

# Jealousy's a goon

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Jealousy is one of those emotions humans constantly struggle with. Envious feelings are unwanted and can creep up when not expected.

There is no cure or rulebook for dealing with jealousy and the effects have the potential to cause disaster. In *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Jennifer Egan explores different reactions to jealousy and the blindness caused by this emotion through Bennie and Scotty's relationship. Rhea, a friend of both Bennie and Scotty, offers the first insight to the pair's relationship when the three are teenagers. As the narrator who is also enamored with Bennie, Rhea makes Scotty seem like a background character. An incredible guitarist, Scotty is described as magnetic when he plays but is also tied to Bennie by a strange brotherly bond.

While the two never speak, they jointly run their band. "...Bennie and Scotty drive from club to club, trying to get people to book the Flaming Dildos for a gig...Scotty waits in the truck while Bennie deals with the rude assholes inside the clubs" (Egan 45). They act as two parts to a whole necessary for making their band a success. Bennie's jealousy stems from his love for Alice. Unfortunately for him, Alice only has eyes for Scotty, while Scotty loves Jocelyn. Bennie controls his feelings and retains hope that Alice will return his affections at some point, Scotty and Bennie's friendship crumbles once Scotty and Alice begin to date.

Bennie retreats into himself with his jealousy, no longer coming to the group's hang out spot or making much contact with them. "He and Scotty still don't talk, but before they were like one person. Now it's like they've never met" (Egan 57). He removes himself from the situation the best he

can, severing the close bond between himself and Scotty forever. But as Rhea reveals more and more about Scotty's past and character, his life becomes obviously difficult.

His family has greatly affected him, with a mother who constantly left home and eventually died from an overdose. This abandonment once caused Scotty to stare at the sun for an entire day, leaving him with permanent blemishes in his vision. Scotty loves Jocelyn because she knew him through all this time and understands him and he has some dependence on her. He is unstable as Rhea notes, " We have to be careful with Scotty" (Egan 45). Yet, Bennie overlooks all of Scotty's troubles and holds jealousy for his friend. When Bennie and Scotty meet again as adults, both their lives are different.

Scotty married Alice, but they have since divorced and Scotty's friends lost track of him. " Of our old gang, only Scotty has disappeared. No computer can find him" (Egan 85). He works odd jobs in New York City, living as a poor man who fishes in the East River and passes time by trying not to dwell on his past. Meanwhile, Bennie has become a successful record producer with a wife and newborn son. When Scotty visits Bennie in his office, he takes in the luxuries his high school friend now possesses.

They came from the same world but have vastly different lives now. The object holding Bennie's jealousy many years ago no longer has any meaning. Scotty does not have Alice anymore and Bennie has his own family that he loves. There was never any closure to their friendship. Bennie simply pulled away from Scotty and then Scotty disappeared.

Scotty is not even quite sure what happened between them but he still has something to say about their end, though he does not tell Bennie. “ And deepest of all: You were the one chasing. But she picked me” (Egan 101). Scotty holds anger towards Bennie for maybe what was lost and what he has now. He goes so far as to imagine attacking Bennie and tearing his “ fancy” shirt off his back. This lingering tension creates a wedge in their ability to rekindle their friendship.

Scotty deals with his jealousy differently than Bennie did. He denies the fact that he is jealous of Bennie and convinces himself their lives really are the same. “ Hey ‘ buddy,’ don’t you get it? There’s nothing you have that I don’t have! It’s all just X’s and O’s, and you can come by those a million different ways. But two thoughts distracted me as I stood there...(1) I didn’t have what Bennie had. (2) He was right” (Egan 103).

He finally admits to himself at the end of the chapter that he wants Bennie’s life but still tries to turn a blind eye to his jealousy. Behind the great job and expensive lifestyle, Bennie has his own struggles that Scotty cannot possibly know. His family does not fit in with their new community. His wife, Stephanie, desperately wants to be included but all their neighbors think Bennie might be a terrorist just because he looks different. “ I was slightly deceptive, of course, not only through omission - to protect Bennie from knowledge that distressed him” (Egan 118).

In an attempt to spare him pain, Stephanie lies about her tennis outings with a “ friend.” Bennie will also soon be fired from his own record label. Although not evident to Scotty at the time of their reunion, Bennie’s entire life is about

to fall apart. Jealousy can often make a person blind to another's plights. This problem can be seen with Bennie and Scotty's relationship.

Bennie does not see the many difficulties surrounding Scotty; he only sees that Scotty had the one thing he wanted: Alice. His reaction was the demise of the band. Later, the same shortcoming happens to Scotty. Scotty, at this point a stranger to Bennie, has no possible way of knowing Bennie's personal life and falls victim to jealousy regarding his lifestyle and success. Jealousy dominated their friendship.