

The Painter

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Age: 17

This story that I'm going to tell you is about one of the greatest, in my opinion the best, impressionist painters in the history of Holland: Berg Janssen. Born at the beginning of the 20th century into a rich family from Rotterdam, he grew happily with his seven elder brothers. He spent his long childhood days in the vast estate of the family playing under an infinite blue sky, reading travel books or taking endless walks through forests and trails. His relatives remember him as a cheerful, sensitive, curious and imaginative child. His father, Heer Ludger Janssen, had made his fortune by exploiting a mine that he inherited from his great-grandfather. He was, in fact, an extremely recognized and skilful businessman; with a fortune that even nowadays is still estimated as one of the greatest of all the country. Due to his pragmatic nature, and because the business was marching very well, he pressured his sons so they would have professions that could help the family in their company. Berg's brothers became lawyers, engineers, accountants ... But Berg was different. His talent for painting manifested early; when he was only nine, he finished his first picture. He started painting, with great simplicity but beauty, the colourful and majestic highlands and meadows; as well as the chores of the servitude, the miners and the boisterous inhabitants of Rotterdam.

When Berg told Heer Ludger that he wanted to become a painter and study fine arts, he expected a colossal anger from his father. Nevertheless, the patriarch of the Janssens thought that having an artist member would be an excellent addition to the status of the family in high society.

He studied pictorial arts in the University of Rotterdam. But his artist soul pushed him for more, he wanted to expand his artistic horizons in a way that imagination cannot do, but reality does. When he told his most beloved brother his plan of running away from home and undertake a trip across the country in order to paint and reflect life, his brother thought that Berg had completely lost his mind. His father would not leave him in a thousand years. Berg was aware of that; and in spite of the love that he professed to his father, brothers, friends and to some servants of the house, and despite knowing how much he owed to his father, one day he disappeared leaving a note. He took a big backpack, clothes, brushes, small canisters with paint, two canvases and all the money he could need for the trip.

He walked through countless hills, roads, towns and mountains. When he saw a breath-taking landscape or a moving scene of daily life, he stopped, placed his tripod with a canvas and with a few but expressive brush strokes he was capable of depicting beauty of the moment with a shocking honesty. When Berg finished a painting, he

immediately bought another canvas and went to the nearest post office to package his artwork and send it to a friend, who kept them safe and exposed them in art galleries. Soon, the legend about a young painter who travelled across the country depicting it in his paintings became popular. People talked about him in all the corners of Holland, wherever he went, some people recognized him.

This fame led him to come across an unusual admirer, while looking for a place to sleep during his stay in Amsterdam. He was sat in luxurious black car smoking a long brown cigar. He dressed in the most elegant and appropriate way and talked soft but roughly. This businessman reminded Berg of his father; so, when the gentleman made him a work offer, he felt in such confidence with him that he accepted. His name was Manfred Brouwer. He said he was a rich man with a great interest in art and that he was really interested in his journey. He liked him and his art so much, that he would contract Berg for doing a portrait of him. The payment would not only be money, but also staying in his mansion on the outskirts of Amsterdam until he finished it.

Berg slept that night in Mr. Brouwer's mansion and spent the whole next day portraying his host. The friendly and flattering businessman was so satisfied with the result, that he offered Berg staying another night in his mansion; which he accepted. That night our painter discovered a terrible secret, that would change his life forever. He woke up late at night by the distant hoarse voice of Mr. Brouwer shouting to someone. Curious about this situation, he silently followed the voice through the mansion until reaching the main room of the house. He carefully peeked the door and saw Mr. Brouwer, accompanied by two stout and expressionless men and a police man, standing up in front of a terrified 30-year-old man. This man's face was extremely familiar to Berg, like if he had seen it on the newspapers. Mr. Brouwer shouted incensed about how he had betrayed him, about alcohol, medicines and tabaco loads and about sale of weapons. Was there when Berg realised that his host was not an usual businessman, he was a gangster.

Mr. Brouwer told his two subordinates to give him the "punishment" for the actions of the man. They gave him a revolver. The next thing Berg saw was the man on his knees begging for forgiveness and, after moments of cries and prayers, his chest crossed by a black and red hole, followed by a freezing silence. His lifeless body fell in the carpet, dyeing it in the colour of blood. Mr. Brouwer ordered to "clean up this mess and, after that, go to check if the artist has heard anything". Horror invaded Berg. He went back to his room as quiet and fast as he could, and in a completely instinctive way, he picked

up what was his and jumped out the window. He landed safe and started running through the vast property of Mr. Brouwer. Once he reached the road, he realised he had to stay out of sight and the further away possible from Amsterdam in order to survive. He did not care about the cold of the night, because in his legs burned the fire of dread.

He arrived the next morning to a small town, where he tried to be unnoticed, and rented a hotel room. Despite having been walking all night, he couldn't sleep; the horrid vision of the murder pursued him. It was rotting his heart, he needed to take it out. And he did it. He painted my favourite picture of his, in which he depicted the scene with a force so terrifyingly overwhelming, and still maintaining a sense of eminently melancholic beauty, that can only be achieved by a genius. As usual, he went to the nearest post office and sent it to his friend. One day later he was assassinated while painting a plantation of barley. His blood covered almost completely his never finished last work. No one knew who did it.

And there I was, 11 years later, watching an exhibition of my favourite artist. It was titled "The never published art of Berg Janssen". But I couldn't enjoy it because I was stressed by my job. This case was the most important of my entire career as a detective: to find evidences that Mr. Manfred Brouwer was related to illegal alcohol and tabaco traffic, sale of weapons and murder. I knew he was guilty, and I had some evidences, but not solid. I needed a strong evidence that could unite the other ones and make them make sense. And, as I've already said, there I was, watching an exhibition of my favourite artist when I came across this painting. In it you could clearly see Mr. Brouwer shooting someone who looked exactly like Gerber Dekker, an assassinated politician. In the edge of the picture it was signed by Berg and dated two days before his dead and one after the dead of Gerber Dekker. It's well known that Mr. Brouwer had Berg in his mansion for a couple of days, painting his most famous portrait. Janssen and Dekker died on dates suspiciously close. Slowly, while I was watching that masterpiece, my mind began to gather the pieces until I realized I had just found the central evidence; through it I could dig in the other ones and, with all of them, uncover the truth. Mr. Brouwer may have killed Berg Janssen, but he didn't considered one fact: the artist perishes, but his art never dies.