

***Van Gogh Cafe* by Cynthia Rylant**

Marc comes out of the kitchen to smile and greet his customers, and suddenly sees the elegant man at the small back table. And unlike everyone else who has remembered his good manners, Marc stops what he is doing and stares.

The man smiles shyly and looks away.

Marc is staring because he knows who this is. He looks around the café to see if anyone else realizes who is among them. No one does. No one remembers this man's movies.

But Marc remembers them all. Marc has seen all of the old silent films, the ones with Charles Chaplin and Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks.

He knows them by heart, and he knows the actors' faces like he knows his daughter's face, and Marc is *certain* who this elegant man in the café is.

He is a star.

The breakfast hours pass and people go their way, to work, to the mall at the edge of town, back home to put up a tree.

The door of the Van Gogh Café opens and closes, opens and closes, and he stays on, looking out the window.

Marc cannot help himself. When there is no one left in the café except the silent star, Marc walks over to his table.

"I know your work," Marc says softly. "I love it. I love all your films."

The old man blushes and smiles.

“Thank you,” he says.

Marc and the silent star talk about the old films. The silent star seems pleased, quietly thrilled, to talk of his work with someone who understands so well.

There is a moment or two when each is quiet, catching his breath.

“Why, sir, are you at the Van Gogh Café?” Marc gently asks.

The old man seems glad someone has asked. He reaches into his coat and pulls forth an old photograph.

It is of a beautiful young man in a waistcoat and top hat, standing before an old theater. Marc looks carefully at the building in the picture.

“Is this...?”

“Yes,” replies the silent star.

The building is the Van Gogh Café. In 1923. When it was a theater.

“He and I did some shows here together, the summer we met.” The silent star smiles and puts the photograph back inside his coat.

“Today I am waiting for him,” he says.

Marc offers the star a fresh cup of tea and a piece of apple pie, which is gratefully accepted. Then Marc leaves the old man to his waiting.

Name:	Date:
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Please answer these questions in your own words. You may use extra paper if you need it.

Question #1: What does Marc discover the Van Gogh Café used to be?

Question #2: What does Marc do when he first sees the elegant old man?

Question #3: What does Marc mean when he says the strange old man is “a silent star?”

Question #4: How do you think Marc feels about seeing the star at the café? What makes you think that?
