

Stories for Lipreading



FINAL ENCOUNTER by Jean Hulme.

[This text is read aloud at the beginning of this video:]

Welcome to Stories for Lipreading. If you haven't used our website before, we suggest you look at our 'How to Use' page before you begin. We hope you enjoy this story, which is called 'Final Encounter' by Jean Hulme. It was inspired by the 1945 movie 'Brief Encounter'.

Final Encounter by Jean Hulme.

The interior has changed but, even after all these years, the old familiar smell still lingers. I can taste the coal dust. I stand, expecting to hear the whistle.

The woman behind the counter is looking at me.

"Tea, please," I smile.

"You seemed lost for a moment, my dear." She turns to collect a white cup and saucer.

"It's been a while since I was here. I was noticing the changes."

She nods as if she understands. I pay for my tea and take it across to the table in the corner. Why, on this day of all days, did I feel 'obliged' to come here? I look up at the clock on the wall – the same brown one, with its huge Roman numerals. I count the seconds, as I did then, watching the long hand tick its way around the clock-face.

The door opens and a lady enters with an excited child, who rushes up to the counter.

"Hello, Lou-Lou – what would you like today?" enquires the woman behind the counter.

"A Penguin biscuit," shouts Lou-Lou.

"Please!" warns her mother.

My mind goes back to when I was small. Had the same thing happened to me?

Several people then enter in quick succession. Perhaps a train is due. A businessman is soon followed by two chattering middle-aged ladies, possibly sisters. A youth arrives next, sporting a black T-shirt exclaiming, 'Don't Wake Me! I'm Not a Morning Person.'

Now an old couple enter – probably husband and wife. She deposits her husband in a chair while she collects their drinks. His back is towards me. When she returns, she nods.

"Lovely day," she beams.

"Yes, it's beautiful," I reply.

"We come every Thursday. He loves the trains." She lowers her voice a little. "It's Alzheimer's you know. He settles here. He's used to it, aren't you, love?"

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A train rumbles into the station. People collect their belongings and make for the door. The lady has to restrain her husband from rising.

“Not today, dear – there’s no one coming today,” she says gently.

He sits down again, obviously disappointed.

“He often does this. Thinks he should be meeting someone,” she explains. “When we lived in Chorley he’d get off the train here for the hospital – he was a doctor, you know. I think he remembers.”

“It must be difficult for you.”

“I’m used to it, my love. I used to get in a flap but we’ve learnt to live with it. I’ve not seen you here before, have I?”

“No. I’ve not been here since I was a child. Mum used to bring me to the shops in Milford. We always had a drink and a biscuit here before catching the train home. It was our treat. It’s the 6th anniversary of her death today – somehow this seemed the right place to be. Silly, isn’t it, after all this time?”

“Not at all! If this is where you feel close to your mum, then it’s the right place to be. If anything happened to my Alec, I think I’d come here too.”

She pauses. “Tell me about your mum. What was her name?”

“Laura. Her name was Laura. She was lovely. Although I would say that, wouldn’t I?”

“Is your Dad still alive?”

“Yes. He worshipped her. It was dreadful for him when it happened; I didn’t think he’d ever get over it, but he’s met someone new and is happier now. ” I pause. “Have you always lived in this area?” I ask.

“No, Alec worked in South Africa for a time but he couldn’t settle, so we came home. It seemed important to him to come back to this area – and as long as he was happy” Her voice trails off and I can see the love in her eyes as she looks at him.

We chat for a while, until my train becomes due. Then I get up and walk round the table to face the old man.

“It’s been lovely chatting to you both,” I say. “Perhaps we’ll meet again sometime. Goodbye, Alec.” I take his hand and he looks up at me – with an expression I can only describe as wonder – and for a moment I hold his gaze.

“Goodbye, Laura,” he says, tears forming in his eyes. “I knew you’d come back.”

I turn to his wife.

“He gets confused, dear,” she whispers.

Yet, as I leave, I have the strange feeling he knew exactly what he was saying – and my heart lifts – and I feel glad.