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about 750 words

The One-way Ticket

by Jamal Rashad

"Yeah, yeah! One sec! I'm coming, mac!" The night watchman hustled to the rapid knocks coming from the employee entrance.

"Sheesh! Whaddya want?"

"Boston Police! We're responding to a disturbance!"

"I never made a call."

"Look, mac. We got a call saying there was a disturbance at the Gardner Museum and we're just here to check it out. Ya gonna

let us in or what?" The mustached officer's gruff voice crackled over the PA system.

"Yeah, hold on." A loud buzzer rang, and the wooden door's automated lock clicked. The door creaked open, and two policemen entered the art museum, looking around as the security guard scratched his scalp. "I didn't call the police. Maybe my partner did. H-hey, Joey! You call the cops fer somethin'?"

Joey shook his head as he remained seated with his feet crossed and propped on the counter of the security desk.

"I don't know what to tell you guys, we never -" he turned to see a gun pointed at his waist. "Whaddya think yer doing?" he yelled.

The taller, clean-shaven officer looked at the guard's nametag over the rounded rim of his glasses. "Rick, is it? Joey?" he inquired in a British accent while pointing his gun at Joey. "Gentlemen, this is a robbery."

The mustached officer clubbed Rick over the head with a blow that knocked him to the floor and retrieved a roll of duct tape from his jacket pocket; the adhesive's distinct peeling rang throughout the room. He taped his captive's wrists behind his back and rifled through his pockets.

"And what do you think you're bloody doing, you wanker?"

"I-I wanted to see if he had any change his pockets."

"Don't muck this up! Get over here and tie up this chap, eh?" Wearing a sly grin on his face, the Brit pointed a gun at Joey, a glare of light glinting across his glasses as he turned to face him. "We don't want this fellow doing something stupid while we loot the place now do we?"

The mustached officer finished tying the second guard to a chair; afterwards, he searched for his partner who had moved into the museum's Dutch Room. His boorish voice and thunderous footsteps echoed throughout the corridors. "What are we stealing, mac?"

"We aren't stealing anything, 'mac,' we're liberating!"

"Lib-a-who-ting?"

"Liber-ATING! We're liberating art! And keep your voice down! Do you want the neighborhood to know we're robbing it?" He massaged his brow while speaking under his breath, "Bloody Yanks and their poor educational system. I can't believe we end up losing the war to them." He surveyed the room and made checks on a piece of paper he had pulled from his phony police blouse, "and Édouard Manet's Chez Tortini; that makes six. They're all here; time to collect." The Brit unsheathed a box cutter from its protective casing and cut into a painting with unbridled vigor. "I don't need anyone looking for professionals after this is over with."

"Which ones should I take, mac?"

"Er, take whichever you think will look good on your Frigidaire, mate. Maybe your mum will think you got better at your crayon drawings." He rolled his eyes and continued to smash and cut into the paintings from his list. He placed each painting between two layers of bubble-wrap and walked them to the museum's employee entrance.

While his partner was preoccupied with choosing paintings, he made one last trip into the museum's "Dutch Room." Upon entering, his eyes locked onto his heart's true desire: the bronze eagle finial atop a Napoleonic flag. With both hands, he unscrewed the finial from its post, careful not to drop it, and placed it into a mahogany box with a foam insert of its shape. After securing the box, he made his way to the employee entrance to meet with his partner.

The Brit and the mustached officer loaded their score into the trunk of a red Dodge Daytona. The mustached officer started the car as the Brit opened the box in his lap; a faint light shone throughout the car as he marveled at the finial and his eyes sparkled in it. His soul warmed as he wondered if what he felt was like what Sir Galahad felt when he drank from the Holy Grail.

"Wh-what's that?" The mustached officer peered from the corner of his eye.

"My ticket home."

"H-home? You mean back to England? Where at in England ya from?"

"Where?" the Brit smiled, his eyes still fixed on the finial, "it's more like 'when.'"