Morgan Andersen
The Painter’s Journey

Quickly, quickly, quickly was all that I could think about. I had to get out of here as fast as humanly possible as my life depended on it. Running down the hallway, without actually looking on either side, I sensed what colors were passing on either side of me. No, no, where is it? I was starting to run out of time, so I picked up the pace, when suddenly I saw a flash of red and orange. I stopped abruptly and was standing face to face with the painting I was searching for, my first painting. Everything about it seemed familiar to me: the strokes, the colors, and yet they seemed distant, as well. The sounds outside were getting closer – loud explosions on either side of me; I had to pick up the pace. Tearing my painting off the wall, I started running with it cradled awkwardly between my arms. The sounds seemed even closer now; the entire building was shaking now. I was almost out of the building when a bomb feel onto the wing where I had just been. My body was pushed to the ground by the force of the explosion, and my painting fell out of my arms. Getting up, disorientated from the fall, I searched frantically for my painting. I found it under some rubble, but thankfully it seemed to have survived the fall undamaged.

I feel as though I have some explaining to do. You all may be questioning why I was stealing from a museum – let alone one of my own paintings. Did I forget to mention that I was in London in the middle of a German air raid? I was risking my life to steal my own painting back, and for you to understand any of this, I do, indeed, have a lot of explaining to do.
So, I’ll start from the beginning. My name is Benjamin, and I was a painter until a month ago. My life used to be based around painting, but now I can’t even look at a paintbrush, let alone paint. My paintings were based on emotions – the events in life I had experienced. In the beginning, they were colorful and joyful, and then they progressively got darker and gloomier. I couldn’t help it; it was just the way I felt – as though there were no inspiration left. My last painting was devoid of colors completely, and I sold it a month ago. Handing over the painting to the buyer, a wave of depression fell over me; bright colors and joy no longer existed. And since that day, I have no longer felt myself; and I have been unable to paint.

I tried and tried to paint, but I couldn't even lay down a single brush stroke. Nothing would help, so I decided to meet my friend in town, since if anything weird was happening to me, she was the one to contact. She knew everything there was to know about the weird, abnormal, and even paranormal happenings in art history. The prospect of this meeting was all that got me through the next week, the chance that she could help me. The day that we were meeting, I felt hope. But I was also worried: what if Rosalie couldn’t help me? What if I were stuck this way for the rest of my life? Although I was feeling these emotions, they were not as strong as they once were. Yet, I still wasn’t myself.

When I walked into the cafe in which we were meeting, Rosalie could tell immediately that something was wrong. As I explained my predicament to her, she seemed worried. It took her a long while with continuous questioning of me, to figure it out. And with one last question, as though a lightbulb went off, her face lit up. But then she looked very worried. The question that put it all together was when, exactly, had the depression occurred? When I told her it was at the exact moment in which
I had let go of my last painting, giving it to the buyer, her face became even graver than it was before. She looked me straight in the eye and said: “I know exactly what has happened to you, and you are not going to like it.” She told me that, because my paintings were linked to my experiences and emotions, every time I painted I was inserting my soul into the paintings. The reason behind it was that every single brush stroke meant something to me, so they were connected to me literally, so when I sold them, each took a piece of me with it. Like puzzle pieces coming together it began to make sense, how my colors were getting darker, and how my emotions were getting gloomier. Although this made sense, I still had a lot of questions: how did my soul wind up in my paintings; and could I ever get my soul back? Could I ever be myself again? Rosalie told me not to worry, that she had read about it before, and although she didn’t know the why, she did know the how – how to fix my problem. I had to get all my paintings back in one place and add an unintentional stroke of color into the painting – which was a relief because it wouldn’t ruin the integrity of what meant so much to me. That would be the easy part, physically getting back all my paintings would be the hard part. Since there were twenty of them out in the world. Another problem that I may not have mentioned is that the world was at war right now, for the second time in not a very long time. This probably should clear up why I was in a London museum in the middle of an air raid. It was all part of the plan: get the paintings when no one was around, and why would someone be out during an air raid? Rosalie told me that I had to get each of my paintings back in the order in which they were sold. This red and orange painting was the first one I had ever sold, and holding it outside of the destroyed museum made me realize how hard this journey was going to be. It would be
worth it in the end, if it could get me my life back. Even holding this painting made me feel a little better, it gave me hope that this journey would not be a vain one. One down, nineteen to go. After bringing my painting back to my flat, I immediately went to Rosalie’s place to tell her the good news. She knew it was good news that we already had one painting, but she also informed me something about the current situation. She had read a lot more in her history books, and found out that there were two painters that this had ever happened to. And the problem was that the painters could only live without their souls for two months. The first had died before getting all his paintings back, but the other had survived. So, if I calculated this correctly, we only had three weeks to get back thirteen paintings.

Changing the subject, we started to hatch plans on how to get all the paintings back. We created intricate plans on how to steal all of the paintings, planning out every last detail, the only one that would cause us any trouble would be number nineteen, but we decided not to worry about that one for now. The next two paintings were in the same house, but they were in Scotland. Rosalie decided to come for the ride and help me out with these two. I knew the layout of this house, so both of us could go for one painting each, and get out of there quicker.

Five days after the London museum, Rosalie and I were on a train heading back to London, two “packages” wrapped up and on the luggage racks. Three down, and this plan had gone without any troubles.

Two days after the train ride, I was in possession of seven of my paintings. These four were the easiest, because they had been gifts to friends and family. All I had to do was ask for them back, saying how I wanted to restore them, to make sure that the colors wouldn’t fade.
We followed the plans to a T, and they worked. We traveled to different countries day after day getting my paintings back. The count was at eighteen, and everything had gone according to plan. Nineteen was the one we were worried about, though. The problem with this one was that it was on display at Buckingham palace. The queen had approached me about buying one of my paintings; she commissioned it for one of the bigger galleries in the palace. And we had issues figuring out how to get this painting back, since stealing from the queen was risky business. There was virtually no way to get into the palace anymore; visitors were no longer allowed. With time and hope running out, Rosalie heard of an event that the queen was hosting, welcoming service members into the palace, trying to boost their morale, so they would keep fighting for their country with passion. This was our way in, our last resort, so we went, me dressed as a sailor, and Rosalie as a medic.

The timing was cutting it a little close to our deadline, with only two days left. Two days and I was dead without this painting. So, walking into the palace, there was a feeling of anxiety and fear. One wrong move, and then there was no hope. When the time came, we both excused ourselves, and headed straight towards the gallery. Realizing that we couldn’t walk out of the palace with a giant frame, the best plan would be to roll up the canvas and hope for the best. We arrived at the gallery with no trouble, and went to work straight away. I took out a knife and started to pry up the corner of the canvas. When we started this plan, I forgot how loud the ripping canvas would be, and I realized that with increased sound, there was an increased chance of us getting caught. Being cautious, I sent Rosalie outside of the room to act as a lookout. It was a good thing that I had done so, because a minute later, I heard Rosalie start talking. Immediately, I stopped what I was doing and tried to find cover in the room, just in case someone came in. I could
hear Rosalie going on about being lost, how she went looking for the bathroom, and her bearings had gotten messed up. I could hear her putting on her charm, and she even got the guard to escort her back to where we were supposed to be.

With them gone, I got the painting off as quickly as possible and tried to roll it up carefully as not to ruin it. I stuffed the painting under my shirt, and hurried out of the room. Of course, I ran into a guard; but today seemed to be my lucky day, because the guard just looked at me and said: “you look like an appreciator of art, you must not see a lot of beauty out there fighting.” I was shocked, but responded, “it's really nice to see something that isn’t destroyed and revolved around hate,” and with that the guard left me alone to appreciate the artwork. I was so relieved and shocked that I got out of this, and began to look for Rosalie. There was no sign of her until she burst out of the bathroom and almost ran right into me. She gave me a questioning look, and I just nodded. After that we headed towards the doors, and once again found no guards.

There was one day remaining now, and nineteen paintings were not sitting in my flat as Rosalie and I were retrieving the last one. It was almost as though I could almost feel a pull towards it, as though my last painting was calling out to me. This painting was the easiest to retrieve, since it was in a summer resident of a man, and the season was now fall. All twenty paintings were placed in front of me, and all of them were retrieved within a month, and we still had the the last hours of this day, my last day. With all my paintings surrounding me, I felt a little better; they were already starting to affect me, even to the point in which I could pick up the paintbrush and choose a color. Yellow was my color of choice; I felt drawn to it, so I took the paint and added a little brush stroke into every bottom right corner of all twenty of my paintings. After the twentieth painting, I put the paintbrush
down, and immediately felt a surge of emotions, as if every piece of my soul went soaring back into me at one moment. Nothing else in the world mattered. I was myself again.