Though the Heart be Still as Loving

by Brianne Fidgety

Right Atrium

The moon starts to glow with a certain determination around 3 a.m. I often wonder if it's practicing to compete with the sun someday, unleashing the depths of its potential when nobody is looking. It splays its light across every open leaf, dappling the sleeping world with distorted reflections of itself. To me, that's the best time in a twenty-four-hour rotation of the earth's axis; maniacs dance, clouds shatter, and secrets evaporate.

I knew what I had to do. I climbed out onto the roof, my bare feet scraping against the shingles. I had packed my supplies into an unceremonious cardboard box. My intended action had been a longtime coming. The fireflies hung in the still air, frozen, acrimester flashes paused on an illuminating setting.

I took out the knife. It was sort of one of those deals that an extra from *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* would have probably carried. With the exception of being real, it was curved at the end, the blade a perfect container for light.

Without a word, I made a careful incision into my chest. I did not bleed since I had resolved not to. After all, my mind is a tough neighborhood.

Once a sufficiently clean opening had been made, I painstakingly separated my costal cartilage from my sternum, doing my best not to wince at the crackling sound it produced. It took me a while to

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work through all that connective tissue, but I remained Spartan and stoic. Words had no bearing on what I was about to do.

I reached into my thoracic cavity, and, minding my lungs and arteries, pulled out my own heart. It came loose with a sloppy gurgle. I stared at it beating and glistening in the moonlight. Time, however, was working against me, so I quickly got to work.

Step one called for twine. I lifted it from the box and strung it around the organ I held in my hand, which was continuing to contract strongly. A good sign. I bound it tightly while humming a song to keep my nerves at bay.

Once half the spool was gone, I decided that it was enough. I cut the twine and began to add items that would keep my heart living and fresh. I wove flowers I had crafted from my own words into the twine, along with lunamoths that had spontaneously generated from late nights passed listening to music and sapphires produced by every stray flash that had ever emanated from my camera.

With my heart preserved, I shoved a handful of baubles back in its place: some pages torn from my favorite books, a bass guitar string, a butane lighter, a shot of vodka. I stitched myself back up and left the roof in favor of the attic, where I hung my still-beating heart in a window that was barely discernible from the street. I figured the sun would keep it warm.

"You're staying here until I need you again," I instructed the once-king of my circulatory system.

The loneliness had taken hold of my thoughts and reasoning. It had been uncontrollable, despite the copious amounts of booze and books I drugged myself with. I couldn't deal with it for much longer, so I did the only thing I knew would work. Sure, some people would

say that a cardioectomy is a little extreme, but I have always worked well with extremes.

I wasn't surprised that I slept so well that night. The unrelenting pain in my chest was finally gone.

Right Ventricle

I noticed right off the perpetual thumping in my ears. I could still hear it when I was far away from my house, like at work or grocery shopping. I shrugged it off, rationalizing it as something akin to phantom limb syndrome. It eventually faded, or I just didn't notice it anymore. Whatever.

One night I felt like walking instead of slumbering. I get like that sometimes. While out around 3 a.m., I encountered a band of radioactive ghosts on a streetcorner.

The music they played plunged through my neurons, roughing me up through the span of my central nervous system. The violin sank with sorrow and rose with helium produced by joy. Drums of varying types spelled out rhythms as ancient as antimatter. A cello worked hard to be superglue of the quark variety. There were no lyrics, but there didn't need to be. I understood, or more accurately, I wished I could.

I rushed home, opened myself back up, dusted off my heart, and shoved it back into its rightful home. Tiredness suddenly hit me, and I stumbled downstairs to bed.

Left Atrium

I wasn't feeling right the next day. Worried I might have an infection, I checked my incision for redness and inflammation, but it seemed to be healing nicely.

Out of boredom, I telephoned an acquaintance of mine. The only thing I really knew about him is that he insisted I take his number home since I wouldn't take him. We met one night after one of my shows a few months ago, and other than exchanging emails a few times, I had no real connection to him. Good, because that's exactly what I was looking for.

We went out for coffee, but that didn't last long. I have a certain stare I perfected in the mirror, but was always too nervous to try in the outside world for fear I would look stupid. I had a theory that it could bring any man to his knees, excusing the fact that I'm not a pretty girl. But since I now lacked emotion, I poured it on post haste. It worked, and less than a half an hour after arriving, he suggested we go back to his apartment.

I was never a one night stand kind of person, mainly because my heart was too big not to have feelings that were easily hurt. Sex this time was difficult, not on account of the awkwardness, but rather because I could not get a beat down. My internal metronome had vanished. Eventually, I played a song in my head and did my best to go with that instead. It did its job.

Afterward, a lay on my back while smoking a cigarette. My pulse was barely above normal and my brain was empty. I had no interest in anything.

"Hey, would you like to -- " he started to ask.

"No," I replied, startling myself with a resounding tone of emptiness. "I want to go home."

I hastily pulled my clothes back on and left.

My suspicions were confirmed: My heart was still beating in the window, suspended by twine. I considered another surgery, but thought it wouldn't be in my best interest since I was sure it would not stay inside me.

Left Ventricle

There are a multitude of things I miss about having a heart, one of which is my ability to write. The only way this account came to be is through a crackling voice message I left for myself that I later transcribed. I'm not sure when I'll be able to replace my organ, if I should forget about it completely or fashion a better substitution than the random crap I have shoved in there.

It's 3 a.m. I'm strangely indifferent to 3 a.m.