

Nuts and Bolts

990 words

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I put a painting for sale on CraigsList. Never again. More or less, here's the order of events.

So I move from the Marina district of San Francisco to Manhattan Beach to try it out. I sublet my apartment to a tech guy--which turns into a separate disaster but at least I don't know it yet.

I'm relaxing with my morning coffee a couple blocks from the pier when I get this message:

Hey There Bro followed by

Yo I don't even like Byrd's work but I can tell a fake ass picture when I see 1 a 100 miles away.

Got a lot a nerve, don't you?

2500 fuck your mother.

Holy Smokes.

What the heck do you do with *this*?

I ran it by my tennis partner/retired lawyer Chandler. He wanted to hear the exact message, and he got serious and said he knows what *he'd* do about it. He didn't elaborate but that reaction surprised me.

So I messaged the person back.

Thank you for your interest in the Mario Byrd art. The piece is part of a sign that Byrd painted for an opening at the Blue Belle Gallery on Post Street in San Francisco in 2013. I'd be happy to show it to you at your convenience and confirm authenticity, as well as provide paperwork that indicates value. Sincerely,

I made up the gallery and paperwork stuff, and the painting definitely wasn't authentic but that didn't matter.

The dude gets back pretty dang fast.

There was no opening for any blue belle gallery in 2013 because that place didn't exist then.

Don't go insulting my intelligence which makes you more of a piss-poor excuse for a fake loser human than you already are.

I started and stopped a couple responses, shut it down and went to the pizza place in Hermosa where the owner talks to you a lot but I didn't mind, and in the morning I was fired up and answered back.

You know something? Your wise-guy act is wearing thin. I know what I have, and I know it's

the real McCoy. You want to see it in person, I'm giving you one chance. And feel free to bring your art appraiser. Day after tomorrow. Monday. October 23. 21020 Aviation Boulevard, Unit 147. 6pm My lowball price is \$1666. But you'll need cash. If I see you fine. If not, you can contact me until the cows come home but that was it.

I re-read it after I sent it, this was absurd. Both getting involved with this guy and composing something so stupid. And lengthy. Not my normal style.

Still, I kept checking my messages and nothing back overnight, or Monday either.

I had a reunion up north and could use a few things from the storage unit so I showed up at 6, not expecting anything, but there he is. Introduces himself as Marcus.

Guy was friendlier than you'd think but of course right away pulls out a flashlight and magnifying glass and declared the painting a fake.

He said: "I used poor judgement coming here. Art fraud is an epidemic. You should be ashamed of yourself, honestly."

"Is that right," I said.

"Excuse me?"

“What I’m wondering now,” I said, “did you even bring the money. Or is that your mission, get in the way of law abiding citizens going about their business?”

“Okay now you’re out of line,” Marcus said.

“Taking it a step further--I’m pretty sure you’re a failed artist . . . You tried, right? Probably went to art school. Then the reality sunk in . . . Then you developed your e-mail game.”

The guy said, more slowly, “You’d best watch your step, friend . . . I’m not going to tell you again . . . So if there’s nothing more, and we’re capiche, I’ll be leaving.”

I tossed it back and forth. “Well there is something else. I wasn’t planning on putting it for sale, but since you made the trip, it’d be at least worth a look.”

“What is it?” Marcus said.

“It’s a Picasso.” I said. “And in full-disclosure mode, I’ll tell you right now it’s a print . . . but an old one. My parents picked it up in Europe, after the war.”

“Whatever.”

“There’s a large box in back. You got blankets top and bottom and sandwiched in the middle is your piece . . . Lemme see your phone for a sec, I want to show you a site I was on, all about Picasso prints.”

I was surprised he gave me the phone but he was into

this even though he pretended not to be, and wasn't thinking 100 percent straight.

He said, "Whatever prices they're showing you, those are a joke. The market for Cubism hasn't been this depressed in decades."

"Fine, cross that bridge when we come to it."

I waited. He fiddled around back there. "It's pretty heavily taped," he said.

I said I'd get a razor knife which should work, and there was a tool box up front, where you had the chain hanging down that operated the roll-up door. I stuck the guy's phone in my pocket so I'd have both hands free, and hand-over-hand got the job done quick, and when it was all the way down I took the padlock and completed the process.

Wednesday I'm halfway up Highway 5 toward my reunion, and the nice thing about the old Camry, she still played CDs, and I picked up a couple at a Pilot when I stopped for gas.

I'm cruising in the left lane feeling pretty good.

SHIT.

The storage guy.

FUCK.

I meant to release him after a couple hours but I

forgot. Hopefully he got rescued by a storage security person. If not, at least there was that case of Guayakis in there, so not likely the guy would expire. Still you had to go back. There was always something.