

with him. They all had big things ahead of them, and Lucas knew he didn't fit into any of that. He was just grateful for what they had. At least no one could say he took things for granted.

Florence felt like an absolute genius. Creating a time capsule was a brilliant idea, if she did say so herself. This was a momentous occasion. They couldn't just let high school pass them by without a proper farewell. Her own addition to the box was small in size, but she was sure it would be worth a lot of money soon. Right now, her guitar pick was pretty worthless, but once she became the famous musician she knew she was destined to be, everything would change.

She had been dreaming about albums and sold-out crowds for years. She practised guitar until her fingers bled and sang until her voice was hoarse. Nothing was going to stop her fulfilling her dreams. She had gotten awfully good at silencing the voice in her head that said she couldn't do it. She faked confidence for so long and then one day suddenly realised it was real. She believed in herself, even if the people around her didn't always.

Her parents had made many failed attempts to get her to follow a more stable path. Stability wouldn't give her a lifelong legacy, though. She was going to write songs and people were going to sing them long after her death. She was going to show them all.

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he box was almost finished. Everyone waited impatiently as Lucy racked her brain for something to write. To everyone else, she was writing a letter to her

future self. If that was the case, it would have been a lot less stressful. She was too young to even write a proper letter, so she had no clue how she was going to handle raising a child.

The father wanted nothing to do with it. She didn't have much of a plan before, but when a pregnancy test came out positive two weeks ago, she realised just how much growing up she had to do. And she didn't have much time to do it.

She put the pen to paper, tried to tell her child all of this. That things were uncertain. That she didn't know what she was doing. That she didn't want to mess it up. Above all, she wanted her child to know that, despite all of this, she already loved them.

She made a promise to try her best, something her teachers had asked of her for years but only now felt worthwhile. She signed the letter "*Love, Lucy x*". It was only once it was sealed the thought occurred to her that this child would know her as "Mum".

They each grabbed a shovel and dug a hole for the box. They would never return to open it, their friendship never the same after 19 April. None of them would end up famous. Their names would fade from the world shortly after they do. If they knew that back then, they would have called it failure. But a life is not measured by the mark it leaves. To leave behind Grammys is no more worthwhile than to leave behind a shoebox hidden in the ground.

They would live somewhat boring lives from an outsider's perspective, their time together deemed pointless after they split apart. But this moment would last forever, each of them alive and vibrant, held within time. To be remembered or forgotten is inconsequential. Real people hold more value than a legacy.

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he magic of fantasy shines a light on our intimate realities. Perhaps you felt invincible after watching a Marvel movie? Maybe you left salty tears on the pages of a *Harry Potter* book or became irrefutably enraged after your fantasy football team lost?

Some might choose a library for mind-bending possibilities, a cinema or stadium for a life-altering experience, or even a humble park for endless interactions. For me there's nothing quite like walking into a gallery or museum to throw you out of your comfort zone, yet keep your feet firmly planted in the here and now.

Museums and galleries are alive with paradox. They push you through history, pull you closer to the truth, magnifying the blurred lines between fantasy and reality.

Before you even enter the hallowed halls of such a place, your expectations are

The Stuff Of Dreams

by Charlie Newman

momentarily suspended. Will I “get it”? Do I even like said artist? Can I like their work, but dislike the artist? Will there be a decent spot for a coffee to gather my thoughts? I hope there’s somewhere I can buy a postcard afterwards, a physical memento of what I’ve just witnessed.

Once you’ve shaken off your umbrella, popped your belongings into the cloakroom or simply just tied them around your waist/bag straps, your golden ticket is eagerly scanned. It’s only just begun.

The soft thud of the closing doors marks the border of another world. You’re whisked away to another century, to another norm. Sometimes you can’t believe how backwards the work is and yet so close to the contemporary. Other times, it’s unfathomable to think how modern and progressive they were. Whichever the case, your tiny life has been put on hold. The deadlines, the worries, the to-do lists are paused and replaced with questions of wonderment – how on Earth did they build the Stonehenge? Gosh I’m finding this Francis Bacon difficult to stomach. Ouch, my eyes can’t focus on this Bridget Riley. Wow, I can’t believe that’s a drawing not a photograph. Goodness, why am I crying over Mark Rothko’s pulsing paintings?

You’re immediately immersed into the artists reality. You’ve entered another realm and in today’s world of polarisation, the arts have never felt so important.

You might not be a fan of pop art’s commercialisation, of Pablo Picasso’s misogyny or the ancient Egyptians obsession

with gold, but at the very least you’ve been challenged and forced to listen to your thoughts before the media brainwashes your own. Even if your main takeaway from the exhibit was, “Yikes, all those corsets and summer strolls featured in Impressionist paintings look extremely uncomfortable”, you’ve caught a glimpse of another era.

And yet, despite the inducement of all that awe, the “Oh, I must look that up later”, the inability to understand what it was like to live during World War II, or as another gender or race, you find yourself immediately putting yourself in the artist’s shoes, whether you like it or not.

Philosophers argue that we’re selfish beings and yes it does seem embarrassingly narcissistic to place yourself, friends or family at the centre of an Old Masters painting. But there’s something incredibly unique and humbling about the empathy that only art can yank out of us. Suddenly history’s great loves, catastrophes and tragedies feel all the more real when they’re tirelessly chipped away into stone or painstakingly marked on the canvas.

You can’t help but reach out to a loved one post exhibition, checking in, promising more. The fantasy of it all draws truth from your own life.

Despite the works hanging on the walls or sculptures standing proud on plinths, it is the gallery goers and employees themselves that sprinkle the fairy dust onto the occasion. Whether you’re in a blue-chip gallery, government institution or local space, you’ll always find your forever friends.

There’s the student who’s simultaneously nursing last night’s hangover, studying for tomorrow’s exams, nose-deep in a book, and guarding priceless artworks, shifting from one numb bum cheek to another. There’s the wiry-haired visitors who proudly wear their members’ gallery card on a lanyard like an Olympic medal.

There’s those who shape-shift quietly around the space never to be seen or heard and those who guffaw, sigh exceedingly loudly and read the artwork description aloud as though they wrote it themselves. The art buffs in diaphanous dark shapes (think Severus Snape) squinting hard at a seemingly blank canvas. The tourists who set off the bleeping alarm while leaning over the security wire to get their 300th photo. (Note to tourists: flash and reflective glass aren’t a match made in heaven.)

There’s the children who begin the exhibition firmly holding their parents hand before slowly drifting off to sketch their own brilliant interpretation, sat crossed legged on the polished floor. The weary mothers valiantly pushing their sleep-deprived offspring around before whisking them out again to feed/soothe their tears. Hats off to you.

But my favourite gallery friends are the octogenarians who slowly pad around in their comfortable shoes, stooping their head over the paintings without a care in the world for the impatient queue behind them. They might even whip out a foldable chair and plonk themselves in front of the prized work like you would a deck chair in front of the sea. They sit idly

for hours taking in every last brushstroke, savouring every memory the image has provoked within them. Note to self: live more octogenarian.

For where there’s fantasy, there’s life-giving reality. A gallery or museum is a modern-day church for me, a community of sorts where you’ll discover the weird and wonderful, but arguably most powerful of all live, beside them.