

If pictures could speak

The air conditioning hummed in a low note like the grasshoppers you hear in the evening on a Spanish holiday. Todd and Michael had lagged behind the rest of their class lulled by the stillness and the droning voice of tedious gallery guide, who was trying to give 6F a tour of modern art. Todd could think of a time when he had been more bored, but only when listening to the most incredibly dull report that a real swot in his class had read out once, telling them all the delights of commemorative canal glasses.

Michael offered Todd a large gobstopper, but before he could reply a voice said,

“ _____ ”

Todd and Michael stopped. Neither recognised the voice and there was no-one else in sight.

“I said _____?”

It was clear that the voice was coming from the painting which hung exactly in front of them. Todd and Michael looked at each other, dumbstruck. The painting showed a man in his thirties with a very severe crew cut and small steel rimmed glasses. He looked very severe and clever. Neither of the boys had replied to his question. They were both still astounded that a painting had spoken to them.

Todd was very uncomfortable. The painting looked so real. He had heard the old cliché about how the eyes followed you round the room, but with this painting it was more than this. In fact, just as he was about to ask Michael whether they should make a run for it the man in the painting stepped out through the frame.

“ _____ ” asked the man searchingly.

“ _____.” Explained Todd.

“ _____,” added Michael.

Michael and Todd were both terrified. There was something so unexpected about the whole situation. The man from the painting seemed so sinister. There was his eastern-european accent, his slightly odd dress sense and a coldness in his manner that was very unsettling. Todd noticed, with mounting fear that there was a bulge in the breast pocket of his jacket, just about where all the police in the American cop shows kept their guns. As the man turned slowly around, looking carefully at the cavernous room, Todd tried to mouth to Michael, “Do you think he has a gun?” Michael’s already pale face went white.

Todd could hear a distant clumping and realised, with great relief, that within minutes the rest of the school would be joining them.

“Don’t move,” growled the strange man as he strolled confidently over to the corner of the room.

“_____,” whispered Michael.

“_____,” replied Todd.

The feet came closer and closer. Strangely the sinister man from the picture seemed unconcerned by their approach.

“And this, 6F, is our newest innovation,” exclaimed the small brown-suited gallery guide, sounding much more animated than she had done at the start of the tour. “Oh,” she squeaked catching sight of Todd and Michael, “I see some of your number have already met Damien!”

“Damien?” questioned Todd and Michael together.

“Yes,” smiled the guide, as the man from the painting walked towards them his face transformed by a beaming grin. “Damien is a performance artist who is challenging all our views about art,” explained the guide smiling rather coyly at Damien.

“You mean we’ve been rooted to the spot terrified out of our mind by some twit who is trying to challenge our view of art!” Shouted Todd, his voice revealing the outrage that he felt.

“That’s right,” smiled his teacher, Mrs Martin walking towards Todd and Michael, a rather smug grin on her face. “Perhaps next time you’ll listen when I tell you not to wonder off!”

Todd groaned. Damien removed a small tape recorder from the breast pocket of his suit.

“I’ve got it all on tape, Sally,” he said to the guide, all traces of his eastern-European accent having disappeared. “Never mind lads, you’ll be on my next video,” he beamed. “It might even get the Turner Prize.”