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619 words

Gesundheit

By Matthew Schnell

White paint splattered over the farmer's wife of American Gothic.

A mock female voice said, "Dammit, Jebediah, I told you to warn me."

A second voice chimed in, also in mock voice, "Hush, Ethel. If the good Lord wanted you to know, he'd a given me warning lights."

Snickering erupted from all three of the masked men and deteriorated into fits of laughter.

Similar acts of vandalism lined the walls. In every frame, a painting had been defaced with mustaches drawn over faces, brown paint smeared over lips and behind animals.

Several of the busts received the same treatment. One of the busts had a trail leading from its nose down to its chin. Another sculpture wore a party hat. Another statue bore a wig and beard of shaving cream.

At the end of the hall hung a portrait of a large woman with even larger hair and a gaudy dress that was covered in jewelry. "Achoo!" had been written in big bold letters across it and the wall on either side of it.

Michael wiped the paint off his finger onto the wall and looked down at the nameplate. "Grant Wood. Sounds like a douche."

"Guy probably got his check and was like, fuck you guys, I'm out," said Bob.

James reached into the push cart behind them and plucked a paint filled balloon from it. "Yeah, right? Probably sends his family Christmas cards and shit with no money in 'em. His nephew opens up his card and is like, 'Uncle G sent me another card ten years in a row with no cash. Burn in hell Uncle G,'" he said and chucked a water balloon at the name plate. Blue paint splashed across a portrait and the wall.

Bob spun around and tripped over one of the upturned benches.

His partners doubled over laughing.

Bob rolled onto his back, aimed a streamer at Michael's face and blasted him with multicolored paper bits. "Ha ha ha, very funny, assholes," he said as he got up.

"Dude, those things are all over the place and you even flipped that one yourself. Dumbass," said James.

At that moment, the double doors leading to the lobby burst open and the three men froze.

A middle-aged man with a trench coat and a badge stormed in with a pistol leveled at them. "Police, put your hands in the...Gesundheit," he shouted at them.

James lobbed a balloon at the detective's face and grabbed Bob, leading him into the janitor's closet. "Oh shit, sneezing powder. Sneezing powder!"

Michael followed them in and put his hand on a cart loaded up with portraits. As the sound of footsteps approached, Michael reached into a vest pocket and pulled out a small powder sprayer.

Bob and James hugged him and he sprayed his face. He winced a few times, sneezed, and the three men and the paintings disappeared.

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Somewhere in the middle of the Sahara, the three men trudged through the dessert. "Great fucking plan, genius," Michael said.

"What? We got away scot free, didn't we?" said James.

"Yeah, and now we're in the middle of God knows where," said Michael. "Just grab a few paintings, sneeze and be out of there. It's a perfect plan," he said in a mock impression of

James' voice. "Who the hell makes a plan around sneezing powder and forgets to refill the fucking the bottle?" he asked, shaking the sprayer.

"Well, I have a solution," said Bob. Bob picked up a handful of sand. He held it up near Michael's face and swished the sand around in his fingers.

"What the fuck are you- Ah... ah... Achoo."

The three men disappeared from the dessert, and then reappeared somewhere in Antarctica.