

October 7, 1974

Dear People of the Christo Family

Holly ask me to give you my phone number. The reason I don't like to give away my phone number is because it is mostly for my family and although they are very nice, good hard working with a lot of integrity do sometimes call at the wrong time, for them I must be there in case of some family emergency. Although my family (meaning mother, father, grandmother, aunts, uncles, and cousins\* ) no longer live in the same building on the same block they have extended the extended family to the telephone. The fact that I do not have a "regular" job and live the type of life they do leaves me wide open to their "concerned" advice. But they are family and first therefore. (Blood is thicker than water.) In between their phone calls I must work my life by the clock because they do and if I don't, I get nothing done. I have no self discipline and only want to have a good time and am basically a very greedy person. The alarm clock gives me the discipline. The unexpected phone call cuts through the order I need and gives me an opportunity to indulge my natural lazy la-dee-da-disposition, using the excuse that if I tell the person I'm busy that I'm being impolite. It usually ends up with an appointment for a certain day and time that usually ends up somewhere within a two or three hour range around the time agreed upon. Three hours shot! Not to say time I let myself waste by convincing myself how worried I am about the outcome of the said situation. Like the little candles that flicker in red glasses in rows before the saints in church, my art wherever it may be stands in vigil for me, and speaks for me where I cannot be. Life is too short and not so sweet and every second it gets shorter so as the clock ticks and the alarm sets its limits I must work, work, work. However being human and therefore subject to the weakness of original sin here is my phone number -\*\*-\*\*-\*\*\* - but give it to no one. Time is precious.

Thank you again

Tommy Schmidt

\* Sociologists call these kind of people Working-class Ethnic Catholics

## “Two altar Boys and the Pearl”

Filthy! Disgusting! Get your hands out of there! His lips said “stop.” His eyes said “Go!” Salvatore’s voice meant yes, but the words were NO. From way down deep in the Sacristy trash can, among wilting, drying, dying, flowers, banana peels, pencil shavings, eggs shells and still warm (not yet solid) candle wax, Willie found what he was looking for.....Gold aluminum florist’s foil scraps, pieces of glitter pipe cleaners and the crumpled saran wrap from Sal’s green pepper and Egg sandwich. Willie squeezed the plastic wrap into a tight little bunch crumbling some gold foil around it. Sal got the stapler from the old priest’s office. He stapled the pipe cleaner into place. Together they held it up near the light bulb. Its layered plastic membrane flashed for a moment creating the impression of translucent nacre in a setting of molten gold. For a split second they both gasped, OOed and AHd. Then instantly froze (had they broken a silent masculine code?). Terrified that either one of them was caught “acting like a kid” or showing feminine emotions.....

Salvatore said “My grandmother says that if a dewdrop filled with moonlight falls into the sea and is swallowed by an Oyster at midnight (His voice cracked!) “It is magically turned into a pearl !?!?” Willie’s answer was pleasant yet firm “That’s nothing but a silly, superstitious old wives tale!!! A bunch of cheap, sentimental Hogwash. In an age of science and education we know for a fact that the process of the oyster coating any little tiny intruder who breaks or enters its shell by slowly rotating it in nacre is how a pearl is formed. It is only an act of self-preservation. Only human beings think pearls are valuable or beautiful! To the oyster it’s as annoying as a corn on your toe or a splinter in your finger!!!”

Had Salvatore and his grandmother’s folk stories opened the proverbial can of worms? Sal paused for a very very long moment then said “All I know is that you took the saran wrap from my pepper and egg sandwich. Fished it up from the garbage, crushed it together with some scraps of foil and created a pearl!!! If you need to call that a bunch of sentimental bull or “Survival of the Fittest” go right ahead.....

But to me it’s magic.

P.S. “Think upon a Mediterranean oyster having indigestion in his watery cloister, so that Basra could have a pearl” (adapted from “Baubles, Bangles, Beads,”) Kismet