

The Muse

It took me three days to find my muse. I finally found him underneath a pile of overcoats on the floor of the closet in the guest bedroom, hiding behind my wife's bread making machine. Not surprisingly, his eyes were glued to his smartphone. I never should have given him that thing.

"What's up?" he asked, not taking his eyes off the phone.

"What's up?" I replied. "I've been trying to find you for the last three days! That's what's up. I want to write a short story and I need some inspiration. It's been months since I've written a good story."

"I hate to break it to you," he said, still staring at the phone. "But it's been a lot longer than that since you've written a *good* story."

"You didn't like my last story?"

"The plot was weak, the characters were shallow, and the writing sucked. Other than that, it was OK."

"It was *your* idea," I grumbled. "*You're* my muse."

"Well, it sounded a lot better in my head than it did coming from your pen."

"I don't use a pen. I write on a computer."

"Well, maybe you ought to try writing with a pen."

"Oh, great," I said. "That would slow me down and force me to start all over again if I wanted to make changes. Eventually I'd wind up copying it onto my computer anyway, so I could post it online."

"You make it sound like a delay would be a bad thing. If there were more delays, you'd write fewer bad stories." He still hadn't taken his eyes off the phone.

I stared at him and fumed. "How'd I get stuck with *you* as my muse?" I asked. "You're a short, middle-aged man with a goatee and bumps on his head. I thought muses were supposed to be beautiful women. Like Eros."

He finally stopped looking at his phone. Instead, he stared at me with a look of incredulity.

"Eros is a guy," he said. "He's the God of Love. Aphrodite is the Goddess of Love. She's pretty hot, but she's not a muse. You've probably thinking of Erato. She used to be the muse of lyrical choral poetry. She's pretty hot too, but she's no longer a muse. Now she's slingin' hash at a Huddle House."

“What made Errata get out of the muse business?” I asked.

“Erat-O,” he said, emphasizing the last syllable. “Errata is the muse working with the President’s speechwriter. Erato left to pursue other interests because there wasn’t much call for her talents as a muse. I mean, when’s the last time a book of lyrical choral poetry made the New York Times’ bestseller list?”

I had to concede he had a point there. “Weren’t there other muses?” I asked.

“Oh sure,” he said. “Lots. But the last hundred years or so have been hard on muses. There have been a lot of changes. Epic poetry? Phhht!” He made a disgusting noise known as “the raspberry” while giving a thumbs down. “The musical muses went deaf after they traded their lyres for electric guitars. The dance muses need hip replacements now, thanks to the advent of hip-hop. Zeus was having trouble filling all the vacancies. That’s how I became your muse. I’m really a satyr.”

“So, you can help me write satire?” I asked.

“Not satire. Satyr. With a ‘Y.’ You know, half man, half goat?”

“You don’t look like a goat,” I said.

“You haven’t seen me without my trousers,” he replied.

“And I don’t *ever* want to see you without them!” I quickly added.

We sat for a few moments in awkward silence. He started to play with his phone again.

“So, are you going to help me write a story or what?” I asked.

“I’m searching for inspiration,” he replied loftily, eyes glued to the phone.

I leaned over and got a glimpse of his screen. “You’re watching cat videos!” I said.

“Inspiration can come from anywhere,” he countered.

“I guess you’re right,” I replied. “I just got inspired to stop paying for your phone plan and cut off your WiFi.”

He closed the app and put his phone in his pocket. Then he furrowed his brow and appeared to concentrate for a moment. “Write about this,” he said.

“This what?” I asked.

“What just happened,” he said, taking the phone out of his pocket again. “Our conversation.”

“That would make a lousy short story,” I said.

He shrugged. “It’s not like that would be a surprise to your readers,” he said, staring at his phone.