

Toy Boy – Leon van Nierop

Extract

He remembered meeting Christina.

After his traumatic experience, before fleeing to Europe, he swore off sex completely. He was like a map without towns, a series of open spaces on a landscape. There may have been a few deserted roads, but there was no clear destination. Most roads simply vanished into nowhere.

To dull his memories he tried to keep busy, doing odd jobs. He laid bricks in London with an energy resembling a live electrical wire. This was an attempt to exorcise the demons that threatened to destroy him. And sometimes, when he slapped cement onto yet another brick, the sound triggered a memory that would make him lose his grip.

He worked as a security guard in Ireland, he plucked dead turkeys on a farm in Scotland, he wandered the moors near Inverness, hoping to find a job that would feed him. And with every boat he hopped onto towards a new destination, he felt even more lost.

His memories threatened to haunt him even when he slipped into bed in yet another hostel, the bedding still reeking of the farm worker who had slept there before him. The deeper he buried his head under a pillow, the fainter the memories would become. It provided him with short-lived respite from his night terrors.

The only time a memory managed to surface was when a woman openly stared and smiled at him. Then he felt the panic rising, the idea of a quickie or one-night stand filling him with dread. And the more he swore off sex, the deeper the memories sank into his subconscious. After a while he felt like a tree planted on the banks of a river, the bark concealing the wounds of an axe or a sharp knife.

Those scars finally started healing when he met Christina in Italy. She awoke his emotions again. He felt like a patient waking from surgery. The desire for a woman filled his whole being. It reminded him of the Tristan he had been before being emotionally stunned months before.

When he met Christina, she smelled of the tiny waves on the Positano shore, caressing his ankles as he strolled through the water. He gradually welcomed the sexual human being he was too scared to recognise. It was like covering himself with a blanket in front of a fire after a snowstorm. That was the warmth she gave to him.