

Broken Art

I met him at the museum: we were surrounded by statues and the most intricate paintings in London. Elegant busts of mythical heroes, staring bravely out for all of eternity - or until some deviant took a hammer to them.

I think I appreciate beauty more if it's destroyed; it reminds me what we've lost.

When I think back to that week, it was like we moved in slow motion. We barely spoke; we just gazed into each other. We moved in an ever diminishing orbit around each other's hearts: spiralling in until we burnt up in each other's acrid atmospheres.

There was a small etching, almost buried in the far corner of one of the tiniest rooms: it was shrouded in shadow and so faint as to be almost indistinguishable from the dancing lights that flickered from the neon bulb overhead. There was a harshness to this place and I think that's what made us stop.

He was tall, powerful and resolute in his stance. His back was broad and his long coat hung like a cloak from his wide shoulders. Next to him, I felt like a troll, a dwarf: a troglodyte. Why would he even notice me?

So what should I have thought when his brave fingers twisted into my shaking hands? Joined, we absorbed each other.

The sharp lines of the etching shimmered behind the glass. My barriers were less sturdy. I went with him: following behind, almost struggling to keep pace with him. Invisible chains.

He talked at me all day: pointing out the most arcane of details in the exhibits. Telling me what to think. I liked to listen and I liked to learn. I liked leaving with him.

The grey statues, cold and unmoved, observed us as we left. The light had faded into a half night and a thin fog crept from alleys and cuts, into the desolate street.

He ordered monkfish for me. I didn't realise I liked it. He had steak: rare and bloody – an inch removed from the field. He tasted it slowly, chewing with his eyes fixed on me. I watched his tongue as it ran slowly over his teeth and his lips. I couldn't move and he liked that. I know this now.

The next morning, as I sat on the Tube – roaring south towards Stratford, I examined my bruises: angry, yellow and accusatory. He'd educated me some more last night; he'd explained to me that pain brought salvation. After he'd used me...

I can't tell you about that. Just like I can't explain why I went back to his flat that night.

You'd think I would know better: a professional man with a sensible city job. At forty eight, you'd think I'd... well, be less pliant, less malleable.

But I needed him; I needed it. I needed to be somebody's – I wanted to be owned.

And for that week, that's what I was: his possession. Another work of art for him to enjoy – to explore. Until he'd drained me.

Then he didn't answer the door, didn't pick up his phone, didn't open his window when I scratched at it in the pouring rain. But I could see him, looking into me from behind the vintage, lace curtains. Another statue.

In another life.