

Where is Old Tom

By
Arcy Conley

Come in detectives, said Tom and sit down. I'm celebrating tonight because tomorrow is my 75th birthday and I'm being retired by force. Would you like a glass of wine or maybe a cup of coffee?

No Sir, thank you, said Detective James, Detective Rodgers and I have been ordered to come here not to place you under arrest but to recover the paintings that you illegally removed from the Gallery. Notice Please, Sir, that I did not say stolen, I said removed

Detectives you must wait said Tom I wish for you to listen to what I have to say. Then I'll tell you where the paintings of Sebastian and Remembrance are. Those are the names of the paintings I removed.

“Sebastian” is a painting of a very old and aged man that you are able to see the pains that he has suffered in every line that is etched in his face and the faded black and gray in his full head of hair in all of the years of his life, his past longing for the better times he saw in his earlier years. You're able to see the dreams that died in his eyes that suffered in his soul.

“Remembrance” is a painting of the woman who waited for her prince charming to come but never arrived. You could see the wishes and dreams in her eyes also if you look closely, the tears that have silently flowed from those sea foam green eyes that look like arctic ice in a glass, with just a dusting of ancient freckles near her turned up nose.

I knew I was in trouble when the pretty young blonde receptionist held the door for me today when I came to work, and she smiled at me. Someone knew that I had removed Sebastian and Remembrance from the gallery.

After graduating from High school with a B+ average at 18 years of age and with nothing gnawing at my insides to do I decided to fulfill my military obligation. I

learned to fire weapons, crawl through crud, and obey superior officers, although in most respect they weren't any more superior than I was. They just had the rank and rating. After four years of average military service, I was discharged. I never fired a shot in anger. I never saw an enemy. I never fought a war.

After my military obligation concluded I found a job working in the census bureau entering data in a computer which paid me minimum wage. On the First and fifteenth of each month, a paycheck was delivered to my desk. I took a two-week vacation over the first two weeks in July and again over the Christmas and New Year Holidays

I met a lady during a summer vacation one year and after dating for six months we married over the Christmas and New Years Holidays. Somewhere in the next five years, we were blessed with two children. That required more money then I was earning at the census bureau so I acquired a part-time job in the evenings in the gallery. I pushed a 48" wide dust broom across the floors and emptied the trash cans in preparation for the next days opening. Again I was paid twice a month but this time on the fifth and twenty-first so it worked out nicely money wise.

I never missed a day of work at either job until I had a stroke at Fifty years of age. I missed two weeks of work but my accumulated sick leave took care of the time off and the insurance paid my hospital bills.

Then when I turned sixty years old I had a heart attack, they called it some fancy name but I missed another two weeks of work. Again accumulated sick leave took care of the time off and my insurance paid the hospital bills.

Somewhere in those twenty-five years, my wife of twenty plus years decided she had fallen out of love with me and asked for a divorce. I, of course, gave it to her as it was not worth the fight. She is happier now without me but with someone else who understands her according to her anyway.

Right around that time I found "Remembrance" hanging forgotten in a storeroom covered with a dust cloth being neglected so I brought her home late one night after work where she could be appreciated.

“Sebastian” was found two weeks later further back in the same storeroom again forgotten and covered in a dust cloth being neglected also. I brought him home also. When I look at Sebastian I feel as if I'm looking in a mirror and seeing myself Tomorrow, when I'll return to my office, clean out my bureau desk and pick up my final paychecks and go to the gallery and turn in my keys.

“Remembrance” and “Sebastian” have hung in my bedroom for the past twelve years of my life. No one has missed them for those many years that they hung in that storeroom covered with dust cloths and the twelve years that they have been in my bedroom where they have been appreciated. I have appreciated them as they have not been fixtures they have been my companions for the long lonely years that I have enjoyed their company.

I can only hope that the gallery will hang them in a location where they can be admired and appreciated for the fine works of art that they are. They are not average like me but examples of someone's achievement in art and they speak to the souls of men and women and deserve to be displayed with reverence.

I can only hope after I've cleaned out my desk and turned in my keys and turned the page to start my seventy-fifth year and you've returned “Sebastian” and “Remembrance” to the Gallery. That I had not become a fixture and hear the words.

Where's Ol Tom