

THE GALLERY

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The gallery was dark and silent. It was a brooding silence that seemed to suggest that silence was all the gallery had ever known, and over the decades it had become so accustomed to it that the slightest noise would cause its aging structure to crumble into dust, like the ancient skeleton of some long-dead hero.

But the silence wasn't all that it had known. It had been built long ago, and had once teemed with life and noise. Guides had once articulated over the noise of camera flashes and film winding, telling the history of this picture or that statue to hundreds of awed spectators.

Once, loud and brash tourists had "Gee"ed and "Ahh"ed and remarked how quaint this or that picture was. Once, thousands of feet had passed over the carefully waxed and shined floor tiles every day, dulling their

mirror sharp surfaces with the mud and grime of a living, breathing city. Once the gallery had been alive with people, people from hundreds of different living, breathing cities from all over the world.

Now it lay empty. A decrepit, desolate building filled with nothing more than colourful firewood and oversized paperweights. But in its direst moment, it attracted life still.

This life had crossed the boundless infinities of time and countless galaxies to visit the most famous gallery the planet Earth had ever conceived and found it an empty, desolate hole.

The Doctor wandered down the corridors of the gallery, through its seemingly endless rooms filled with nameless faces its nameless walls. The blank, sightless eyes gazed down at the cool grey eyes of the time traveller as he admired the work of the old masters. The painted faces seemed to stare at him, filled with knowledge they could never forget; filled with life in the midst of death. Collages hung on the walls, next to picturesque streams trapped in mid-babble with birds hung in the sky, wings never flapping, their progress through the eternal summer sky halted by a painter's skilful hand.

He paced steadily, his bright umbrella tapping the floor in a monotonous rhythm that echoed the stagnant air of the gallery, breaking a silence that had lasted for hundreds of years. His eye was caught and held by one face, staring down at him from the wall, a frown like an accusation on her young face. The pain in the eyes held him, his neck twisting to keep them in sight as he paced onwards, transfixed by their radiant anger. He could no more escape their fiery intensity than a rabbit could break the fatal stare of the headlights that bore down on it. He would have been caught by their stare,

held forever in the stale atmosphere of the gallery, were it not for the statue.

It was small, perched on a tall pedestal encrusted in centuries of dust, but perfectly formed. A ceramic piece carved with painstaking attention to detail, a foot-tall man bent over clutching onto a globe almost twice his size. The expression on his face, carved in loving accuracy, was one of great exertion, but joy at being able to perform his responsible task. Tiny ceramic beads of sweat stood out on his strained ceramic muscles and his tiny ceramic eyes were clenched shut against the weight of the world on his shoulders. The Doctor took in all this detail in the one glance he had of the statue after he walked into its dust covered pedestal.

The Time lord stood by impotently while the statue tottered on the edge of the pedestal, one moment looking like the dwarf Atlas would topple straight off and topple onto the floor, the next as if all would be well and he would soon settle back onto his feet. But it was not to be – it soon became obvious that the man was to take a headlong dive from the column. The Doctor leaped forward, fingers grasping for the figure, and for the briefest of moments, held the ceramic man in his grasp. For the briefest of moments, the Time Lord could feel the cold pottery beneath his fingertips and actually thought he might be able to save it.

But then it slipped through the fingers that had never really held it, fingers that had been deluding themselves that they were really in control, and the man dived from his haven.



He fell, headfirst, towards the floor, the expression on his face now looking more like fear than exhaustion. His strong arms still held the world in their vice-like grip and pulled it down with him, towards destruction on the cold marble floor. It hit with a loud crash, shattering into a thousand shards of its former glory in front of the Doctor's eyes. For a moment it looked as if the world might survive the fall, but then it too cracked and crumbled, mixing with the dust that already lined the cold hard floor.

The Time Lord dived onto the floor and scrambled through the wreckage, trying to salvage part of the statue. Eventually he held in his hands the two largest pieces of the shattered globe, rising to his feet in front of a large white frame as he tried to join them together. Perhaps, with a little time and attention, the work could be returned to its former glory . . . but he was deluding himself. His hands still tried endless permutations to join the two shards, but his head rose to stare at the frame before him.

The scene within it was a landscape drawn out of a pessimist's nightmare, a land of bleak greys and empty deserts. No birds hung in the skies, no scenic rivers babbled into the sea. Just grey dust whipped into a frenzy by a cold, unforgiving wind. No life. Anywhere. It was a world destroyed, laid barren by wanton waste and foolhardy destruction.

Tears came easily to the Doctor's eyes. He stood, his hands abandoning their fruitless task, with the sound of his sobbing echoing through the once quiet gallery. He stared blankly at the world of grey. Staring not at a painting, but a study of destruction painted by man on the canvas of creation.

The Doctor stood, the shattered remains of the statue at his feet, staring out of the gallery's window, out into the world as man had made it.