

Excerpt from "Another Vermeer"
Written by Bruce J. Robinson

HAN

You'll never believe the truth, will you?

BREDIUS

I'll never believe the lies you'd pass-off as truth. That's what critics are here for: to keep so-called creators like you as honest as your twisted little souls allow. You discovered the Emmaus! Case closed! Rather than maybe, just maybe taking that chance that all real artists take; risking noble failure; poverty, even, and madness – like van Gogh: you took the coward's way. Look, van Meegeren; you know as well as I that if I swear to the Court that you forged the Goering "Vermeer," they'll believe me. I've earned that. So. What'll it be: do I testify, or do you die?

(Han can't answer.)

Well..?

(Han looks lovingly at the photo of the "Emmaus" and can't bring himself to agree to Bredius's codicil.)

Goodbye, then.

(He leaves but is stopped just before exiting by...)

HAN

I'll do it. What you say. I'll...

BREDIUS

In writing. Notarized.

HAN

You'll have it.

BREDIUS

Fine. Renege on this compact, sir; you'll regret it. Well.

(Bredius starts out again.)

HAN

(blocking Bredius's exit)

No, damn you!

BREDIUS

Out of my way. I warn you.

HAN

Or what? What'llya do? You've already taken everything.

BREDIUS

Get out of my way.

HAN

No. Nobody else out there may ever get to hear how I did the "Emmaus," but you will; or are you afraid?

BREDIUS

Of you?

HAN

Hate is a mighty fuel. It took two damned years to find a way to make the paint right. Bakelite! Yes! Bakelite! Plastic! Mix that plastic with lilac oil in the ideal ratio. Combine with hand-ground pigments identical to Vermeer's. Indigo from isatis tintoria. Ultramarine from lapis lazuli. Vermilion from cinnabar. I did this! I knew this! I studied this! Did you!? Did you!?!

BREDIUS

No.

HAN

"No!! No!!!" And look! Badger-hair brushes!

BREDIUS

Lovely.

HAN

Made by me! Just like Vermeer! You know nothing – nothing about the craft of art! Two years! Two years of experiments! I find an old canvas and remove everything save the ground paint. The age-earned crackles remain. Then I work the surface oh-so carefully with soap and water and pumice...a palette knife. I get more crackle by removing the canvas from the frame and rolling it on a barrel! Then, spread the canvas with a thin varnish; let it dry. Oh, how varnish takes on that lovely crackle pattern! I put down my own ground paint; do my Vermeer; let it dry; and here – inspired! – I cover the surface with a layer of India ink! It works its way into the cracks – a testament to time passed. Gingerly, I remove the ink from the surface with turpentine. A final varnish. Pop it in an oven at 105 degrees centigrade for five hours – and how I battled for that discovery - and what's left is perfect. I try to rub-off some paint with a little alcohol. Nothing! Consummate! What ecstasy! A joy like the one I feel when I look into your rheumy, rodent eyes and see how profoundly I scare you.

BREDIUS

You!?

HAN

Yup!

(moving to new painting)

And this terrifies you: "Young Christ," my newest Vermeer; 'cause when the world calls this "true genius," that same world will see that no matter what anyone says, this hand created the "Emmaus." The painting you crowned "the glorious work of the great Vermeer" is the work of "the great van Meegeren," and you'll be the punch line of a national joke: and then - no more gallery openings, where tremulous women await your next bon mot; no more fat speaking fees and no more monthly magazine column or features in scholarly journals till finally all that's left is the occasional article in a second-tier publication; and then...silence. No more Bredius. Nobody else may see it, but you can! My painting! Wanna see it!?

BREDIUS

If you wish.

HAN

You wanna see who you really are?

BREDIUS

Sure.

(Bredius moves to canvas – calling Han's bluff. Han holds Bredius away from the painting.)

HAN

No! It's not ready. Not yet.

BREDIUS

(smiling and triumphantly backing away)

I don't have to see it. I know who you really are. I own you, 'cause I see you - a so-called artist laboring to prove he's a forger; who struggles to confirm he's committed an artist's most venal crime: stealing from another artist. Treason's honorable compared to what you do. You dine on the bones of Vermeer - the purest artist of all, the god to all true artists. But it's not all your fault. You were born and bred to be a forger. You never had a style of your own. You're a boulevardier on a dead-end street - a raconteur with nothing to say. A real artist painted the "Emmaus."

HAN

Tell me, Abe; when you were a boy, did you sit at your mother's knee sharpening pencils and invective and gaze up at her and say, "Momma, I wanna be a critic?"

BREDIUS

Sadly, this escapes you: what one does as a boy is very different from what one does as a man.

HAN

You ached to be an artist - didn't you? - but the paint wouldn't dance with you: so you're like a rejected lover; always longing from far away, always hating a little what you can't have. An artist lays his soul on the line to be dismissed by people who can't create and don't even try. You're the forgery. A real artist did do the "Emmaus." I did the "Emmaus." I don't care about our agreement. I don't care if I hang for it. I did the "Emmaus." I did the "Emmaus." I did the "Emmaus."

BREDIUS

Fine. Perfect. Are crazy people driven to art, or does art drive people crazy?

HAN

My first show. You remember? I was so young. Can you imagine my getting up the morning of your review? Running down? Getting the paper? Opening it right on the street? There. And getting this sick feeling here. I swore I'd never feel that again. 'cause of you; everything that sprang from my soul, I myself was without any value.

BREDIUS

You know, van Meegeren, if I loved your work, we'd be having drinks, and you'd be mocking the work of lesser, poorer artists. You'd be famous. Oh, and I am an artist. I paint. I simply have the sense to keep it to myself; so I don't need a critic, 'cause nobody else sees my stuff. I paint just as I like. So; let each man be his own artist, critic-free? Great. Fine. Fling your bloody excrement at the wall and call it a Da Vinci; but when you bring in an audience and especially when you put a price on your vision, when you ask another to put down his money - the byproduct of his labor - you ask to be judged. You must be judged. You will be judged. And this time: you will also be executed.

(Bredius exits. Han stands alone, frozen, eviscerated. He ducks behind his easel.)