of him. I actually looked forward to science class. Now *that* is love."

"Just like that? A beating heart told you that you were in love?"

"Trust me, honey, when you find love you'll know it. It will hit you like a Mack truck."

Kaley nodded, deep in thought. She had been hit by a Mack truck, at least it felt that way when she had run into Eli. Perhaps there was more to it. After all, she couldn't get him out of her mind. Everything she did

reminded her of those brief few moments spent together on the floor of the school corridor. She shook the thoughts away and changed the subject.

“So who is coming to dinner tonight?” Kaley asked with only mild interest. There were always strangers in the house for some reason or another. She was used to walking into the living room in her pyjamas only to be confronted by a room full of people she didn’t know. It was even worse when her mum started introducing her around.

“Your father’s boss and his wife are coming. Dad’s in line for a promotion so we need to make a good impression on them.”

“Oh no, there’s no *we* here. There’s you and Dad, right?”

“I was hoping you’d join us,” Georgie’s voice dripped with disappointment. She pouted, just like a little kid did when they didn’t get their own way. Kaley was used to it, it didn’t work on her anymore.

“I’ll pass, thanks.”

“Don’t you want your father to get a promotion?”

“Of course I do. However, I think that would be more likely if I wasn’t there.”

“Fine. I give up. Spend the rest of your life in your bedroom playing that terrible guitar,” Georgie’s hands shot up in the air to symbolise the giving up part, the wooden spoon dripping cream liquid everywhere.

“Will you please fold the napkins for me before you shut yourself away?”

“Sure.”

The napkins had to be folded a particular way or they would need to be redone. Kaley knew the process well, she’d been trained young. While other kids learned how to ride a bicycle, she learned how to fold napkins so they looked like a swan. To each their own, she guessed. One day the skill might come in handy, like if she was working at a Chinese restaurant perhaps. Or maybe it could be her talent in a beauty pageant. One of those alternatives was more likely to happen than the other.

As she folded, Kaley thought how good it would be for her father to get a promotion. The science nerd had become a sales rep after four years of college. He worked long hours and slaved away at his desk. He deserved to finally get somewhere after so many years of hard work. She hoped he would get the promotion.

She also knew they would make a better impression on his boss if she wasn’t there. A shy teenager was often mistaken for a sullen one, especially when old people were the ones making the assumption. Kaley had never met her father’s boss, but she bet he was old. You didn’t get to be CEO of a corporation without putting in many years. Perhaps her father would be a CEO one day, it all started with one promotion.

“Mum, I’m done, I’m going to my room,” Kaley yelled into the kitchen. She got a dismissive wave in response, good enough for approval.

The best part of her entire day was retreating to her room at night. It was her oasis, the one place where she could be who she really was. It contained all the usual things – a bed, nightstand, wardrobe, desk, and a television. But that wasn’t the best part. Her absolute favourite item in the room was her guitar. She had worked two jobs last summer in order to save for it. She didn’t want just any old guitar, it had to be a Taylor brand.

Through the guitar she could express everything that was inside her head. When she couldn’t say the words out loud, she could put them into a song and sing them. It was her outlet for all the terrible, horrible, wonderful, and magical things in her life. However, mostly the songs were about how invisible she was. One day, she vowed, people would hear her songs even though they couldn’t see her. She could never sing them in front of others, but perhaps someone would buy them one day. She would probably *give* them away if someone actually wanted them. That was her dream anyway.

Picking up the light brown acoustic guitar, Kaley sat on the edge of the bed and strummed. The beautiful humming sound she could hear and the familiar vibrations she could feel in her fingers was all she needed to instantly feel better. With that guitar in her hands, she felt invincible. It made a nice change to the rest of her life.

As she tried to replicate the tune she was hearing in her head on the strings, Kaley’s mind started wandering. Eli had been bouncing around in her head all afternoon and he wasn’t going away. It had been fatally embarrassing running into him in the school hallway. If there had been other people around, she would have died right on the spot. But *he* was the one that had apologised. It was *him* that had run into her. And then he actually helped her put everything back into her bag. For one or two moments, their hands even touched.

Soon, the tune in her head had some words to go with them.

It’s a little bit magic, that thing that you do.

She tried a few different chords, trying to work out which one fit the best. The higher ones were too high and the lower ones she would never be able to sing. Kaley decided to stick with the middle range. She sang the words over and over again, making sure they fit the tune. It was a perfect match. She moved on.

It's in the nod of your head, the twinkle in your eyes.

There was only one person that inspired the words: Eli. She thought of the few minutes they had spent together in the hallway. His eyes were so sparkly, so alive – like he had some secret that only he knew. She wanted to know so badly what had made his eyes twinkle like that. Surely it wouldn't be running into her. She wasn't the kind of girl that inspired such a reaction.

Kaley wrote down the notes and lyrics in her song book. It was good enough to commit to paper – but only in pencil. She wasn't ready to get the pen out yet and make it permanent. Her songs were always just a work in progress, no doubt they could be improved a thousand percent by someone who actually knew what they were doing.

Nobody knew of Kaley's songbook except her old music teachers and they had sworn to secrecy. She had never told anyone else or shown it to anyone. It was her secret, one she felt was something that was all hers. She didn't have anything else like that. When her parents listened at her door – and she knew they did this all the time, they were so nosy – they just assumed she was playing some song she'd heard on the radio or downloaded from the internet. It never even crossed their minds that it was her music she was playing and not that created by someone else. She would never correct them.

The sound of people outside interrupted her thoughts. Kaley went to the door and opened it a crack. Two strangers, presumably her father's boss and his wife, were standing in the living room. Just as suspected, they were on the older side. Probably about fifty, Kaley thought. She closed the door, leaving it to them. Once they were ready to eat, her mother would deliver a plate of food to her door. She was good like that, she still thought about her even when there were more important people there.

She continued playing on her guitar, the tune in her head repeating over and over again until a few more chords fell out. She had twelve notes to play with, each song just a variation of those same twelve. It was the same for every song ever sang, it all came down to those magic twelve. Her first piano teacher taught her that. Old Mr Doherty had been such a patient man. To five year old Kaley, he seemed a hundred years old. In reality, he was probably about sixty. He would spend one hour with her on a Tuesday evening. His stories were almost as good as the lesson. He played nearly every musical instrument made and had been in the national orchestra for most of his adult life. Upon retirement, he decided to pass on his knowledge to students. All for twenty dollars an hour.

Those Tuesday lessons evolved into Tuesday and Thursday lessons as Kaley's thirst for music couldn't be sated in just one hour. Mr Doherty recognised her natural talent and aptitude for the notes and told her parents that she needed to learn more. To their credit, they listened and actually did something about it. Not only did they double the lesson time, but they also asked her if she wanted to try some other instruments. She tried the flute but didn't really like the sound and the limitations. Next came the saxophone because she had seen Mr Doherty play it once when he invited her to an orchestral performance. She could never make it sound like he did.

Next, Kaley tried the guitar. It was an instant fit. The beautiful rhythms it played danced around her ears like sparklers at Christmas time. She held it in front of her and her hands just knew where the chords were. She barely needed any lessons before she could play it as good as any adult. Her teacher was named Mr Eton and he was possibly the coolest guy she had ever met. He never played the guitar professionally, he had always taught music in high school. Offering private lessons to younger kids was a way to make money on the side. He knew thousands of songs and could play any in a heartbeat. He mesmerised seven year old Kaley with his talent and only sparked the fire inside her further.

Kaley still saw Mr Doherty and Mr Eton on a regular occasion. She no longer needed lessons, but occasionally she would play them a song she was particularly proud of. They were the only ones that knew of her secret songbook. They promised to keep her secret, despite telling her too many times to count that she should share her talent. Every time she refused, it was just something to give her a voice when she needed to find one – not something to tell other people about. Even Harper didn't know, and they shared everything. Almost anyway.

The door to her bedroom opened while Kaley was lost deep in thought. It startled her for a moment.

"Your dinner," Georgie placed the plate on her desk. "Are you sure you don't want to join us? They aren't so bad, really."

"I'll be fine, thanks Mum."

"Okay, but if you want dessert, you'll have to come and get it."

Georgie closed the door after setting the bait. She always did that – try to lure her daughter out of the room. The joke was on her, Kaley didn't particularly like the dessert she made. It was a strawberry tart and she never put in enough sugar to make it sweet. She almost felt sorry for those that had to eat it and pretend it tasted good.

Kaley looked at her dinner, steam rising from the hot meal. It smelt really good, it was enough to tempt her away from her writing session. She flicked on the television to have some background noise. It was

better than listening to the outbursts of laughter coming from the dining room. Georgie had a high-pitched giggle that could resonate through several walls and a sturdy door. It was one of the things she loved about her mother. It might grate on other people, but she found it cute – like it reminded her of complete happiness. Either that, or she was a good actress. It could have been either with Mother Barbie.

After the meal, Kaley returned to her guitar. She wasn't done with her song yet. She wanted to keep going, at least it kept the thoughts about Eli at bay while she worked. Providing she didn't focus on the lyrics anyway.

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