

SCOTT NOEL

Portrait of Bettina, 2014
Oil on linen, 40 x 38 in



COURTESY GROSS MCCLEAF GALLERY

CHRISTINE SNEED

Good Works

was heart failure, in her sleep). She left part of her money to my brother Peter and me. We were like her grandchildren, she always told us. Proxy grandchildren, because she didn't have any of her own, or kids either, for that matter—lucky for us, I guess you could say. Like the nude beach question, this will probably sound strange, but I decided that I want to give away part of what she left me. You're one of the people I want to give some of it to. I don't have a compelling reason except that you were always so nice when we were in symphonic band together junior and senior year. Do you remember when I broke the reed for my clarinet during practice, and you lent me one of yours because I didn't have an extra one with me that day? When I tried to return it to you the next morning, you let me keep it, even though I'd washed it (at the time, I was kind of offended that you wouldn't take it back, but I think you really did want me to keep it because you were generous, not because you didn't want to put your lips where mine had been).

I'm wondering if you'd be willing to email me your mailing address? I'd really like to send you a gift. It's not going to be big but I thought maybe you could use it to treat yourself to something you don't ordinarily buy for yourself, like that expensive protein powder some guys I know use because they're body builders (or pretend they are)—that powder is around fifty or sixty dollars a container. I once dated a guy who used it and my eyes almost dropped out of their sockets when I looked at his GNC receipt when I was in his kitchen by myself. And this was a guy who'd never pay the extra dollar for a carton of organic blueberries. He always got the conventionally grown ones and I'm sure we both now have a lot of pesticides racing through our bloodstreams. (I know I didn't have to eat the berries, but I don't have a lot of willpower sometimes.)

I'm not implying that you should be using protein powder because you need bigger muscles or anything. I don't know what you look like these days. And even if you were very skinny, that wouldn't matter to me.

Anyway, enough of me putting my foot in my mouth.

One other thing. Just so you know, this isn't a scam where I'll tell you to send me money before I'll send you a check. I've heard about how some people have lost thousands of dollars to scammers in Montreal or Nairobi or Milwaukee, where these thieves are living under the names of the people whose identities they've stolen.

To: tdickinson@goodmail.com
From: shannonk@mercersmith.com
Date: 7 May--22:52--

Dear Todd,

I know it's been many years since we last saw each other, and I hope you still remember me. Lately I've been thinking about you. (This isn't the only reason, but there's a moving company in Chicago that shares your last name and their trucks have been in my neighborhood a lot this year.) Was it our ten-year reunion when we last saw each other? And now we're almost forty. My mother likes to say that growing older is better than the alternative, but I don't see how we can grow younger. (She doesn't think it's funny when I say this either!)

I found your email address in the directory that the twenty-year reunion organizers sent around to everyone last summer. I hoped you'd be there, but someone told me you're living in Hawaii now. How is that? Pretty great, I bet. This will probably sound strange, but the question just popped into my head—do you live near a nude beach? I don't know if I'd ever be able to go to one of those. Do you have a boat?

The reason I'm writing is that I recently inherited some money (from my great-aunt Hannah, who was ninety-six and still drove! She didn't die in a car accident though—it