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A PERFECT PARTNERSHIP

“We’re almost there,” said the driver as the tourist bus pulled up by a sign on the side of the road. “Anyone who wants to take photos can hop out for a few minutes.” He always stopped at this particular point of interest because it was a good start for his passengers before he drove them the next five kilometres to the place the sign advertised: Walkabout, it claimed, was famous for its beauty and a wonder to behold. It had also won the title of Tidiest Town three years ago. According to the brochure that everyone on the bus had been given a copy of, visitors could take pleasant walks through the streets, enjoying the quaint houses set in pretty gardens; and some of the larger ones even allowed people to enter for a stroll through the grounds. Not only were there many flowers, but there were also little statues and the occasional fish pond with a fountain. Then there were cafes and restaurants serving everything from cream teas to full meals of excellent quality. And, of course, souvenirs were available to buy as a reminder of this beautiful little place. Walkabout was indeed a town that most tourists were keen to visit. At least, it used to be; and the reason for its more recent dwindling popularity was plain to see closer to town.

This was where another large sign advertised a business that was hardly pretty, not at all tidy; and was certainly a far cry from beautiful. “Ennio Lyon,” it said, “Scrap Metal Dealer;” and across the bottom of the hoarding: “Turn your old junk into cash.” It seemed that many had taken up the offer and had sold Ennio their junk. Over the three years since he had begun trading, Ennio had bought anything from broken fridges and washing machines, to cars, caravans, sheds and farm equipment; all past its use-by date. And the more he bought, the bigger his junk yard grew until it eventually became a sprawling eyesore. So, apart from the visitors who were brought on the tourist bus and had no choice but to continue on into town; others who came to Walkabout in their own cars frequently arrived at Ennio Lyon’s, saw what a mess it was; then turned around and drove away.

“You really must do something about it,” pleaded a councillor at the latest meeting. “Not enough people are coming to Walkabout, and businesses like cafes and shops are losing money.”

“I see your problem,” said Ennio, “But I have to make a living too. The best I can do is try to tidy the yard up a bit; but it will be a long job, and it won’t be easy.”

Discussion of the matter continued after Ennio had left the meeting. "I can't see it's going to work," droned the town engineer dismally. "He can shift his junk around all he likes, but it will still look like junk. Can't we get him to move out of the area; somewhere well away from town?"

"We suggested that before," the Mayor reminded those present, "But, as Ennio said at the time, and rightly so, he owns the land; and when we sold it to him we agreed that he could operate whatever business he chose. All we can do now is hope he can make his junk yard look a bit more attractive."

The exact same thought was on Ennio's mind driving back to his yard; and as he approached he could see how the mere sight of it would put people off visiting the town. Over the coming few days he moved stuff around; lining up the old cars as neatly as possible; and stacking fridges and washing machines in rows. There wasn't much he could do with the rusting farm equipment, but he tried. Unfortunately, when he stopped to inspect his efforts, they seemed to have made little difference. He was sitting outside the office having a mug of tea and wondering what else he could do when a van drove into the yard. It was painted with all sorts of brightly coloured, weird patterns; a combi van like the ones driven by long-haired, hippy-type youngsters. The engine sounded pretty sick and it was belching smoke. This was definitely another pile of junk that he didn't need right then.

The combi pulled up and the driver slid open the door and jumped out. It was a girl, or she might have been older than that – it was hard to tell – and she was dressed in clothes that were the same colours and patterns as her van. Her eyes grew wide as she turned slowly in circles, gazing at the surroundings. "This is so great," she said to herself, "Really mega-fantastic." Then she noticed a man sitting outside a small building and went over to him. "Would you be *the* Ennio Lyon, the name on the sign?" she asked. Not waiting for a reply, she announced: "I'm Ally Zarin and I'd like to talk business with you."

Ennio groaned and tried not to be rude. "If you want to sell your van; sorry but I'm not all that interested."

"Sell my van?" said Ally with a frown. "Why would I want to do that? There's nothing wrong with her – she's my friend. No," and she began turning around again, actually marvelling at the junk yard, "I'd like to strike a deal with you. I'm an artist and I just know I can do some amazing things with pretty much everything you have here. Between us we can create works of art that will be sought after the world over; and we could start selling them from here. Displaying them around your place could really put Walkabout on the map."

"It actually is on the map," explained Ennio. "The trouble being that anyone who uses it to come here sees what a mess my junk yard is and imagines the town is the same."

"Well then," Ally sighed joyfully, "I must be the answer to Walkabout's prayers; and yours too, Ennio. My brill idea will have tourists flocking here just to see our creations; and before long we'll have to fight off buyers with a stick. It's a win-win situation. Now, let's talk business over a cup of tea – do you have camomile or ginseng by any chance?"

Ally's ideas certainly sounded very possible. Turning junk into works of art that could be placed around the outskirts of the yard would definitely make it look more attractive than the way it was right then. There were, however, a couple of problems, and they became clear as Ally was drifting around, stopping at one piece of junk, then another: "Now, this here is two stags

fighting..." Rushing to a pile of old farm machinery, she went on: "And this can be made into a fire-breathing dragon. You can see that, can't you?" she asked.

"Not really," replied Ennio, screwing up his face as he tried to picture Ally's visions and failed miserably. "All I can see is piles of junk and twisted metal. I'm no artist, Ally, not like you."

Ally was momentarily puzzled as she tried to understand why someone couldn't see what to her was so obvious. "Well, maybe not right now; but you could learn as we work."

"I can't imagine what good I would be," said Ennio, "Apart from moving stuff around for you."

"Actually," said the artist, "You will be doing the most important part." She pointed across the yard. "That's welding equipment, isn't it? So, presumably you can weld; and that's something I can't do. If I pick out the bits and pieces we'll need for each artwork, and tell you how they need fixing together; could you do the welding?"

Ennio didn't have a problem with that; and so they began that very afternoon on the first project. "Let's start with something simple," said Ally walking over to a pile of metal sheets, steel fence pickets and tangled wire. "I can see an eagle in flight..." She frowned, then changed her mind. "No, I think an eagle about to take flight. What do you reckon?"

Ennio smiled and shrugged. "If you say so, Ally. Just tell me what I have to do."

Even as he was welding the parts together, Ennio was able to see the eagle taking shape; and when it was finished he had to admit that he felt proud of what they had done together; and he was keen to begin on the next artwork. Over the coming weeks they created all manner of metal sculptures; from dancing bears to giant butterflies. Ennio followed Ally's instructions; and when he'd finished each piece, she would add a touch of colour with her paints. She was particularly pleased with the creation Men at Work, and was standing back admiring it when Ennio tugged her sleeve. "I think I see something over there - dinosaurs," he declared as he pointed. "That's a T Rex, and there's at least one Pterodactyl from that old tin shed."

Ally beamed with delight and laughed. "I told you, Ennio. Didn't I tell you? You're starting to think like an artist. Now, between us there's nothing we can't do."

And so their partnership became a perfect one, transforming the unsightly junk yard into a place of beauty. Word spread around Walkabout of what was happening outside of town; and before long people kept coming just to see the latest piece of artwork. As for tourist visitors, they too made the trip, often more than once; some to actually buy a particular sculpture that took their fancy. And, of course, the cafes, restaurants and souvenir shops were always full of customers.

Ennio's and Ally's venture was so successful for all concerned that the council suggested calling it Walkabout Gallery; which was the new sign that was put up facing the road. Naturally, it wasn't just any old sign, created as it was from welded metal and painted in brightly-coloured patterns; just like Ally's van and clothing; and also Ennio's pants and shirt which he had taken to wearing so that he didn't spoil the look of the place.