

Withdrawal Symptoms

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.