Johannes Vermeer was a seventeenth-century painter from the city of Delft in Holland. He mainly painted the people and things he saw around him: the rooms in his house, the people who lived or worked there (usually women), and the things they did every day.

For example, in his work, you will see women who are playing music, reading or writing letters, or working in the kitchen. Vermeer was especially skilled at painting light coming into a room through windows. Partly for this reason, people often describe his work as being like photography or film — his paintings can seem very "real."

This painting, The Milkmaid, is one of these very "photographic" images. The woman, a maid or a servant, is pouring milk into a bowl. Perhaps she is making a bread and milk pudding, because there are pieces of broken bread on the table. Nobody knows if the woman he painted was a real servant or a model.

However, most people think Vermeer usually painted his wife, his daughter, and his servant, not models. A famous book and film, called Girl with a Pearl Earring, inspired by one of his best-known paintings, is an imaginary story about Vermeer and his relationship with his young servant.

People admired Vermeer's paintings a lot in his lifetime, but he was never rich. There are two reasons for this. First, because he painted very slowly. Today there are only 34 paintings that we can be sure are by him. Second, because he used very expensive paints.

The blue paint he used for The Milkmaid's apron was made from lapis lazuli, which was a very costly stone. People loved this painting from the beginning, and although it is very small — only 46 by 41 centimeters — twenty years after Vermeer died, someone bought the painting for 175 Dutch guilders.

That was an enormous amount of Money for the time.

Marta's Story

This happened two years ago. I'm Spanish, but I was in Ireland at the time because I had a job in Dublin. Some friends of mine who lived in Lyon, France, invited me to come and stay, so I decided to take a short holiday a long weekend, from Friday to Tuesday.

I looked for cheap flights, but I couldn't find any direct ones. The only option I found was Ryanair from Dublin to Brussels and then Air France from Brussels to Lyon. Anyway, the flight to Brussels was fine, and when I arrived, I went to the gate for my next flight to Lyon.

But when I needed to show my boarding pass and ID, I couldn’t find my ID card. I looked everywhere, in my bag, in my case, but it wasn’t there. The people at the gate were very nice and made some phone calls, but nobody could find it.

So, hey told me to wait in a small room, and I sat there for more than an hour as my flight to Lyon left without me. It was awful — I cried — I was so stressed and unhappy. In the end, a policeman came and said that I couldn't go to France because I didn't have any ID — the only place I could go was Spain to get a new ID card!

I waited another five or six hours for the flight to Madrid, feeling very depressed. So, I never had my holiday! I spent the weekend in Madrid getting my new ID card.

1.

Anya: This is me and my mum in York. It was my first term at university, and she came to visit me, and I took her on a tour round the city.

Friend: ls that, er, the cathedral there?

Anya: Yes — well, it's called York Minster, but it's really a cathedral.

2.

Anya: And this one's on the beach in ConwaII with my boyfriend, Ollie. I was staying with him in the Easter holidays, and he took me to the beach and we went for a walk.

Friend: It looks windy!

Anya: Yes, it was really windy and cold. I think we were the only people on the beach!

3.

Friend: Nice photo! I like the moustache.

Anya: Yeah, that's me and my friend Maisie. We were doing a music course — I do it twice a year, and this was at the party at the end of the course.

Friend: Why the moustaches and the picture frame?

Anya: There was this corner that the teachers made where people could take funny photos with the big frame, and hats and moustaches and things.

4.

Anya: OK, this one is me and two of my best friends — we were at school together. One of them, Libby, the one on my right, has a house by the river, and we went there in September before we all went to university.

5.

Friend: That's a nice photo. In Rome, I guess?

Anya: Yes, I was there for a holiday with my mum the summer before I went to university. She took this when we were visiting the Colosseum — as you can see.

6.

Friend: That's your mum again, isn't it?

Anya: Yes, that's her and her partner, and my sister Roz on the river in Oxford. My mum's birthday is in July and Every year we go punting and then we go for dinner. We were all drinking champagne, and Roz was doing the hard work!

Friend: Are any of the photos selfies?

Anya: Yes, the one of me and my Mum and the one on the beach!