

His Golden Masterpiece

“Maybe one day I’ll show it to you.”

Pierre had let the lie flow earlier that night from his lips in the same way the crimson, red wine now flowed down into his cup. He watched the pour as he laid his head in his arms, eyes half-lidded. The barkeep muttered something Pierre couldn’t hear, and when he blinked again, he couldn’t spot the man anywhere. With a groan, he laid back down, closing his eyes and resting his hands on the back of his neck.

A liar, that’s what he was. He doubted there would ever come a day where he showed Aaron that painting. Even when the man had danced forward, joking as if he would take the cloth off of the painting, Pierre felt his heart almost jump out of his chest. Even now, thinking about it, he felt his heart pick up again. If he had taken the cloth off, if he had seen the painting underneath, what would he have said? What would he have done? God, even the thought of it—

Pierre quickly straightened, throwing the cup up to his lips to drink. The taste of fruit coated his tongue and slid down his throat to join the numbing sensation growing in his gut. How much he wished it would spread, how much he wished it would finally reach his head and blur the thoughts that raced and pressed and *pushed*. Something burned alight behind his eyes and the world swayed, shuddering.

Quickly, he reached down to fumble with his wallet, leaving enough money it hopefully paid for whatever drinks he had that night. However many that had been. God, it should have been more, still. Pierre could feel his pinching thoughts pressing in, and that meant it wasn’t near enough.

Getting up, Pierre swayed as he made his way for the door, stumbling past tables of married couples or giggling, blushing partners—the kind who sputtered and laughed every time their hands brushed against one another. They were all *fools*—

—Or perhaps they were *lucky*, and Pierre instead played the part as the bitter, sad man because they somehow easily held in their hands the gold which he had mined for, day in and day out. His hands, covered as if cuts and bruises adorned them, scratched at cave walls for that one singular flash of golden light, a saving grace in this world of dark, bleak existences. Of lonely nights and half of a cold bed.

Love. God, it was ridiculous.

“Love is not a product of reasonings and statistics.” Twain.

Love made no sense, and that in and of itself stood as a reason to avoid it.

“Love is the whole and more than all.” Cummings.

It didn't matter if Pierre knew something deep within him felt aching hollow. Empty.

“Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind...” Shakespeare.

Because he didn't need something so trivial that could torment his life so intimately.

“Love is when—”

He didn't need it.

“Love is—”

He didn't.

“Love—”

No. The painting— Merely an expression of artistry! The subject no more than a *muse*—

“Love.”

The muse didn't matter. His muse meant nothing. His— No, wait, not his, not *his*—

“Love?”

Tauntingly, horribly, ringing in his ears, beating out of his skull, twisting and reaching and curling around his heart until he gasped and reached for air because *god*, what was life when the only ambition he wished for, the only ambition which *mattered*, stayed mere meters, mere steps away from his grasping, straining reach—

“Love!”

“No!” Pierre shoved himself back into the nearest wall, laughing as his hand ran through and grabbed at his hair, now slick with rain. Had it started raining? Where had he been walking to? When had he even left the building? Questions raced and quickly fell and died within his mind to the more overwhelming, the more pressing matter as the laughs bubbled and pulled from his lips, falling down from the air to the ground like drops of rich, red blood.

A bit like wine, his mind supplied. He laughed at that too.

He felt the tears fall across his cheeks, flowing alongside the rain as his breath eventually ran out of his pathetic, torn laughs, his throat rasping and rough as he shut his mouth with a click. Quickly, he found himself back to the door of his apartment, falling within it and only having the mind to close the door before he knelt before the covered painting as a priest does to their god, holding his head up in his hands as he no longer had an excuse for the water falling down his face, pooling on the crooked wooden floor beneath him.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry...” Pierre whispered out, the words quiet on his tongue like a prayer as he closed his eyes tight. Flashes of the painting found themselves burned into his mind like sun spots across the eyes. He let himself lay forward, head pressing against the floor as he let his hand grab ahold of his chest. Prying his heart from the empty cavity of his chest would hurt less than this. *Death* would hurt less than this.

Pierre lurched forward, hand bundling deep into the painting's cover as he ripped it from its sanction. It fluttered down, down, down, splaying across the ground in front of Pierre as he stared upward, his hands shaking.

And there it stood. A painting. The painting. *His* painting.

Easier, would it be, to describe what it wasn't.

The world around it paled in comparison. Lives moved on its dull, insufficient rotation of function, of work and of duty. Listless, droning, aimless. The world had people—had Pierre—in a chokehold they no longer cared to fight their way out of. Nothing more mattered when the life within you slowly poured from every crevice of your body, washing away. Grey tainted every color—hurt the pure, unadulterated blue of the sky.

Hurt even the dripping red of the roses.

Hurt *especially* the golden shine of the sun.

But god... *god*. It hadn't mattered before. Because Pierre had *his* sun. He had the shining, golden blond that flickered in and out of his sights—the thing that brought the saturated and excited, excessive color back into the world, chipping away at the bleak mirror of reality he constantly found himself trapped in.

Because, at his core, Pierre knew himself as a Creative. An artist.

And every artist needed a muse.

Pierre found his muse, years upon years ago. The person who led to his breath ebbing from his lungs in awe, in uncertainty. He hadn't realized until years later, how deep he had fallen. "Head over heels," people would say, but Pierre couldn't help but believe that to be a baffling oversimplification. Whatever he felt equated to nothing similar to falling, nothing so trivial, so simple. No, he felt as if he had been climbing for years—for so, so long. Up long, sharp

cavernous walls where he could see that golden light at the end of the tunnel, the laugh that lit up his insides, the touch that left him coughing and sputtering like smoke curled and infested his lungs. His love was desperate.

Love was not meant to be desperate.

Love should have been kind. Love should have been soft, gentle, caring... There stood to be a reason that the word “loving” stood for something affectionate, for something seeping with that saccharine sickness Pierre had watched person after person fall beneath. Of course, these *lovely*, sweet feelings only existed in a fragment of his mind: the idea stood as such, but he had never experienced it, never seen it for himself. If he saw it, if he felt it, then maybe he would understand its gentle touch. Maybe then he wouldn’t know love as something which only worked to tear him apart—piece by piece, fragments falling from his skin as he ached, *god*, as he wished and hoped and prayed and begged with his entire heart...

Ties between people. That’s all love was.

But when that tie was severed, well, love turned into everything it shouldn’t have been.

Love could fray.

Love could break.

Love could be “From me, to you,” with no response back.

A letter opened, left to sit and rot on top of a desk somewhere.

If it had ever been sent in the first place.

...Pierre looked back up at the painting. He lay, kneeling before it, before the glory that held itself within those eyes, the pity he felt emanating from his own work. Because, of course, it understood the fascination that accompanied the early sketches. It understood the fluttering hope

of the first coat of paint. And most—and least—of all, it understood the desperation in the details he continued to add.

Because it could never be perfect.

It could never be perfect.

That letter could never die.

Pierre let himself sob, once again, the old tears drying only in time for new ones to replace their tracks. “*Maybe one day I’ll show it to you,*” he had said. May heaven and hell strike him down first if that were to ever happen. May they call upon their wrath for watching something so utterly *pathetic* unfold before their eyes.

No. No, he could never show Aaron this painting.

Not when it still stank of desperate desire, of love and longing.

The cover fluttered back across the canvas, settling as the dust came back to gather.