

“I’ve done it! I’m in!” But he feels a draft entering between the legs of his trousers. “It seems I have torn a hole in my crotch! Damn!”

Seeking concealment in the crowd, he examines the first painting studiously. It seems the first of the temporary display galleries is displaying late abstract expressionist works, some he recognises, like those of Mark Rothko and some he doesn’t, like an obscure artist called Pollock.

Inkwell’s breathing is only just returning to normal, though the adrenalin rush makes him alert to every sound and sight in the gallery. Far to his left, gathered like a tide against a corner, journalists and photographers work away at something. He imagines they, too, are creating an art piece, before he grasps that they are gathered around somebody important, somebody in a voluminous red dress.

“Verminia!” he declares, to himself.

The man beside him smiles and nods.

Instantly, Inkwell sees all lines of power and influence crisscross each other over the gallery space, but all radiate from her. Feeling that a beam of red light now emanates from his forehead, he bashfully sidles toward the crowd.

But they suddenly shift, as one, and move through an arch into the second gallery.

Not all the works in the first gallery are late abstract expressionist. On a stand in the centre, rests a Giacometti statue and the Picasso bicycle saddle bull. It is plain to see that everyone is trailing Verminia, but after the paparazzi, the rich

and paying will get her first. The queue subtly forming has a long tail, and those at the tail end are prepping up on art, ready for their chance. Inkwell joins the group studying the saddle, though he knows he is at the absolute end of the queue and cannot change the pecking order.

“Incomplete,” a young miss whispers to her beau.

“Missing?”

“Yes.”

“Us.”

“Yes.”

Both nod and move on. Inkwell shuffles into a vacant space, and a grizzled man with few teeth but excellent taste in attire reaches out to touch his elbow.

“Rothko transcends, while ’casso ends.”

“Sorry? What?” Inkwell blurts, finding the man’s accent trickier than his ideas.

“Up, down, around … Rossko …” Pointing to the saddle, he continues, “To the,” and points to his solar plexus.

Inkwell studies the saddle intensely. He feels it, as if Picasso meant the audience to be an integral part of the artwork, so that their lines of influence touch and empower the saddle’s. Now, the saddle is part of him.

“Er … Yes. Feel …”

“Yes.”

Both men nod, and the stranger moves on, leaving Inkwell to wonder where he really is.