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Maureen

Maureen

"Maureen, don't go. I need you."

They were the last six words Maureen Jones heard before her eyelids fluttered and closed for the last time – her final breath slipping silently into the vastness of the private room on the top floor of St. Josephine of the Sacred Shrine hospital. Angry tears poured from Tom's bitter eyes and splashed onto the starch-white sheet that had been changed only minutes before. Now the sheets were dark grey – soaked in melancholy and morose tears from Tom, the man who waited.

The stench of the unchanged bedpan assaulted his sinuses as he wiped his dripping nose with his hairy right arm. He was shocked at how quickly this had all happened. Only a day before, Maureen had been vibrant, beautiful, full of life and full of love for her soon to be husband, Tom Carson. The wedding was less than two weeks away – a wedding that would now have to be cancelled.

Tom and Maureen's lives changed when bus number 66 slammed into a parked car and then rolled onto its side before sliding down the embankment of Santan Avenue into the oncoming traffic of Mantle Street. Maureen might have walked away with only minor cuts and bruises had the freight truck been able to swerve out of the way before splitting the sliding bus into two sections that spun across Mantle street.

Even still, some passengers might have survived had one of the bus sections not careened into the propane tower at RJ's Fuel-n-Food on the corner of Mantle and Canyon, rupturing the tank and igniting the compressed gas into a mushroom cloud of suffocating black smoke and fire shooting a hundred feet into the air.

The first half of the bus was launched back across Mantle Street from the force of the explosion, landing on top of the second half of the bus that was still lying on its side in the eastbound lane. Now stacked together, the bus parts were rapidly consumed with fire, smoke, and heat as the remaining living passengers struggled to crawl out from the carnage.

Only six made it to the safety of the median strip. The remaining passengers, including the driver who had fallen asleep at the wheel after consuming two Vicodin – and one Viagra for good measure – for breakfast, were killed by the impact of the gas explosion and the subsequent unbreathable smoke.

Police arrived on the scene almost immediately – a twenty-four hour waffle and pancake restaurant was just down the street from the gas station, and there was a breakfast special going on for Valentine's weekend. Within the hour the six passengers were transported via helicopter to St. Josephine of the Sacred Shrine, and were undergoing emergency surgery – most of them with severe burns, broken bones, and the requisite internal bleeding. Maureen Jones was the last to leave the operating room – her injuries so horrific and voluminous that there was nothing more the doctors could do.

Third degree burns covered eighty percent of her body. The stench of charred flesh permeated the observation room where she was initially placed after surgery. The orderlies complained so vehemently that the hospital administrator was called to assess the situation. After one breath he directed the staff to move Maureen to the sixth floor into a private room.

Sensor pads and tubes dripping with thick liquid were attached to most parts of her body. These sensors connected to flashing lights and digital displays that monitored everything from respiration to heart rate to body temperature.

Every number was in the red. Maureen wasn't going to make it.

Tom sat in an uncomfortable chair next to the bed, recounting in his mind the moments since he got the call.

"She's where?" was all Tom could muster when the police officer told him that Maureen was in beyond-critical condition after a tragic accident on the Santan. What had she been doing on the Santan?

Tom left the office immediately, without even saying goodbye to his secretary Evon, who jumped up from her chair so fast that her knees hit the underside of the desk, knocking a

precariously placed picture frame onto the floor where it subsequently shattered. Evon looked to the floor, and then to the front door of the office as she called out "Tom, what's wrong?"

Tom raced across town in his brand new Passat – an engagement present to himself that had been parked in the driveway for only a day before being fouled by a flock of gulls taking their morning constitutional. Tom listened to DJ Ki on Mix98.5, the local 80's alternative station, describing the horrific details of the bus crash and subsequent propane gas explosion.

Tom looked up and out of his sunroof as he caught up to the rush-hour traffic stand-still only a mile from the exit to St. Josephine's. Black smoke lingered in the air above – the wind was still, and the smoke was destined to stay hovering above the highway for most of the day as a reminder of the terrible crash. Tom pressed the air recirculation button on his climate control system to keep the dark smell from permeating the new car scent of the Passat.

Minutes that seemed like hours had passed, and Tom was finally able to reach the exit he needed, and now he sat staring at the blackened dead face of his once-future wife, Maureen Jones.

He wondered whether he had remembered to lock his computer before leaving the office. And then he remembered that the screen-saver was set for six minutes of inactivity and it would automatically lock. He sighed in relief and then left the hospital room.

"That's what she gets for making me wait until our wedding night," he mumbled.

A Disturbing Short, in 955 words - Copyright © 2012 [Heath L. Buckmaster](#)
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