Saviour

“What are you doing in here?”

Charlotte turned.

“Come look at the view.”

“But”-

“Ben, seriously, look.

The strip of railway that split the countryside in two had fallen out of use months ago, but that was no explanation for the engine quietly rusting into the landscape. Maybe it was waiting for repairs that would never come or maybe, like so many in recent times, the driver and all the people inside simply got up and walked away.

The stagnant water that pooled between the seats also hung in the air, leaving everything damp to the touch, as though the carriage itself was the carcass of some recently departed animal. In the far corner a cluster of bottles and cigarette butts lay festering, the trail of scuttled debris leading to it the only sign of recent habitation. A fine layer of broken glass crunched underfoot like snow. It smelt like gin and dust.

Charlotte was sitting in one of the empty windows, a thread of smoke unravelling above her head. She shuffled up as he swung his long legs over the windowsill and joined her, train wobbling ominously. He followed her gaze - and felt his breath catch in his throat.

“Woah…”

“Yup.”

They’d been driving with their backs to it but now he saw, next to the thin line of motorway halving the scrubland, poised on the horizon was a gigantic statue. It was the figure of a man, simply moulded, one hand reaching towards the sky. From the knees down it was encased in a giant mound of stone, not randomly uneven, like rubble, but jointed, like it’s feet were buried in a spine. The clay it was made from was stained a deep crimson, the bleak light behind it stencilled it’s outline into the clouds.

“That’s amazing!”

Charlotte grunted in approval. Stowing the cigarette in the corner of her mouth, she reached into her jacket pocket and produced a small tin, emblazoned with the logo of the bookshop she used to work at. The night the store was raided she’d escaped with only a stack of Batman comics and their entire supply of promotional mints. They rationed them out now to mark special occasions.

Solemnly they both took one. Ben let his melt on his tongue.

“How long till we get to the docks?” She asked.

“Two days.” Supressing a chill, he detached the car keys from his belt and began to toss them in the air. They jangled as they hit his hands. “Reckon it’ll be better in France?”

“It’s got to be, right? They still have a government.”

“I heard Germany fell last week.”
“I heard that too.” She looked at him. “Who did you vote for, that last time?”

“I didn’t vote.”

“No. Neither did I.”

The keys jumped higher, glinting in the cold sunlight. Finally he missed and they fell to the train’s floor, disappearing into the trash. Cursing, he leant down to pick them up. Charlotte muttered something under her breath.

“What?”

“I said thanks for bringing me.”

She coughed, chucked the cigarette butt over the side. Coughed again.

“I’ve got no money, my flat burnt down and I can’t speak French. But you brought me with you. So, thanks.”

The train groaned as Ben straightened up, swallowing the mint whole. It stuck in his throat for a moment before slipping down.

“Of course I brought you, I’d get bored.”

She nodded.

“Besides…. You’re all I’ve got.”

She nodded again. After a moment she shifted awkwardly along the windowsill and put an arm around him. He hugged her back until she pulled away. Suddenly he laughed.

“What?”

“Remember when we made that voodoo doll?”

A grin spread across her face. “Mrs Williams, wasn’t it?”

“You made me bait!”

“Not bait, distraction. You were too chicken to do it yourself.”

“You got the hair though, right?”

“Hell yeah I did. Christ, remember we couldn’t figure out how to make the doll, so we just shoved it all in a sock?”

“And the googly eyes.”

“Oh yeah, I forgot that. That was your idea.”

“What did you do with it, anyway?”

“I don’t know, I think I forgot about it.” She snorted. “Hey, if it went up with the rest of the flat, maybe it worked.”

“Somewhere, in some retirement home, an old woman burst into flame.”

“Yup.”
He watched her hand wander towards the packet of cigarettes, retreating as she decided against it. A fleeting wind rattled through the train. He wouldn’t get a straight answer if he asked in the car. It may as well be now. It had to be now.

“You ok?” He asked.

Charlotte raised an eyebrow.

“Seriously.”

He realised it then. She looked sad. She hadn’t looked sad for a long time. Not since there were much smaller things to be sad about. Not when the radio stopped playing. Not when he’d picked her up on the curb outside her flat, everything she owned burning behind her. Not even that day a week ago when he’d started crying in the car.

“I don’t know, dude,” She said.

Ben paused. Then he reached out and pointed to the monolith on the horizon. The dying light outlined it in a burning red, clay darkening to the colour of blood.

“You know Anthony Gormley?”

“He’s an artist, right?”

“Yeah. He did The Angel of the North.”

“That one of his?”

“It’s the last one he ever did.”

“He’s dead?”

Ben exhaled slowly.

“He got caught in a riot. Trampled to death.”

“Damn.”

“Yeah... They put this one up just before Parliament was stormed. Some kind of last ditch attempt to keep the country together.”

“What’s it called?”

They looked at the statue, feet entrenched in the angular dirt, one hand cupping the sun.

“Saviour.”

A breeze whipped across the grass. They moved a little closer together. The train’s shadow spread like a stain over the earth. In ten minutes they would get back in the car.