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As the people walked down the beach, the sun seemed to grab them and make them move as slow as possible. But it wasn’t the sun slowing them at all. The boys were showing their hairless chests to the girls in bikinis and sarongs, and I was watching them as they were blown sideways by the force of a huge blast. Concrete, wood, and metal, bulletted from the nearby buildings. Windows cracked and shattered. The sound was God-awful. Each bit of debris was a soul-ripper on a mission to cleave through flesh and bone, wanting a taste of humanity, a fusion of sorts, to become a new object that some would call art when it was washed up on the beach years later. The pieces plonked into the water, and rutted the sand. People lay on the ground, the silence, inhuman. It was never this quiet around here and I’d only been here two days. I looked up to the roof of the tallest building and saw a man there dancing a joyous jig. Everything was silent. Silent and beautiful. Until the screams started. I couldn’t handle that, so I went into the nearest bar.

I sat at the end of the bar with my pad and pen and began writing. Soon the barmaid, a fleshy lass of around twenty-two years of age served me a beer which I hadn’t asked for, but for which I paid and drank, nonetheless.

‘What are you writing?’

‘It is not what I’m writing. It’s what I’m writing about that is important.’

‘What are you writing about then?’

I hadn’t written anything yet, so I made something up. ‘Notation. The right musical notes to put on my door. So then, when anyone comes to my house and my doorbell is out of order, which it is, they can hum a few bars and I’ll know someone’s there.’ She stared at me. I continued. ‘Did you hear the bomb go off?’

‘What bomb?’

‘Just a minute ago a bomb went off. At least twenty people killed. At least. Not enough to make the national news though. Maybe the local rag.’

She goes to the other end of the bar and on tip-toes, moving her head and body from side to side for a better view, peers out the door through which I entered. An old fat woman in a straw hat and pink floral dress collapses against the frosted window head first, smearing blood from a large gash to her brow.

‘That’s strange. I didn’t hear a thing. Can’t see anything either.’

‘Maybe it didn’t make a sound.’ I begin to wonder whether anything happened at all. Am I living in my own mind? ‘I can’t really remember, and yet it was only a few minutes ago. Strange, isn’t it?’

‘Hmm.’ She comes back to my position. ‘So what is it that you’re writing about?’

At this moment I notice that there are no other people in the bar and that the staff must have the jukebox on at random seeing as the air is filled with a slow jazz. ‘Nice music. I like this music.’

‘I like it too.’ She smiles. ‘But I think you’re stalling. Are you writing anything at all?’

I’m thinking about motivation with a pen in my mouth. Motivation. Mo-tivation. Mo-ti-vay-tion. I smile back. ‘Want to be my muse?’

‘I’ll have to think about it. What will you write about me?’

‘Oh, I don’t know. Your body. Your mind. Your incredibly incomprehensible decisions. Your foibles. Stuff like that. I’ll ask you questions. You refuse to answer. Mostly.’

‘Hmmm.’

‘What? Not good enough?’

‘Hmmm.’ Wiping a glass.

‘If you do y’know we’ll have to go out for a year, do unspeakable things to each other. Y’know, betrayal, beat each other up. Things like that. Then I’ll be able to write with more authority on the subject.’

‘Why only a year?’

‘People should never go out longer than a year, and if they do, they should get married. But who wants to get married? No, a year is long enough to know what’s going on. Anything longer than that is simply tedium, to say the least.’

‘I agree,’ she says. ‘One year. Max.’

‘That’s settled then. Okay, let’s start, hypothetically speaking. What comes to mind when I say the words “bomb blast”?’

‘I think of a bright light, an intense blue and a man dancing a jig.’

‘You saw him too?’

‘Saw who?’

‘The man dancing a jig.’

‘No, no, no. That’s what comes to mind when you say the words “bomb blast”.’

‘Let me rephrase the question. What comes to mind when you say the words “bomb blast”?’

‘A bright light, an intense blue and a man dancing a jig.’

‘So you did see him!’

‘Who?’

‘The man dancing the jig!’

‘No, no, no! That’s just what comes to mind when I say the words “bomb blast”.’

I was unconvinced. ‘I think you’re missing the whole point of the exercise.’

She leans back. ‘I see.’ She screwed up her mouth sideways, thinking...

‘So...I bet you were raised by wolves because...your mother was an alcoholic...’

‘That’s a damn lie! But right on the money.’

I beamed triumphantly. ‘You’re a goddamn natural!’

‘Hmmm.’

‘Brilliant! Indifferent and aloof at the same time! So, how about it? Want to be my muse?’

‘What’s the pay like?’

‘Pretty crap really.’

She leans over but I covered my work with my arm, like a fifth grader. ‘You can’t look until it’s finished.’

‘You haven’t started!’

‘Beside the point! I am rigorously thinking of something to write.’

‘Like what?’

‘Like...a bomb blast...on a beach...’

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ross Murray.*