

The Heart's Return

A short story by Avalon Anttila Smederevac

Originally written in Swedish, translated to English

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Content Warning: This story contains themes of blood, emotional distress, and existential struggles. Reader discretion is advised.

What happens when your heart finds its way home?

About the Story:

The Heart's Return was originally written in Swedish and later translated into English. This version reflects the essence of the original. The Swedish version can be found for those who wish to read it in its original form.

Story Teaser:

In *The Heart's Return*, emotions are more than just fleeting feelings—they have a physical presence. When a girl's heart literally leaves her body and starts its own journey, she's forced to grapple with the power of love, loss, and the essence of self. As she tracks the bloody steps her heart leaves behind, she finds herself torn between reclaiming what's hers and understanding that love might be about giving away the most precious thing you can own.

Themes & Tone:

This story explores the depths of emotion and how love can both define and break us. In a world where hearts physically carry the weight of our feelings, love is not just an abstract concept but a raw, visceral experience. A tale of self-discovery, the boundaries of attachment, and the endless cycle of loss and return, *The Heart's Return* invites readers to explore the fragile line between possession and surrender in the face of love.

The Heart's Return

What is it that screams inside me? That itches, tears, rips, and *pulls* my skin in all directions. It splits a clean line down the middle of my chest and steps out with thunderous strides in an unknown direction. What is it that vibrates beneath my skin? When I look at my hands, they are shaking. Why does it feel so unnatural? My only conclusion is that there is too much inside me, it wants to get out, the feelings want to run away from me, they hate living in my chest, in my bones.

Humans have always carried a sort of label of being *sensitive*. What makes us who we are is that we *feel*. Our feelings are our hallmark, the thing that makes others judge us for our choices but also be inspired by our blindness. How is that possible? When it feels like the way we are built makes it impossible to weave our feelings in? To bind rational arguments to what clouds in our chest.

We shake, we feel sick, we scream, we cry, we laugh, we throb, we bleed. Everything feels like desperate reactions to let everything out because it doesn't fit inside. There is no space within us to carry everything, so we fade. The older we get, the more we forget, because we carry more than we can handle.

We are slaves to what we feel, there are myths about those who claim they can control their emotions, who can tame and steer them. There are rumors about those who don't feel at all – empty shells, driven by the black hole that shows everything that's missing. Should I be surprised when I see my heart grow legs and learn to run without ever learning to walk?

What do I know about anything? I think to myself as I watch my heart leave two small bloody footprints in a line. A line that leads away from me, that seems to pulse with words I can't understand. I witness those words fly into the air in invisible ink, each letter twisting around my neck like a noose. My heart is not just a container for my feelings, it is my center, my everything. It's where my fears hide, where my dreams live. When it leaves me, it's as if my entire self cracks apart.

A smile grows on my lips, I gasp for air. Is that what people long for when they say they want love? Do they want it ripped straight out of your chest and run into the arms of someone else? Why would I not want to keep the most important thing I can own? The thing that makes me breathe, live, exist? Should I want to give it to someone else with a pretty ribbon around it? Is that love – to give away the most precious thing you have?

I grip tightly around the emptiness in my chest. I clutch the bloodstained shirt and try not to bleed all the way from the bus to my bench at school. I dare not look down to see how many feelings I've spilled over myself. My friend says something about how nice my shirt is, but I hear nothing but murmuring thoughts trying to convince me that I'm still alive, that my two legs still work and can take me to my chair.

When I've just sat down, I'm met by a warm hand on my leg, attached to an arm that stretches across the gap between our desks. My eyes stare straight down, they don't dare look up. Something pulses. It grows in time with my breaths. *My breaths*. I'm still alive. I feel them in time with what should be my heartbeat, vibrating

through my legs, into the hand on my knee, out through the arm to the one beside me. *I don't dare look up.*

Instead, I try to focus on the day's chapter. But about halfway through the sentence, I see small bloody steps, almost dried into the paper, they have that brownish color. I follow them slowly with my eyes, leading to the edge of the desk and abruptly stopping as if they've jumped down. I look down at the floor and follow the steps to the person next to me.

They climb up the chair and disappear into his jacket pocket. He says something, but I only hear the vibrations in the air. They struck me hard in the head, and I'm thrown out of the emptiness I've been trapped in all morning.

"Sorry?" I say weakly and look to the left.

If my heart was still in my chest, it would be pounding fiercely. The eyes I meet are soft, yet despite that, I'm struck by nausea. I realize it's because I recognize these eyes. As if multiple versions of me have lived in different countries, on different planets, in different bodies, with different opinions and personalities, raised in different families with different backgrounds, speaking different languages, but always managed to stare into these dark brown eyes. Always manage to study their soft features that compose the face I'm now, not for the first time, looking at.

It should be comforting to recognize him, but instead, it makes me uneasy. How can someone feel so familiar and yet so foreign? As if he carries a part of me that I've never been able to keep for myself.

I study how his dark skin glows in the sunlight that's managed to squeeze through the tight clouds covering the sky. A striking contrast to the white shirt he hasn't bothered to tuck in properly. His hair lies

on his head in the form of wild dark curls in a way that seems both intentional and rebellious. Each strand has conspired, whispered among themselves to make sure to create an effect that not only contributes to his mischievous charm but also ensures that no one walks with their heart safely in their chest.

His glasses rest on his nose, slightly crooked, as if even they can't keep up with his pace. He looks like the kind of person who could charm the stars down from the sky. The worst part of this irresistible constellation of features he carries must be his smile. Broken, carefree, and contagious. But with something behind it, something growing, waiting to be discovered, locked in a room that even he hasn't managed to find a key to.

I take a sharp breath when his warm hand leaves my knee. I glance down quickly to see if it has left a burn mark through my clothes and that the skin isn't red and fleshly in the shape of his hand.

"I just asked if you're okay?"

His voice glides between us so effortlessly that I almost feel like slapping him. No, he's not behind what happened to me this morning. Or is he? I glare at his jacket pocket. If my thoughts weren't swirling uncontrollably in my head, I would have thought about this earlier, but there's something there, pulsing, raw, inexplicable. I want to reach for it, yank it back, and hold it tightly against my chest. But I know it's already too late. It has chosen him, and maybe I have no choice but to let it stay there.

"I'm okay," I mumble and slump in my chair.

The thoughts have started spinning again, hoping to weave some sort of calming thought that my heart knows what it's doing, that it has some kind of plan. That love isn't about someone coming and

taking your heart, but knowing what they want. It ripped itself out of my body and left me empty as if it always knew it didn't belong here. Is it love – to be powerless, to be abandoned by yourself? I lay my hands resting on the table in front of me and try to make peace with the rest of my body that it's okay. Even though all my insights and nervous system scream at me about all the possible dangers that come with love. I try not to listen, convincing myself that this is beyond my control.

After about half the seminar, my body has settled, I don't let the smell of his perfume make me dizzy, his voice doesn't pull me in, I pretend that his laugh doesn't make me naturally lean towards him, as if someone has sewn magnets into our cells. Instead, I think about how his beautiful untouched hands rest softly against the edge of the table.

I try to convince myself that they won't pick up my heart from his pocket and crush it slowly in their grip. I convince myself that his fine soft eyes won't stare at how life slowly fades out of it and that his warm smile won't twist sadistically when he looks down at the pool of blood, the only evidence left of my existence.

I jump out of my chair and quickly find myself in front of the sink in the bathroom. I stare myself in the eyes as I promise myself I won't lose control. I splash water in my face. I try to breathe air into my lungs, listening to the blood still flowing in my veins. I stand by the doorframe and stare into the classroom through the blurry window.

What happens when the heart finds its way home? When it tears, pulls away, disappears from your arms and falls into someone else's? I see how my heart beats in his pocket, but what I don't see is how it

lies pressed together with someone else's. How his own heart ripped itself out of his chest and landed next to mine. He managed to wash off the blood and change his shirt before he sat down in the classroom.

If I had looked closely, I would have seen how my dark, worn-out heart had bound itself to his glowing, warm one. How they embrace each other because they recognize each other, they have lived in several different bodies, under different times, and they have never failed to find each other again. The first time, they shyly shook hands with rosy cheeks. Now, they hold tightly to each other because they know they will be torn apart again, just as they tore themselves out of each of their chests. They will be separated again and again, beating out of sync, flowing in solitude. Until they find each other again.

I should feel relieved, I should feel that there is a meaning in our hearts finding each other again and again. But all I feel is a weight. Because what happens when they're torn apart again? How many times can a heart leave and come back before it breaks for good?

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