

Artistic License to Kill

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Thursdays, in the humble opinion of Mr Bertram Jones, were disagreeable things. If any sort of disturbance were to strike, inevitably it would occur on a Thursday – he was quite sure of it. This irrefutable opinion was not without reason, for Bertie had certainly had his fair share of disagreeable Thursdays. Falling down the stairs, for example, or the slugs getting into the primroses, or the time he accidentally chopped off one of his wife's fingers whilst preparing carrots, that sort of thing.

Everyone experiences an unfortunate Thursday every now and again, however Bertram was certain that Thursday really wasn't his day. His wife, Margaret, was at first dubious about the superstition, however in time she learnt to dutifully support him in the matter, which may, or may not, have been accountable for the fact that the pile of bodies in the garage was steadily increasing.

"You've got to do something about them, Bertie!" She would say now and again, usually at the breakfast table with coffee at the ready.

"What am I to do? It's hardly an easy task, my darling. I would continue with the old method, however your friend, Donna, from next door relentlessly asks when she'll be invited round for one of our 'famous barbecues'."

"But we've never had a barbecue?"

"Exactly."

"Oh."

"Is there any coffee?"

Coffee and cake. The key to a successful marriage (according to Donna, who had never been married in her life). It would be untrue to suggest the pair were unhappily married, for fact the truth was unequivocally the contrary. Now and again, another dismal Thursday would crop up, but on those days Margaret left Bertie to his own business, and life would continue agreeably.

Despite Bertie's unfortunate side-business, it was not the orchestrated disappearance of individuals (as Bertie referred to it) that was the pinnacle of his interest: truth be told, Bertram Jones had a dream. As he would often speculate from behind the shade of his Sunday Telegraph, Bertie wanted nothing more than to be a painter.

A painter! Oh, the things he could paint: whispering clusters of lavender, gilded sunsets, viridescent forests, towns and flowers and birds and oh, such wonderful things! In just three weeks' time, the local village hall was to hold the annual amateur artist's competition, and Bertie yearned to enter.

Alas, equipment was scarcely found in the Jones household, and this month's 'treats' deposit had already been put aside in favour of a brand new van – which was purchased, stubbornly, on a Thursday.

Bertie's obscurer quirks hadn't been noticed by the authorities, so Margaret was moderately secure. In fact, a small part of her appreciated his secretive doings – it made for the most interesting dinner table conversations – that was until Bertie would start waffling on about his desire to paint. Margaret enjoyed activities of a more adventurous kind, driving the new van to the canal, being one of her favourites.

Margaret would hop in to the driver's seat and patiently wait, whilst Bertie ran back in the house, as somehow he would *always* 'forget' something. Then, on feeling a peculiar change of weight in the

van and hearing the large back doors close loudly, she would start the engine and wait for Bertie to hop in beside her.

The journey was just long enough to be far away from all of life's problems: work, neighbours and police officers to name a few. On arrival, Mr Jones would instruct her to walk to the bridge whilst he 'checked the van' for any damage. Then he would re-join Margaret and the two would happily observe the dappled sunset from the bridge. There were two things Margaret liked about the pastime: firstly, she enjoyed the chill of the riverside air, and secondly, the van always felt considerably lighter to drive on return, as if any worries they held had been discarded in the waters.

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A few weeks after the couple had acquired the new van, Bertie drew himself up one morning, coughed indignantly and wandered out to Hobbycraft to buy a set of watercolours. That same evening, Margaret suggested their favourite activity: a trip to the canal. This time, Bertie carried with him his watercolours and some paper, settled himself at the peak of the bridge, and began to paint.

How liberating it was to sit with brush in hand! Vibrant oranges, deep greens, the flecks of light from the river... Bertie painted with relish, without a second of hesitation, painting each and *every* detail he could see without a single thought as to *what* it was he painted...

His first masterpiece. A spectacle for all to behold... in a week's time. He was to enter the village hall's competition, and no one was to stop him. For that reason, Bertie covered the painting in brown paper and hid it, even from himself, before the day dawned.

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"I can't begin to say how excited I am to see your piece, my dear!" Margaret crooned as she sidled over to Bertie. She wasn't alone: most people of the village wanted a peek at Bertram's efforts, for his painting prowess was unheard of.

With a flourish of the wrist, Bertie swept the brown paper away, revealing his artistic debut...

Stunned silence entailed.

Bertie looked around him, a wide smile upon his face inviting praise from the onlookers, and was met instead by confused horror.

"Bertram, you fool..." Margaret whispered, as she inspected his painting of the view from the canal. For in the foreground, was the murky outline of a human body.

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Following a hefty investigation, accelerated immensely by a sizeable tip-off from Donna, Bertram found himself sitting squarely in the centre of a comfortably padded cell, his face still contorted in a radiant smile. He'd barely paid attention to the details of his sentence – all of that excitement was heavily outweighed by the new-found joy which swept through his very bones: at long last, his wish had been fulfilled. Bertram Jones was a painter.