I was spending the month of March in 1892 on the Riviera in France. I was staying at a spa, which was more private than most, especially those in Monte Carlo a few miles away. The place was beautiful with bright sunshine, a gentle wind, and a beautiful blue sea.

As a rule, the rich do not come there, however during my visit a rich man who told many stories came for a visit.

One day, at breakfast, he exclaimed. “Quick! Look at the man who is walking out the door.”

“Why?” I asked

“Do you know who he is?” he inquired

“Yes. He has been here for several days here before you came. He is old, retired, and very rich. They say he is form the Lyons, and I guess he is alone in the world because he always looks sad and doesn't talk with anybody. His name is Ted Magnan,” I answered curious as to why he would ask the question.

After thinking for a while and letting his breakfast become cold, he stated, “No, it's gone; I can't remember what I was thinking.”

In the evening, he invited me to his room and offered me a drink. I sat down for a relaxing evening of conversation with him.

“I have a story to tell you that might surprise you, are you ready?” he asked.
“Sure, go on. I love a good story,” I was eager to hear his tale.

He began to tell his story:

“A long time ago, when I was a young artist looking to improve my talent, I went to France, where I traveled from place to place making paintings and sketches.

“One day, I met two French artists who were doing the same thing. I joined them and we traveled together. We were as happy as we were poor, or we were as poor as we were happy, I am not sure which says it better.

“Their names were Claude and Carl. We were always laughing and in good spirits, even though we were very poor. We got money from selling our drawings from time to time. When nobody would buy our pictures, we went hungry.

“Once, while I was in the north of France, we stopped in Breton Village. We had a very difficult time selling our sketches and paintings there.

“We met another artist who was as poor as we were who lived in that village. He took us into his house and saved us from starvation. The artist’s name was François Millet.”

I interrupted, “The famous François Millet?!”

“Yes, it was he.

“He wasn’t any better than we were. He wasn’t even famous in his own village.

“We were so poor we could only have cabbage for dinner and sometimes we couldn’t even get cabbage. We lived and worked together for over two years.

“One day, Claude said, ‘Boys, we’ve come to the end. Do you understand? Everybody is against us. I’ve been all around the village and they do not want to give us food unless we pay them the money first.’

“There was a long silence.

“At last, Millet said, ‘What shall we do? I can’t think of anything. Can you boys?’

“No one answered.

“Then Carl began to pace back and forth across the room.

“Suddenly he stopped. He stood in front of a painting he had just finished, and said, ‘It’s a shame! Look at these pictures. They are good, as good as any of the well-known
artists. Many people we’ve sold our pictures to have said so, but they don’t want to buy our paintings anymore.’

“Carl sat down and said, ‘I know how we can become rich.’

‘Rich! Have you lost your mind?’ François asked.

‘No, I haven’t,’ responded Carl.

‘Yes, you have. You’ve definitely lost your mind. How will we become rich?’ I asked.

‘A hundred thousand Francs per painting,’ Carl said matter-of-factly.

‘He has lost his mind. Now I know it for sure,’ Claude said.

‘I spoke up and said, ‘Yes, he has.’

‘Then I looked over at Carl, ‘These troubles have been too much for you, and…..’

‘Claude interrupted me, ‘Carl, you need to take some medicine and go to bed!’

‘Stop it!’ said François seriously. ‘And let the boy say what he wants to.’

‘Then to Carl he said, ‘OK Carl, go ahead and tell us your plan. What is it?’

‘Well then, to begin with, I will ask you to note this fact in human history. Many great artists died of starvation. Only after their death did people begin to buy their paintings and pay large sums of money for them,’ Carl began to explain. ‘So, the idea is quite clear. One of us must die. Let’s draw lots to see who it will be.’

“We all laughed very hard at this idea, but through it all he waited quietly and then he continued his plan.

‘Yes, one of us must die to save us. We will draw lots. The one who dies will become famous, and the rest of us will become rich.

‘Here is my idea. During the next three months, the one who must die will paint as many paintings as he can. He will create sketches and pictures with his name on them and do something that is easy to recognize as his artwork. All these things will be valuable and then can be sold or collected at high prices by the world’s museums, but only after the artist is dead.

‘In the meantime, the rest of us will inform people that the great artist Millet is
dying and that he won’t live for more than three months,’ Carl explained his plan to us.

“We asked him, ‘What if he doesn’t die?’

Carl answered our question, “Oh, he won’t really die. He will only change his name and disappear. We will bury a dummy and cry over it. The entire world will help us. And…..”

“We didn’t allow him to finish. We applauded his idea, jumped up and down, and hugged each other’s necks. We were happy and excited about making the plan work. We talked for hours about this wonderful plan, forgetting that we were hungry.

“After we calmed down, we drew lots. François was the one who drew the lot to die.

“We gathered what few things we had and took them to the pawnshop. This would allow us to travel and have food for at least a few days as we told people about François and sell his paintings.

“The next morning Claude, Carl and I left the village. Each one of us had several small paintings and sketches made by François. We went different directions. Carl went to Paris, and Claude and I planned to travel throughout the countryside.

“On the second day of my journey, I stopped to paint a wonderful villa. The owner saw me painting and came down to look at my work. He liked what I had done. I showed him the picture by François Millet. I pointed to his name in the corner of the artwork.

“ ‘Do you know who this is?’ I asked proudly. ‘He is the one who taught me to paint.’

“The man looked confused.

“ ‘Don’t you know the name François Millet?’ I asked him. ‘He is dying and only has three months to live.’

“He paused for a second, and then he said, ‘Of course, it’s a Millet, I recognize it now.’

“He said this even though he had never heard of him before, but he pretended to know the name.

“ ‘May I buy that painting from you?’ he asked
“At first, I said no, but he insisted, so I let him have it for eight hundred Francs.

“The picture I made of his house was very nice. At first, I was going to offer it to him for ten Francs, the price I used to sell my paintings for, but then I thought, ‘I’m a student of the master,’ so I sold it for one hundred Francs.

“I sent the eight hundred Francs to François and continued my journey. Along the way I sold many more of Millet’s paintings, as well as my own. I always made a point to say, ‘I’m a fool to sell a Millet at this price. He only has three months to live. When he dies his pictures will most certainly sell for a much higher price.’

“I didn’t walk, I rode. I had enough money to buy a horse. I would only offer to sell one Millet at a time.

“Our plan was far more successful than we had dreamed. Every town we went to, we met with the owner of the town newspaper and told them the story of how François Millet, our master, was near death.

“We would get copies of the newspapers and share the information with the people we met along the way.

“Millet’s fame grew more and more. He was even becoming famous in America.

“At the end of six weeks we all met in Paris. We decided not to ask Millet for more art. We were now ready for him to die. We sent word to Millet to begin to prepare for his death. We told him to die in ten days. We counted our money and found we had sold eighty-five small paintings and had earned sixty-nine thousand Francs!

“Claude and I went back to the village to care for the dying Millet. We sent messages to the newspapers about his condition and impending death. Actually, we helped him produce more art. We made sure that no one came into the house.

“The sad day came, and Millet was no more. Carl returned to the village to help carry the casket, which had a wax dummy inside, to the grave site. Millet disguised himself as one of his cousins and helped carry his own casket.

“A large crowd from far and wide attended the funeral.

“After the funeral, we continued to sell Millet’s paintings. We made more money
than we knew what to do with.

“He became so famous that one man in Paris purchased seventy of Millet’s artwork and paid us two million Francs!” he finished his story.

I asked, “Whatever became of François Millet?”

Leaning forward and speaking in a soft voice he asked me, “Can you keep a secret?”

“I can,” I responded.

“Do you remember the man I called your attention to in the dining room this morning? That was François Millet,” he informed me.

“Great Scott! That was François Millet?” I replied.

“Yes, and for once an artist didn’t starve while others put money into their pockets; the rewards he deserved for his work. We made sure of that!” he said a with a smile on his face.
VOCABULARY: (Match the word to its definition)

1. sketches ____  a. unsure, baffled, puzzled
2. good spirits ____  b. a fake person, doll
3. starvation ____  c. in a good mood, happy
4. draw lots ____  d. place to get money for goods
5. dummy ____  e. coming soon, about to happen
6. pawnshop ____  f. choose by shortest straw
7. villa ____  g. pencil drawings
8. confused ____  h. dying of hunger
9. owner ____  i. large home, country house
10. impending ____  j. one who owns a business

TRUE / FALSE:

1. The writer of the story was an artist.  T / F
2. There were five artists living together.  T / F
3. François Millet died of the smallpox.  T / F
4. Claude made a plan to make a lot of money.  T / F
5. The other artists laughed at the idea.  T / F
6. They sold many paintings.  T / F
7. The artists buried a dummy.  T / F
8. François Millet went to America.  T / F
9. The other artists could not sell their own artwork.  T / F
10. The artists almost starved to death.  T / F
MULTIPLE CHOICE:

1. The artist who was to die was named? _____
   a) Claude
   b) François Millet
   c) Michael Di Angelo
   d) Matisse

2. How many paintings did one man buy at the end of the story? _____
   a) twenty-two
   b) thirty-five
   c) eighty-eight
   d) seventy-five

3. In what country were they living? _____
   a) America
   b) Germany
   c) England
   d) France

4. In how many days did they tell Millet to die? _____
   a) six
   b) five
   c) ten
   d) two weeks
COMPREHENSION: (Write a complete sentence to answer the question.)

1. What kind of food did the artist usually eat?

2. What kind of work did they do?

3. What did they sell to make money?

4. Where did Carl go to sell François Millet’s paintings?

5. With whom did they speak to in each of the towns they came to?

6. Who was chosen to die?

7. Who helped carry his own casket while in disguise?

8. What did the man in Paris pay for seventy-five paintings?

9. Who made the plan to kill Millet?

10. Where did Claude and the writer go to sell paintings?