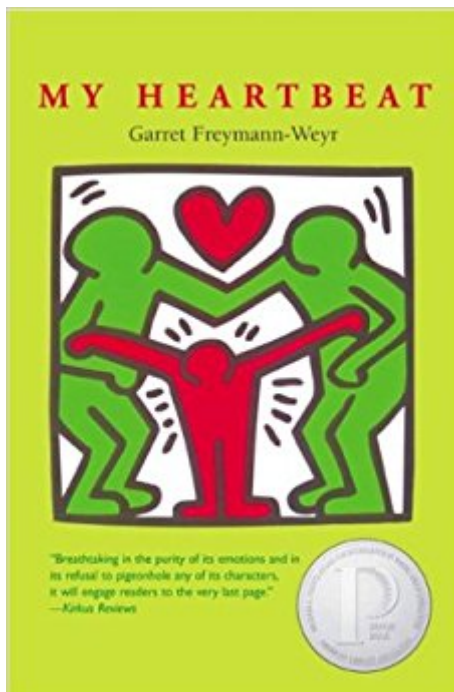


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# My Heartbeat



## Synopsis

Ellen loves Link and James. Her older brother and his best friend are the only company she ever wants. She knows they fight, but she makes it a policy never to take sides. She loves her brother, the math genius and track star. And she is totally, madly in love with James, with his long eyelashes and hidden smiles. "When you grow out of it," James teases her, "you will break my heart." Then someone at school asks if Link and James might be in love with each other. A simple question. But the answer is far from simple, and its repercussions affect their entire lives. This extraordinary, multiple award-winning novel is funny, heartbreaking, and messy—just like its characters, just like life.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Narrator Ellen learns about love, family and "society's unwritten rules" in this sophisticated but gentle novel set in Manhattan. Ellen adores her older brother, Link, and has had a crush on Link's best friend, James, since seventh grade. But at 14, when she starts high school, popular classmate Adena, who really likes Link, mentions to Ellen: "They're like a couple, aren't they?" Freymann-Weyr (*When I Was Older*) subtly and authentically follows Ellen's thought process as the question triggers a series of responses: "I resolve never to ask them. Ever. I resolve to put it out of my mind. There is no reason for me to know." Yet Ellen reviews their past behavior for clues. When Ellen finally frames

the question to Link and James ("I spear a cherry with an unused fork... and ask if they are a couple"), Link denies it, avoids James and gets a girlfriend. Ellen and James, meanwhile, grow closer. As their relationship becomes physical, some inconsistencies surface (e.g., why, if Ellen is so loyal to her brother, would she "date" James?). But the sensitivity with which the author handles the issues of whom one loves and complexities more far-reaching than sexual concerns outweigh these minor matters. Ellen relates telling details about herself and those around her with humor and compassion, exposing the many dimensions of her parents as well as the three featured teens. A thoughtful approach to the many confusing signals that accompany awakening sexuality. Ages 12-up. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Grade 8 Up-Garrett Freymann-Weyr's novel (Houghton, 2002) about a teen's maturing understanding of friends, family, and self is brought to vivid life in Christy Carlson Romano's fast-paced reading. Fourteen-year-old Ellen has known James most of her life, as he is her older brother Lincoln's long-term best friend. Just as she realizes that she has developed a romantic crush on James, he and Linc appear to have a significant falling out. The revelation that James is gay not only plays havoc with Ellen's romantic designs-although they do manage to consummate their youthful admiration for each other with honestly drawn sexual encounters-but pits Linc into a silent war against his former bosom buddy. Ellen and her circle are moneyed New Yorkers, but their story is relevant and resonant beyond culture and class. How friendships pause and then restart, how teens let themselves peek a little at a time into their own and their families' souls are among the truths eloquently played out here, with humor as well as angst. Romano's youthful tenor fits Ellen just right, making this a bit like listening to a young friend share her observations and experiences. Franciska Goldsmith, Berkeley Public Library, CA Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"A mind with its own heartbeat!" This is one of the best aspects of geekiness according to the father of *My Heartbeat's* narrator--Ellen, an honest, perceptive, urban teen. I have found few books that show the struggles of sexuality and young love in a realistic, complex way. This one does. ("And now James and I navigate around each other's bodies, trying to establish boundaries even as we erase them.") It also blurs the lines of what exactly it means to be straight or gay and examines how we figure out who we are and who we love. Another refreshing aspect of this story is that, despite confusion and heartache and love, the melodrama is kept in check. It's not overly tragic, nor is it all

perfectly sweet in the end--it's more complicated than that, just like life. Ellen is a likeable narrator who never becomes annoying or whining, and both James and Link are dynamic and believable. I should mention that, depending on perspective, some people may find the frankness about sexuality shocking in such a young person (Ellen is a 9th grader) while others will think it is realistic. I don't mean to imply any raunchiness--the narration is never obscene or explicit in any way--but some of the teen characters are sexually active. Overall, a sweet, honest YA novel that many teens and adults--straight, gay, or anything in between--will enjoy.

As usual, Garrett Freymann-Weyr had me captivated. I was already a fan of *Pretty Girls*, so getting my hands on another book by this most talented author was sheer joy.

The plot of *MY HEARTBEAT* is a good one, with some finely written scenes that reflect the emotional gulf that exists between these parents and their teenage children. I particularly admired a tightly-contained confrontation (yet essentially non-confrontational) scene that's between Link, his parents, and Ellen, the young protagonist, after he's started dating a girl. It's revealed that his father is giving Link money -- is it to have extra money to entertain the girlfriend with, or a bribe to Link to go on dating her, and thereby prove he's not gay, as the father secretly fears? My biggest criticism of this book is that the 13/14-year-old narrator, Ellen, ever so gradually begins to sound like the 30-something that the author, Garrett Freymann-Weyr, really is. No 14-year-old girl, even an intellectually bright one such as Ellen, would be as deeply rumative as Ellen becomes after she and James have their first full sexual encounter, projecting years ahead to their future relationship and what that may become. Ellen's gradual "aging" begins a little more than halfway through the story, and is a pretty large flaw in my opinion. Despite that, *My Heartbeat* at times still manages to accurately capture certain adolescent conclusions and confusions, and parental (adult) attitudes toward them. But curiously, I think adult readers would admire this book more than adolescent ones.

I featured this book on my Throwback Thursday at <http://treasurecovebookreviews.com> I loved coming of age stories with introspective insightful writing and strong female characters as a teenager (and I still do). *My Heartbeat* has all of this. In fact, the writing style in this book is probably one of my most loved. Seriously, Garrett's ability to write with an insightful and introspective style really appealed to me as a teenager and still does as an adult. Perhaps this is where my reflexive nature originates from (I'm a postgrad sociologist)? Also my love for the main characters; Ellen, Link and James, in this book is unparalleled. I just love of their dynamic. Their

relationships is really something else “ and for me it works to produce an amazing story about the complexity of love and growing up. The way in which Garret handles their relationship, in my opinion, is what makes this book so effectual in dealing with questions of sexuality and issues surrounding it. I guess some may say that this book is dated now. But you know what? I don’t care and I still think this book is some of the strongest teenage fiction that I have ever come across, So much so that it is certainly one to read, even now. In fact, writing this post has rekindled my love for Garret’s writing so much that I have now added the rest of her books to my “to read pile”!

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