

The Heart Jar

by Lori Lou Freshwater

The diner on the corner is one of those Disneyfied modern cut-outs trying to mimic the actual thing but failing utterly. The street, a vein of hipness running through an Ivy League campus that is still trying to cling to a time when it all meant something. As I walk by, I am blasted with a Motown song, a fabulous beat, it lifts the corners of my mouth into a smile even though it doesn't make me happy. Around the bottom of the impostor diner, the good burger franchise people have added a metal facade to make people think of one of the classic little silver trailer diners from the old days. At least they have that. At least they have a facade, I mean. Unlike me. My facade has been destroyed, not as much by the jackhammer days that seem to come in violent spasms, but more by the slow water erosion of all the days.

I've been an atheist since so long ago, but now I actually know what it means to lose faith. It is a loss that starts filling the hourglass with black sand, fast, relentless, as gravity hisses it down into the last remaining empty space. Gravity, gravity, after the faith is lost (faith in the possibility of magic?) gravity stops being a steady and grounding force, and starts pushing, pushing, pushing, like a bully, so hard that the muscles respond with aches and joints all feel like they're two parts of a mortar and pestle. This is when you become the walking dead. People like me, we're the real zombies. We're the only real thing left in a world that has abstracted itself so many times that artifice becomes the achievement.

The sidewalk moves past me on a conveyor belt. The college students and mothers with babies, the righteous professors trying to salvage as many lucid moments as they can from the deep pits of intellectualism and alcohol, the old poet women with their manes of long gray hair and their live eyes, all move past me in a silent movie I am no longer an actor in, only a watcher. But I'm not really watching either, am I?

The scent from the Indian restaurant begins to penetrate. This helps me to I know I am close. I am within a block of the store, the only store in the city that sells relics of Canopic Jars. Those jars the Egyptians used to keep their organs in during the mummification process. I may have to buy all four in the set, even though I only need one. But however I have to do it, I am going to buy my heart jar and take it home. I am going to put it on the mantel of my boarded-up fireplace, and I am going to wait.

I walk into the store and into a musty thickness. There is a girl unpacking a box in the corner. "Excuse me, do you still carry Canopic Jars?" I say without wasting any time.

"Yes Sir, we sure do. They're right over there," she says as she points to the glass shelf in the back.

Relieved, I walk over to the jars. Right away I think I want the one that has more of an animal than a human face. I certainly know I need the biggest one. I pick it up and it is heavier than I thought it would be. I open the lid. "Miss, this is solid. I wanted to put something in it."

She stands up and looks at me with this strange expression, "Oh no, sorry, those are only for decorative purposes."

I smile again.

