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## Andrew

by Martin Bourne

'How wonderful to be alive,' he thought. "But why does it always hurt?" the words slipped from his thin lips.

"It hurts?" I replied.

"Yeah, but only at first, then, then it's just the best. I was just thinking how great it is. You can't imagine just how good it makes you feel."

Andy placed the syringe in the small metal box and drifted away on his tranquil ocean of peace. His thin fragile body reclined against the debris of dirty pillows and blankets, which he referred to as his bed. This and a few clothes were his only possessions in an empty flat which he called home.

How could the 13 year old boy singing Seasons in the Sun with a ruler as a microphone acting the fool in class have turned into the shallow breathing wreck in front of me? I knew the answer, I'd watched it happen.

Andy was not one for obeying the rules. He never wore a school uniform, preferring a light brown fake leather jacket that looked like it would have suited a girl which he coupled with a variety of lurid colour shirts and trousers. We both tried out for the school football team. Most boys wanted the limelight of being an attacker, but Andy was clear from the outset.

"I am the goalkeeper," he announced with emphasis on the definite article, and what a great goalie he was. Even now I can see him launching himself across the goalmouth in the gloom of an Inter-school match to deny Wickham Boys an equaliser. Such energy and spirit, almost cat-like, and then later all of us in the team daring each other to take the shortcut through the graveyard to the bus stop.

I studied his face, still bearing that impish irreverence and the scar from the edge of his mouth stretching across his left cheek. A minor set-to between two groups.

Andy thought he'd been punched until he saw the blood. He returned to school the following Monday with a line of stitches. Of course he laughed it off, but it changed him. How could it not? That scar had been with him for life, and was still clearly visible even at the age of 60.

We were not far short of 16 and it was a few months after the incident when I said, "how are you feeling?"

"Not good, just keep going over it in my mind," was all he could manage but later that year he started going off the rails. First it was alcohol but he soon left that behind when a so called friend introduced him to cannabis and then Tuinal. He got a job in a warehouse but for most of the time, or at least whenever I saw him, he just seemed out of it. Over time the cannabis and barbs gave way to heroin, cocaine and really anything that could take him out of reality. And there he had stayed. Relationships were doomed to failure and he was stuck in a ground hog day of needing his next fix.

So how had I come to meet him now? Well meet is a strange word nowadays. I was feeling lonely and depressed during lockdown and decided to try and find old friends online, just to see what they had been up to. I found a former friend on Facebook and messaged him and he gave me Andy's details. Then I ended up Face timing Andy.

Now I watch him as he sleeps and think of that diving save.