

Untitled

—Yi Huang

Thank goodness it's Friday. You usually look forward to the end of the week, bringing with it the prospect of a weekend of relaxation, but after the shenanigans of the last few days, your relief today is almost palpable. It forms a separate entity when you joyfully realise that this is the Friday when you have the whole day off. There's no time to waste, then; it's off to the National Gallery of Victoria to see the Pissarro exhibition that you've been waiting for all year.

Running your fingers in time-honoured fashion through the water wall as you enter, you hand your coat to a surly cloakroom attendant before entering the exhibition. The sight of each painting seems like another step into an enchanted Impressionist fantasy; you float beside the hazy scenes, passing through emotions like stepping through beams of soft, dappled light. Soon you find yourself seated before two women hanging laundry in a field, and you close your eyes, almost able to feel the idealised serenity of a warm spring breeze carrying to you the scent of blossoming flowers, freshly washed linen, and the ethereal notes of *Clair de Lune*.

When you open your eyes, however, you feel unsettled and out of place. While you hear the same music as before, the painting that you were looking at has contorted into something entirely different. It isn't the only one; you look around to discover that all the paintings in the room have transformed into black and white sketches, each pulsing with fear and dread. While you recall most of them being untitled, each infernal artwork seems now to have trapped and disfigured not only a human soul, but the very name of the person who gave it its title. You run from one to another, eyes darting over each one as panic rises with alarming speed. Tension seeps through your skin as your mind races over what to do next—you start violently when something bumps you from behind.

“Oh my God! I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, are you alright?”

As you blink to try to remove the dryness from your eyes and squint to cope with the brightness of the lights, you gradually become aware of a few things:

1. You have a painful ache at the top of your head;
2. You seem to be sprawled on the floor facing somewhat upwards; and
3. A twenty-something woman is apologising profusely and trying to help you up.

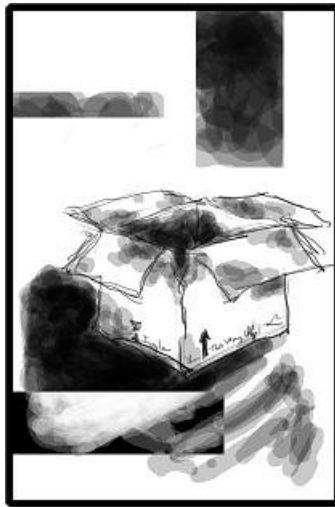
Eventually your sleep-addled brain stumbles onto the conclusion that you'd dozed off, and the lady trying to help you had accidentally knocked you off your seat and onto the floor. Taking some deep breaths to wake up as much as possible, you manage to reassure the woman that it wasn't her fault, that you don't need any medical attention, and that she is entitled to enjoy the rest of the exhibition despite the unfortunate accident. After a final apology and well-wishing, she departs, leaving you in with the paintings of Pissarro just as they were when you first came in.

You wander slowly through the rest of the exhibition, but are prevented from enjoying it as you did previously by the dull throbbing in your skull. Still, it was very good, and you might ask some friends to come with you to make seeing it again worthwhile.

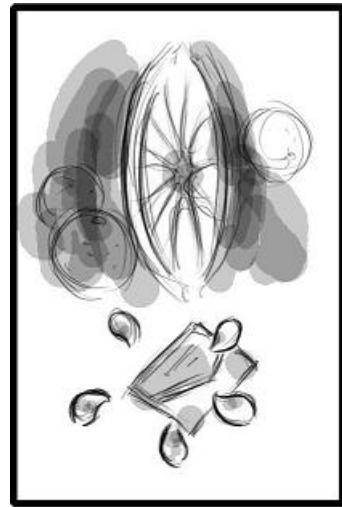
As you head towards the cloakroom, you reach into your pocket for the card to redeem your coat, but you pull out a glossy, neatly folded piece of paper. Where did that come from? Unfolding it makes you stop in your tracks: as it releases the smell of pipe tobacco, the piece of paper reveals the paintings that you saw in your dream—or, at least, what you had thought was a dream.



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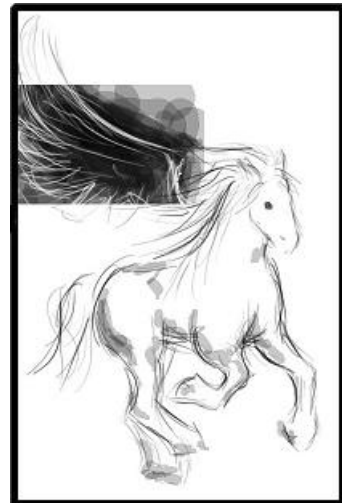
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