

Fulton's Muse

The bar was an ordinary place where today's twenty- thirty-year-old crowd hovered in their position, like in grade school where desk assignments were given out at the beginning of the school year. Some took the real estate at the bar's end so that they could be close to the bathroom. Others took the middle by the taps where the bartender was in the default position in between pouring the newest IPA. All the regulars knew who would stand where and talk to whom. It was understandable when Fulton, a man just shy of sixty-five years, walked in and promptly sat down at the nearest open table, where all eyes were upon him.

Fulton was a man of few words. Usually, he would disappear from view in whatever setting he was in after the initial curiosity from onlookers. And today, being out in the open, at a single table for two, was scrutinized longer than usual. Fulton was average height and weight for his age, according to the insurance scales, he was at most a four to five out of ten, and was told so during his life by past would be girl acquaintances. "You don't do anything for me," the girls would all say during his younger years. Women followed the same remark in each decade until he was sixty when Fulton didn't care anymore.

What he did care about was writing. Fulton would write fictional short stories, whereas a supreme being, the author, he could control who, what, where, when, and especially the character's dialogue. But he was truthful, in some respects, of not writing about a person who was a nine out of ten when he or she was just a five out of ten.

That was why he was here, using an exercise of the mind, an early writing lesson of building characters by examining, listening, and most importantly imagine what they may say.

For instance, in the mid-bar position, out of earshot, was a twenty-year-old with no noticeable ink on her skin, small breasts and stringy long blonde hair that came down to her shoulders. No rings on her finger or any tan lines to propose so. She was drinking from a glass, not a bottle. The dress she wore was a designer style but had to be an offseason one from a discount store. She wore glasses that made her look sexier with them on than without. Good teeth, fair skin, and a whisper of color on her eyelashes suggested with no other makeup that she accepted the way she looked naturally.

Fulton noticed all these, but the fun part is what she, Fulton now named her Libby, would say in his mind. A conversation, a dialogue, one-sided of course, would begin. Fulton took out a small pad of paper from his back pocket and started to write with a pencil he borrowed from the table's middle lottery card display next to the propped up menu.

He would look at her, staring of course, on how Libby would talk a little, then laugh, continue talking, a sip once or twice from her glass, then continued her conversation to a guy her age. Occasionally, she glanced over his way, probably looking past Fulton to see who was entering the front door well behind his table.

"Well, I think the government is all wrong about the refugee situation too. Libby would say in Fulton's mind as he wrote this as a starter. "I'm from Belize," she said, "I came over here by myself when I was eighteen, six years ago."

Now the starter sentence had been produced. It was up to Fulton to follow with his version of what he would answer, leaving spaces for her words in between.

He wrote.

"That must have been tough, at such an early age. What happened to your parents? Why did you leave?"

Fulton left the next lines blank for her answer.

"Looks like you proved them wrong," he wrote.

Another blank line.

"So you were pretty resourceful. I wouldn't even know how to begin living here."

Line blank.

"Sixty-five, widowed, no kids, wish I had."

XXXXXXXXXX because blank lines were getting annoying.

"No"

The pencil tip broke. Fulton got into his groove, as he put it, and unknowingly pressed down harder with each written line. He rummaged through the canister of pencils on the table to find a sharp one.

"Hey," a terse voice said, "old guy."

Fulton looked up. It was that girl. It was the "Libby."

"See you've been starring at me and writing down shit on your paper. What are you some kind of a perve?"

"No, a writer," Fulton said after he composed himself. "I was not aware I was doing any harm. It's a free country the last time I checked with the government."

"A writer huh," she said. " Well, I think the government is all wrong about the refuge situation too."

Startled, Fulton choked up the words, " Would you care to sit down and I'll tell you about it," as he stood and pulled the other chair out from underneath the table. He motioned with a short wave with his hand palm up like a model on one of those game shows, signaling for her to sit.

She looked around. What could she lose, she thought. He was gentlemanly enough to pull the chair out for her. She couldn't remember the last time someone ever did that. The girl placed her glass down on the table and took the seat. Fulton rushed back to his chair, still flustered.

"My name is Fulton, I'm a writer from Upstate New York, trippin', No on a trip to New York City, here to uh, live, find a place, here to find a place to live. So I can write," he said.

She laughed. "Don't be nervous. You don't get out much, do you? Well, my name is Libby, nice to meet you," she said.

A chill ran up Fulton's spine that left him speechless.

"I'm from Belize," Libby said, "I came over here by myself when I was eighteen, six years ago."

Fulton still didn't recover from the precise words he had thought and written down on his paper. The words she said precisely matched his own. This situation must be a dream, he thought. Fulton heard about, and once experienced himself, the writer's phenomenon of how characters write themselves, actually come alive with dialogue the writer would never have thought of during the writing process. But Libby was real, right in front of him, and he could not speak what was on his mind. He looked down at his paper pad to find the words he wrote earlier and saw where he left off.

"That must have been tough, at such an early age. What happened to your parents? Why did you leave?" Fulton said following Libby's line written on the paper pad.

"I ran away from home because of the abuse. Everyone treated me like a little girl," she said.

"Looks like you proved them wrong."

"Yeh, it wasn't easy, especially finding a place to live in this big city. Spent most of my time at NYU. I was the right age to blend in, took courses, learned, and worked in the library. Slept there too.

"So, you were pretty resourceful. I wouldn't even know how to begin living here."

Fulton skipped saying the crossed-out phrase, "in this big city," on his pad because of the edited redundancy.

"How old are you? You married?" Libby said.

Fulton looked up from the pad since he knew the questions well. He was asked the same ones often by other women when they first met.

"Sixty-five, widowed, no kids; wished I had."

"Wished you had what?" Libby asked.

Baffled, Fulton looked back down to the paper. That line wasn't in Her dialogue he wrote.

"Kids, uh I always wanted kids, children, you know, to keep the name going."

"Yeh someday, I hope to have some too. But I have to start at square one to find a decent guy first. Not many around here," Libby said, "Ever been here before all by yourself?"

Fulton shook his head. He didn't have any written dialogue left on the paper.

"You can't just try to live here. People will eat you alive. You need a guide. Maybe I could help, point you in the right direction. I have extra space you could stay for a bit. You can do your writing, and I can have someone to talk to, you know, be your muse if you want."

It wasn't the alcohol talking either. Mineral water was all Libby drank since she arrived that afternoon. But her offer was the best thing a writer could ask for, a muse, which Fulton never found until this day.

"That would be fine," Fulton said.

Both of them left the table and walked out of the establishment with plenty to say to each other, as they walked toward Libby's loft. And Fulton remembered each and every word.