



ALL TIME IS LOCAL | COMPLICATED PIGMENTS

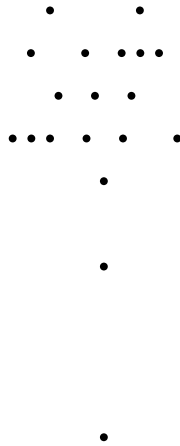
At midnight on December 27, 1888, Theo and Paul arrived in Paris by train after a twelve-hour journey from Arles. It has not been easy keeping the act up around Theo, driving the madman angle hard, convincing him that his troubled older brother has lost touch with reality entirely. Paul and Theo leave the train station, say *good night* to each other, and part ways, agreeing to reconvene later in the week to get business back to normal. Paul visits a local brothel and falls asleep there with his big, drunk head buried deep in the pillowy, rhomboid thighs of a pretty-ish night-laborer. Paul dreams of four days previous—The Winter Solstice of 1888, December 23, at 3 a.m.: Paul and Vincent huddle around a malfunctioning furnace centered in the indescribably cold quasi-art salon. The two weirdos have recently returned from one of their exhausting all-day *hygienic excursions*, but Vincent manages the energy to rant about Paul's abhorrent brothel behavior; his aggressive, rough & ready nature with the whores. Never has Vincent seen such pushing and pulling outside of a bullfight. That's it; Paul is more a matador than a painter at times! Paul changes the subject to what's really on his mind: murder. He says that the barmaid, Gaby, at Café de la Gare, mentioned that he and the damned criminal Prado share an uncanny likeness. She would know. Prado frequented the café, and Gaby would nearly always serve him. Could Vincent ever believe such a thing? Vincent attempts to recall if this Prado had indeed crossed their paths. Perhaps they've even met the condemned killer. Paul drinks more

wine and goes on a philosophical rant about physical truths colliding, like how smoke makes our air temporarily visible. Without fire, we would always be blind. Paul folds the wheatpaste-soaked newspaper gently over his forearms. What do you think would happen if I just left this as it is, let it dry up? The pills have taken full effect, pushing Vincent to confide in his new friend that he is in love with the brothel maid, Gaby, the very cafe maiden Paul spoke of earlier. Paul tells Vincent he's gone mad, then. No sir, ARTISTS! must remain steadfastly immune to the implications and derangements associated with this *in-love* disease. Gaugin has six children to prove this theory. No. Vincent is destined to indulge limitlessly and endlessly. Paul feverishly attempts to fix the fire while Vincent prepares materials for their fieldwork planned for tomorrow. Paul is annoyed at having to make a last-minute change to a painting for Theo to ensure its sale. Vincent mixes a crushed Indian yellow pigment into an oil suspension, getting a bright, translucent yellow paint in answer. Yellow-based pigments have booned greatly from advancements in modern science, offering many more color variations and possibilities. Vincent has a major love affair with the color yellow. This ochre that Paul has brought here is magnificent. Vincent talks admirably of its deep emotional truth and how it shines as a symbol of the trifacta: sunlight, life, and GOD—GOD! Paul begins the origin tale of the rank golden brick, and GOD's intervention is perhaps the farthest thing from its ontology. : : : We are transported to a tiny northeastern Indian village in the Monghyr region of Bihar. It is 1883. Moving closer, still, we arrive at a farm spotted with dairy cattle, but it is not a dairy farm. Recently, their manufacturing methods have been called into question by the London-based Society of Art and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Paul pokes and prods and questions his way through the fabled production of unrefined Indian yellow pigment manufactured for painting and textile dyes. Paul is introduced to the cavalry of gwalas or *milkmen*. He questions the guide about the leather bindings suspending the cattle inches off the ground. He is sold a story

of bovines historically kicking over bucketfuls of sona, and a farm of this stature cannot sustain such losses. The cows must be hand-fed. This maintains the safety of all creatures involved. The cows survive on a strict diet of adolescent mango leaves and water. Nothing else to ensure peak pee-pee pigmentation. A side effect of this diet often finds the cows afflicted with kidney stones, which requires the gwalas to massage the steer's genital region to coax out that precious pungent gold. Paul is in luck. He is led to a gwala, where, today, a cow is in just such a condition, and Paul bears witness to the unpleasant process; a gwala succeeds in pushing out a precarious beam so rich in yellow that the sun is nearly white in comparison and struggles to shine through. The urine trickles through a burlap sack and collects into a wide-mouthed clay basin below. The palpability of both color and odor cannot be overstated. Other farmhands were tasked with boiling the discharge in a cauldron for several hours, creating a syrup-like reduction that is then displayed in the sun, where it bakes for over 72 hours, congealing. For Paul, this link in the manufacturing chain is by far the worst, but for the workers, it's just another stroll in Pungent Park. The cauldron requires constant supervision. The vapors blasting out are first overwhelming before abruptly turning intoxicating, beguiling, causing the guide to break her confidence to tell the kind of monster story told around weenie roasts. The gwalas are known to sing or whistle to the cows, passing the time and setting the tone for the day. This was true; Paul can vouch for it, having heard it himself—a happy gwala nursed a fat bladder free of its burden, all the while humming *You Are My Sunshine*—The guide continues: a year ago, the gwalas noticed that their cow-side concertos coincided with the appearance of THEM—*On the ridge up there*, the guide said, pointing out a treeline no more than a hundred yards to the east; that's where They saw the *Sootman*, a massive black blob, formless, dark of a thing, dense like a swarm of ten million flies. The Sootman would observe their processes from the lookout, sometimes many times against the day, hiding just out of view beyond

the tree line. One morning, the gwalas were alarmed to arrive on the farm to find that their cows had already been drained, a bucket full of piss waiting beside each of them, and from what the gwalas gathered, not a drop was spilled. The tour nears its end, but first—the *bolaroom*! It is just as it sounds: a ballroom where barefoot workers stomp and squish the jelly bile, kneading it under their arches for hours, transmutating it first into sticky cakes, before it's formed into its final shape and color for exportation: a brown sphere. : : : The fire catches and erupts in the iron cauldron's belly. Paul celebrates by sucking down a couple of hard ones. Properly primed, the two painters huddle around their indoor sun to spin a good yarn or two before the self-dosing overwhelms their interests, and the two fade into the French air. The pills & booze-fueled discussion has mutated oblongly into the subject of the Whitechapel Murders and Jack the Ripper; the mutilations happening at that very moment in time, only a short rail ride away. Paul claims intimate knowledge that at least one of the purported Ripper murders has been misidentified. Vincent pops digoxin and returns to an earlier subject: Prado, and tries, again, harder this time, to recall if, yes, maybe they had crossed paths with the condemned killer. Perhaps they have even met or exchanged glances. Paul takes the bait, choosing to focus on Prado's execution and talks at length about the abandoned primitive disposal methods, those much more horrific than what awaits Prado. Paul expresses a particular enthusiasm for lateral bisection. Caligula would dine in his great hall whilst a criminal heathen is, well, divided tableside. Paul questions the idea of cannibalism. Vincent remembers reading an article around 1880 about a Canadian who cannibalized his entire family, even though an outpost was a day's journey away and the area was aplenty in game. The Canadian chose to do this and was hanged. *HANGED for his appetite! ... That's nothing*—India still squishes heads under elephant hooves, and that's only after the beast drags one to their own death stump. *Hanged ... pthhhh, c'est époustouflant, Vincent!* Paul talks of what is in store for Prado, the eternal separation of the

bulb from the socket. *The French love a beheading, that is for certain.* Vincent finds it strange to be amused about looking like a known murderer, but he, too, becomes unable to distinguish Paul from Prado, settling on calling his roommate PAULDO from now on—Paul was simply expressing an interest in *mirroring*—the nature of duplicates—that’s all, so cool it down, Red. Vincent swallows more digoxin, says that he has lived and died once already, and is a victim of forced reincarnation. He dwells obsessively on his dead baby brother, a cosmic *twin* who shared the exact same name as Vincent and who was born on the exact same calendar day, too, only one year previous. He described a dream in which They, the two Vincent Willem Van Goghs, swapped heads, and now the surviving one believes it was more than a dream. He inspects his neck in a mirror for suture scars, wondering aloud if they would have both been painters.



Paul awakens from his lap-slumber at four in the morning and leaves the brothel, wandering into the mostly quiet courtyard of the Prison de la Roquette. 65-year-old master executioner M. Deibler and his three assistants make a quiet bustle erecting and preparing the guillotine for a decapitation at dawn. They are cautious, moving slowly and methodically, careful not to catch the inmates' attention and trigger hysterics. Deibler's son, Anatole, is likely the next French empire beheader. Only a month ago, Anatole turned twenty-five, having worked steadily as a tailor's assistant, but recently realized that his seated position as a third-generation headsman is coming to fruition. It's futile fighting the fact that he possesses the midas touch. The Diebler name has earned a reputation as a smooth operator. This mantle, at the very least, Anatole, by God, must be maintained. That's how the old man put it before returning to his garden. All three methodically construct and test the guillotine, which is kept, this one at least, on the prison grounds. A bushel of tightly bound hay is loaded into the neck restraint, and down comes the blade, splitting the grain so acutely that a fine mist of fiber hangs in the air. This morning, the mysterious inmate known only to the masses as PRADO (aka Count Linska de Castillon)—*a bandit of the savannah who found his way to the boulevard*—will rest his neck on the lip to stare into the dark corners of a hungry wicker basket. Although Prado will not know his fate for another three hours, a passionate group of the curious has already caught wind and begun filing into the courtyard for a peek. Other onlookers stake out the perfect spot to take in the Big Cut. At daybreak, Prado's severing is set. More than two hundred spectators gather in the prison courtyard. Paul wedged his way to the front of the line and crouched to gaze perfectly between the guards' boots, gaining a clear, proper view of the contraption. Paul contemplates how he arrived at this place, lying belly-down on the dirt, counting the minutes before the separation of a man from his head. Paul stared at the executioner, a young man shy of thirty. He admired the boy's attention to detail. How does this public servant

deal with the constant threat of retaliation? Where does he drink in peace or eat free from ridicule? Joan of Arc's executioner, Geoffroy Therage, suffered so from crippling guilt of having possibly killed a messenger of GOD, that on the night of her roasting, Therage claimed that Joan appeared to him in a fever vision as a pure white heifer. Suddenly, Paul's eyes fell upon Prado waiting patiently in the prison yard corridor, smoking a cigarette, chasing puffs with sips of cognac from a tulip-shaped glass. Paul was immediately struck by their physical congruence—nearly identical, just as Gaby had said—except for the perforated line that rang Prado's collar. As Paul compared their uncanny facial similarities, he was trapped in Prado's gaze, and his thoughts raced back to the Chinchorro mummy he once touched as a child in Peru. He remembers how their heads were lobbed off clean and replaced with a bag of straw and seed that would eventually be capped with a clay death mask. Without warning, or a countdown or fanfare of any kind, Papa Deibler drops the plunger, and Prado's rigid body tumbled neatly into a waiting wicker casket out of sight. But the head—the head, when it settles, reveals Prado's face, frozen in a silent, guilty scream; his bulging eyeballs firing at Paul, who falls into the voids and thinks of the two small sunflower paintings by Vincent that he swiped from Yellow House. Paul figures that Vincent only painted them to entice him there, so success, they worked. Vincent should be flattered when he discovers their absence.

