

Masterpiece

By Daniel German

I stood in the presence of a masterpiece. The basement room of the museum was barely lit, only having two overhead lights for the large cement room. But looking at the masterpiece, and my version of the piece together brought a smile to my face. I'd spent weeks studying the painting; double checking my work, analyzing brush strokes, comparing matching color patterns, and researching aging techniques, all to make the perfect copy of the masterpiece. It was a thing of beauty. The rest of the crew would be back soon to take my piece back up to the display floor. But for these few seconds I took stock of the masterpiece and my... painting.

As I circled the pieces, Mark, one of my partners, came in to retrieve my fake. "Pete, what are you doing? Take the real one to the van and give me the fake. We can't stall the tourist anymore."

"Fifteen?" I said, ignoring him.

"What?"

"I had read the original took five weeks to complete, in total it's taken me fifteen."

"Yeah, I know. You're the reason we had to delay the heist, twice."

"Yeah, \$2,500."

"You're not even trying to pay attention to me anymore, are you?"

“No,” I said causing Mark to throw his arms up in frustration. “The original was commissioned for about \$300,” I continued. “Between the realistic canvas, tools to etch the frame, aging products, and then paint, I’ve spent over \$2,500 to get the same thing. Yet only one is a masterpiece. You know, the original is over 200 years old?”

“Make a point and make it fast, Pete.”

“It took me three days. After I put it under UV light, to get my piece to look the same. I have squashed 200 years of aging into three days, virtually bending time to my will, all to get the same product. Yet, mine is... fake. I have created something so perfect that it will be perceived as a masterpiece. But internally it will not be considered one. It will be considered not real.”

“That’s because it’s not real,” Mark grunted as he massaged his forehead, attempting to stay in control.

“But it is real, to me. More real than this masterpiece is to any of the tourist looking at it. My work has meaning to me. My work has life to me. My work is both a masterpiece and not a masterpiece, and I don’t understand why.”

With this Mark took a deep breath. He calmly walked over to me and put his hand on my shoulders. “Pete,” he said through grated teeth. “I don’t care, neither does anyone else. Give me the fake and take the real one to the van. That way we don’t all go to jail, and I don’t have to kill you with a sharpened toothbrush.”

I took one more look at the paintings and brushed Mark’s hands off me. “Fine, it’s that one.” I said pointing at the painting on the right. “Take it.”

Mark went to the easels and stared at the two paintings, then back at me.

I nodded at him and he picked up the painting. As he left the room I smiled, for now I stood in the presence of my new masterpiece.

