

Thirty Seconds

by Erin Zulkoski

That was all it took.

Thirty seconds.

Half of a minute.

30: He was standing with me on the corner of the street,
29: waiting for the crosswalk to say it was okay for us to make our way to the other side.
28: The red "do not walk" signal changed to the white "join us over here, friends" signal.
27: He took the lead,
26: stepping down off the curb,
25: and realized I was not following.
24: He stopped,
23: looked back and me,
22: and offered his out-stretched arm to me,
21: his hand open and inviting me to take it.
20: I did,
19: and he gave me a smile,
18: and turned to face the road again,
17: taking another step into the street.
16: The bus driver didn't see him until it was too late,
15: and he had been hit by several tons of city transportation.
14: His hand, the one holding mine, was ripped away from my grasp once the bus hit him.
13: The bus screeched to a stop,
12: a crowd already gathering on the corner,
11: and the sound of sirens in the distance,
10: screaming at those in the way to move over,
9: there's an emergency to tend to.
8: I ran into the street,

7: kneeled down beside his mangled body,
6: and held his head in my arms.
5: He was miraculously still alive,
4: but didn't have much time.
3: With one last heaving, gasping breath,
2: he breathed his last,
1: and died.

Thirty seconds.

One half of a minute.

