

Stuff

by Phillis Ideal

Art books, paintings, antique chairs, marble tables, full length gold gilded mirrors, oriental rugs, tapestries, a Louis XVI painted French armoire, a wrought iron Deco coffee table, flatware, silver flasks, mantel lamps, iron gates, a silk settee, theater seats, a Deco gas stove, 1950's retro chrome kitchen table and chairs, a Rococo walnut king bed and much more filled three storage units and a friend's empty trailer. This was Anthony's inheritance from a house where he and his crazy sister had grown up in Scarsdale, NY. After their mother died, they lived in the house, fighting, drinking and living it up, taking out loans on the house till they could no longer pay the taxes and had to sell it.

Anthony kept the contents of the house. The thought of parting with any of it was wrenching. Just knowing the objects that represented better times were safe and sound in expensive storage units gave him some comfort. This safeguard came with the elevated price of three storage units in NYC. Every month his credit card was charged \$1,050 to assure the protection of times past. This payment came out of his meager bank account before he wrote his rent check. He teetered on the edge of losing his tiny Greenwich Village apartment, stuffed with less exotic daily trappings: old newspapers, CDs bought from a homeless street vendor, broken frames to be repaired and used at some point, found wood to someday make a collage and piles of unopened bills and clothes. There was a narrow goat trail from the bathroom to his bed.

In his thirties, Anthony dated models and had a part-time job delivering the *Village Voice*, making just enough money to eke by and to party night after night, drinking heavily and often waking up, still plastered, with a woman he barely knew. He had a great sense of style, wit, and playfulness, and had been a presence in the 70's downtown art scene. Even, now at seventy-four, before taking in the whole picture, women gave him a second look. His once dark hair

was white blond and his physique, though wrinkled and softer, was still reminiscent of an athlete. One might have thought that his clothes were soiled because he was working outdoors. Anthony wasn't working at all. On closer examination one could see that old dirt was ground into the weave of the cloth, creating a shiny patina. He was at the end of his rope: no job, no money and now recovering from prostate cancer surgery and under daily radiation treatment.

He called. I always knew it was him when the first few seconds were a long pause, and then the sound of his throat clearing before he started to talk. "It is Anthony. It is Monday, obviously. I don't know. I don't know. It is 11 o'clock. I am so unbelievably uncomfortable. I can't even; I can't even begin to tell you. It is so humid. I guess there are people who don't mind it. Ninety, ninety-three degrees in my apartment. I am going to lose my friggin' mind. Huh, I just kind of hung up on this woman who I was supposed to see. I don't know. I don't know what the Hell is the matter with me. You know I was supposed to have a talk with a counselor at the hospital. I didn't do the hospital thing this week and missed two radiation treatments. I don't think it is a big deal. Right now I am standing in front of a crate at the storage unit and trying to remember what is in it. I have been thinking about that Victorian still life painting of the monkey and the fruit. Remember, the painting I paid that guy to restore and decided not to sell. Well, it is here somewhere. We had it over the mantel in the house in Scarsdale. I want to make sure it is OK."

I put my hand to my brow and shook my head and said, "You have to sell the stuff and raise some money. I will help you organize it and advertise it online. I bet there are seventy thousand dollars locked up with those antiques."

He said, "Yeah, I know," sounding very far away. Then he spoke with determination, "Can you lend me \$4000 just to get by?"

