## A HEARTBEAT AWAY

Minute Four

Frank is omnipotent. The city is silent as a mausoleum. Millions shrunken to ashes by the first brutalising impacts, portent of billions more. Silence lasts for seconds but seems like hours. Perhaps it isn’t silent just that all the eardrums which might hear are perforated to shreds by the unearthly sound preceding the silence of unheard noise. Explosions rip buildings apart, tear people up like cartoon characters, cars fly and planes fall. Frank’s rage towers over all. Matter decomposes in milliseconds reforming in hideous jigsaws to the stares of hollow eye sockets. Unheeded screams surf on the torrents of mushroom cloud, alarms wailing in a futile attempt to secure unneeded possessions. The ground the air and sky are gunmetal grey. They melt into each other.

Minute Three

The wind becomes sticky. The sky turns to marigold. Children tumble and frolic in a playground while parents run to pick them up. Frank’s breath bowls a small child over who struggles to rise. Emergency vehicles speed and skid like dodgems. Wildlife senses danger and takes flight but there is nowhere to fly to. The low rumbling thunder of Frank’s belly laugh underscores the howling sirens. People dine and sleep, walk and run, drink and make love, live and breathe. Frank mingles with the crowds. Traffic stops and buildings darken as power becomes powerless. A grotesque dominoes match begins as automated systems launch missiles against unseen imagined enemies. The ravaging genie refuses to return to the bottle.

Minute Two

Phones growl into life. Mixed mumbled messages leave not so superpowers headless and aimlessly pushing buttons never designed to be pushed. A frantic search for blame more than cure spirals into offense as the best form of defense. Lovers twist and turn entangled in satin sheets ensconced in each others being skin to skin aware only of each other. Franks invisible fingers pry open the window and paw at the sheets. The stable doors are blown away and all the horses have bolted. A budding artist puts the final touch to a future masterpiece. Logic and reason are led up a darkened cul de sac by fear and patriotism, beaten senseless and left for dead.

Minute One

The wondrous sound of a first cry is greeted by the boundless joy of proud new parents. Laughter rocks the room as a flushed new mother beams while a frazzled proud father shakes with a mixture of excitement and trepidation. The scent of just baked bread fills a cobbled village street as it wakens from the nights slumber. Sun rises over miles of golden crops ready to fill autumn larders. Teenaged eyes meet in first discovery of all that life has in store. Whales spout flumes from the ocean to turn into rainbows in the sun’s rays. Lovers linger over heady espressos and risk their lives smoking Camels. A sky dawns as a distant siren bawls a warning too late.

Before

Frank ate a full breakfast that morning and felt a twinge in his side as they boarded the Airbus. Proud of their giant plane the company had recruited only the best, the brightest and the fittest in the first few years. Later, the bean counters held sway and the brightest gave way to the cheapest.

Frank did his best. Jogs, diets, greens, juices, miles on the clock, nature, genes, divorce, dalliances, maintenance, monotony, statins, sessions, an untameable algorithmic cocktail.

Halfway through the flight from Rome to London he felt the spindly tendrils clasp and squeeze in his chest.

Nuclear power station plus dying pilot is a zero sum.

Frank is reborn in a trillion subatomic particles of boundless unstoppable energy

FADE TO BLACK