

ARTURO & PIGMENT

by

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FADE IN:

INT. CAFE TERMINUS NORD, PARIS - DAY

Late afternoon sunlight streams into a busy Art Deco-style cafe. Gathered around the TV in one corner, customers are hooked on a horse race. The WAITER busies around serving. Across the room, an OLDER MAN sits, sketching.

ARTURO, eight-years-old, lively eyes glazed over, head on his hands against the back of a chair, gazes around. SIGHS loudly to himself. No one seems to know he's there. He gets up, wanders the room.

On the wall, pictures - reproductions - of VAN GOGH'S SELF-PORTRAIT and a PAUL KLEE ABSTRACT painting, plus the famous photo of Workers Sitting on a New York Skyscraper Girder. Below, a replica of the VENUS DE MILO.

Arturo sidles over. Stares at Venus, pats her shoulder.

ARTURO

Hello! You look bored too. How about a game? You choose. Maybe one that doesn't need hands...

A WHISTLE sounds. Arturo turns around. The Waiter, not even stopping as he zooms past, TUTS and shakes his head.

WAITER

Every time, Arturo, honestly! It's not a toy, OK?

Arturo sighs again, gets up, kicks at the floor. Eyes down, muttering to himself as he trudges away, he nearly walks into the table where the Older Man sits. He looks up.

On the table, a half drunk cafe au lait. And more importantly, a folder with a sheaf of art paper and a bundle of coloured pencils. The Older Man just finishes a sketch of one of the customers watching the horse race.

The Older Man **smiles**. Gestures at his sketch subject.

OLDER MAN

Well, what do you think?

Arturo looks from paper to the man, deep in contemplation.

ARTURO

Hmmm... The nose is too small.

Leisinger looks down. Makes the nose smaller.

OLDER MAN

Better?

ARTURO  
I guess... Are you an artist?

OLDER MAN  
Some might say so.

ARTURO  
So why draw Max?

OLDER MAN  
OK, what should I draw?

ARTURO  
Animals! How about a dog?

The Man considers. Takes his pencil, adapts the sketch man's face so it now resembles more a canine face.

ARTURO (CONT'D)  
That's not a real animal...

OLDER MAN  
A real animal? OK then...

He searches for a new piece of paper, can only find one with a shopping list scribbled on the side, the word "Pigment" circled. Starts drawing again. Arturo leans in, much more interested, describes what he sees taking form.

ARTURO  
Wings... some kind of bird? Oh no  
- hooves?! Do birds have hooves?

PETER LEISINGER  
Who said it was a bird?

The sketch continues. A long neck is added. And a hump. Long eyelashes and a questioning, innocent face that looks as surprised to find wings on his back as Arturo is.

ARTURO  
A...a camel? With wings?

PETER LEISINGER  
You've never seen a flying camel?

Arturo is fascinated, hops up onto the seat beside the Man, gently shifts the sketch closer to him -

- when the piece of paper is abruptly YANKED from his grasp. The waiter, his father MICHEL looms over him.

MICHEL  
Arturo, please! Mr. Leisinger is  
working in peace, leave him be!

ARTURO  
He asked me, I didn't -

MICHEL  
 (to Leisinger)  
 I'm sorry, it's August, Arturo's  
 friends are away but I must stay  
 and work, so he gets a little  
 restless when he's on his own -

ARTURO  
 (under his breath)  
 Which is all of the time...

PETER LEISINGER  
 No problem at all. Actually I was  
 just leaving - nothing to do with  
 Arturo. How much do I owe you?

Michel firmly removes Arturo by his shoulders as he and Leisinger settle the bill. Arturo wanders off, looks at the people vacantly staring the horse race on TV.

Arturo turns back, sees Leisinger getting ready to go. His father is away, so he sneaks back over to him.

ARTURO  
 (whispers)  
 Hey, Mr. Leisinger! Is it true?  
 Are there really flying camels?

Leisinger folds the sketch into a PAPER PLANE.

PETER LEISINGER  
 What do you believe?

He hands Arturo the paper plane. Arturo takes it eagerly and examines it. Looks up. Leisinger is already standing by the door. Arturo looks at him questioningly: shall I? Leisinger nods, smiling: sure, why not?

Arturo winds back his arm and lets the paper plane fly. He watches it soar over the heads of the TV spectators, curving round... then suddenly DIVE BOMB into the Female Customer's plate. She YELLS in shock, looks round in alarm.

Michel grabs the plane, rushes over to Arturo. He opens up the plane, realises that it's the Leisinger sketch.

MICHEL  
 What are you doing with this?

ARTURO  
 Mr. Leisinger gave it to me...

Arturo looks round to the door: Leisinger has vanished.

MICHEL

Sure! And Madame Bernau just gave me the keys to her Porsche as a tip! Do you have any idea how much one of Mr. Leisinger's pieces, even a sketch, can cost?

ARTURO

But it is my flying camel...

MICHEL

I don't care if it's Aladdin's flying carpet! That's enough from you for one day! Up to bed! Now!

Arturo sulks off for the door. Michel clears the customer's plate, takes the sketch and puts it behind the bar.

MIGUEL

Kids. No appreciation of art...

INT. ARTURO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A simple child's bedroom. Arturo tosses in bed, in the middle of a vivid dream. The sound of horses galloping...

Horse after horse straining forward, hoofs thundering to keep up in the race. Suddenly a different type of hoof, thinner legs, starts overtaking...

As a CAMEL breaks for the front, effortlessly cruising past its rivals. Approaching a JUMP, as the herd leap the fence -

The camel TAKES OFF, its WINGS SPREADING wide as it soars above the other animals, fitter, faster, HIGHER...

Arturo jerks awake, sitting straight up in bed. His breathing slows. He looks out the window, moonlight flooding through. Slowly, quietly steals out of bed...

INT. STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS

Arturo creeps down the stairs, careful not to make a sound.

INT. CAFE - CONTINUOUS

The door handle slowly turns, Arturo enters. The cafe is deserted, still, lit by moonlight. He tiptoes inside, turns on a side lamp, looks around. Sees what he's looking for.

Arturo stands on a chair, reaches up and grabs the crumpled piece of paper with the winged camel sketch. He brings it down, sits at a table. Starts to smooth its folded lines.

VOICE

Mmmm...

Arturo stops. What was that? Only silence. He resumes smoothing the paper, more alert.

VOICE

Mmmm, that's nice...

Arturo stops, stares slowly down at the paper. What...?

VOICE

Don't stop. In fact if you could just scratch my nose. It's been itching me the whole night...

The sketched camel is talking to him.

Arturo yells, tosses the paper away and runs for the door. In his haste, the lock clicks shut. He tugs at the handle but the door won't budge. Arturo looks behind in panic.

The sketch winged camel is SLOWLY RISING UP FROM THE PIECE OF PAPER on the floor. Its head lifts up first, its long neck peering about as it emerges. The body slowly lifts itself, feet stagger, folded wings twitching.

Arturo's curiosity overrides his fear and he slowly walks back towards it, fascinated. The camel totters about like a newborn. Looks around the room, then finally at Arturo.

WINGED CAMEL

Hello.

ARTURO

Uh, hello.

WINGED CAMEL

Was it you? The one who made me fly really fast before I crash landed into the sandwich plate?

ARTURO

Uh, yes. That was me.

WINGED CAMEL

That was very dangerous. Someone could have been hurt.

ARTURO

It... it was an accident.

WINGED CAMEL

I have only one thing to say.

A beat. Arturo hangs his head in shame.

WINGED CAMEL (CONT'D)

Can we do it again? Please?

Arturo looks up. The camel bounces in excited anticipation.

MONTAGE: Arturo getting ready, the camel raised aloft above his head. Arturo's feet running up. The camel propelled forward through the air, gliding across the bar, reflected in the mirror, landing smoothly on the centre table.

WINGED CAMEL

Juuhuuuu!!! This is great!

Arturo giggles, skipping along, dodging between the chairs, following the camel's flights, enjoying himself immensely.

The camel touches down on a front table, gasping for breath. Arturo jumps up into the chair beside him.

WINGED CAMEL

Wow, that was fun!

ARTURO

It really was! I'm Arturo, by the way. What's your name?

The camel stops, unsure. Looks down at himself. Shrugs.

ARTURO

Here, let me see...

He turns him round, examines him. Spies the written list.

ARTURO (CONT'D)

It says here... 'Pig... Pigment'.

PIGMENT

'Pigment'. Hmm. 'The Amazing Flying Pigment'. Sounds good, eh?

ARTURO

Actually, you're not really flying yet. Not on your own, anyway. Can't you use your wings?

Pigment checks out his folded little wing stumps. He concentrates and they flutter a little bit, then stop.

PIGMENT

(changing the subject)  
Shall we do one more?

ARTURO

OK. But... well, what are you doing here? Alive, I mean?

PIGMENT

Well, what are you doing here?

ARTURO

Tonight? I... I had a dream.

PIGMENT

Maybe I did too... Anyway, come on, let's go! Up, up and away!

Arturo picks up Pigment, lines up, runs up and lets him go.

Pigment sails onwards, upwards. As he passes the photo of Skyscraper Workers, they TURN THEIR HEADS. One of them even DUCKS. Pigment notices them, turns his own head, distracted - and suddenly VEERS RIGHT, heading straight into -

PIGMENT

Woah, brake, brake!

- the Venus De Milo. His wings twitch as he tries to brake but stop as he hits her and the floor in quick succession. Arturo rushes over. Pigment stirs, evidently dazed.

ARTURO

Are you OK?

PIGMENT

Ow, my hump! Is it dented?

VOICE (O.S.)

Never mind your hump, what about me You might have taken my arm off - if I still had one..!

Pigment and Arturo slowly look up.

Venus De Milo is not happy.

CONSTRUCTION FOREMAN

Hey, buddy! If you can't fly, you got no business being airborne! In 70 years up here, that's the closest we come to fallin' off!

VINCENT VAN GOGH

Quite simply, my friend, that is not how art should behave.

VENUS DE MILO

Well, therein lies the problem. This camel is obviously not art!

Arturo stares from one art work to the other, mouth agape.

ARTURO

Uh... you're all... talking...

CONSTRUCTION FOREMAN  
Smart cookie, ain't he?

PIGMENT  
Don't speak to Arturo like that!  
(to Venus De Milo)  
And what do you mean, I'm "not  
art?" Leisinger himself drew me!

VINCENT VAN GOGH  
(coughs apologetically)  
Yes, my friend, and then threw  
you away. Quite literally.

CONSTRUCTION FOREMAN  
Yeah, and it took him, what, a  
minute? I always say, Work is the  
measure of Value. If something  
needs a lot of work, it's worth a  
lot. That's the way it is.

VINCENT VAN GOGH  
Don't forget inspiration. And, of  
course, the suffering...

VENUS DE MILO  
You missed out the symbolic  
meaning. I, for example,  
symbolize the epitome of beauty.

VINCENT VAN GOGH  
Oh, not again! Since I was hung  
here in 1979, it's the same old  
thing. I can't listen any more.

VENUS DE MILO  
That's funny, since you can  
surely only hear half of it...

VINCENT VAN GOGH  
Why, you... you plaster copy!

VENUS DE MILO  
Copy? Look who's talking!

A loud argument breaks out among the three art works.  
Arturo and Pigment look on, bewildered.

ARTURO  
Excuse me. You can all talk, and  
all you do is argue?

PIGMENT  
Yeah, and about stuff no one even  
understands. Not even you!

CONSTRUCTION FOREMAN

Woah, there! Now, we don't have  
to take that from something that  
ain't even real!

PIGMENT

What do you mean?

ARTURO

What do you mean?

CONSTRUCTION FOREMAN

Flying. Camels. Don't. Exist!

Silence. Pigment stares at them in disbelief. Arturo too.

PIGMENT

(quietly)

If I don't exist, why am I here?

Arturo speechless. Reaches out to Pigment. Pigment bows his  
head and slowly shuffles away. SNIFFLING can be heard.

A THROAT IS CLEARED. Everyone turns to look at the abstract  
Paul Klee painting. It waits for undivided attention, then:

PAUL KLEE

"Art does not reproduce what we  
see; rather, it makes us see."

The others wait for elaboration. Nothing more comes.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

I hate it when he does that.

CONSTRUCTION FOREMAN

Says the guy who looks like an  
accident with a paint pot!

(to Paul Klee)

Hey! Just cos you don't say much,  
don't think it means more.  
Sitting there looking mysterious  
while we're hammering away on  
this here skyscraper...

VENUS DE MILO

Please! For 70 years you've been  
eating your sandwiches, not doing  
a stroke of work!

CONSTRUCTION FOREMAN

See, you just don't get it, sweet-  
heart. We symblem...sybellish...  
represent the nobility of working  
men - even on our lunch break!

VINCENT VAN GOGH

Oh yes, what enormous suffering  
in a hearty ham sandwich...

And they're off again, bickering with each other. Arturo has had enough. He storms forward, bangs on the wall.

ARTURO

I think you're all very mean. And very jealous! Pigment exists more than all of you! You all talk but can any of you move? No! Pigment can move! Pigment can even fly!

CONSTRUCTION FOREMAN

To be fair, kid, the camel don't fly too good on his own.

ARTURO

Yes he can.

PIGMENT

(looks up, sniffing)  
What?

Pigment checks his little folded wings again. Gives them a nudge. They flicker for a second. He shakes his head. Arturo comes over to him, leans in close.

ARTURO (CONT'D)

I believe in you.  
(a beat; Pigment nods)  
Let's show them who's real.

Pigment slowly walks to the end of the long table.

VENUS DE MILO

If I had hands, I would applaud.  
Very, very slowly.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

Let him try. Of course, pain is the greatest teacher of all.

CONSTRUCTION FOREMAN

What do you say now, Klee, huh?  
Nothin' abstract about a camel falling on his face!

Pigment steadies himself, takes a deep breath, stretches his neck. Starts his run up...

Arturo watches as Pigment gathers speed along the table...

The art works look on avidly as Pigment approach the table edge at full speed, folded wings twitching...

Arturo bounces with excitement, trying to will him up.

ARTURO

Go on, Pigment! Up, up and away!

Just as he is about to take off - THE DOOR FLIES OPEN.  
Michel stands there, half-asleep, grumpy, growling.

MICHEL

What on earth is going on here?

Pigment, distracted and surprised, slips off the edge of the table and drops like a stone.

The other art works don't move a muscle.

ARTURO

Papa, Pigment the camel is about to fly!

Michel rubs his eyes. He sees the limp paper camel on the floor, bends down to examine it, totally confused.

MICHEL

Arturo, did you do this to Mr. Leisinger's sketch? If he wants it back? How can he use it now?  
(examines it carefully)  
Although you've done an amazing job. How did you get the hump..?

ARTURO

You don't understand! Pigment came to life. And so did the other pictures - and Venus De Milo. They said he doesn't have any value but I know he does! And we're going to prove it! Just let-

Michel slams the table in anger. Then notices that Arturo is nearly in tears, obviously exhausted. He calms down.

MICHEL

We can talk about this tomorrow. Now let's get some sleep.

ARTURO

But Pigment -

MICHEL

Tomorrow, Arturo. Come now.

He puts Pigment down, takes Arturo's hand, turns the lamp off and leads the way back upstairs. Arturo has one last look at Pigment, lying prone on the floor.

INT. ARTURO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Michel tucks a sleepy Arturo in, strokes his head.

MICHEL

Listen, I'm sorry I've been so busy Arturo. How about we go away this weekend, just the two of us?

ARTURO

(half-asleep)

Three of us.... Pigment too...

MICHEL

OK, the three of us. Good night.

Michel gets up and leaves. Arturo's eyes flicker then close. His breathing grows heavy, he falls into deep sleep.

LATER: a TAPPING sound at the window. Arturo stirs slowly. The tapping more insistent. He rises, groggy. Sits up, stares at the window. His eyes shoot wide open.

Pigment's head hovers just above the window sill, nose tapping the glass. Arturo rushes over, opens the window.

ARTURO

Pigment! How did you get out?

PIGMENT

Through a small window. It was a squeeze. Lucky my hump was already dented a little.

Arturo suddenly realises Pigment is hovering one floor up.

ARTURO

But you're... you're flying...  
How did you get your wings?

PIGMENT

From you, Arturo. From you.

Pigment hovers up, his wings now extended to their full glorious span, feathers fanned in the moonlight.

Arturo jumps up and down in excitement as Pigment swoops off into the distance, wings powering him upwards.

PIGMENT / ARTURO

JUHUUUIII!!!!

FADE OUT.