

HART LOCKETT

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Lyna

*To My Family,
You Who Make My Heart Strong*

“Love is a divine act that can transform and
bring a change of heart.”

— *Lailah Gifty Akita*

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Koraline tried hard to control her breathing as wave after wave of dizziness made her surroundings spin out of control. The unbalanced equilibrium she faced had her slamming her back into the girl's changing room lockers. The hit had her sprawled out on the floor, gripping her locket tightly to her chest. These episodes were already normal to her. Lately, they'd been more frequent and a lot stronger. Her breathing came in erratic chops. The pain much more severe than before. Unable to control her tongue, a loud grunt escaped her lips, followed by a rare obscenity.

No sounds were audible to her but for the ringing in her ears. So when she felt strong, gentle hands on her slumped shoulders, she almost had a real heart attack right then and there. Kora knew her heart better than that. The issues with her heart weren't exactly from a heart attack. There were times when it sure felt like one. The boy in front of her wasn't her first choice. Hell, he wasn't even her last choice for a savior, but beggars can't be choosers. She could barely see him through the tears pooling in her eyes, but boy did he smell good. Surprisingly, Bastian Lockett smelled incredibly lovely—for a

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weed smoking, class skipping, Emo. The dark haired boy was talking to her, but not one word penetrated the fog in her brain. A sharp, stinging pain had her shouting another expletive. Bastian looked around for something or someone as he kneeled in front of her. He went to get up off of the floor, but Kora couldn't afford someone finding out about her heart condition. She looked at him again.

Someone important she thought.

She tightly grabbed his wrist, knowing she was mouthing the words 'not to call anyone' even though she couldn't hear a word out of her mouth. Koralline Hart was the school princess. Everything went her way. Her life—for all people knew—was perfect. Having a rare condition like Brugada Syndrome wasn't something she wished to share with anyone. She didn't want the pity-looks from her friends, or the whispered words behind her back. Kora wiped at her brow as sweat dripped from it in small rivulets of liquefied discomfort. Each drop represented the tightening in her chest and the erratic beats of her troublesome heart.

The pain began to subside. Koralline blinked away the tears, breathing in and out at a steadier pace. Each breath through her nose brought images of sexy male models, while each breath out brought the realization that the scent was coming from the wrong type of guy. Then she realized she was still

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holding on to his wrist like a hungry crocodile at dinner time. She let go as if burned.

“I-I’m fine now,” she managed to squeak out.

Bastian swooped in to stare at her face. The sudden invasion of space had her almost slamming her head on the lockers. She stared at him while his face hovered mere inches from hers. Her heart began to do its abnormal acrobatic routines, but this time it felt different. His smell surrounded her. She breathed it in like a deprived woman.

How strange.

The boy tipped his head to one side as he stared at her with jaded eyes. The long hair he usually had slicked behind his ear, slipped from its confines, swaying in front of his face. “What was happening to you, Hart?”

His proximity had her hearing things because she replied defensively. No person had ever realized it was her heart giving her problems. “My heart is fine, Bastian Lockett! It may be a little erratic, but it’s not like there’s anything I can do about it.”

It’ll eventually kill me, so why should I stress about it now, she mentally added.

However, it was his reaction. This boy’s shocked look—those big green eyes going all wide that Kora understood she had said too much. With shaking arms, she pushed herself off of the floor, placing a hand on one of the lockers to keep steady. Bastian

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rose along with her. The curiosity in his eyes gave him away. The silence worried her. The mayor barely knew the extent of the issue, and the old man was her father.

Sebastian was an idiot. With all the brain cells he was losing doing drugs, it was a miracle he knew how to dress. Koraline looked at the outfit in question. Dark blue jeans that looked black in a small lit room had several rips in them. He wore his signature large hoodie that probably covered a plethora of tattoos. Then he topped it off with faded combat boots that had gone through the Vietnam War.

Correction: He didn't know how to dress.

Koraline watched as Bastian looked at the empty room around him as if taking in the prohibited environment for the first time. Seeing him in the girl's locker room didn't shock her if the rumors around school about him were true. He had finally finished his debauched perusal when he turned to face her again.

“Does the school know about your heart issue?”

A sour taste filled her mouth, and as she swallowed, it seemed the only thing she could think of was that it was all over for her. “It's none of your business!”

He slightly reeled back. “You're right; it isn't.”

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Sebastian didn't say another word to her, but Kora couldn't leave it at that.

Pointing a slim finger at his chest, she puffed out her own, looking down her nose at him. "You better not say a word to anyone, Sebastian Lockett, or I'll make you wish you hadn't."

The look he returned was a challenge. He didn't shy away from her like others did when she strutted around her plutocracy of refined eating habits, and ritzy aristocratic noses stuck up in the air. Bastian could not care less that she came from an influential family. The boy merely lets one side of his mouth lift slightly, inching nearer and nearer.

"Is that a threat, Koralline Hart?" She shuffled backward, her heels touching the wall.

"Because if it is, then I must warn you that I do not take kindly to threats."

Kora's heart somersaulted by his nearness and lack of boundaries. The sensation scared her. "I don't make threats," were the only words she barely muttered before he was whipping his bag over his cold shoulder and walking out of the room.

Now, why couldn't she look away? Kora leaned on the locker door, trying to control what remained of her weak heart. Her hand automatically went to her locket. Anxiety wouldn't help her any right now, but when she couldn't feel it, she looked around in a panic. The locket was the only thing her

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mother had left behind before she died. Inside was a picture of her deceased mother. But, the necklace was gone. She grabbed her bag from inside the locker, feeling worse than before. This latest attack on her heart felt stronger than all the others.

A while later, Kora sat up in bed with her favorite book. She felt horrible for what she said to him. The only person Koralline ever saw him talking to was his little sister and at times the gaggle of hormonal teenage girls that flocked towards the bad boy. She knew guys at her school who would call him all sorts of names, but he didn't bother with any one of them. There were several reasons why he could've walked away from her earlier, but instead, he risked coming into the locker room. His actions meant he was a lot more decent than she was.

Koralline looked at the clock on her cell phone.

8:40 P.M.

Biting her lower lip while deep in thought, she decided to walk to his house. She was never going to get any sleep that night knowing she was such a jerk. Jumping off the bed, Kora slid her feet into some sandals as she grabbed her house keys from the nightstand. Her father wasn't home yet, so she didn't bother telling anyone where she was going. Sebastian lived with his grandmother a few streets down from her in the more obscure part of their neighborhood. The only reason she knew this was

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because her boyfriend took that route on his way to her house and she'd see his old, beat-up jeep sitting in the driveway. The vehicle was darker than usual outside when no stars were in sight. She pulled her knit sweater closer to her to ward off the chill in her bones.

The more Kora walked, the more she realized that she had no idea how she was going to go about apologizing to him. Crossing the street, she could see his house partially lit by the buzzing street lamp in front of it. Most of the street lamps were barely illuminated, humming their exhaustion. Her heart began to hammer wildly behind her chest. A hand went up as if to hold it in place. Why couldn't she wait to do this at school tomorrow? Koraline's hands fisted by her side. Taking deep breaths to calm her nerves, Kora heard the front door creak open. She looked to see a dark silhouette step out from the dimly lit interior. The person walked towards the jeep, throwing a large bag into the open back seat. She saw a strong hand pull down the hood from its head, belatedly realizing that it was Bastian. The awareness brought a squeak from her lips, her heart pounding harder within her.

A sense of urgency drove her to turn around and begin rushing back home. What was she thinking coming down here? She shuffled faster away,

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cursing, hoping that she wasn't making a fool of herself.

“You stalking me now, Hart?”

The deep voice made her stop dead in her tracks. She fought with two things then—if she ran, Sebastian would never honestly know it was her. She could also turn around and apologize, instead of dragging it along. Standing there debating wasn't going to change things, so she turned around to face him. Bastian looked freshly bathed from the top of his head to his neck, but then he wore that same disgusting hoodie and her opinion of him changed again.

“I'm not stalking you, Sebastian. I was out taking a walk. I didn't realize you lived here.”

Yeah, smooth Koralline.

Seems as if she had spoken the words out loud again because he smiled. At that moment, she felt her world tilt, but it wasn't for the usual reasons. Her heart did flips in her stomach. Sensations she never felt before rendered her immobile as she stared at his lips.

“What are you staring at?”

Koralline jumped as if burned. “I-I wasn't staring!”

He smiled again. “Okay, if you say so. Listen, I gotta go do something real quick.” He gestured to

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his vehicle. “If you aren’t busy, you wanna come with?”

She looked over to his jeep and then back at him. What did she have to lose? She was sure none of her friends were going to see her, so it didn’t matter if she took a quick drive with him.

“Okay,” she managed.

Following silently behind him, she wondered why she agreed and then tried convincing herself that it was because she needed to talk to him. He opened the door for her and helped her into the seat. For the entire time in his presence, she wrapped the sweater closer to her, trying to hide the crazy beats of her heart from showing. The moment he jumped in, he drove the key into the ignition. The car groaned as it came to life, most definitely seeing better days.

“Will it explode?” Kora asked.

Sebastian laughed as he placed the car in gear. Kora stared blankly at him. She wasn’t joking! BS was eventually going to land her in a grave, but Kora wasn’t ready to go now. She told him so. That’s when his mirth disappeared, replaced by a seriousness she didn’t wish to see. That was the reason why she didn’t tell anyone she was dying. The last thing she wanted was for others to tip-toe around her or to treat her any differently. That’s why perfection was so crucial to her. If she was

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perfect, then there were no faults they could point out, and if they couldn't point them out, then they didn't exist. Her heart problem wouldn't exist either.

She didn't know where they were going, but she felt an unexpected calm wash over her. Kora watched as he switched gears like a pro, maneuvering the vehicle around different streets till they approached the slummier side of town. He turned the jeep down another street, this one cracked and full of potholes. The stench of unwashed bodies assaulted her sense of smell. Kora turned to see several homeless citizens lining both sides of the street. Fear of the unknown began to manifest. She shifted closer towards Bastian, hoping that if any one of them jumped up to snatch her, Sebastian would be close enough to pull her back.

But that didn't happen.

“Before my parent's died, they opened up a small soup kitchen here to help those who needed a quick meal. I wanted you to see that even though problems were lining the street, at the end of it was hope.”

She didn't understand him then.

He parked the jeep in an empty spot near a small concrete box with fresh blue paint and a sign on the

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front labeled *Lockett's of Love*. Everyone inside sat happy as they ate a warm meal.

“I’ll be right back. Stay in the jeep. You’ll be fine here, I promise.”

For some reason, she believed him.

Koraline watched as Sebastian exited the vehicle, grabbing the bag behind them. He walked down the debris stricken street, approaching each destitute soul squatting in their makeshift beds. He put a hand into his bag and pulled out a full, plain brown, paper bag, and handed one to each person. She was once again struck by how gentle this guy indeed was inside. When he finished, he made his way back to the jeep, throwing the now empty sack back onto the rear seat. A warmth so intense filled her that she reacted without even thinking about what she was doing. A reaction he immediately welcomed with one of his own. There wasn’t time to rationalize what they felt.

There was only them.

This.

Now.

Kora felt, rather than saw, Bastian slowly pull away. With her eyes still closed, she tried to speak but couldn’t. The man had just thoroughly kissed her silent. He didn’t say anything to her, and for that she was grateful. Bastian turned on the car, shifted into gear, and made his way back down the street. This

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time he grabbed her hand in his, and she wasn't sure why, but she enjoyed it more than she thought she ever could. A hard, slick object nestled in her hand between their palms. She wasn't sure what got into her or why her heart beat so much differently around him, but she was afraid of going back to the way things were before him.

Sebastian never questioned her about her illness or choices. She didn't regret him knowing. She was privy to a side no one else saw. Kora realized that this was a powerful feeling and so far out of her control. The fear of it made her pull away, clutching on the object he had placed in her hand. Kora needed the power. She required consistency. Craved it! So, when the jeep parked back in his driveway, Koraline jumped out of the car, taking quick steps away from him. Not once did she turn around, even when he called out to her. Her death was sure to come, and when it did, she would go knowing that she could do no wrong in anyone's eyes. She dated the perfect boy, achieved the perfect grades, and lived a perfect life. That way, when others figure out her flawed heart caused her death, it wouldn't diminish how hard she worked to achieve those goals.

When she made it back inside her lonely house on the top of the hill, she opened up her hand to see the locket. Sebastian's beautiful gesture made her

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cry. Her heart started beating menacingly in her chest, every beat pulsing with the strength to crack her ribs. The pain sent her backward onto the door, her head bouncing off of it. Tears streamed down her face to wash away her preconceived notions. This intensity reminded her that she wasn't in control anymore. Kora cried out in agony. Sheer terror had rendered her immobile.

Her night was coming to a close with a seriousness she couldn't ignore. Bastian's words to her flitted back into her mind.

“At the end there was hope.”

Bastian *was* her hope.

Her erratic, uncontrolled heart knew it, and it was about time she listened. Koraline now understood. A man so out of control on the outside, but in control on the inside. She was doing it all wrong from the start. With the realization of this, her heart began to calm. The need to be in control always came from someone who's lost it, and she refused to lose it again.

Except, she did.

Death wrapped his cold, dark fingers around her heart to squeeze what light remained. There were no other sounds audible in the whole room, but for the ticking of the large Grandfather clock in the foyer. Kora's heart locket hung, half open, from the spot it landed on the floor—the picture of both her and her

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mother now lay inside. No voices threatened the calm of the night. No beating heart full of hope and pain.

Nothing, but a heart locket with her picture inside.

The End