

Extract from:



About Griffen's Heart
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Prologue

One day you're playing soccer with your mates. Next, you're pretty much an invalid. One day you're on a school tramp in the Port Hills, next it takes all your energy just to get to school.

It started with a simple old sore throat. Then one morning a few days later I woke up and thought I was in the land of the triangles. My legs felt like they were on fire. Mysterious parts of me were hurting. I threw back the sheets and tried to get out of bed. The floor rushed up to meet me. I fell flat on my face.

When Mum found me, I was babbling about getting on the motorway and heading for Timbuktu. And we don't even have a motorway in our town. She must've got me back into bed. I say 'must have' because the next few hours were blank. Like somebody had got a pair of scissors and cut several hours out of my brain. Snip.

Eventually, I found myself in hospital and was told I had rheumatic fever.

Rheumatic fever can damage the valves of the heart – openings like petals that let the blood in and out. They're something you don't ever think about; not until something bad happens to one of them. The technical term for what I've got sounds like a heavy metal band: aortic valve stenosis.

Around that time I ended up in the care of Doctor Brad. My very own heart specialist. Now I was on the waiting list for open heart surgery. I was hoping I wouldn't have to wait too long.

Chapter 1
(Pages 8-10)

That was the trouble with having a serious medical condition like a wonky heart: the teachers didn't know how to handle it. A couple of them were okay, but others, like Chaucer, were pretty nervous when I was around. Probably scared I'd cark it in class. Ever since Mum had told the school the score, Chaucer hadn't been able to look me in the eye. And I thought I was gutless.

I grabbed my copy of *Twelfth Night*, as the class gawked at me like I was a sideshow freak, and headed carefully for the door. I felt sick. I'd been hoping to thrash Daniel at chess at lunchtime, but Chaucer was right: I did need to lie down.

The corridor running through the English block was eerily empty. It could've been the inside of a space ship, even with the distant voices of teachers trying to knock essay writing

and poetry into lumpish heads. I was trying to figure out the most direct route to the sick bay – round the Science block, or through the library? Either way seemed like a humongous expedition, and I wasn't sure I was up to it.

Up ahead, a door cracked open, and a girl carrying a black ring-binder stepped into the corridor. Her skirt was way short. She had shoulder-length hair, the colour of bleached sand.

Roxy Martin.

Everybody knew who she was. She was a year behind me, and seemed to have a reputation. The guys in my class called her the perfect chick. Because she was hot. Hotter than wasabi. Actually, I was paraphrasing. The jocks in my class probably thought wasabi was an exotic kind of deer.

Roxy Martin was that unattainable kind of girl I thought of as Ms Popular. But not in a cheesy, sweet way. She was very cool, very aloof. I wondered sometimes what made her tick. How could you be so beautiful and still human at the same time?

Somebody once passed around a magazine which had her posed in a forest, with ruins and a full moon in the background, modeling a pair of shoes. She looked 23 in that photo. Shameful, but I bought a copy of the mag, so I could study that fierce glare and those long legs.

Meanwhile, up ahead the light made Roxy's hair gleam like white gold. Despite feeling crook, I sucked in a breath. Then she glanced back over her shoulder, eyes flashing. God, she'd looked at me! I nearly turned round, pretending to go the other way. But too late. And for some reason, she was waiting for me to catch up. She was standing there, tapping the ring-binder gently against her leg. Her pink nail polish shone against the black.

I sucked in another breath, more slowly this time, and readied myself to say something vaguely intelligent to the most beautiful girl in school. I also noticed she had perfect knees. Lights were sparking in front of my eyes. Bummer. Why did my heart have to play up at an interesting moment like this?

'Hey ...' I said, trying to control the wheeze, 'Roxy.'

Good, man – good start. I'd used her name, confidently and out loud.

Her eyes were steely grey as she looked at me with this funny expression. 'What're you doing out here?'

'Sent to the sick bay.'

That didn't sound too good. I should've lied. Should've told her I'd been sent out to take over a Year 9 class while the teacher had a nervous breakdown. Or I was going to blow up some rugby balls for an important lunchtime match.

'Are you sick?' she asked, her head on one side like a bird listening for a worm. She had that curious, detached look girls get when they're deciding whether they like another girl's new haircut. *Is that cool, or does it suck?*

My ears went hot. What to say? It was way too complicated. I gave a shrug, trying to look relaxed, but my mouth was dry and my brain had forgotten basic English. This conversation wasn't going how I would've liked. We started walking. I'd never been so close to Roxy before. I could smell her perfume. Some kind of flowery scent a bit like raspberry frappuccino. My arm closest to Roxy was tingling slightly. I hoped that was because of her, and not something else. To take my mind off it I tried to think of something to say that would be deep and meaningful, yet witty. She beat me to it.

'You're the kid with the bad heart,' she said in a matter-of-fact voice.

From the author:

About Griffen's Heart was inspired by the true story of a young man with a bad heart who did something very brave. Although James is a bit of a wimp in many respects, he is also capable of acting selflessly, and that was something I wanted to capture in this novel.

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