

Heart In The Window

By Laren Grey

Who is running my heart? How does it beat? Surely there must be a team of engineers keeping it going. They seem distracted by the whistles they get while strutting in their tight curved jeans and breast-boosting posture. Why are they not tending to the boiler in the basement? It needs fuel; fire. There's no time for games and catwalks and catcalls and downfalls. Who is ruining my heart? The same tightly dressed engineers? Distracted. Complacent. Insincere. They smell so good one would never know there was a problem. The sidewalk has flowers growing through the cracks, despite no sign of dirt and trampled and hot. Surely if a flower can grow here unmaintained then my heart can pulse blood through my body a few more times until I find a new engineer. But there is a uniform, she has to dress the part: long brown hair that swirls without explanation and skin aging just enough to form interesting lines to study and fall in love with. First she will have to clean out this dust. It collects under the awning where the wind pushes it away from rain. It piles up in front of a forgotten antique store where it is safe from shoes. My heart sits unseen in the display window, next to a mannequin head with a cool hat nobody wants. It is black with a wide brim and a satin band with turquoise designs. Everyone loves it, but nobody wants it. Most don't see it, they just walk past as if it were landscaping, nor do they see the pathetic little heart of mine partially hidden by it. They look at the plastic eagle, patriotic blues and whites, or the samurai sword or the painting of Abraham Lincoln sticking his tongue out. But this heart has more value. It is real. Stuck in a cheap window at the edge of town. It doesn't merely represent. It *is*. It is my heart. It needs an engineer. No. Not you, old man. Yeah you, in the reflection of the glass, trying on the hat. You can have the belt buckle with a scorpion inlaid in epoxy. Don't even look here. Not that hat either, it doesn't fit your head anymore. I'll buy it if no one else does. Look over there, across the street. Hey, old man, are you paying attention? See her? You see her? Now *that* is an engineer. She gets the heart ticking and the body sprinting. It's those white low tops that curve like a hammock under her smooth, golden ankles. They are carefully selected. She didn't just pick them up and put them on. She chose. It was a deep decision like a marriage proposal or what style of casket would be best for her grandmother. See how white they are on this dusty street? She's been walking all day but they are still like new. That's how I know she is an engineer. She knows how to take care of a heart. She knows how to take care of what she loves. See those holes in her jeans? Yeah, she bought them like that knowing full well her legs would fill the worn spots to her exact dimensions. That's an engineer. Good eyes. Her eyes are like marble worlds. If I could be a sun for them to orbit she would feel warmth. But there is a cold wall between us. This street. It's another continent over there. Cars cutting between us. An ocean of pavement divides us. Whole lives and terrors and beliefs and loves and pains splitting us, and my heart struggles. Dogs run backwards on that side of the street, but I've never seen it because my heart is selfish and doesn't care if any car rides past with excitement about a new pet or fear of going home. I'm distracted, like the finely curved engineers of yore. I too am distracted. The cars are just occasional blurs of white or silver or gray, yet they cut my attention, they cut all the potential with their metal, with their aerodynamic shapes, all while I ignore the angels and demons in their windshields. She takes my breath every time, though I've never seen her before. First she takes my breath away then my breath goes away. I have to sit. I will sit on a hot bench next to a few hopping finches and feel my heart slow as she fades away. A slow heart in a dusty window under a yellow awning at the edge of town located half a

dozen miles from nowhere. An engineer fading into the afternoon heat like a mirage. The heart keeps beating in the window. Everyone loves it, but no one wants it.