

Withdrawal Symptoms

By Andrew James Paterson

Scott Puryear wanted to get out of his tiny apartment but what were the options during this third wave of the COVID-19 epidemic.

Well, the weather was spring pleasant but where to go for a walk. If he walked south he would no longer have the option of the Lakeshore Gallery to spend an afternoon in. Of course he could walk in that direction anyway but what was the point.

Going nowhere for the sake of going nowhere?

He could walk east but his favourite bookstore had closed well before the pandemic's onset. He could walk west or north but why?

What was open? Nothing...except for grocery stores, big box stores, and takeout restaurants.

He wouldn't be hungry for a couple of hours. Then he could order in a basic stir-fry and a can of IPA.

Scott wanted to paint for a moment but then realized he had neither canvas nor any paints for that matter. He had not made a painting for over a year, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. He had made very few paintings since he had severed with his former dealer.

He still had a tiny studio in his apartment but what was the point of making art that nobody was ever going to see.

This damn COVID pandemic just had to coincide with additional factors in his life, such as ageing. Three years earlier he had been diagnosed with expanded prostate. The doctor had informed him that one byproduct of his medication would be an inability to get hard. The doctor was right.

Well, at least he didn't have cancer.

He entered his password into Facebook, on which his name was not Scott Puryear. His FB name was Terry Starkley. He liked the fact that nobody seemed to know who Terry Starkley was, as he did not provide Facebook with a photograph.

But social media was dominated by either the final passing of the stupid Duke of Edinburgh, or the passing of a rapper named DMX, or by ancient former Toronto musicians posting their heyday photos and bragging about their former importance.

Terry reverted to Scott and then decided to cue up a Harold Budd album on YouTube for his ambient listening. He primarily listened to music either intended to be ambient or suitably adapted to ambient listening. Harold Budd and his soft piano was exactly right...shut-in music for shut-ins.

Forty-seven minutes later the album ended. What to do now?

Scott decided that he could walk south and then east and see what businesses or watering holes had recently bitten the dust. Then he would order food from the nearest roti place to his apartment.

He made sure he had his key and then he left the building.

Laura Sinclair stood outside Scott Puryear's apartment, watching two police officers micro-examining the dead artist's bedroom.

Laura had smelled an unpleasant odor and informed the building's superintendent. The superintendent had been enjoying cocktails and barbecued food with other tenants in the building's courtyard.

Scott Puryear had been found dead on his back, on his bed. There was a bottle of pills and a note that stated 'Genug'.

'German for enough', muttered Laura to the superintendent whose name was Dan Stratton.

'Well, this looks pretty shut and closed', the first cop said to the second. The second cop nodded.

'What can you tell me about the deceased, either Miss Sinclair or Mr. Stratton?'

Dan looked at Laura, who responded.

"Not too much, I'm afraid. Scott was an artist, as you can see by looking at his little studio. I don't think he'd shown his work too much over the last couple of years....even before COVID kicked in.

"Can you describe him personally?", Officer One asked both Laura and Dan.

Dan spoke up "Well, he was quiet. Didn't seem to socialize with the other tenants very frequently, if at all. He was reliable with his rent. He took on a responsibility for recycling and garbage on Monday nights".

Officer Two stared at Laura. She realized she was expected to say something.

"Scott and I did talk sometimes...have tea either in his or my apartment. We share...shared some interests....art, reading, music. Scott was a movie person....he was coping with the pandemic by watching a lot of movies and listening to music.

"Ambient music.....sometimes nineties trip-hop", Dan chipped in.

'Spiritual jazz', added Laura.

The two officers looked at each other, as if trying to process or define these terms.

"Did he have a girlfriend. Or boyfriend?"

Laura shook her head. Scott was gay but never seemed to have company.

Officer One now tried to access Scott Puryear's laptop but the password was unavailable.

"Well, Mike", Officer One addressed his partner. "This looks shut and closed."

"Yes. Enough." the two cops turned to leave.

"Well be in touch if we need to talk further, Miss Sinclair and Mr. Stratton".

Dan and Laura nodded and then the cops closed the door.

They stayed behind after the cops' departure. Laura looked at notes of scrap paper on the desk beside the computer.

"Dan.....do you see something 'off'?"

Dan didn't respond although he looked around the apartment.

"The handwriting on these notes doesn't match the handwriting on Scott's suicide note."

The handwriting doesn't match, so who is the other writer?

Who wrote that note consisting of one German word “Genug”, meaning enough? Laura had seen a few other suicide notes during her lifetime. Scott’s note, or was it Scott’s note. Made as much sense as any of the others.

Nobody takes that large a dose of antidepressants unless they’re trying to kill themselves. Laura knew Scott only slightly, but probably more than any other tenants of the apartment complex did. What did she really know about him? Scott was likely in his sixties...he was single....he was gay....he was a painter who used to exhibit at the Taylor Townshend Gallery. He had severed from Taylor Townshend prior to the pandemic’s onset. Why had he done so? Did Taylor or Townshend let him go? Did Scott make work that his dealer felt couldn’t be sold? Scott had moved from abstraction to landscapes...neither had been fashionable for a long time but that didn't prevent them from selling. Did Taylor Townshend lose some clients who had been buying Scott Puryear’s art?

Laura had never seen anybody visiting or calling on her neighbour Scott. He had told her that both his parents were dead and changed the subject when she had asked him about siblings. Laura had never seen evidence of Scott being a drug user or even much of a drinker. Did he take sedatives for a sleeping problem? She had looked up Inipramine which was such an old fashioned anti-depressant? Yet that was the name on the vial beside his body. She wanted to know if there would be a funeral or memorial. She looked at the death notices in the daily paper and there was going to be a funeral. She would attend the funeral scheduled for the following Monday.

Neil Puryear stared out at the pews of Kingsbury United Church. The pews were sparsely occupied indeed as funerals were of course among events heavily regulated by COVID-19 restrictions.

He acknowledged his Aunt Betty, who was his deceased mother’s sister. He grudgingly acknowledged his brother Scott’s former dealers... Eric Taylor and Dennis Townshend. And he had reluctantly admitted two of Scott’s neighbours....Dan Stratton and Laura Sinclair. The minister and his organist had requested that a few spectators had to be in attendance. Neil considered the priest to be a frustrated actor. He had hemmed and hawed about his brother’s funeral arrangements and compromised with his dead parents and Aunt Betty.

Neil Puryear was a post-Marxist atheist. He had no use for organized religion and also very little time for the art world. But he did install one of Scott’s abstract paintings in proximity to the organ, out of respect to his brother. Neil disliked Scott’s art practice. He considered both abstract paintings and beautiful landscapes to be mere wallpaper.

Scott had been supportive of the idea of art as wallpaper. His former dealers certainly valued wallpaper art. His brother's biggest patrons had been banks and hotel lobbies. Plus there had been a rich woman named Caroline Burton who had recently died. Mrs. Burton’s death put a serious damper on Scott’s income and motivated his slimy dealers to stop representing his brother. And there were the pair of them in a central pew, still together after all these years.

The organist played the mandatory Bach variations in preparation for the minister’s entrance. Scott and Neil both disliked Bach but if one entered traditional religious territory then Bach was

expected. Scott actually liked some religious music....John Coltrane, Pharaoh Sanders and other spiritual jazz musicians. Neil enjoyed some of that music while conveniently ignoring the religious titles.

And now the organist changed his Bach as the priest took his place at his podium.

The priest looked at his notes and then began speaking.

“We are here today to mark the passing of Scott Alan Puryear....”

Neil zoned out as soon as the priest commenced. . This damn pandemic is going to last forever

Neil registered Aunt Betty glaring at him. He realized that he must have cursed out loud, although Aunt Betty was the only other spectator admonishing him. Neil thought he detected Eric Taylor and Dennis Townshend laughing although covering their masked mouths.

The priest was now calling up Mr. Neil Puryear. He collected his thoughts and his notes.

Thank you for attending this service in memoriam of my brother Scott Puryear. Thank you to all of those who wish they could attend but cannot due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Scott was born to Anne and Edward Puryear, almost three years before my own birth. We were typical brothers, initially fighting all the time but then becoming friends..even allies. In our respective teenage years we began to move in very different directions. I moved toward education and Scott moved toward the fine arts. After high school he studied at the Montclair Academy of Art, which may have seemed an odd choice for his time as Montclair tended toward realist painting. Scott, being Scott, moved against that current, becoming a highly-respected abstract painter. He exhibited locally, nationally and internationally. Scott’s abstract paintings are in the collections of The Toronto and Royal Canadian Banks as well as the collection of the late Mrs. Caroline Burton.

A few years ago, Scott’s practice took a one hundred and eighty degree turn. He began painting landscapes. Some thought they were straightforward landscapes but I thought they were too subjective to be so dismissed. He did part company with Taylor and Townshend and at the time of his death he was not represented.

Scott Puryear...my brother.....made a difficult choice in life. Many people choose the arts while also keeping themselves secure with something more practical. So many artists teach but Scott didn’t...I would say he had a strong love and hate relationship with academia and academics. Scott wasn’t one to talk very much about his art...he believed that they works spoke for themselves. What people saw is what people got. But Scott didn’t make wallpaper.....his work was layered very deeply.

Scott was also something of a recluse. In his younger years he partied hard but in his early thirties he settled down. My brother was a gay man but he never met a partner he could settle down with so he stopped trying. I think my brother Scott was quite mystical by nature. He may not have been one for orthodox religion but he was attracted to spirituality....he listened to spiritual jazz musicians. Scott was an immensely private person who retreated more and more into himself until, alas, he had nowhere else to go. But Scott Puryear should also be remembered for all that he did while vibrant and healthy.....his art and his absolute joy in working.....making his idiosyncratic art.

Now I’d like to play a piece of music that was one of Scott’s favourites.....Teardrop, by Massive Attack.

A stripped down sample from some soul-jazz recording was soon meshed with a repetitive harpsichord. Now a piano established a chord pattern and then the world's most ethereal female voice soared on top of it all. Neil understood why this would be one of Scott's favourite pieces of music.....it was cerebral and the lyric sounded close to gibberish. At first he thought the lyric was 'feel like summer pray' until he recognized it was 'fearless on my breath'.

Music had been one of the few topics that Neil and Scott had been able to converse about. But their tastes were so different....Scott liked 'art' music while Neil was something of an old punker. He liked The Clash, The Undertones, Buzzcocks and other bands of that period.

He observed the other people at the small ceremony, after returning to their pews. Taylor and Townshend seemed familiar with this musical piece, as did the woman who was one of Scott's apartment neighbours. The group Massive Attack he had heard of in the nineteen nineties but never followed. They had both cerebral and trendy but now they were probably nostalgic.

Neil was relieved that his eulogy had been delivered without a hitch. There would be more Bach and then final words from the priest and then the ceremony would be over. Due to COVID restrictions, there would be minimal socializing outside in the parking lot.

And it had begun to rain during the brief service, so the mourners were disinclined to spend too much time talking in the parking lot. Eric Taylor and Dennis Townshend gave Neil their rather formal hugs and condolences and then walked toward their shiny new car. Neil was about to walk over to where Aunt Betty was standing by herself when Scott's two neighbours approached him.

"Thanks for your support, Laura and....".

"Dan".

"Thanks, Dan."

"I have to spend some time with my aunt now", Neil let the pair of them know.

Laura composed herself.

"I'll just be a minute, if you don't mind. There is something you need to know".

"Oh?"

"Neil, after the two policemen left Scott's apartment, Dan and I stayed for a minute.

'We were careful not to touch anything', Dan chimed in as Neil's face registered alarm.

"We noticed that the handwriting on the suicide note did not match the handwriting on the various notes on Scott's computer table".

Neil stood silently for a moment.

"Are you sure about this? 'Laura....Dan'?"

"Yes, it was obvious. I'm not sure of the two cops registered this disparity or not?".

Neil scanned the parking lot. Aunt Betty was still standing by herself in a corner.

"I think we need to talk further, Laura and Dan. I'll gibe to my email....I have to spend time with my aunt now".

They nodded as Neil gave Laura his card. They would be in touch.

'Are you going home, Laura?'

Laura realized that Dan was offering her a ride and she nodded her head. They walked to where Dan's compact family sedan was parked, almost next to where Taylor and Townshend had been parked. She wondered if Dan had ever been a family man, as he didn't seem to be one now.

Dan pulled out of the church parking lot and drove along the main road.

"So, Laura. You intend to pursue this handwriting matter further with Scott's brother?"

She nodded.

Dan drove carefully as a pedestrian was taking his time jaywalking the street.

"I think I have to, Dan. Although surely at least one of those cops must've noticed the discrepancy?"

Dan shook his head. "They were strictly in and out as quickly as possible. Small-time artist commits suicide...open and shut case."

Laura watched Dan turn left on another major street which would take them to their mutual apartments.

"I suppose everything will have to wait for the toxicologist's report".

Dan nodded. "At least. But yes...if the cause of death is anything other than those Inipramine pills then that will turn up with the toxicologist."

"And I wonder if Scott had a will? Or an estate?"

"Your guess is as good as mine on those details, Laura."

They were almost home. Laura decided to change into more casual clothes, have a catnap, and then e-mail Neil Puryear.

Laura woke from her nap, made tea and then lit a cigarette. She only smoked when she was nervous.

She entered 'Neil.Puryear@gmail.com' and then paused before composing.

lsinclair4@gmail.com subject handwriting

Cc. danstrat@gmail.com

Hello Neil,

I hope this finds you well. We talked at your brother Scott's funeral, or actually after the funeral. I pointed out the disparity between the handwriting on his note and the handwriting on his personal memos.

Laura sipped at her tea and smoked her cigarette. Her laptop rang and it was Neil Puryear responding.

Neil.Puryear@gmail.com

Hello Laura,

Yes, I recall our brief conversation. I am puzzled by it. I don't think there's anything incomprehensible about the handwriting of a drugged man on the verge of losing consciousness not matching his everyday handwriting. The police didn't take note of this little discrepancy so I'm baffled by your doing so.

In a week or so, there should be a toxicologist's report. It should confirm that Scott died from swallowing a nearly entire bottle of the antidepressant Imipramine and that should close the matter.

Thank you for your concern, Ms. Sinclair. But now I would prefer that you drop the subject as there is really nothing further to discuss.

Yours cordially,
Neil A. Puryear.

Well, that was that then. Except that it wasn't.

Laura wondered if Scott had a will or estate and, assuming so, then what would its contents be. What would become of Scott Puryear's paintings?

She decided not to pour herself another cup of tea. Laura wished she still had a cat. She had found another home for Buttons upon moving into this apartment complex. Dan was generally a good landlord but he was strict about pets. If no dogs, then also no cats.

She washed her teacup and then opened up a MUBI file. Movies were one of the time-honoured ways to kill time during this pandemic. Tonight's movie was a documentary about Cubans in Havana living on the roofs of their houses. When housing becomes endangered, go vertical.

The documentary was engaging while relaxing. Laura did wish she could travel. She was still living on the advance she had been given for ghostwriting the autobiography of a local punk hero who was dying from pancreatic cancer. The punk music world seemed so ancient now, although that didn't stop old punks from posting their photos and handbills on a Face Book page.

She had interviewed the dying punk who had been eager, almost too eager. The punk, whose stage name was Murder Mark but whose real name was Roger Pennington, had also been given an advance. He probably needed every penny of it for his meds and painkillers.

Laura felt too tired to resume working on the punk bio. She would listen to wallpaper music and then make dinner.

What on earth might be anybody's motive to kill Scott Puryear? Just maybe Neil Puryear was right...his brother's death was a clear cut suicide.

Neil killed time on Face Book while scowling.

That woman had had a nerve, pestering him about some discrepancy between the suicide note handwriting and Scott's everyday writing. Did she have no concept of how groggy, how stoned her brother would have been after swallowing all those antidepressants?

Who was she anyway, in addition to being a Nosey Parker?

Laura Sinclair's name didn't come up among his Face Book friends, so many of whom he had no idea who they actually were or what they did. Neil could have searched for her but he decided not to. He wanted no further contact with the woman, of her landlord friend.

Neil had contacted his lawyer...Bill Jennings. Bill had told him that Scott had died without a will or estate instructions. Neil was annoyed but not surprised. It was not as if his brother owned property.

What was to be done with Scott's paintings? Damn Taylor and Townshend for letting Scott go from their fucking gallery and in the process help make him suicidal. Perhaps some other art dealer might be interested in Scott's paintings? Didn't dead artists have currency?

Or...what about an auctioneer? That was making more sense.

Neil guessed that Scott's paltry bank account would be left to somebody, but whom? Or, it would be defaulted to the government since there was no will? Well, it wasn't exactly a significant amount of money.

Neil retrieved a CD of The Clash's Greatest Hits. When in doubt, fly back to 1976. Janie Jones, I'm So Bored With the USA, Career Opportunities, White Riot.....would anybody use that title today even though The Clash were anything but racist. And then Police and Thieves, their slower-tempo reggae cover.

He liked social punk, council-flat music even if Joe Strummer had been a diplomat's son. He disliked nihilist crap like The Sex Pistols, or that Toronto band The Scholars. He remembered their lead singer....Murder Mark. A drunken asshole shouting gibberish masking as anger. And Scott had been so opposite from Neil in his musical tastes. Scott thought The Clash were just The Stones with a sore throat. Scott didn't like vocal music very much...he wasn't much of one for language. That's why he made those abstract paintings. What did they mean? Nothing. Neil was supposed to get together with this woman Heather whom he had met at a friend's birthday party. But he didn't feel like seeing anybody, so he called her and requested a rain-check. She sounded disappointed, but that was her problem. Not his.

Laura finished her tea and then got down to the Murder Mark ghostwriting.

Her file was called Murder Mark Autbio. It didn't have a title yet. That was yet to arrive from Murder Mark, or Roger Pennington.

She found an email from rpennington@hotmail.com in which his attitude to other local bands was downright communitarian, which was completely at odds with his stage and interview persona during his glory or notoriety days. He praised a self-consciously experimental local band called The Scientists for at least trying to do something different. He excoriated one of his former band mates in The Scholars for heckling The Scientists. Ignorant behavior indeed, according to Murder Mark.

The other members of The Scholars didn't seem to be available for interview or comments. The Scholars' guitarist was dead...drug overdose in the late eighties. The bass player had reportedly become an accountant and the drummer had discovered religion and taken jazz lessons. Both were apparently seriously ashamed of their punk histories.

There was a knock on the door and it was Dan Stratton.

'Morning, Laura. Sorry to bother you''.

"It's okay Dan. What's up?"

Dan cleared his throat. "Well, I have to start cleaning out Scott's apartment. What to do with specifically his book collection and his paintings?"

She nodded. She imagined everything else was standard...the clothes could go to Value Village and the bed sheets could be washed and recycled and so forth.

The shelves could remain for the next tenant. After of course being emptied and cleaned.

“Laura, how did it go with Scott’s brother?”

“Not well”, she tensed. “He had nothing to say about the handwriting and he doesn’t want me bugging him again.”

Dan nodded. “But I’ll have to contact him and see what Scott’s estate says about the paintings and the books. Unfortunately, he was completely severed from that gallery.”

“Yes. Taylor and Townshend. ”

“ Hey, Laura. I am wondering. I’m assuming Scott had a doctor or therapist. But I looked up Imipramine and it’s an almost obsolete antidepressant.”

She nodded. It was a weird old fashioned drug indeed.”

‘Did Scott ever use illicit drugs?’”

“Not that I know of, Dan. Not that I ever saw evidence of.”

Her laptop rang. Laura registered an email from an old friend she hadn’t heard from for quite some time.

“Dan, it’s quite possible that Scott didn’t have a prescription for Imipramine. That somebody else did.”

“Oh, you mean ‘the murderer’?”

She bristled. “Well, if you want to use that word...”

Dan bit his tongue and then informed Laura that he would contact Neil Puryear and inquire about the estate, only in relation to Scott’s possessions.

:Talk to you later, Laura.”

She ignored the new email message and returned to writing about Murder Mark and The Scholars. A first draft was expected soon, from that sleazy small publisher. Well, she had taken an advance so she had better deliver.

Dan brewed coffee and cleared extraneous papers from his computer table. Then he composed himself and contacted Neil Puryear.

Neil.Puryear@gmail.com

[Scott’s Possessions.](#)

Hello Neil Puryear,

I hope this finds you relatively well.

I am writing you to ask your advice on what to do with your late brother’s possessions...

primarily his paintings and his book collection. I need to get moving with this situation soon as there are possible new tenants for the apartment complex for which I am superintendent.

I know that Scott had severed his relationship with the art gallery owned by Eric Taylor and Dennis Townshend. Do you know of another gallery or dealer who might be interested in hosting these paintings? Or, for that matter, a family friend?

Scott’s book collection is also significant. I feel that these are not books that one just donates to the Salvation Army or Value Village. The latter might be fine for the clothes but not the books.

Please let me know if you have any suggestions here. I am willing to do some grunt work if necessary.

Yours sincerely,
Dan Stratton

Dan then contacted a woman named Emily Venables who he knew was interested in the now vacant apartment. He had to explain to Emily that the unit was not yet ready for viewing but that hopefully it would be soon.

He relaxed with what he considered easy listening music..Stereolab. He remembered Scott listening to a lot of Harold Budd and Brian Eno, which for him was beyond easy listening. He read the day's newspaper which, in addition to mandatory COVID pandemic coverage, was reporting on a report concerning the serial killer who had run rampant through the city's gay community for years and who could have been hauled in much earlier than he finally was. Lives could have been saved. The report seemed to restate the obvious...that the police didn't give a shit about the lives of queer and mostly racialized men. So, what was to be done then? Special police training? Having a chief of police who doesn't deny the presence of a serial killer when such a presence is obvious?

Dan finished his coffee and prepared another cup. His computer indicated that he had mail.

danstrat@gmail.com
[Scott's possessions](#)

Hello Dan,

I wish I could be more helpful with regards to my late brother's possessions. With the weather finally warming up perhaps you could have a sort of yard sale with the books, or perhaps take them a public library as some of these books are no doubt scholarly? And I really don't know about the paintings? Did Scott not have artist friends who might want to own at least one of his paintings as a memorial or a memento?

I appreciate that you have to clear out the apartment as soon as possible as you could use the revenue from a new tenant, but I don't really know the literary or visual art communities.

Sorry I can't be more helpful,

Neil A. Puryear

Neil watered his plants. He supposed he had to be grateful that Dan Stratton was willing to do some grunt work with regards to Scott's possessions. What a crock of bullshit. What the hell grunt work was he talking about? Just pack up the books put them in boxes, try to hand them out to neighbours or pedestrians, or why not take them to Value Village? Oh right, so many of Scott's books were academic in character. Why the hell hadn't Scott returned to university and got himself at least a Masters of Art so that he could then teach and make a more stable income. Because when that rich woman Caroline Burton died his flaky art dealers were helpless. They

couldn't find another rich patron with dubious taste who liked to buy art and then write it off as expenses for his or her taxes.

And, yes, Scott's paintings. Why didn't Dan The Landlord just mount them on the tenants' walls in his apartments? Dan could do that if properly motivated and use the paintings to jack everybody's rent up, perhaps? Neil always thought Scott's paintings were wallpaper and his death did nothing to change that evaluation.

Neil felt that his email to Dan had made it clear he considered the matter of Scott's possessions to be of no further interest. He hoped Dan understood this...Dan and that woman Laura. The pair of them should mind their own business and get on with their lives, if they actually had lives.

Laura woke up and resumed working on her ghostwriting job.

In writing Murder Mark's autobiography, she had to apologize for many of Murder's transgressions. Today she had to deal with Murder's and a friend's assault of a Toronto post-punk performer named Artanis Knarf. Murder Mark nee Roger Pennington and his friend from a local gang had assaulted Mr. Knarf in the washroom of a long defunct club over four decades ago now.

Artanis Knarf, which was also the name of his band, had not been performing that evening but had been in attendance with a female companion. Murder Mark did not know the relationship between Knarf and this woman whose name was unknown, but they appeared to be isolated in their own corner of the club. Murder and his friend had suspected Artanis Knarf of being queer, so why was he hanging so close to that woman?

Laura scowled to herself. Like perhaps they were friends? Is that even remotely unusual?

After the beating, Knarf (she realized she would have to look up his real name) fled from the club and apparently took a cab back to the woman's apartment and not to a hospital. A week later Artanis Knarf and his band were playing at a different club and Murder Mark showed up without his friend. At intermission, Murder Mark apologized to Artanis Knarf and told the ridiculously foppish singer that if he wanted to beat the shit out of Murder Mark then he could proceed to do so. Knarf been on the verge of saying okay then here goes but then checked himself. Did he trust Murder Mark? Hardly.

Laura had postponed writing this section of Murder Mark's autobiography. The problem was that this incident was not out of character for the subject. Murder Mark had assaulted others usually when drunk or under the influence of cheap amphetamines. In fact, he had done fifteen months for a similar assault. Prison had affected Mr. Pennington. He did reform The Scholars with ever-changing lineups and the band still played in this COVID-19 defined decade. But he had kicked his booze and drug habits and become one of those people who is, believe it or not, still alive and relatively low-key.

Laura had taken on this ghostwriting assignment because she needed to make money. Her instructions were to make this book like every other generic rock bio while emphasizing the uniqueness of the subject. A difficult balance indeed, she groaned.

The phone rang. The caller was identified as Jessica Warren, an artist who had also been cast aside by Taylor and Townshend. Laura decided to take the call. She didn't know Jessica Warren but had some familiarity with her ;paintings.

“Hello, Laura. Sorry for the cold call, but I would like to run something by you.”

“It’s okay. Go ahead, Jessica.”

“What do you think about mounting a posthumous exhibition of Scott Puryear’s paintings?”

Laura thought for a moment before responding.

“I could be interested. But how would we go about doing it? And where?”

“I know a showroom that’s empty for another two months and which I can have for free.”

“Okay. Is it large?”

“A bit smaller than Taylor and Townshend’s gallery.”

Laura nodded. “I see. So we’re looking at how many paintings?”

“About ten to twelve?”

“That sounds right. I have six. Would you like to come over and take a look at them?”

Jessica agreed to do so. She would drive over in about a half hour and then they would look at the abandoned showroom.

Laura hung up the phone and then made sure to save her writing about Murder Mark’s assault of Artanis Knarf. She wondered what the hell that fool’s real name was.

She walked over to the refrigerator. She didn’t really know Jessica Warren although she sounded both pleasant and honest enough on the phone. She hoped to hell that Jessica wasn’t one of those stupid anti-mask people.

Twenty-five minutes later Jessica Warren arrived, wearing a typically generic mask. The two women had met on at least one previous occasion, it turned out. This has been at openings at Taylor and Townshend for other artists in the stable. One of those artists was borderline figurative and the other one an even more hard line abstractionist than Scott Puryear had been.

“So these are all paintings Scott made after getting dumped by Eric and Dennis?”

“Yes”, Laura wasn’t used to hearing the dealers’ first names.

“They could have found other buyers for these paintings. Eric and Dennis just got lazy.”

“Why did they do that?”, Laura didn’t understand why a dealer would get lazy even during COVID-19. Dealers have to keep the money coming in even more than most other businesses.

“Dennis has money in his family. Eric doesn’t, but the Townshends are big in the construction industry.”

“I see”, although Laura didn’t really.

“Do you want some tea or coffee first, or shall we head over to the showroom?”

Laura thought why not just head over and then maybe have coffee or other drinks.

So Jessica started her car and the two women quietly observed the deteriorating cityscape. So many small businesses had called it quits. They weren’t allowed to be open for even minimal traffic so they could still manage pay their rents. Laura and Jessica groaned every time they would see yet another cannabis store opening up soon. How many weed stores were necessary anyway? Laura remembered in fall of 2018 returning to Canada from Berlin and being interrogated as to whether or not she was bringing any cannabis into her country. She had forgotten that the stuff had finally been legalized.

The vacant showroom was a little bit further east. It looked like it had once been a car dealership, for compact cars or perhaps Volkswagens.

“You sure we can have this place, Jessica?”

Jessica nodded. She parked her car and they walked to the showroom, where they were greeted by a friend of Jessica's. The man's name was Vincent and he said the showroom could be a gallery for one month beginning at the end of the current month. Use it while you can, he told the pair.

"Yes", they nodded. "Let's use it while we can".

They signed the papers and then left.

"Hey Jessica?" Laura closed her door, "Would you be interested in driving by Taylor and Townshend? I need to see if they still have any of Scott's paintings."

"Sure, Laura. It's worth trying.....even though I can't stand either of them."

"I'll be your beard."

Jessica laughed and started the car.

Taylor and Townshend's Gallery was not a long drive away. The cannabis stores and shut-down nail salons gave way to warehouses much larger than the showroom they would be using to host Scott's posthumous exhibition.

"Here we are", Jessica announced as she parked the car.

"They walked up to the gallery's front entrance and registered that the gallery was closed today.

Then they drew closer and learned that the gallery was closed permanently.

"Holy shit", Laura muttered. "They're not closing just because of the pandemic?"

Jessica parsed the situation.

"No, I think they've gone out of business. It's true that the pandemic has affected business for the worse, but there's something else going on:.

"Eric and Dennis themselves are going broke?"

"Could well be, Laura. Now, when I was one of their artists I was never exactly in the loop about gallery finances. As long as I got my percentage, I was a happy obedient artist. But I'm sure there are, or were, silent partners."

Laura nodded. This would make sense.

They walked back to the car so that Jessica could drive Laura home. Laura decided not to tell Jessica about the discrepancy between the suicide note handwriting and Scott's personal memos. Not for now, anyway.

Neil Puryear poured himself another shot of brandy. Although brandy was good for sore throats he vowed that this would be his last shot before calling it a night.

Neil had been driving around the city during the afternoon and noticed that Taylor and Townshend G gallery had closed down. This wasn't merely a COVID-related shut down but rather a permanent closing. Presumably all the artists had been informed of the owners' serious decision/ Maybe even the other artist who Taylor and Townshend had cut loose recently? What was her name.....Janet...no Jessica Warren.

Or were the artists not informed of the sudden closing? There wasn't any art on the walls but this could have been because the gallery was in-between scheduled exhibitions. Neil didn't know what the dealer and artist percentage was. What had Scott told him so many years ago.....sixty to

fourty? Fifty fifty? He felt slightly sorry for any artists who were counting on upcoming shows, but not that sorry.

The art world had always seemed like an elitist racket. Only a tiny percentage of practicing artists made a living from their art and talent didn't play any role in the scheme of it all. Neil looked at reproductions of what was hot in the art world and thought most of it was crap. He was amused by the latest trend of Non Fungible Token or NFT art. Was this some off-line black market scam? Anarchists who bypassed traditional systems interested him, except here there was some guy named Beeple selling for a fortune at Christie's...one of the art world's biggest auctions. Like, how legitimate and respectable could anybody get.

Neil didn't like painting or sculpture very much anyway. Music and theatre he had more time for. They were live...they didn't exist without the audience. Well, maybe not all music. His brother Scott had been a fan of what was called ambient music...meant to be wallpaper rather than a theatrical performance. Scott actually bought into this pseudo-intellectual crap. No wonder he became so depressed.

Taylor and Townshend closing so soon after his brother's death did look suspicious, whether or not it was a red herring. Neil guessed that the two partners were skint and that they may have had to make a sudden decision, whether or not the artists were informed before the closing letter was installed on the gallery's front door.

He wondered where the two partners had relocated to. Surely they had maxed out their credit cards and traveled somewhere overseas, even despite the current travel restrictions. They could chill out in some hotel in a faraway land, fucking each other silly while going on coke binges. Such a pair of stupid men...the eighties had now been over for four decades and they hadn't read the writing on the wall.

Neil hoped that girl neighbour of Scott's and her landlord weren't going to contact him... asking what he knew about the gallery's demise. He wanted nothing further to do with those two fools.

Dan had been trying to listen to Kate Bush's most recent LP Fifty Ways of Saying Snow but one of his down the hall tenants was playing techno or trance or illbient or some similar firm of loud dance music.

This was unacceptable. Dan knew which tenant was the offender. Young Ryan had become more and more scattered as to whether it was day or night time over the past two months. Dan more than suspected drugs were involved .

Dan also had a code that tenants could do whatever they wanted to do in their pwn apartments. Except that the noise Ryan was listening to was bleeding into his and others' apartments. He opened his door and was about to admonish young Ryan when he observed another tenant...Christine Venables...complaining to Ryan.

Ryan seemed to take the hint, as he returned to his apartment and lowered the volume.

Dan did not want this to happen again. He decided that Ryan's inconsideration had ruined his own listening experience and that he would have to return to Fifty Ways of Saying Snow at a later date.

He checked his email. He was surprised to see an email from Laura Sinclair.

danstrat@gmail.com

Taylor and Townshend

Hi Dan,

Thought this might interest you.

The artist Jessica Warren and I tried to visit Scott's former gallery Taylor and Townshend earlier this afternoon and the gallery was closed. Not temporarily because of COVID-19 but permanently. It seems the two gentleman have run out of financial support. This could be relevant to Scott's death, among other factors.

Best,

Laura

Dan scowled. Why would the death of a former artist in their stable necessarily have a damn thing to do with the gallery's demise? Why did the two dealers necessarily have something to do with Scott's terrible decision? Scott's financial situation may well have become precarious but this wasn't the first time it had done so. Dan recalled giving Scott Puryear a break with his rent a few years ago. Dan had hired Scott to paint walls in a vacated apartment.

He hoped Laura wasn't getting herself tied up in something way beyond her scope. Why didn't Laura contact the police about the fucking handwriting? Probably because she knew the police would simply laugh at her.

He decided to respond Laura's email's as perfunctory as possible.

lsinclair@gmail.com

That's interesting to hear, Laura. But, as Scott was no longer with that gallery, I don't see how his death would be particularly relevant to the gallery's closing.

Best,

Dan.

He hoped this response would suffice.

Young Ryan had definitely lowered the volume down the hall.

Dan decided to try Fifty ways of Saying Snow again.

Neil Puryear and Heather Carson had fucked after watching a movie on Neil's home system. The sex had been pretty good and the movie oddly interesting.

'Neil?'

‘Yes, Heather?’

“Now I’m thinking about that movie we just saw.....with the girl psychopath who stalks an Instagram star and then things get weirder and weirder.”

Neil was putting his clothes back on.

“What are you thinking about that movie. I thought it was okay, but derivative.”

Heather brushed her trousers and combed her hair.

“Derivative? Well, maybe the teenage celebrity stalker movie has become a genre, I guess. But those people exist completely online..they’re totally wired as the old song goes. I certainly know people like that’

Neil recognized the Fall song title that Heather was referencing.

‘Like the Instagram star is famous only on Instagram. It’s not as if she’s a movie star or a pop singer.

Neil snorted. “Well, for some time there have been people who are famous merely for being famous. At least since Elizabeth Taylor.”

Heather shook her head.

“ Mind you, Heather, there is a major character in...what was it called...Ingrid Goes West...who is completely analogue. The Instagram star’s husband is an analogue painter. Not unlike my recently deceased brother, except Scott was not an alcoholic.”

“Yes, the alkie painter and also the coke head brother. But the stalker..the psycho....was not completely unlikable. At first, I thought why are we watching this shit. But then I figured the two young women were sort of mirror images”

Maybe”, Neil was worried that Heather was going to mutate into a movie critic or an art critic. He knew she was a freelance photographer.

“Drinks?”

Heather assented as Neil poured two glasses of vin rouge.

“Also, Neil, the protagonist inherited a large sum of money from her grandmother. She cashed the cheque and never put any of that money in the bank.”

“Well, she was unstable. With Hollywood as well as real life, what characters do with large sums of money indicates whether they’re sane or insane.”

She thought about this pronouncement. She thought of the fourty thousand dollar red herring in Psycho. The cops thought Perkins killed Janet Leigh for the stolen money. If Perkins didn’t do it for the money, therefore he had to be nuts.

They sat at the kitchen table and sipped on their vin rouges.

“Neil?”

He nodded to her.

“How do you make money?”

He had hoped this question wouldn’t come up just yet. He had Heather had dated off and on over the month and she hadn’t pried into his finances until now.

“Well, Heather, I have a trust fund. Plus I do play the stock market.”

She decided to not pursue this matter any further until later.

“Your brother, Nail, did his art sell?”

“No. Well for a while maybe five to ten years ago Scott’s paintings were selling. But them something happened between Scott and his dealers.’

“Not Taylor and Townshend?”

“Yes. Them.There’s dick all in Scott’s estate. Dick all.”

Heather sipped at her glass of wine.

“Do you want another glass, Heather?”

“Not now, thanks. Too early.”

He refrained from pouring himself a top up.

“Neil, Taylor and Townshend are in the news. Townshend was kidnapped. What the fuck is that all about?”

“Drugs, probably. Both partners are big coke heads. Townshend has money and Taylor’s a parasite.”

“Was your brother a drinker or drug user?”

“No, Heather. He wasn’t.”

“Did he kill himself because he was broke?”

“You know what? You ask too many questions, Heather.”

“Sorry”.

They sat silently for at least a minute.

“Do you want to hear some music?”

“Sure, Surprise me.”

Neil chose Patti Smith’s Horses album, her first. He notice that Heather didn’t seem to like it very much.

“Not your cup of tea?”

Heather shrugged. “It’ll do. Old punks aren’t really my favourite people.”

“But Patti Smith can’t be reduced to an old punk. ...I mean that was so long ago...that whole English versus New York who’s more punk than who.”

“Exactly, Neil. It was a long time ago.”

Heather used the washroom and then put her coat on.

“You don’t have to go now, do you Heather?”

She nodded “I have to start prepping for this shoot tomorrow. I have to photograph somebody who is more of an Instagram star than everything else they claim to be.”

“Who?”

“Sorry. It’s confidential.”

“Well then, bye for now. Let’s see each other soon”

He rose, walked with her to the door, and kissed her.

She walked to her car. She would internally debate whether or not to see Neil Puryear again.

Laura made breakfast and then returned to her yet-untitled ghostwritten autobiography of Murder Mark. Today she had to tackle the prickly subject of Murder’s relationships with women. There were and had been various women who had accused Murder Mark of sexual assault...both recently and at the time of the incidents. Roger Pennington (check name) had been charged with assault in 1978 but his girlfriend at the time agreed to drop the charges.

Yes, Roger Pennington did indeed have a bad reputation with his behaviour involving women but so did many of his contemporaries. Some witnesses to the punk era brushed off these accusations as being typical of the time and also hardly unusual behaviour for male rock stars or aspiring rock stars.

But that did not justify it. That did not make it 'okay'.

Laura had asked Pennington or Murder Mark about his relationships with woman and he had admitted to being a frequently jealous possessive asshole who had on more than one occasion resorted to violence. There were at least three women, one a former girlfriend, who were willing to go on record about being assaulted by Pennington. In all cases, alcohol or cheap amphetamines were involved, but they didn't cause the violence but rather brought out what was already there.

It was not pretty and Roger Pennington had consented to have this information published. Her phone rang. It was Jessica Warren wanting to talk on Zoom. Laura consented and clicked on the link Jessica had provided.

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

Hi Laura. Did I get you at a bad time?

lsinclair@gmail.com

No. I was working on a writing assignment but I can take a break. What's up?

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

Dennis Townshend has been kidnapped.

lsinclair@gmail.com

What? When and where?

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

New York. Upper East side. Eric Taylor reported it.

Laura remembered that Townshend was richer than Taylor.

lsinclair@gmail.com

They...the police ...are sure it's a kidnapping? They're sure Townshend didn't just take off by himself?

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

Two gunmen held them up in their suite and then took Townshend. Taylor was bound up and gagged. He managed to un-gag himself later and call the cops.

lsinclair@gmail.com

Sorry, Jessica. I'm still digesting this.

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

Of course. This kidnapping seems to be the work of pros. No fingerprints...nothing messy.

lsinclair@gmail.com

What about on the doorknob?

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

Oh. That's a good question, Laura. You don't think there's some weird connection to Simon's suicide, do you? I mean, why and how?

Laura decided to confide in Jessica.

lsinclair@gmail.com

Jessica, I don't think Simon committed suicide. Here's why. The handwriting on his note..the 'Genug' note, isn't the same handwriting as on the scrap paper memos on his computer table.

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

What? Are you sure? Have you told the police?

lsinclair@gmail.com

I don't trust the cops not to laugh in my face unless I can bring them more evidence. I have talked about this with Dan and also with Simon's brother...Neil Puryear.

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

What was the brother's reaction?

lsinclair@gmail.com

Negative. Dismissive. What else could Simon's death possibly be except suicide? Oh, and I'm never ever to bother him again."

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

Well, that's pretty explicit, Laura. He sounds defensive, if I may say so."

lsinclair@gmail.com

I agree, Jess.... Oh, by the way, when we have the exhibition of Simon's paintings, we're going to have to take turns regulating the numbers of people in the gallery space. We may be able to have free wine outside in the alley.

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

That might be complicated. Licensing and all that bullshit.

lsinclair@gmail.com

Yes. Bureaucracy. This fucking pandemic. Listen, please don't tell anybody what I'm saying about Scott's death not being a suicide.

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

Okay. But if it's not suicide, then what is it?

lsinclair@gmail.com

Murder. How I don't know, but murder.

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

How are you, or who is anybody, going to prove it? And what would be the motive? Who on earth would want Simon dead?'

lsinclair@gmail.com

I don't know, Jess. But with the two hand writings not being the same person's, then something is strange here. More than strange.

Talk later,

Laura.

Laura decided she'd have to break from working on Murder Mark's autobiography. A parade of anti-maskers was marching outside her west window. The anti-maskers were a gang of complete idiots, but they were not marching in a vacuum.

Laura had to confront another stumbling block with the Murder Mark autobiography. She had to deal with how The Scholars began to disintegrate due to the usual factors...specifically the guitarist becoming a junkie. Wasn't there a junkie in every band, she scowled.

The guitarist was older than the other band members. He had been around the block. Every late seventies punk band had one member who was an older rocker. Fashion would demand that they cut their hair short and always wear at least a black leather jacket...the more leather the better. Laura thought of the contradictory origins of the term 'punk'. It had been prison argot for the sex slave, a bottom whose institutional currency depended on his bottom status being common knowledge. Punk music had queer origins despite the protestations of so many of its practitioners.

She remembered the suburban art school bands many of whom had obviously queer band members. Those bands celebrated suburbia and scorned all forms of mandatory downtown chic.

Who the fuck was William Burroughs, anyway? Who would want to do heroin and be like Keith Richards?

Well, a lot of old rocker punks became heroin users. Including Murder Mark's guitarist and bandleader. This created problems within the band...about focus and about money. She had mail. She looked and it was from Jessica Warren.

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

Hi Laura

With the new COVID restrictions being announced today there's no way we can proceed with the exhibition of Scott Puryear's paintings.

However, I have been talking with a West End gallerist about having a show of Scott's and my work down the road...sometime after this lockdown has been lifted.

Best,

Jessica.

Laura would respond later. Hopefully Jessica would soon have more information about an exhibition plan with this mysterious West End gallerist, or dealer.

She returned to Murder Mike and his disintegrating band. Since the guitar player had overdosed, she could google other old punks who still were technically alive who had been or still were hardcore junkies. But did she really have to? Surely she could say that drugs particularly heroin had become prevalent in the late seventies punk scene without dwelling on the subject? Although the subject was of course part of the formula. So many nerds who wanted to be junkies or somebody 'transgressive' bought these rock bios and other tell-all books.

She had bought in and now she had to cash the cheque. She had to pander to her market.

And what to do with Scott's paintings and his books? Used books stores were now closed or by appointment only. Could she then make an appointment with one of them? But what a sorry fate for Scott's art books. Where and whom, then? And maybe between herself and Dan she could store the paintings for a while at least. he looked at her bedroom cupboard and a cleaning was quite overdue.

Too much mess. Her messy apartment, the two messy art dealers who had been kidnapped apparently for drug -related reasons. Was Taylor and Townshend's gallery a drug front? What did Jessica Warren think about this scenario.

And Scott Puryear's life didn't seem to have been a messy one? But had it been one, actually? Laura looked at her cupboard's top shelf. There were useless VHS tapes that could be tossed to make room for the paintings. But why should she and Dan Stratton get stuck with the paintings? It wasn't as if they were leftovers.

Damn Scott Puryear's asshole brother. Wasn't he who or what would by default constitute Scott's estate?

lsinclair@gmail.com

some questions

Dear Jessica,

Here are some questions we must find answers to:

Was Taylor & Townshend a gallery serving as a front for drug trafficking?

Why was Dennis Townshend kidnapped and not Eric Taylor?

Why would the handwriting on Scott Puryear's suicide note not match the handwriting on the artist's personal notes if there wasn't a second person writing the suicide note?

Laura was working at her ghostwriting assignment and feeling that she had turned a corner. True, she wished she could have spoken to Murder Mark's band mates about how the band had quickly come to intensely dislike each other and how Murder's ego and the guitarist's addiction didn't exactly help matters. But she had managed to cover up the drugs issue without getting caught up in it.

She had dabbled in drugs when quite a bit younger but now she found the drug world pathetic. She didn't understand why people like Amy Winehouse and Kurt Cobain would blindly emulate their ancestors when their ancestors were such prototypical drug casualties. People think they can do addictive drugs and not get addicted. Well, they're not categorized as addictive drugs for nothing.

She moved on to a section-in-progress about audience confrontations at Murder Mark's performances. Murder would goad the audience to climb on stage and attack him. Or, he would pick some poor nerd out of the audience and lunge at him. Finally, Murder picked the wrong guy to tantalize. The performer had to be hospitalized, and after this convalescence Mr. Roger Pennington was far more restrained on stage. In fact, he almost made a complete one eighty degree turn, often sulking with his back to the audience. Plus his drinking got worse and worse and much worse. Drugs, alcohol.....same old shit.

She took a break and checked her news feed.

A dead body has been found in a West End condominium. The body has been identified as being that of Eric Taylor, an art dealer whose partner was recently kidnapped in New York City. An empty bottle of protriptyline was found beside his body on his bed, along with a note that said "This can't go on any longer".

Laura lit a cigarette and shook her head. What was it that couldn't go on any longer? Being separated from Dennis Townshend? Being broke? What couldn't go on any longer so it had to be stopped.

There was knocking on her door. It was Dan.

"You've just heard the news, Laura?"

"Yes, I just heard it. Like what the fuck is going on? Dennis gets kidnapped and Eric commits suicide? Or does he?"

“What do you mean?”

“ Did Eric Taylor commit suicide?”

Dan made himself at home.

“What are you taking about, Laura? There’s the empty bottle of an anti-depressant and the note? There wasn’t any other paper with Eric Taylor’s writing, if that’s what you’re inferring.”

“I guess I just don’t believe it, Dan”. She puffed on her cigarette, exhaling away from Dan’s face . “I mean, this news is more than slightly unbelievable on top of the kidnapping, which was a weird kidnapping. Why Dennis and not Eric? I don’t think it’s because Dennis Townshend was the partner with the money. I think something else is happening. But what?”

Protriptyline? Rhymes with Imipramine. Brand names. Anti-depressants.....arggh!

“ I’m sorry, Dan. Would you like some coffee?”

Dan shook his head. He had just wanted to make sure Laura knew of this latest twist. Obviously, she did.

Dan said he’s talk to Laura later and then left. Laura finished her cigarette and then ground it out angrily.

Where is Dennis Townshend? Where was he taken to? Was Dennis Townshend still alive?

She checked for incoming email messages. The most recent was from Michael Whitfield, a man she’s had a brief affair with years ago and whom she did not wish to respond to. She scrolled down and there were both the New Democratic Party and The Green Party asking for her support or for contributions. Laura had once been an NDP member so the hits just kept on coming. She voted NDP but did so more because they weren’t Liberals let alone Conservatives let alone anybody further right. Politics was big business..it was corrupt and inaccessible.

Here was Jessica Warren, finally.

jessannwar@sympatico.

Dead Eric

Well, Laura. This is completely out of the blue. Two men kidnap Dennis in New York while typing up Eric, and then somebody or bodies kills Eric in Toronto.

What the hell do you think is going on?

Jessica

lsinclair@gmail.com

Dear Jess,

I’m damned if I know what the hell is going on, Jess. But I’d love to see Eric’s suicide note and then compare the handwriting with Scott’s.

I had been thinking Dennis Townshend had been kidnapped and not Eric because Dennis was the money. But I think that has been blown right out the water. What would be anybody’s motive for killing Eric Taylor?

Jess, is there something you remember about Taylor and Townshend back in your final days? You and Scott were cast out at the same time, or am I wrong here? Did you have any sense that the gallery was seriously losing money?

Thanks,
Laura.

She watched the news stream. There had been another march of anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers. These idiots had no idea his likely germs were being spread among their sizable contingent. But they were advocates of 'free speech'. They also thought racists had the right to free speech. Everybody has the right to free speech but not to germ-free air. To hell with these libertarian idiots.

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

Dear Laura,

Not really. I mean, neither Scott nor I were exactly wiping up the charts so we were both considered useless baggage. I wasn't aware of any artists having difficulty getting their percentages. Scott and I both got ours. I think there may have been other reasons for the gallery pulling the plug but not sure what.

Eric and Dennis' relationship seemed relatively stable. It was an open relationship and I'd heard they were fond of threesomes, but this is hardly unusual. I don't know if there was anybody else in their lives who they were paying off.

If I think of anything else I'll drop you a note.

Best,
Jess.

Neil Puryear had opened a bottle of good Italian red wine. He wanted a drink but not because he was particularly happy or depressed. If anything, he was strangely relaxed.

Eric's death had been necessary. Why had Eric returned to Toronto anyway? He had been supposed to discreetly vanish to parts unknown. But Eric Taylor couldn't even spell the word 'discreet'.

Only the fools at the bottom of the pyramid used the shit. Coke heads always talked too much. Neil had been a blabbermouth when he used to snort the stuff.

Hadn't Eric enjoyed being tied up while watching his boyfriend get abducted away? Weren't they into those kind of silly bondage games? Weren't they breaking up anyway? Neil had been informed that Eric enjoyed being tied up while other shit happened.

And Dennis had been safely hidden in different parts unknown, if Dennis was indeed still alive. He sipped on the wine, which was a good wine. He wanted to hear music. At first he was inclined toward The Clash but then he changed his mind. The Clash had always been too earnest and later on they became multi-culturally insufferable. The Ramones were more his cup of tea today.

The Ramones were minimalists. Anti-expressionists. No excess whatever.

His late brother Scott was another guy like Eric Taylor who had the big death drive. Scott had been such a fool with his art. And his incompetent dealers had clinched matters. They had lost the plot. Scott's abstract paintings were supposed to be wallpaper. Wallpaper for banks or hospitals or maybe government buildings or similar institutions. Scott thought he was expressing himself but nobody took expressionism of any variety seriously anymore.

The buzzer rang from the lobby. Neil stiffened. He was not expecting company. Who the hell would just drop by expecting to be let in. He didn't want to see anybody. He ignored the buzzer. Maybe it was Heather Carson? He hadn't heard from her for a few days now. They'd had fun and also good sex, but she was too nosy. Asking too many fucking questions about his bank account..it wasn't as if Neil was rich or anything. He supposed that knowledge of a partner's financial dealings went with the territory when it came to relationships.

Neil didn't want any relationship, although he did like having sex. Sex for its own sake, nothing wrong with that.

He went back to The Ramones album. They were formally predictable but also very loud. They were not wallpaper.

But now there was a knocking on his door.

Shit, the person who had buzzed him must have snuck in with another tenant in the building. Well, if it was Heather then at least they could talk and Neil could tell her why a relationship wasn't going to happen.

Since Neil was obviously home he felt no point in pretending not to be. He answered the door. Dennis Townshend was staring him in the face. What the fuck? Wasn't Dennis supposed to be captive in a farmhouse in Vermont or somewhere similar?

'Hello, Neil. Aren't you going to invite me in?'

Dennis walked into Neil's apartment without waiting for an invitation.

"So this is where you live, Neil. It's not bad. You could do something with this apartment if you had the inclination. But, then you don't, do you?"

Dennis seated himself on the nearest large chair.

"Can I get you a drink, Dennis?"

"Oh that's a considerate thought. But, no not now, Neil. And could you please kill that music. I mean, The Ramones. Really, Neil."

Neil turned the music off. He had never had much to say to Dennis Townshend. Eric Taylor had been easier to talk to, although it had been difficult to get a word in with Eric.

Dennis was supposedly the brains as well as the money. Not that any brainpower had been used in running the gallery into the ground. Taylor and Townshend had never known what to do with his brother's art, or Jessica Warren's, or the remaining artists who were now free agents without any of them being especially attractive commodities.

"Actually, maybe I will have that drink, Neil. What are my choices?"

Neil grabbed the bottle of red wine and poured a glass for Dennis.

“Cheers, Neil”.

They clicked glasses delicately.

Dennis sipped his wine

“Oh this isn’t bad at all. It’s rather good, if I may compliment you so.”

Neil glared at him. Had Dennis been expecting Neil to consume cheap local wine?

“This is a nice apartment, if I may so so. Do you often entertain? Do you have a girlfriend?”

Neil ignored the questions.

“ You should try collecting art, Neil. Since you have no taste yourself you should hire an art consultant. They are a dime a dozen and they're surely not out of your league financially, as you do make money. Don’t you, Neil?”.

Neil swallowed. He sipped his wine and decided that it really wasn’t very good wine.

“You’re one of those old lefties who doesn’t like art because it’s for the one percent. But then you stopped being a leftie when you realized that you had to have some form of income streaming in so you bought into some daft pyramid scheme and it kept you afloat for a while except the pyramid collapsed. So, when in trouble, there's always drugs.”

“ Well, you would know, Dennis.”, Neil responded sharply. “You and Eric blew all your profits up your noses. And you never knew what to do with my brother's art. That abstract shit, what the fuck is it good for? Sell it to banks, hospitals, generic restaurants. Art for people know nothing about art. Film productions. They need art on the wall but any generic art will do.”

Dennis lit a cigarette without asking permission.

“Get me an ashtray, Neil.”

Neil retrieved an ashtray from the kitchen. He kept his eyes to Dennis.

“Thanks, Neil. And you don’t need to walk backwards to make sure I’m not pulling a gun on you. That’s not my style.”

Neil sat down again.

“You own a gun, Neil. But you’re not a man who ever pulls the trigger.”

Neil did have a gun, if it became necessary.

“You just whip your gun out and stare your victim down. That’s how you killed Scott, right?”

“I didn’t kill Scott, Dennis. Scott committed suicide.”

Dennis exhaled smoke.

“Oh please, Neil. You held the poor bugger up and then forced him to swallow those Imipramine tablets. You told him you would shoot him if he screamed.”

Neil stood up.

‘What do you want from me, Dennis?’

Dennis laughed.

“Oh, Neil. You’re so limited. You think oh poor Dennis has gone broke so now he’s going to blackmail you. How dull, Neil. But of course you are dull.”

‘What do you want, Dennis. What the hell are you doing here?’

‘I just want to hear you confess that you killed your brother. I’m not the only person who knows that fact, Neil.’

Neil ran to a drawer and grabbed his gun. He pointed it at Dennis who rushed at him. Dennis managed to grab Neil’s gun hand and wrestle him to the floor. Neil’s gun went off.

“Oh dear, Neil. It was actually loaded this time. You must’ve known that somebody might actually want to kill you.”

Neil tried to wrestle the gun away from Dennis’ hand.

“Police. Open up!”

Two uniformed cops entered through the unlocked door.

“Drop that gun right now!” ordered the first cop.

“Both of you” added the second.

Neil and Dennis were struggling for the gun.

“You realize, good officer, that I let go of the gun then Neil will have it, which is highly inadvisable?”

The first cop glared at Dennis.

“Don’t tell me how to do my job, Townshend. Let go of the goddam gun!”

“Drop the gun now”. The second cop rushed over to where Neil and Dennis had been fighting over the gun.

Two more cops arrived as backup.

“Neil Puryear, I am arresting you for the murders of Scott Puryear and Eric Taylor. You have the right to remain silent.”

The two backup cops hoisted Neil and handcuffed him.

“You, Mr. Townshend.”, the first cop pointed at Dennis. “You come to the station with us. We have a lot of questions for you.”

Dennis was escorted out of Neil’s apartment toward the elevator. Neil was similarly escorted after Dennis and his escorts were in the elevator riding down to street level.

Neil clenched his teeth. He was thinking about lawyers. He knew a few property lawyers but not any of the criminal practitioners.

The cops must have been following Dennis. Perhaps Dennis was a cop? Certainly Dennis would not be above it as he had always been a whore for a few bucks.

“Into the car, Puryear.”

Neil was shoved into the back seat with his hands cuffed . The first cop sat beside him as the second cop started the car.

The cops said nothing. They had done their job. They looked so pleased with themselves, the overpaid morons.

It was an unusually warm night and Laura had accepted an invitation from Dan to join the building’s tenants in the outside courtyard. There was barbecued food as well as canned beer and cannabis.

Dan had been worried about Laura, so she was basically doing him a favour by attending. The other tenants in the building did not interest her. They were largely young man with peculiar tastes in music, peculiar to their age constituency. These boys all liked American roots music. It was as if their parents had been post-punks and their grandparents punks.

Ryan The Raver was not in the courtyard. He was either sleeping or out somewhere, most likely sleeping. Apparently there were clandestine indoor raves during the COVID pandemic. Laura shuddered.

Joints were being passed around and Laura partook, something that she rarely indulged in. She was becoming hungry again and she decided that one beer would be quite enough.

“Dan?”

“Yes, Laura?”

“Any further decisions on both Scott’s books and his paintings?”

Dan groaned. Could this not be discussed later?

Laura finished her beer and stood to leave. She bade the group good evening and returned to her apartment to work more on the Murder Mark autobiography, which was progressing nicely. She had cleared the hurdles about Murder Mark’s violence against women and his rivalries with other local punk stars of the era. She had also found space to include details about the man which somewhat redeemed him. Murder Mark could be a gentleman when he wasn’t either competitive or drunk. He had defended a queer member of another band against the gang members who followed Mark around.

Laura was parsing through the autobiography prior to emailing it to the publisher, whose editor would largely rewrite the book. This didn’t bother Laura at all. It wasn’t as if the book was supposed to be great literature.

Her laptop was indicating a new message. Laura was pleased to see who was contacting her.

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

Hey Laura,

So what do you make of the whole arrest or takedown of Neil Puryear?

Laura paused, and then typed with a vengeance.

lsinclair@gmail.com

Hi Jess,

I’m still digesting it all. Let’s see...

Neil held Scott up with a gun and commenced him to take the Imipramine. Did Scott want to die or did he feel it was pointless to resist? Whatever...Neil killed Scott without leaving any fingerprints.

Did Eric and Dennis have a thing for being kidnapped? I read once that Anthony Perkins used to pay hustlers to tie him up and then burglarize his house, but really! Anyway, two guys tied Eric up and kidnapped Dennis. Now, Eric got loose and then somehow found his way across the border and was killed in a West End apartment, apparently by Neil. This time it was a different antidepressant...we can’t have the cops searching for The Imipramine Killer now can we?

And then I guess the cops followed Dennis Townshend to Neil’s apartment. Except....how did Dennis get away from his abductors who were apparently in some Vermont farmhouse? Your guess is as good as mine, Jess.

Laura

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

The fake kidnapping that became a real kidnapping? The murderer who made no sound and left no fingerprints? How did the cops connect all this to Neil?

lsinclair@gmail.com

Because they'd been watching him already. Neil and Eric and Dennis were in on some coke pyramid and Eric had to be taken out. Neil thought he was doing Dennis a favour ha ha.

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

Cocaine. It's such a stupid drug.

lsinclair@gmail.com

Well it's okay once or twice a year, at some boring party that you get stuck at.

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

Come on, Laura. Why get stuck at those parties in the first place? I know.....you're a writer and I'm an artist. Sort of goes with the territory. But the amount of money involved it's what's obscene about coke or other drugs.

lsinclair@gmail.com

Agreed, Jess. It's an old-fashioned drug.

So, what are we going to do with Scott's books and his paintings?

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

Well, I have a few ideas.

lsinclair@gmail.com

Oooh. Do tell.

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

I'd prefer to do that face to face. Do you feel like meeting up?

lsinclair@gmail.com

I'd love to. But..... sure, Jess. We should be able to play safely.

jessannwar@sympatico.ca

I'll pick you up in fifteen. You still on.

lsinclair@gmail.com

Oh yes. I'm into it.

Laura signed off, shut down her computer, and then refreshed her face. Then she would wait for her ride, very eagerly.