

The Painter's Studio

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My brother-in-law, Matt, is a painter. When you look at his paintings, you feel just like Matt must have felt when he painted them.

I asked Matt how he paints such beautiful paintings.

"Well, Jesse," he said. "I put myself into every painting."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"It all began many years ago..." said Matt, and he told me a story.

When Matt was learning how to paint, his teacher gave him an assignment. She told him to paint a picture of his studio.

What a boring assignment, thought Matt.

Matt liked best to paint things that he found very strange and unusual. He painted cities all lit up like the starry sky at night, giant scientific machines, and cactuses he had seen while hiking in the desert. Why would he want to paint his studio where he worked every day?

Matt planned on spending the next day painting. He would try to finish the assignment quickly. "The sooner I finish," he thought, "the sooner I can paint something more exciting."

He set up his easel and started to paint his studio. He painted the floors, the walls, the lamp, the window, and all the unfinished paintings that were hung up on the walls.

"I'm almost done," he thought, "and it's not even noon yet."

But it didn't look quite right. Matt kept painting. The longer he painted, the more he noticed things in his studio he hadn't painted yet. He painted a piece of tape on the wall, a branch outside his window, and a dab of green paint he had spilled on the floor. He even painted a fly that was buzzing around the room and a fleck of dust that was coasting through a sunbeam.

It was five in the afternoon when he finally paused and wiped his brow. He could tell something was still missing, but he didn't see a single thing he hadn't painted.

I must be losing my mind, he thought. But I know there is something I'm forgetting.

Suddenly, Matt realized what he had forgotten. He had forgotten to paint the easel his painting was resting on, the palette with all the different colors of paint he was using, and his paintbrushes. Most importantly, Matt had forgotten to paint himself.

Matt painted himself, just as he was in real life, standing before the easel, painting.

It was long past midnight, when something magical happened. The painter Matt had just painted started to move.

I am losing my mind!

The painter in Matt's painting dipped his paintbrush into the paints on the painted palette. Matt watched him spread the paints over the small canvas that was in the painting. In a moment, the painter had painted the same painting Matt had painted in real life. Then, the painter in Matt's painting painted an even smaller easel and an even smaller painter in front of it.

Imagine Matt's surprise when the smaller painter that Matt's painter had painted began to paint an even smaller easel in the painting that was in the painting that Matt had painted! And in this tiny painting, there was an even smaller painter who painted an even smaller painting. In that painting the painter had already started painting an even smaller painting, and in that painting was yet another painter...

"When I woke up the next morning," Matt told me, "the painting was finished. It was the most beautiful painting I'd ever made. And I had learned a lesson: so long as I put myself into my paintings, my paintings will paint themselves."