

An Encounter

By A.M. Jeans

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Here I was, a young man walking through the mall with my girlfriend. Things had been going great. I was sailing through college with flying colors, and I was savoring every minute of it. I had a girlfriend. My grades were high. I had money. Things at home were stable. I was happy. We round the corner to enter the theater, and a fraction of a second explodes into an eternity as I enter thought.

I see a group of people our age exiting. Among them stands a familiar face. An old friend. We hadn't spoken for two years. He had taken a turn for the worse, and relied on drugs and what would be referred to as a "hard bunch". I met him in a class some years ago, and we became instant friends. We had confided in each other, spoken about complicated subjects amongst ourselves, and became best friends for years. We were both well aware of the others home troubles, but mine had been clearing up as of late. His situation was the opposite.

He started missing school, and his absence began to frequent each passing month. I tried reaching out, and I got nothing. A year passes, and now he is seen about twice a month. I never stop trying to help. The next school year begins, and we share not one class. I feel the bonds breaking. News soon arrives from one of his new friends that he had been expelled from school. Why? For missing too much. Ahh, the irony.

I always felt guilty. I could have saved him. If I had stepped in the way of the wrong road and stuck close to him, he'd be in a better way. I filed the thoughts away as the cornucopia of good things appeared on my side of the fence.

Eternity compresses back into that fraction of a second. Another time, all those years ago, we would be surprised we hadn't known we were both here, or conjoined our two outings. As he passes me with his worn out clothing and rhythmic sniffing, his bloodshot eyes make their way over to mine. Not a word is said. It lasts about one second before the turn into the theater is completed and we each go our separate ways. I remain withdrawn the rest of the night. She notices, and asks if anything is wrong. I don't respond, my mind is elsewhere.

I could have saved him.

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