

12:41 AM, New York City.

ANNE is a security guard in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which has been long closed for the evening. Her appearance is a paradox: though she is good at her job, she doesn't look like she could be a security guard - fragile, quaint, deeply sad. She is all, all alone, seated on an uncomfortable bench in the middle of a cavernous room. She stares straight ahead at The Thinker: Portrait of Louis N. Kenton by Thomas Eakins. The room is dark except for a few emergency lights and one light pointing upward to illuminate the painting. Shadows dance across ANNE's face just as erratically as thoughts dance through her head. She speaks to the painting. He is listening.

ANNE:

We just sat there, for...

For a long time. In utter, bitter silence.

Nothing. Not an echo of a sound. We just

Stared. Not at each other, just at the wall - this crippling beige. Didn't breathe. For 100 short years or 10 lifetime-long seconds

Or - honestly, probably around 20 minutes, if I had to make a guess. But 20 minutes can be however long you need it to be.

And finally, it's like -

Some angel saw me and took pity on me and screamed this - hurricane of air right into my lungs and I would've been grateful

Only it was too much, and too fast, and I didn't want to speak yet and break this still silence into about a million clattering shards

But I had to because if I didn't -

The pressure was too much. It would've just kept filling until it burst

Or not burst but maybe implode

Some disgusting balloon of too-sullied flesh and purple blood and salty marrow and stinking, maggot-infested intestines, and just -

All the guts I never had.

And I would've died on impact.
Which honestly, might have been nicer, but -
You never think the opportunity will come and when it does you don't hold your breath until it
all falls apart, you -
You gasp for air.
Even if you don't want to, even if you've promised yourself, the next time -
But you just can't because for some reason I will never be able to understand, there's this primal
desire to keep on existing.
So you gasp for air
And I
Did.

But it wasn't a gasp above the water -
It's like I was still drowning, I was still enveloped in these cold waves, but I wasn't hurt -
Because I wasn't a person. I was, for just a few seconds, this -
Magnificent force of nature that he finally had to reckon with.
I was the ocean and the minute I opened my mouth
Everything came rushing out -
All the fears we both had, and insecurities, and isolation, and this - this medieval torture of the
soul -
And all I had to do was just -
It didn't even take a lot of words, is the thing.
But it doesn't matter, because, really, you can say a lot no matter how many words you actually
use.
You know that better than anyone -
Thomas Eakins just finished with you, and hung you on a poorly-painted wall and probably
never looked at you again until he sold you, like this - prostitute of his own creation.
And you sit in this dark - empty - corner of one of the most famous museums in the world, and
nobody cares. Nobody cares if you were real, nobody cares who you are or were -
And no matter how many curious children and pretentious art majors and frightened adults and
lonely old people wonder aloud, what could he be thinking about? He's so lost in thought; it's so
- charming!
They never stay here long enough to realize what it could be.

Do you even know? What you're thinking?

If I were you, I would be thinking that no matter how many people stalk right past you to find
van Gogh, and even - no - no matter how many people really stop and look and listen until they

understand - who say honey, I love the composition and hear the chiaroscuro really heightens the emotional tension in response - does it matter?

Does it matter at all what anybody thinks if you have to sit there and hear it all and know that the person who breathed you into being didn't even care? That he looked at you until he was finished and then gave you away. For far less than what you were worth. And he kept all the profit and left you barren. And so cold.

Don't you think his silence said and says a lot more than any tourist could ever dare to think?

What?

The silence. The silence before I -

Maybe in that silence, I said all of the things I regret.

Maybe he apologized.

I don't know, but that's what I mean, it doesn't matter.

It doesn't matter what we said to each other in the silence, even if it was a lot more, even if that will stay with you the most, because at Christmas when my mom asks where you are -

When my mom asks where he is.

I'll have to say what happened ostensibly. What happened on the surface, what happened objectively, what happened in the screenplay version.

And as soon as I do, she won't forgive me, and she won't care. No one will.

Because what happened in the screenplay version
was

Beat.

Then,

Me: I
Hate you.

And he says:
I know.

And then the light changes. Shadows melt inward from the corners of the frame until they reach the edges of this painting and then your trembling fingers and then the last glint of a tear, and then it's gone. Maybe it is black, but a warm kind of black, that swallows you into death sweetly and slowly. And you hear his footprints quietly descend down some grand marble staircase, and you hear a woman crying, and crying, and then you hear her ask for someone to listen. And you do. And then

End.