

Let's write for fifteen minutes says M, setting the timer on her wrist-watch. *Clickety clackety clack* go the laptops of my writing group partners V, D and the two Ks, while the pens and pencils of A, L and E fly across the page. It seems their writing is gushing from an underground stream of consciousness. The words come up — they write them down.

But my fountain pen is still rearranging the list of given words or randomly tracing across the page of my tattered notebook. Writing prompts are always a challenge to my usual creative style. Slow and deliberate, I usually edit each sentence as I go. Researching online. Thumbing through the thesaurus. Sometimes I only produce a page a day.

I know. I know. I've heard it a thousand times from writing coaches. Just slap it down on paper, then go back and edit. I've tried. I really have. But I always come back to my usual practice, slogging along at turtle pace until I find just the right word or sentence structure. Humming a silent rhythm in my head, I lay down a word, move it around or replace it until it matches the secret melody of the mood I intend to portray.

Nevertheless, the forced practice of timed writing to a prompt that may consist of a word, image or phrase, usually pushes me into something I might not have created otherwise. And, at times, I am surprised at the outcome. Now, after receiving the prompt: *awkwardness comes from not knowing what to do with something*, I write:

"You're not from around here, are you?" She asked when I ordered a beer from the tap.

I tilted my head to one side and looked into her eyes with vague amusement. “How can you tell?”

She wiped the counter and placed a frosty glass before me. “Hard to say. Maybe something in the way you comb your hair or knit your brow.”

“Not in my speech?” I asked, interested in her observations.

She smiled. “That too. But not so much. It’s more the way you carry yourself, the way you look me in the eye.”

“Like this?” I said, squinting with comic intensity.

“Yeah. That’s it,” she said and turned to the other customers.

I zoomed out, looking back down at the bar, the dusty street, the ocean, the sky. Was that a connection with her or just a banal interaction? I looked inside myself— no thoughts were coming down the track. I quaffed the beer, left a five on the bar and got back on the road.

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