

Taner Lak
11th grade
Poetry
231 words

The Artist

Dear Van Gogh,
My mistake, I seem to forget
There is nothing dear about your work

You came to me in a starry night
For you I built a dark tower of trust
But even the best work is long forgotten
Left toppled by the torrents of neglect.

With each masterpiece you made life so elegant
I didn't notice the darker colors
You're winsome strokes
Concealing something toxic
Every moment I thought I had mastered the paint
It was never enough for you.

You, dear artist, hungry for originality
And so I altered my own body
My thoughts and my speech
But the paint could never settle
I was never enough for you

I foolishly left a kiss upon your lips
Not realizing that acrylic paint becomes poisonous
Once it enters the bloodstream
But the pain was bittersweet
And your toxic lipstick became addicting

I refuse to pick up the brush
And express the art of my suffering
Yet still the sapphire paint smears down my cheeks

To you I was the yellow house on the corner
Old, decrepit, and ugly
Not worth your hospitality
Not worth your love

I think to myself
Why did I waste my own colors?
Filling in the bare parts of your canvass

When your world was tinted black
But in my darkest times
I was only left with the memory
The masterpiece you never finished

Novel Excerpt: Bottled Love

“You know you should stop worrying all the time.” Of course it was Kat but not in her cat form. “It’s not good for your health.” For the moment she seemed to finally be able to sit still with an aura of calmness, unlike all the other times he had been near her.

“Look I’m not worried but if you don’t mind I need some alone time.” Paz said with slight irritation. Kat didn’t move as if she hadn’t even heard him.

“The garden is my favorite place cause it’s so peaceful.” She paused. “I overheard that you want a love potion.”

“Yes, yes I do.” Paz accepted the fact that she would more than likely be sitting here with him for a while.

“I don’t think it’s fair to force someone to love you or feel anything they don’t want to feel.” She sighed. “If she doesn’t already feel it then how could you possibly think she is the one for you?”

“You don’t know Gisella like I do, we understand each other but she just doesn’t realize how well we would be together. She’s so caught up in thinking it’s all about money that she forgets who or what makes her truly happy.” Paz justified himself and his actions as he felt himself getting defensive. Who was this childing thinking she knew better than him.

“I’ve been alive much longer than you Paz.” She said as if she had just read his thoughts. “I’ve watched the world from a cat’s eye view and I have seen many things, much more than you could wrap your mind around.” Kat looked away from the garden and met his gaze, holding it firm. He realized her pupils were not round like a human but in fact a cat’s slits. They glittered with mischief and knowledge. Paz found it hard to believe her words but in the back of his mind he could believe her. “You won’t find happiness when the happiness is built on fake love given by one or the other. I’m warning you now that your world will descend into madness and ludicracy.” Her bright eyes darkened and he felt his heart be gripped with fear once again like in his dreams. In his head or in her eyes he wasn’t sure but he saw wailing figures, in pain. The sky was red, the land was scorched, and bitter winds tore at the bare skin. Paz wanted to look away and break her gaze but he couldn’t move. The scene changed and he was in his house, the rooms were empty, bare, and dark. He heard a weeping coming from his bedroom. He slowly opened his door to see Gisella curled up in the corner beaten, bruised, and bloody. She was rocking back and forth crying and mumbling something between sobs but Paz couldn’t make out the words. Suddenly the window shattered she screamed as the winds tore apart their room ripping her flesh. His heart pounded, thundering against his chest. He felt her pain as the howling winds bit her skin until at last it all just stopped.

It was as if he had just been tossed out of a hurricane to land on a hardened landscape with the world no longer spinning. His head pounded.

“Paz!” He heard his name being called somewhere far off in the distance. He rubbed his eyes and opened them to see a brown and white peppered cat strolling through the garden making its way down the narrow path to find and pounce on her next victim.

“Paz!” He heard his name he got up, shaking off the uneasy feeling leftover by the trance vision thing Kat had shown him. He made his way back through the garden on the narrow path until he came back around the the front the the cottage. Rizza stood in the door frame. “It’s almost ready but I need you for this last part.” He followed her back into the kitchen.

Rizza’s hair was frizzing out out her bun as she hunched over a steaming black mixing pot.

“Just sit there, at the table and wait a moment as I get this ready.” She motioned with her hand to the general direction of the table. Paz did as he was told and sat down. He tried to sit in silence but he couldn’t help it.

“Does Kat always give people visions or dreams?” Paz inquired. Rizza hesitated before answering.

“No, why do say that.” She continued working.

“Cause she just gave me a crazy vision that I can’t shake.” He said bluntly.

“That damned cat.” Rizza threw her hands up and gave an exasperated sigh. “I told her to stop doing that or she’ll scare away our customers.” She shook her head and and continued stirring the brew. “Anyway come here.” Paz got up and walked over to her.

“Hand me your palm.” He did, placing his palm in her hand. She drew a blade and before he could utter a single yelp of surprise she sliced his skin . Paz drew a sharp inhale in and let out a cry.

“What was that for?” He tried to yank his hand back but she held it in a grip of steel as the blood pooled in his hand.

“I did it just because I wanted to, duh. No! I need your blood for the spell, idiot.” She began a chant over the cauldron. Then she poured the pooling blood into the now boiling pot. A puff of smoke erupted from the pot. Paz coughed. “Now say these words exactly.” Rizza told him as if she was speaking to a toddler who could barely understand her. “I, Paz Surell, take Gisella Barret to be my love until the day I die.” Paz nodded in understanding and repeated her exact words as told.

“I, Paz Surell, take gisella Barret to be my love until the day I die.” Another explosion of smoke and when it cleared the liquid was deathly still.

The pleasing aroma wafted into his nose making him feel relaxed. Rizza took a laydel and spooned out a scoop and poured it into a clear bottle. The liquid was a dark shade of a metallic silver purple color. She closed it with a cork and handed it to him carefully.

“Place three drops of this into her drink a day before you speak to her again and she will be yours but be warned the side effects are not of my control. No more than three drops I warn you! The spell will have a permeant reaction once she vows her love to you.” She gave him a knowing look. He took the bottle and placed it securely in his pouch.

“Thank you for everything.” He gave her a nod and briskly headed out the door desperate to leave the cottage as soon as possible. She called out from the door frame “Don’t forget that you owe me!” Without turning around Paz held up his hand and waved as a sign to know that he understood.

He got the bottom of the hill before he realized he had no clue how to navigate the dark woods. His shoulders sagged and Paz took a large deep breath. He turned around ready to walk all the way back to ask for directions but when he turned around he jumped in fright and shock. Rizza stood directly behind him.

“How do you--” He spoke.

“Don’t worry about it.” She interrupted and before Paz had time to reply he found himself standing outside the dark forest in a blink of an eye.

Fairly Twisted Tale: Genie of the Lamp

He waited. He had waited for what seemed like centuries and it probably had been centuries. One tends to lose track of time when cooped up in such a small space. He lounged on his silk pillows in the dimness of his living quarters. The incense burned, filling the air with a calming aroma. He closed his eyes and let his mind wander. He did this everyday, well what he thought was day, and every time he would picture himself somewhere else. Yesterday he was sunbathing on the beach and today he was hiking through the rainforest. It soothed him, pretending to be free. Suddenly he grew very warm. His eyes shot open. He knew this feeling well. His heart began to beat wildly. His mind rushed with doubt and excitement. The room was becoming an oven. He readied himself. He had to make this entrance dramatic. The room burst into white flames as he shot out of the lamp.

Bursting with nervous energy, Genie began to flying all over the room.

“Ahhh! Oy! Ten-thousand years can give ya such a crick in the neck.” He focused his attention on his new master and fear began to take over and drain his excitement. “Say you’re a lot thinner than my last master... you want your first wish to give you a slower metabolism?” He tried to keep his energy light. The thin man said nothing, he just stood there grinning like a madman. Genie had these kinds of masters before and he knew

how this would end. However he wasn't going to let his time outside go to waste. He pulled a microphone out of the air and held it up to the shallow face. "What's your name sir?"

"Jafar, the royal visor."

"Great to have you on the show! Don't think I've ever had one of them for a master before. This is a cause for celebration!" Genie began his old tricks again but was suddenly interrupted.

"Genie! I am ready to make my first wish!"

"Already? Well Jafar aren't you moving fast? You could have at least taken me out for drinks first." Genie laughed nervously.

"Genie!" Jafar was getting irritated.

"Yes master?" Genie said carefully.

"I wish for you to make me sultan!"

Genie gulped. He knew this was a bad decision but he had to do as he was told.

"As you wish master." Genie closed his eyes and shot a bolt of magic at Jafar. Why couldn't someone else have gotten their hands on his lamp first?

Motion Sickness

Life is a dance with no beats

The laughing voices rings in my ears

 The smiles have blurred together

 until they can't be recognized as happy

Motion sickness tastes like the overwhelming sound of chaos

Life is a dance with *multiple* rhythms

I turn in sync with the earth's constant rotation

It's the silent stepping of Mikhail Baryshnikov

 at the American Ballet Theatre

The pitter patter of little feet

 is the sound of the next generation

"Selfie with me!" has become the new form of greeting

How can you know if today is a gift if tomorrow is still a mystery

Life doesn't give second chances

only lemons
Stress gives you a hug while excitement clings to your leg
balance places his hand on your shoulder
Sour strawberries cover your lips in their juices
reminding you the unfair advantage life has
the ability to create, change, and destroy
The sorrowful tears of truth calls for the realization
that you're sinking in quicksand
you can't rely on others for a helping hand
when it it was their hand that put you there
I blame need of common courtesy and self-indulgence
You laugh like Death
ready to steal you away
You escaped the music's grip
with a pair of wings
The smell of him has permanently stained itself in my nose
My skin remembers the touch of another
Tor was unaware of the monsters under her bed
in her closet
behind her back
In order to remember I have to forget
A bittersweet taste lingers on my tongue
לא להתאפק מהחלומות שלך
Only surviving the uneven steps
by the determination of the rhythmic motions

Next Year in Jerusalem

How could one flight smell so bad? That was one question that constantly ran through my head as I tried to sleep in the dark cabin. I tried to focus on the roar of the engine or the wind speeding by outside but nothing could cover up the screaming of children and the nauseating smell of who knows what. I had been in the air for three hours and I still had nine hours left. I seriously doubted that the smell would dissipate anytime soon.

I am not one of those people that gets labeled as a “frequent flyer” because I am actually terrified of flying. Every drop or shake from turbulence has my heart racing and my anxiety level hitting the roof. You can now imagine my reaction when it dawned on me that I would be in the air for twelve hours. Destination aside, I was terrified. Anything could happen a million miles up in the air over an open ocean. I had been dreading this flight since Passover of 2012 when my dad made the announcement. “לשנה הבאה בירושלים.” or “Next year in Jerusalem.” I was heading to Israel.

After that the excitement began making flight reservations, booking hotels, planning tours, etc. It was worth the stress in the end. But no amount of stress could match my anxiety of a twelve hour flight.

At school I became known as “the girl going to Israel” because no one actually knew my name, not that I really cared. I began counting down the days on my calendar until that dreaded flight.

From the moment I got on the plane I knew this was going to be a bad flight. With it being Passover, all the Jews were heading to Israel so the plane was packed with small children. Not to mention we sat in the way back by the restrooms. Once the metal beast swallowed me and took off I knew there was no turning back. Although I was extremely grateful for the TV screens with unlimited movie stream to keep my mind off the truth that tried to invade my mind with every rattle from outside.

Once the microwaveable meals were served and the lights dimmed did the panic start to creep back into my thoughts. I tried turning up my music as if to blast the thoughts back but, of course, that didn't help for long even with the chorus of crying children and the hushed voices of soothing mothers.

I began to center my thoughts to my destination, Israel. I imagined the trees, the people, the smell. My stomach twisted with excited energy as I smiled. It still hadn't hit me that I would be walking on foreign soil, my home soil. I would be meeting family for the first time. Would they think bad of me for being an American tourist? I laughed to myself at the thought. I hadn't realized it but I had zoned out the chaos that surrounded me. Before I knew it I was drifting in and out of consciousness.

I woke up with a panic attack as I was awoken by turbulence. “I'm gonna die.” was the first thought that flew across my mind. Although my panic attack was quickly forgotten as I caught my breath from the view outside. The dark blue was slowly being taken over by the soft mixture of orange and pink. The layer of clouds below us seemed to glow brighter and brighter with every passing second. Then the clouds turned into the rolling terrain of Israel. “Home sweet home.” I muttered. “It's about time we met.”

Teach me

You taught me how to act
So I learned the ways of theatre
Just like you showed me
I drilled the expressions into my memory
So well that when I showed you
You didn't understand I was acting

You didn't teach me how to love myself
The body you had given me was made unacceptable in society
My face you created was unfinished
I wished upon a star that you would fix me
I could've been a masterpiece
But when I asked why you left me half done
You just told me you were too tired to finish that day

You taught me to draw
So I took that knowledge and drew myself a mask
When I was satisfied with the soft smile and bright eyes
I cut it out and taped it to my face to protect myself from the world
When I brought it before you
You thought I was someone else
Eventually the tears that were shed behind the mask
Reversed the adhesive
And as my protection fell to the floor
I noticed it had become just as smudged and torn as I already was

You didn't teach me confidence
So when the time came
I wasn't able to speak out against the wrong you were letting happen
I had to recall those self taught expressions
And piece back together the mask I had drawn
When I confronted you
All you did was chuckle leaving me without a response

You taught me to write
Through writing we connected
I wanted to show you what I could do
So I wrote about you
The words appeared on my paper
As if the pencil knew what to say before I did
But when I gave you the final copy
You set it aside
It would always be a rough draft to you

You didn't teach me self control
I never knew when to stop
The vicious words were carved into my mouth
The actions left imprints on my skin
I begged you to teach me restraint
My expressions did no good
Nor would writing persuade you
I was left to fend for myself

I can't remember the day you made me
But I know I was too scared to open my ears
My cries took up all the space in my ears
I have no recollection of your presences when I took my first breath
But all I was asking for was a hint

G-d
You created me
And I know you're listening
So just answer me one question
Why did you leave me?

The Quiet Man in the Clocktower

The old man wiped the oil off his hands on his dirty rag before tossing it over his shoulder and picking up his tool box. He hunched over, slowly making his way through the maze of gears until he stood at the top of the spiral staircase. His calloused hands gripped the railing as he took the stairs one at a time. His steps fell into the rhythmic tick-tock of the clock tower. Right foot, tick; left foot, tock. Right foot, tick; left foot, tock. He took his time, smelling the musty, metallic air and listening to the soothing heartbeat of the clock. No, not *the* clock--*his* clock. This was *his* clock. He came to the end of the stairs, where he was greeted by a thin woman with a soft smile. She held a dim lantern that illuminated her smooth skin, causing it to glow in the dusty darkness. Her brown hair was a loose but neat bun. She met the old man's eyes.

"Mr. Grunger?" She spoke in a frail voice. The old man smiled and nodded. "Hi, I'm Kaitlin Charles, but you can just call me Kaitlin." Mr. Grunger smiled and nodded again, his dimples deepening. "I'm the new innkeeper. I'm told you're the caretaker here?" He continued to smile and nod. He brushed his hand off on his grease-stained shirt before extending his hand. Kaitlin took it. His rough skin embraced her own softer palm in a formal shake. Mr. Grunger nodded once more as if to say "goodnight" before shuffling off to his sleeping quarters.

"Well, good night to you too sir." Kaitlin said slightly perplexed. She had expected at least some exchange of words. Finally accepting his silence she turned back to exit the clock tower but she hesitated for three tock's of the clock she stood under. "Mr. Grunger," She turned back around and saw he had stopped to look back at her as well. "I know it's late but would you like a cup of tea?" She asked tentatively. Smile lines appeared on his face. Kaitlin expected for them to head to the main building but instead he held out the crook of his arm to her. His old fashioned manners surprised her. She gently accepted it. He led her deeper into the underneath of the clock tower.

They walked in silence as steps echoed on the stone floor. They stopped shortly at a wooden door. Mr. Grunger pulled out an old key ring weighed down with dozens of keys and... a ring? It glinted in the light of the gas lanterns hanging on the walls. It was a silver band with a small shinning stone welded on. Kaitlin opened her mouth to ask about it but just like that the key ring was back in his pocket. She mentally saved the question for later. Mr. Grunger pushed the door open soundlessly to a dim room. There was a quick *click* and the room was illuminated with an orange light. She blinked a couple of times as her pupils adjusted to the new intake of light. She stood in a small kitchen with only the essentials. Mr. Grunger began filling up a tea kettle but Kaitlin saw how tired he was. She softly took the kettle out of his hands.

"Let me, Mr. Grunger, you must be weary." She met his eyes and she saw a grateful look pass his face. She placed the kettle on the stove top and turned on the burner. A blue flame danced under the kettle. Mr. Grunger sat down slowly as if in pain. "Are you ok, Mr. Grunger?" She took a step toward him. He looked up at her and held his hand

out to stop her. She hesitated mid step; he waved her away as he relaxed in his seat. He gave her a small reassuring smile. Kaitlin stepped back and leaned against the counter. The kettle steamed and began to hiss, the water was on a low simmer. Kaitlin eyed Mr. Grunger, observing him. He was staring off into his own world, subconsciously playing with the ring on his finger. His face seemed pained. Kaitlin curiously wondered what he could be thinking about. She watched as he fiddled with his ring. Then a sudden realization hit her as she remembered the ring on his keychain. The gears in her head began turning like the ones in the clock tower above her.

A shrill whistle sounded behind Kaitlin, startling her out of her head. She grabbed two mugs from the shelf above her and carefully poured the hot water into them, letting the steam raise up to surround her hand. She placed a tea bag into each mug and gently placed them on the table. Mr. Grunger wrapped his hands around the ceramic as his painful gaze evaporated like the steam. Kaitlin sat down across from him, meeting his eye, she couldn't help but wonder how many stories he could tell her. A sense of tranquility rested in the air around them as they sat in comfortable silence listening to the deep sounds of the clock.

The View You'll Never Forget

I don't think I can do this. The giant wheel loomed in front of me as if it to taunt me. I remember the tour guide saying it was 443 feet tall and I gulped. The line shuffled closer and I noticed a child throwing a tantrum because they didn't want to go on. I could hear the mother trying to sooth the child, "It's ok David, don't you want to see the city? When we're at the top you can pretend you're a bird. Won't that be fun?" She crouched down and held his shoulders firmly. The little boy, I assumed to be David, just squirmed.

"But mama I don't wanna" he began to cry again. "It's so high." I chuckled to myself. I was feeling this kid on a spiritual level.

I turned my attention to other people in line. There were another rowdy tour group in front of us. Their guide was trying to get their attention by talking about the construction plans but the bunch didn't even give her a second glance. I turned around to see our own guide on her phone. I shoved my hands in my coat pockets and examined my worn converse sneakers with their sharpie doodles and caked mud. July may be London's warmest month but I certainly wasn't feeling the warmth. The wind whistled in my ears

and I had a sense it was about to pour, again. I'm not sure how long I lost myself in my thoughts but all the sudden my tour guide push passed me, causing me to stumble. I looked up and was surprised to find we were almost ready to board.

"You've got to be kidding." I muttered to myself. "Time flies when you're not paying attention." I ignored the fluttering sensations in my stomach. Only a couple more steps. I glanced up and quickly squeezed them shut as a wave of nausea rolled over me. My heart hammered against my chest. With a trembling hand I grabbed the railing and stepped inside the pod.

"Alright guys, please be careful boarding!" Our guide said a little more cheerfully than I could handle at the moment. The other kids in my group shuffled aboard. Most placed themselves by the glass windows to insure their good view; however, I stood as close to the middle I could. I heard the doors close, sealing my fate. There was no going back now. "As we begin our ascent I would like to give you a brief history of this breathtaking landmark!" We lurched forward. "The construction would take more than a year and a half to complete with 1700 tons of steel and 3000 tons of concrete. It's truly remarkable!" Kids around me murmured to each other as the pod rose further into the air. I seemed to be the only one showing actual interest. I started to become very aware of the ground disappearing below me. I forced myself to focus hard on our tour guide's words. "The Formal opening of this wheel was December 31, 1999 but didn't actually open to the public until March of 2000 due to technical difficulties. It was originally called the Millennium Wheel and some still refer to it by that name today! Since it's opening it has given rides to over 30 million people!"

I dared a glance out the window to my right. I immediately regretted that decision. My body tensed and went cold, no doubt my face became as pale as the cloudy sky outside. My mouth felt like cotton. I sat down on the bench abruptly. I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"You alright? You don't look so well. My goodness you look like you've seen a ghost!" I knew my face had paled. The guide kept her hand on my shoulder looking worried. I waved her off.

"I'm fine" I lied and gave her a tired smile. She didn't look convinced. "Heights just kinda... well... I am not a big cheering fan of heights." I tried to joke but the guide just kept looking worried.

"You tell me if you need anything at all, alright? We're almost to the top so not much longer." She squeezed my shoulder and took her position up front. She continued speaking except she would shoot me a glance every couple of minutes. "How about some crazy fun facts I bet none of you knew about the London Eye?" A few kids turned around to listen. "This is not technically a ferris wheel but actually the world's largest observation wheel. On average, it receives more visitors than the Taj Mahal or the Great Pyramids of Giza. You can see just about 40 kilometers in every direction. Even

though there are 32 pods, they are numbered 1 - 33 but number 13 is left out for superstitious reasons! Right now we are traveling at 26cm per second, which is twice as fast as a tortoise sprinting!” I concentrated on her words to keep myself from daring another glance. “Alright! We are at the top! Look for as many landmarks as you can find.” Everyone pushed themselves against the class. I was probably scared enough for every person in here. I heard gasps and people commenting on the view. I stood up and without realizing it began walking to an open spot by a window.

“It was curiosity that killed the cat, but it was satisfaction that brought it back.” I muttered under my breath. “I can do this, just one look. You’re up here so you might as well.” I took a deep breath and peered over the edge. My heart raced but I couldn’t look away. The view was mesmerizing, breathtaking, priceless, and indescribable. If my parents ask me to describe it I wouldn’t be able to. Every word that passed through my head was an understatement, no word could live up to this. Then suddenly, I wasn’t scared anymore. I felt at ease, peaceful even. I stood at that spot the rest of the ride. My eyes drank in the cityscape laid out before me, not wanting to miss a single detail. I knew then that this was a view I would never forget.

Watching from Side Stage

I was seven when I first started watching from the wings, and remember how inspired I felt watching her dance across the stage. It was then the dream planted itself into my subconscious, and grew. I could hear her determination with each deep breath she took, her confidence dripping in sweat running down her neck. I wanted to be her. Two years later she was graduating, and lost myself backstage because I didn’t want to watch her dance for the last time. She was leaving, moving on with her future. When I was ten I found myself in the wings again, watching another inspiration pirouette in her dazzling tutu. I felt that same dream in the back of my mind digging its roots further into my body, and I wanted to be her. In the next four years I attended as many dance classes as I could, working on my weaknesses, watching what I had the chance to be, and waiting for my moment in the spotlight. I was determined and patient. Of course my role model eventually graduated and I remember crying for three days after she left.

I started to understand the cycle by the time I was 15. Those beautiful, graceful dancers whom I looked up to could only stay around so long. I didn’t want to grow

dependent on my inspirations but I couldn't stop my tears from mixing with my sweat as I danced in sync with the people I so admired for the last time. How had a year passed by already? I was not ready for the duty that they were placing on my shoulders. I was only 17; they were only a year older so why did I feel like I was that 7 year old girl again?

These were the girls I had grown up with; they were the sisters I connected to in a way much differently than my biological sisters. Before I knew it they had graduated away too, and now it was left to me. I had to stand up, I was the role model but how could others believe in me if I can't believe in myself? But then it happened. I didn't get the principal role that I had been expecting, and had wanted for so many years, and everybody knew it. I was crushed.

We are taught that you can achieve anything if only you worked hard enough, but even with the hardest work, life is full of disappointments. However, disappointment is not failure. You don't give up, no matter how much it hurts. I may have to fake a smile and hide the hurt during rehearsals, but still the beautiful girl dancing my dream role gets my support.

I won't lie. After this blow, I doubted myself and thought my body wasn't the right type and that there was no way I could improve. But, there were those seven year old girls watching me rehearse. The tables had been turned, and I was an inspiration to them as I had been inspired by those before me. And setting an example for them was more than just dancing: it was dealing with disappointment and self-doubt. My resolve was doubled, and hope they look back to their seven year old self and remember me.

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I dared a glance out the window to my right. I immediately regretted that decision. My body tensed and went cold, no doubt my face became as pale as the cloudy sky outside. My mouth felt like cotton. I sat down on the bench abruptly. I felt a hand on my shoulder.

“You alright? You don’t look so well. My goodness you look like you’ve seen a ghost!” I knew my face had paled. The guide kept her hand on my shoulder looking worried. I waved her off.

“I’m fine” I lied and gave her a tired smile. She didn’t look convinced. “Heights just kinda... well... I am not a big cheering fan of heights.” I tried to joke but the guide just kept looking worried.

“You tell me if you need anything at all, alright? We’re almost to the top so not much longer.” She squeezed my shoulder and took her position up front. She continued speaking except she would shoot me a glance every couple of minutes. “How about some crazy fun facts I bet none of you knew about the London Eye?” A few kids turned around to listen. “This is not technically a ferris wheel but actually the world’s largest observation wheel. On average, it receives more visitors than the Taj Mahal or the Great Pyramids of Giza. You can see just about 40 kilometers in every direction. Even though there are 32 pods, they are numbered 1 - 33 but number 13 is left out for superstitious reasons! Right now we are traveling at 26cm per second, which is twice as fast as a tortoise sprinting!” I concentrated on her words to keep myself from daring another glance. “Alright! We are at the top! Look for as many landmarks as you can find.” Everyone pushed themselves against the class. I was probably scared enough for every person in here. I heard gasps and people commenting on the view. I stood up and without realizing it began walking to an open spot by a window.

“It was curiosity that killed the cat, but it was satisfaction that brought it back.” I muttered under my breath. “I can do this, just one look. You’re up here so you might as well.” I took a deep breath and peered over the edge. My heart raced but I couldn’t look away. The view was mesmerizing, breathtaking, priceless, and indescribable. If my parents ask me to describe it I wouldn’t be able to. Every word that passed through my head was an understatement, no word could live up to this. Then suddenly, I wasn’t scared anymore. I felt at ease, peaceful even. I stood at that spot the rest of the ride. My eyes drank in the cityscape laid out before me, not wanting to miss a single detail. I knew then that this was a view I would never forget.

Hi mom
I should say, I love you
And I should say, thank you
Thank you for coming back
Thank you for staying straight
Thank you for stopping the mallet that was hammering away at my heart
And I'd thank you
But you seem to be more accustomed to needles
It was such a long time ago
But what happened between us ripped something out of me
And that empty wound is too noticeable
No matter how much I try to ignore it

And Mom I hate you
With every single fight
Every time you said "you don't understand"
It ticked in my ear and I felt my brain bleeding
How could you say I didn't understand
When you would never even hear what I had to say?
Maybe I just didn't know how to say it right.
But back then I thought it wasn't okay to be angry with anyone.
My ouchies turn into lols
My rants always ended with "I'm sorry."
My "why did you leave me" turned into an "it's okay"
You know I was never a very good liar
But I found it much easier to lie to myself

I loathed every pointless fight
Like when you thought I had gotten drunk
You never seemed to understand that
After a childhood of hanging on to your failure
I learned at least not to make your mistakes.
We barked like wild hounds that night
It felt like a bad dream
Then you took me home.
I remember you told me to put my seatbelt on
I said "I'd rather die"
You said we could die together
It slithered off of your tongue as I turned to face you
Staring into the eyes of a basilisk
For that second I knew that you meant it
I felt no fear, but disgust
The thought of dying next to you

Made convulsions in my stomach
I spent a month not talking to you after that
Planning on the rest of my life

But Mom, I love you
I know you were sick
You quit the substances but there was something different intoxicating your mind
Something you couldn't control
And I know that you're better now
And I am healing
But pills don't take away memories
When I was little you used to tell me
There were two angels standing on my shoulders
Be careful not to let them fall
I named them thing one and thing two
And left them in the cinders of our burning apartment building
Suffocated by billowing smoke that ripped apart their lungs
They died there, and the last sliver of my childhood went with them.

Though I didn't have much of a childhood
Through everything you loved me.
You broke through cement walls of your own anxiety by the daily
And with depression leaving bite marks on your ankles
You still chose to carry me on your shoulders.
You were a mom that every mom should be
In all the wrong ways
But you are still my mother

But really I hate you
I didn't think much of it when I was a boy
Insanity had become my lifestyle
The chaos of you and Dad fighting
Was the only music I was accustomed to.
Storming from his ebony lungs
Dad's voice boomed like a drum
Beating violently
Making the walls tremble
And your voice flaring like the sound of seven trumpets
Announcing the judgment day.
Together you were the perfect armageddon
But for me the rapture never came.

When I was four you held the knife against your throat

You told me goodbye and I felt my chest begin to rust
I saw demons in your pupils
They fell from your body and overcame me
Entangling themselves in my brain
And locking on to my deep subconscious
At night they still poison my dreams
Appearing in the form of a succubus
And defiling me in my sleep

Abandonment and attachment
affection and affliction
Mother and son
I do love you
But sometimes I hate it

Novel Excerpt: Bottled Love

“You know you should stop worrying all the time.” Of course it was Kat but not in her cat form. “It’s not good for your health.” For the moment she seemed to finally be able to sit still with an aura of calmness, unlike all the other times he had been near her.

“Look I’m not worried but if you don’t mind I need some alone time.” Paz said with slight irritation. Kat didn’t move as if she hadn’t even heard him.

“The garden is my favorite place cause it’s so peaceful.” She paused. “I overheard that you want a love potion.”

“Yes, yes I do.” Paz accepted the fact that she would more than likely be sitting here with him for a while.

“I don’t think it’s fair to force someone to love you or feel anything they don’t want to feel.” She sighed. “If she doesn’t already feel it then how could you possibly think she is the one for you?”

“You don’t know Gisella like I do, we understand each other but she just doesn’t realize how well we would be together. She’s so caught up in thinking it’s all about money that she forgets who or what makes her truly happy.” Paz justified himself and his actions as he felt himself getting defensive. Who was this childing thinking she knew better than him.

“I’ve been alive much longer than you Paz.” She said as if she had just read his thoughts. “I’ve watched the world from a cat’s eye view and I have seen many things, much more than you could wrap your mind around.” Kat looked away from the garden and met his gaze, holding it firm. He realized her pupils were not round like a human but in fact a cat’s slits. They glittered with mischief and knowledge. Paz found it hard to believe her words but in the back of his mind he could believe her. “You won’t find happiness when the happiness is built on fake love given by one or the other. I’m warning you now that your world will descend into madness and ludicracy.” Her bright eyes darkened and he felt his heart be gripped with fear once again like in his dreams. In his head or in her eyes he wasn’t sure but he saw wailing figures, in pain. The sky was red, the land was scorched, and bitter winds tore at the bare skin. Paz wanted to look away and break her gaze but he couldn’t move. The scene changed and he was in his house, the rooms were empty, bare, and dark. He heard a weeping coming from his bedroom. He slowly opened his door to see Gisella curled up in the corner beaten, bruised, and bloody. She was rocking back and forth crying and mumbling something between sobs but Paz couldn’t make out the words. Suddenly the window shattered she screamed as the winds tore apart their room ripping her flesh. His heart pounded, thundering against his chest. He felt her pain as the howling winds bit her skin until at last it all just stopped.

It was as if he had just been tossed out of a hurricane to land on a hardened landscape with the world no longer spinning. His head pounded.

“Paz!” He heard his name being called somewhere far off in the distance. He rubbed his eyes and opened them to see a brown and white peppered cat strolling through the garden making its way down the narrow path to find and pounce on her next victim.

“Paz!” He heard his name he got up, shaking off the uneasy feeling leftover by the trance vision thing Kat had shown him. He made his way back through the garden on the narrow path until he came back around the the front the the cottage. Rizza stood in the door frame. “It’s almost ready but I need you for this last part.” He followed her back into the kitchen.

Rizza’s hair was frizzing out out her bun as she hunched over a steaming black mixing pot.

“Just sit there, at the table and wait a moment as I get this ready.” She motioned with her hand to the general direction of the table. Paz did as he was told and sat down. He tried to sit in silence but he couldn’t help it.

“Does Kat always give people visions or dreams?” Paz inquired. Rizza hesitated before answering.

“No, why do say that.” She continued working.

“Cause she just gave me a crazy vision that I can’t shake.” He said bluntly.

“That damned cat.” Rizza threw her hands up and gave an exasperated sigh. “I told her to stop doing that or she’ll scare away our customers.” She shook her head and and continued stirring the brew. “Anyway come here.” Paz got up and walked over to her.

“Hand me your palm.” He did, placing his palm in her hand. She drew a blade and before he could utter a single yelp of surprise she sliced his skin . Paz drew a sharp inhale in and let out a cry.

“What was that for?” He tried to yank his hand back but she held it in a grip of steel as the blood pooled in his hand.

“I did it just because I wanted to, duh. No! I need your blood for the spell, idiot.” She began a chant over the cauldron. Then she poured the pooling blood into the now boiling pot. A puff of smoke erupted from the pot. Paz coughed. “Now say these words exactly.” Rizza told him as if she was speaking to a toddler who could barely understand her. “I, Paz Surell, take Gisella Barret to be my love until the day I die.” Paz nodded in understanding and repeated her exact words as told.

“I, Paz Surell, take gisella Barret to be my love until the day I die.” Another explosion of smoke and when it cleared the liquid was deathly still.

The pleasing aroma wafted into his nose making him feel relaxed. Rizza took a laydel and spooned out a scoop and poured it into a clear bottle. The liquid was a dark shade of a metallic silver purple color. She closed it with a cork and handed it to him carefully.

“Place three drops of this into her drink a day before you speak to her again and she will be yours but be warned the side effects are not of my control. No more than three drops I warn you! The spell will have a permanent reaction once she vows her love to you.” She gave him a knowing look. He took the bottle and placed it securely in his pouch.

“Thank you for everything.” He gave her a nod and briskly headed out the door desperate to leave the cottage as soon as possible. She called out from the door frame “Don’t forget that you owe me!” Without turning around Paz held up his hand and waved as a sign to know that he understood.

He got the bottom of the hill before he realized he had no clue how to navigate the dark woods. His shoulders sagged and Paz took a large deep breath. He turned around ready to walk all the way back to ask for directions but when he turned around he jumped in fright and shock. Rizza stood directly behind him.

“How do you--” He spoke.

“Don’t worry about it.” She interrupted and before Paz had time to reply he found himself standing outside the dark forest in a blink of an eye.

Genie of the Lamp: Flash Fiction

He waited. He had waited for what seemed like centuries and it probably had been centuries. One tends to lose track of time when cooped up in such a small space. He lounged on his silk pillows in the dimness of his living quarters. The incense burned, filling the air with a calming aroma. He closed his eyes and let his mind wander. He did this everyday, well what he thought was day, and every time he would picture himself somewhere else. Yesterday he was sunbathing on the beach and today he was hiking through the rainforest. It soothed him, pretending to be free. Suddenly he grew very warm. His eyes shot open. He knew this feeling well. His heart began to beat wildly. His mind rushed with doubt and excitement. The room was becoming an oven. He readied himself. He had to make this entrance dramatic. The room burst into white flames as he shot out of the lamp.

Bursting with nervous energy, Genie began to flying all over the room.

“Ahhh! Oy! Ten-thousand years can give ya such a crick in the neck.” He focused his attention on his new master and fear began to take over and drain his excitement. “Say you're a lot thinner than my last master... you want your first wish to give you a slower metabolism?” He tried to keep his energy light. The thin man said nothing, he just stood there grinning like a madman. Genie had these kinds of masters before and he knew how this would end. However he wasn't going to let his time outside go to waste. He pulled a microphone out of the air and held it up to the shallow face. “What's your name sir?”

“Jafar, the royal visor.”

“Great to have you on the show! Don't think I've ever had one of them for a master before. This is a cause for celebration!” Genie began his old tricks again but was suddenly interrupted.

“Genie! I am ready to make my first wish!”

“Already? Well Jafar aren't you moving fast? You could have at least taken me out for drinks first.” Genie laughed nervously.

“Genie!” Jafar was getting irritated.

“Yes master?” Genie said carefully.

“I wish for you to make me sultan!”

Genie gulped. He knew this was a bad decision but he had to do as he was told.

“As you wish master.” Genie closed his eyes and shot a bolt of magic at Jafar. Why couldn't someone else have gotten their hands on his lamp first?