

A Heart

for Sale

Biki Nhog

On a sunny summer's day, I went away. My feet well-worn, took me to market—and therein I searched the windows for curiosities...until I chanced upon a place quite forlorn; hidden and away from eyes casual or astray.

No sunlight struck this window, not for the awning of faded pink nor the manner those stores—its neighbors—stood so many heads taller than it...but because, in its old age, it never thought a time may come when the sun simply did not want to greet it anymore.

Dust caked its window. Its door didn't open without a fuss and a fight, and few people knew it existed at all.

But, for the effort of its owner—whatever they may be—I could yet see inside. Just one item upon its carved shelves.

A heart.

Shivering, not beating.

Shackled, not free roaming, though the shackle—too large—couldn't have restrained it, if it had the interest in slithering away.

Two dollars.

Just enough for a bottle of tea, which at first—I confess—I had quite been set upon buying. But I went inside and I sought its salesman.

He sat, in weeds, behind an old counter. His tired eyes didn't even open to see me, as I came inside.

"The heart in your window," I greeted askance, "May I buy it?"

He did not answer, not at first. Instead, rocking in his chair. But, after a few moments, stopped. Shuddered a sigh.

"You cannot buy a heart," he said, "You must adopt it."

His lidded gaze lifted to me. Beyond me. To the shelf, and the heart upon it.

"But you do not want that heart, my dear," he murmured. "It is used. And a used heart does not trust. It cannot trust. Hearts have only so much trust to give away, and that one... has given such and so much away—and to so many—but it ran itself dry, for never was trust given back to it from others."

"I will keep it warm," I promised, "And it will have a home with me. It is not much of a home, but I will share it for free."

"You cannot adopt a heart with pity," he said, "A heart is much too proud. Pity does not befit dignity, because pity alone does not promise an identity."

I admit, my interest traded from curiosity...to adversary. Why deny me? “Why don’t you put these things on its price tag?” I demanded, “Instead of luring me with a promise of having a heart for two dollars?”

“You cannot convince a heart that it will have a home, if you get angry at it...and all these things—you know them already—but you have chosen to not remember them. Is the only reason you want to adopt this heart, because you have enough money to pay for it?”

I sighed.

Of course.

I should have suspected.

“Is it right to play games, like this?”

“Yes, but not because I think so. That is what the world has decided. I will let you adopt this heart, but it is my sentimental side which wishes...just a small part...that someone ask these questions before they do. A heart is not to be adopted, and then forgotten about. You see, this heart has been adopted three times already. And all three times, it came back.”

When I asked him to tell me of these three times, he said I would have to ask the heart.

I paid him the price.

And he reached underneath his eye, to produce
an old and delicate key. One to unshackle the heart
with.

When I went with the key to free that heart
by the window, it would not let me. I whispered to it,
sweet things—as I knew all hearts yearn to hear...

...but when the heart heard them, it shriveled
away from me.

I tried instead to catch it. But it would not let
me hold it.

And when I pleaded with it, it bled.

By now, the sun had sunk, and those streets
beyond became dark. I watched as that heart shied
from the lantern lights, to creep instead in the
shadows and the dust.

I tried to offer it food.

A warm bath.

A place to be and to stay.

But still, alas, still...I could not get it to come
to me.

Finally, I asked it outright: “Why do you not
want to have a home?”

“Home is where you are loved,” the heart
answered me. “Home is where it does not matter
how you look, nor how much you are worth...what
you have or do not...it is a place where you are

wanted. A place where someone will listen. Where someone will see you as you, and not for what others say you look like. And if someone says to you, in a home, that you may open yourself to them... then they should mean it, and never betray you for a laugh—nor for ‘better,’ because home... is yours. That cannot be you.”

“And why cannot it be me?” I demanded.

“Because no heart goes for adoption when they are born. They have to be offered, by a price they set themselves. And you. You do not even recognize your own heart.”