

**FOR SALE**

FROM JOE WRIGHT DIRECTOR OF PRIDE & PREJUDICE

JAMES McAVOY

KEIRA KNIGHTLEY

**ATONEMENT**

JOINED BY LOVE. SEPARATED BY FEAR. REDEEMED BY HOPE.

ROGELIO RIVERA

---

*P3*

# FOR SALE

---

When I was a child my parents loved stopping at garage sales on the weekends. While they would look at broken lawn mowers and incomplete crystal sets, I'd look for the really valuable items like Redline Hot Wheels or G.I. Joe figures. Sometimes I was lucky and I'd find a Star Wars figure, albeit missing an arm or a leg. My imagination would make up for the occasional missing limb figuring that Luke had lost his arm to his overbearing father or that Princess Leia didn't need two legs to command the rebels at Hoth.

This routine occurred throughout my childhood and into my high school years though I have admit that searching yard sales in rural Indiana wasn't that exciting when you're a senior in high school. Still, the memory of walking through strangers' possessions along with my parents was a fond one.

So it came natural to me years later that after work on most evenings I'd search the local Craigslist and other online marketplaces looking through people's discarded items in hopes of finding treasure. Mostly though I found that I was simply passing the time, in the way a viewer watches fishing or cat videos on YouTube.

The time I spent as a child perusing the yards and now the internet, had led to me to acquire some decent skills in identifying and valuing collectibles. Most of the time, I was close to the estimates offered on the Antiques Roadshow, a television program produced by PBS that featured various heirloom and antiquities whose owner's

were appraising. I was no expert but I was able to see a diamond in the rough before the expert would offer his or her estimate.

I worked at the local home improvement store in the lumber department. It wasn't very challenging work though somehow the scent of the wood made me feel as though I worked outside. Generally, I'd strike up conversations with the customers about the projects they were working on and it made me feel helpful. I'd even offered advice on building projects I'd never actually done. On breaks, I'd catch myself daydreaming about an old barn find I'd seen on my phone. Though my dreams would aim much higher, I was content for the time being in my hometown of Oakbrook, Indiana.

They say if you can find a way to make money doing something you love, you don't work a day in your life. Well, I wasn't sure what that meant. Until the day I met John Willow.

It was a Tuesday evening in July when I entered a search on OfferUp, an online market place app on my phone. I often searched ads as I ate dinner at the kitchen table. The keyword I used was "Vintage Art" and I expanded my search to 30 miles. A search that I had always used that would return various pieces of "Art." Most of the time, the pieces were paintings and prints that were hanging in someone's home or pottery that looked like it could have been made at the local community college in the 1970s. That's not to say they were bad, just not *real art*. I was looking for something that I could buy low and sell for a little profit. I wasn't trying to make a killing, just trying to make a little money and have fun doing it. Call it a hobby of mine.

The search results had brought up the usual suspects. A hand painted plate set that was from Israel. An old tattered tapestry that may or may not have been a souvenir from India. I did spot a nice

Murano red vase that featured clear handles and base. But I wasn't convinced I could turn that around for what the buyer wanted. I went through my usual motions and decided I can check again tomorrow. As I was closing the app, I saw an item that caught my eye. I opened the app again and touched the thumbnail. The image enlarged to show a bronze colored sculpture that at first look was quite simple. It was a conical shape that rose to a point that had three slits that stretched from the mid section to the base. What made it more interesting is the base was tucked under the mass of the sculpture in such a way that it made it looked like it was floating.

I hadn't seen anything like this piece before and yet it looked like it could have been made in the mid 20th century. I clicked on the rest of the photos and saved the item to my board. The seller had listed the item for \$75 which I thought was a mistake. But it didn't matter

because before I knew it I had sent the seller a message asking if I could come by and see the item.

The following days were just like the ones the week before. The message I had sent hadn't been returned and the item was still listed. How many people list items just to leave it on the web to exist in a digital eternity? I had resumed my routine of going to work, coming home and browsing the internet and finally watching titles from the various streaming services. I missed the days where a TV show would beckon fans on a weekday night, a la Friends, X-Files or ER.

Two weeks after my initial request, my phone notified me that I had a message waiting for me on OfferUp. I quickly checked the message. It read:

*Come by on Saturday, busy during the week. (812) 537-0814*

That was it. No friendly message, no thanks for contacting me but the item is sold. Then again, why should I'm surprised by cold

communications from strangers is beyond me. The internet might have made things easier, but never promised to make things warmer. No matter, I was starting to get excited to see the item after what felt like a really long time.

The following Saturday morning, I promptly sent a text message requesting the seller's address and a meeting time of 11am. Not too late, not too early. The seller responded with his address and an "ok". I lived about 25 miles away so it wasn't too far.

I arrived at the seller's home. It was small and sitting on a nice piece of land. There were crops on either side and the house faced the road. I knocked on the door and waited patiently as the sun began to burn itself into my skin. The house itself was well kept in the unseasonable heat. It didn't look so much like a farm house as it did a normal single family home. The white exterior paint looked fresh and the trim detailed in contrast to the dirt grounds around the home.

Sprinklings of hay and feed all around. There wasn't much in the way of landscaping but I suppose the crops on the property might have served that purpose to the dwelling's owner.

A man who looked to be in his 60s answered the door. He wore a long sleeved button shirt with light colored gray pinstripes and some black Dickies trousers. He introduced himself as John and asked me if I had come to see the sculpture. "Yes, it's quite nice John. I'm Steve." John closed the front door and proceeded to walk me around the home to the garage. "Might I ask where you got it?" I was excited to begin my research on the piece and begin my quest to resell it.

"I made it." John said without looking back. The sound of dirt and gravel clicked under our feet as we arrived to the side of the house where the garage was. John asked me to wait in front of the garage door. A few moments later, the dull thump of the garage door opener drummed and the door began to lift, panel by panel.

"You made it?" I asked. "Aha" John replied. "Be careful when you come in here now, there's a lot of sharp edges around my garage." John motioned for me to enter. He had a two car garage with a counter top that lined all three sides. On the counter top were various parts from what looked like cars, farming equipment and tools. There were boxes on the right wall countertop and a couple of piles of books and magazines. There was some kind of car that was hidden by a blue plastic tarp that had been tied down with bungee cords.

"What's under the tarp?" I asked hoping he would say something like Corvette, Mustang or Bel Air. "It's a Porsche." John responded without much interest in talking about it further. "A Porsche? Really, like a 911?" I asked not quite believing that this old farmer would have any interest in a foreign mark. "No, it's an 80's 944." He replied and said "Here it is. Just a bit dusty." John was in front of a red and

white quilt that had been wrapped around an object that looked to be 2 to three feet in height and secured with duct tape.

He unwrapped the sculpture and grabbed a dust brush that was hanging on the wall a few feet away. He began gently dusting it off, spinning it on its axis. "There she is. I call it Firenze2 or 3. I can't recall." He said. "May I take a closer look?" I said. "Sure" he replied. I walked over to it and examined the piece. "Is this ceramic? I mean it has to be but it looks like it's heavy." I said.

"It's ceramic, but if I recall correctly, I think I used a wooden peg for an armature to support the shape and weight. It's pretty stable, but a little heavy." John said returning the dust brush to its place. "You say you made this? It's quite nice. It looks like something a famous artist would make in the 50s." I said smiling figuring John wouldn't have a clue.

"Yep, I was emulating a Brancusi I had seen in an art history book. It didn't really work out but like I said, it's pretty sturdy and it's stable." John said. "A Brancusi? Was he French?" I asked without knowing who he was talking about. "He was Romanian I think, but he lived in France for a long time. He was known for sculpture."

"Wow. I wouldn't take you for an art person." I said. "I was an art major in college." John said while looking past me in a distant sort of way. "But that was a long time ago in a different life. So do you want it? I need to get back to work." "Yes, you said \$75 right? Say, you wouldn't happen to have more pieces laying around would you?" I said pulling the cash out of my wallet.

"Well, I have some pieces from when I was in Europe. But they are in a storage space in the house. But I really..." I cut him off and said "I'd love to see them, here you go." I handed him the money. He looked down at the money and led me out of the garage and to a

side door for the house. Once inside, I noticed that the house was nicely kept with a traditional country style decor. "I have my old work in this room right here." John said as we walked down a hallway. "Be careful, there's a lot of junk in there."

The door opened to a bedroom where all I could see was various pieces of objects shrouded in plastic sheets. As I looked closer, I could see that the room was filled with mostly canvases of various sizes. I uncovered one of the canvases closest to me and saw what looked like a cubist style painting. I looked at it for some time and thought that this looked oddly like a Picasso I had seen on the Sotheby's website not a month before.

"Is...is this a Picasso?" I asked as my heart began to beat wildly in my chest. "That one, oh no, no...That's mine. Although I painted it after a Picasso we had studied in art history. It's part of a series. I think they are all behind that one." John said. I started uncovering the

paintings in that row, one by one. I didn't understand what John meant by him saying these were his.

"Listen, take your time, take a look around and if you are interested in any of these, pull them aside. I have to tend to the livestock out in the back before it gets too hot. I'll be back in about 20 minutes." John said and left the room.

I welcomed John's absence as it allowed me to peruse the items in more detail without the watchful eye of the owner, or possibly in this case the creator though I wasn't convinced. I started on the left side wall and uncovered monochromatic canvases that could have been from Picasso's blue period. The next row had landscape pieces that looked as though Van Gogh had painted these himself. The only difference that I could see were that the colors were warmer than he had used. The next row were panels that had been painted to emulate woodcuts, intricately detailed and beckoned a reference to

Aubrey Beardsley. Row after row and dozens of pieces deep, the art world exploded around me. Pieces that could have been used to illustrate the various art movements were strewn at my feet. Cubism, Realism, Impressionism, Mannerism, Art Nouveau, Expressionism and even a few Surrealistic pieces were all represented in this small bedroom in rural Indiana. The color from the canvases, panels and boards were all being subdued by the plastic sheeting as if the works themselves were under anesthesia, unable to come to.

However there was something that I noticed about halfway through the room. There seemed to be a common theme or at least a common subject matter when the piece had to do with a person as a subject matter. Though the different artistic styles made it hard to know for sure, there seemed to be a woman that appeared in almost all of the pieces that featured people or figures. Basic features of this woman were dark brown hair, green eyes and a small mouth. But

before I thought too much about who this person was or if it was a coincidence, I decided I should figure out what I had here.

I sat down on a chair that I brought in from the kitchen and began to run the scenarios in my head. Many of the pieces I had seen were worthy of exhibition if not for private collection. And while many of them were reminiscent of other artist's work, they were unique enough to demand their own artistic value. But before I could get any further, I needed to know where they came from. I needed the background on all this art. There were too many copies out there and the last thing I'd want to do is a build a reputation for selling bogus replica art.

"John, how did you come about these? You couldn't have made all of these." I said bewilderingly after he had returned. John chuckled as he wiped sweat from his brow. "Why, you don't believe a farmer could paint?" I was immediately embarrassed by how I had judged

John and I how I had phrased the question. "What I mean is, what's the story behind all this? Did you collect these? How many artists?" I asked now with a cautious tone. "One." John replied.

I waited briefly then asked "Can you tell me how you made these?"

"Sit down. Let me get a chair. It's a bit of a story." John left and returned with a chair and a couple of lemonades. "You say your name is Steve? So Steve, this is what happened. Hope you are not in a hurry." John began to tell me the story of how the artwork came to be.

John said that after he graduated high school, his parents wanted him to go to college as they hadn't had the opportunity to do so themselves. They were immigrants after all and had been lucky to have built a small family farm. After some thought he told them that he wanted to study art at the Illinois College of Fine and Applied arts. They didn't know much about higher education and had asked John

if pursuing a degree in art would lead to a better life. He said yes though he had no idea - all he knew was that at that time in his life he enjoyed taking walks in the surrounding plains and wheat fields and filling his sketchbook with drawings of the creatures that inhabited the area. His books were filled with rabbits, chickens, pigs and horses. His sketches and grades were good enough to get him admitted into the program.

He was an exceptional student and able to grasp the art fundamentals quickly and began making pieces that led the art department chair to recommend him to a newly offered art studio course abroad. The year long course was held in private studios in Amsterdam, Rome and ended with the last quarter in Paris. Only a handful of students that applied from universities across the U.S. were accepted. Tuition, room and board was covered by an endowment that was set up by a quirky philanthropist out of Seattle.

Each studio and city had offered the students various techniques that were tied to that area and local working artists were brought in to provide real time workshops. Art restorers were also brought in to show the technique they used to match paintings which helped speed up the student's progress on various styles of painting. Again, John showed impressive mastery of the subject matter. Yet he kept to himself when not in the studio preferring to sip coffee on his own or have dinner in his living quarters. It was in the studio where he came alive. His body seemed to dance around the easel and he'd join in the chatter that was going around studio. But once he cleaned up his area and hung up his smock, he would retire to the shell of a quiet existence, a spirit subdued.

On returning from his studies abroad, he promptly graduated with a Bachelors of Fine Arts degree and quietly joined a furniture manufacturing plant near his parent's home.

“Wait. What about the art? Why did you stop?” I asked trying to make sense of the rapid departure from creating fine art to assembling common furniture.

“It’s hard to come back to the Midwest with an art degree. I mean, there weren’t that many galleries out here and you know promoting myself just wasn’t my thing. My parents weren’t too fond of my work either so I decided to get a job.” John said and took a sip of his drink.

“That’s it. You came back and took a job. Like the rest of us? You expect me to believe that you created all of this work and that when you came back you just got a job. Something doesn’t add up. And your parents, what... they didn’t like your work? They didn’t see your amazing talent?” I asked.

“You know they were simple folk. The pieces I was really proud of, well they said they was nice and all, but I could tell that it didn’t move them the way my professors and fellow artists had been. And you

know something when your folks aren't into what you do - well it made me feel that what I was making wasn't up to snuff. You know."

I sat dumbfounded and if I'm being a honest a bit sad. Most of us go through life looking for a calling, a direction and a chance to make the work we do meaningful or at the least fulfilling. Here this man, John, had the talent, the ability and the knowledge literally at his fingertips and instead of embracing that he simply abandoned it.

After a few moments, I asked "So all of the art that is in that room was made while you were in Europe?"

"Oh heavens no!" Exclaimed John and giggled. "I painted and made most of this art at my parents home for the first year or two after I graduated. I mostly painted on the weekends you know, after my chores were completed but that never took too long. I'd paint from lunch until the early morning hours out in the barn - sometimes, I'd sleep out with the animals just because I didn't want to wake my

parents. Spent a lot of time out there. But you know, it was great. I had nature all around me and it helped me a lot..."

"Helped you with what?" I asked, having just started taking notes for a purpose that was unknown to me at that time.

"Listen, it's getting late and I've rambled on enough about the old days and the old times. I appreciate you coming out and all. It was nice talking to you." John said getting up from his chair.

"What was it?" I asked John. "What was what?" John replied.

"Come on John. I know we just met but I can tell that there's more to your story. There's something you are leaving out. What was it? Don't you think you've kept your artwork hidden for long enough?" I asked. I wasn't sure where I was going but I wanted John to tell me the entire story not just the outline. The whole story would make his art more meaningful and easier to convert to a sale.

John took my glass and left me in the room alone with the ghosts of his past and the brilliance of his artistic mind. He returned a few minutes later with smaller glasses now filled with something with little ice and dark liquid. "My finest bourbon." I took the glass and adjusted myself on the seat. This time, trying to get as comfortable as I could. I took out my notebook and a pen. The sun was setting when John began telling me about Montmartre.