

# *IS HE LIVING OR IS HE DEAD*

*BY MARK TWAIN*

Revised by Hal Ames

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 sketches.

One day, I met two French artists who were also moving from place to place making sketches. 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 a village. We had 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.

He wasn't better than we were. He wasn't even famous in his own village. He was so poor he could only have cabbage for dinner and sometimes he 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 sell us food until 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 picture 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 sold our pictures to have said so."

"But they don't buy our pictures anymore," said Millet.

Carl sat down and said, "I know we how can become rich."

"Rich! Have you lost your mind?" Millet asked.

"No, I haven't," responded Carl.

"Yes you have. You've definitely lost your mind. What do you call rich?" I asked.

"A hundred thousand Euros per painting," Carl said matter-of-factly.

"He has lost his mind. Now I know it for sure," Claude spoke up.

I looked at the others and said, "Yes he has. Carl, these troubles have been too much for you, and...."

Claude added, "Carl, you need to take some medicine and go to bed!"

"Stop it!" said Millet 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. We gave some medical advice to Carl, but through it all he waited quietly and then he continued his plan.

"Yes, one of us must die to save the others and himself. 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 pictures as he can. He will create sketches, parts of pictures, fragment of pictures with his name on them, and do something that is easy to identify as his artwork. All of these things are valuable and then sold or collected at high prices by the world's museums, but only after the artist

is dead.

“At the same time the rest of us will inform the public that the great artist 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, hugged each other’s necks, and we were happy. We talked for hours about this wonderful plan, forgetting that we were hungry.

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

We gathered what little possessions we had and took them to the pawn shop. This would allow us to travel and have food for at least a few days as we told people about Millet and sell his paintings.

The next morning Claude, Carl and I left the village. Each one of us had small pictures and sketches made by Millet. 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 noticed me. He came down to look at my work. He liked what I had done. I showed him the picture by 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 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 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 Euros. The picture I made of his house was very nice. At first I was going to offer it to him for ten Euros, the price I used to sell my paintings for, but then I thought, “I’m a student of the master.”

He bought it for one hundred Euros.

I sent the eight hundred Euros to Millet 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.”

Our plan was far more successful than we had dreamed. Every town we went to we met with the editor of the 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 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 Euros!

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. 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 his casket, which had a wax figure 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 Euros!

**VOCABULARY:** (*Match the word to its definition*)

- |                       |                                    |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. sketches _____     | a. unsure, baffled                 |
| 2. good spirits _____ | b. a fake person, doll             |
| 3. starvation _____   | c. in a good mood                  |
| 4. draw lots _____    | d. place to get money for goods    |
| 5. dummy _____        | e. coming soon                     |
| 6. pawn shop _____    | f. gambling, choosing              |
| 7. villa _____        | g. pencil drawings                 |
| 8. confused _____     | h. dying of hunger                 |
| 9. editor _____       | i. large home                      |
| 10. impending _____   | j. owner or manager of a newspaper |

**TRUE / FALSE:**

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 1. The writer of the story is an artist.        | T / F |
| 2. There are five artist living together.       | T / F |
| 3. François Millet dies of the smallpox.        | T / F |
| 4. Claude makes a plan to make a lot of money.  | T / F |
| 5. The other artists laugh at the idea.         | T / F |
| 6. They sell many paintings.                    | T / F |
| 7. The artists bury a dummy.                    | T / F |
| 8. Millet goes to America.                      | T / F |
| 9. The other artists cannot sell their artwork. | T / F |
| 10. The artists almost starve to death.         | T / F |

**MULTIPLE CHOICE:**

1. The artist who is to die was named what? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) Frances Morton
  - b) François Millet
  - c) Michael Di Angelo
  - d) Matisse
  
2. How many paintings did one man buy? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 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. 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?

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2. What kind of work did they do?

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3. What did they sell to make money?

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4. Where did Carl go to sell paintings?

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

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6. Who was chosen to die?

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7. Who helped carry the casket in disguise?

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

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9. Who made the plan to kill Millet?

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

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