

Withdrawal Symptoms

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.