

An Important Decision

By Alexei Edwards

'Oh, so you've never made an important decision. A decision that perhaps your entire life could rest on!? No! So then, why the fuck are we talking?' Peter said to the old and seemingly innocuous man who began talking to him on the train the two men sat on.

Peter sat like a man comfortable in his own skin. He held a stout posture, which reflected his good breeding. He also had an acerbic countenance and did not like to dally around. The innocuous old man presented himself in stark contrast to Peter. He sat hunched and held poor posture. His legs were positioned close together but despite his rather modest appearance, his presence resonated an air of sagacity and when he spoke, his tones were relaxed and undisturbed, which reflected an internal contentment, but not a contentment that he shared with Peter.

Peter was undoubtedly confident but in a way which suggested he always felt he had something to prove; the old man did not carry this same weight around with him.

The aged sage had noticed Peter perspiring when he boarded the train and physically painting a mild discomfort; he knew there was patently something the matter and he was drawn to sit next to him.

As he sat down, he stared at Peter and held a benevolent smile in the hope there would be reciprocation but alas, Peter's mind was moving at great speed for one reason or another and he was completely unaware of this genteel gesture displayed by his new neighbour.

'Excuse me sir. Can I borrow a few minutes of your time?' the old man spoke, in a calm voice.

After a few seconds, Peter snapped out of the trance that had held him like a statue of anxiety and he realized that his neighbour had addressed him.

He turned his head haughtily and with authority and looked down at the appearance of a meek old man.

'Sorry. Were you talking to me?' he said brusquely and to the point.

'Yes, I was sir. I asked whether I could borrow a few minutes of your time.'

'Er, yes...Ok. Do you have a particular reason or is it just because you're feeling a little lonely?' Peter said in his typically insensitive tone.

'No, it has nothing to do with loneliness but you were correct with your first estimation about my having a reason' spoke the old man with a quiet confidence.

'Ok then. So what's your reason?'

'Well, I noticed you seem a little erm, disturbed and I was wondering if I could help.'

'Help! You!?' And what exactly is it that makes you think I'm disturbed' the man said with a supercilious slant. Peter's discomfort was gradually becoming a little more apparent.

'I have an instinct for these things.'

'Okay then' the man said with a smile on his face. This was the kind of smile that tries to impose superiority over others but is actually a façade and behind it rests a secret fear and insecurity.

Peter froze for a second while choosing his words carefully. The old man just sat there, meditatively staring at Peter, absorbing all of his mannerisms and in total control of the situation.

'Ok then' Peter replied. 'I have an important decision to make; a decision that would drastically change everything. Have you ever been faced with such a problem?' he asked with a tone in his voice that suggested humility and a genuine want for an honest and helpful answer.

'No' the old man replied rather unexpectedly.

Peter had quickly and quietly felt a sense that this man could perhaps provide a welcome comfort with some much-needed wise words but this was an attempt that was made apparently in vain.

'Please...please, let me explain' said the old man, noticing that Peter was becoming annoyed.

'Of course, I have made important decisions in my life; I've just never seen them as important decisions. It has always been clear to me what my next decision is to be so I don't ever feel that they are important but rather they are, necessary.'

'Oh, so you've never made an important decision. A decision that perhaps your entire life could rest on. No! So then, why the fuck are we talking?' Peter coarsely interjected whilst violently staring at the old man.

The man returned Peter's vehemence with a warm smile and a relaxed stare.

After a few seconds had passed, Peter realized that his sudden paroxysm of anger was uncalled for and the tension that had started to build in his shoulders subsided.

'Look.... I didn't mean to....' Peter said in a feeble attempt to apologize to his neighbour.

'It's ok' the old man replied. 'Maybe if you tell me more about the nature of this important decision, I might be able to help.'

The old man's words made Peter slightly uncomfortable. He shuffled in his seat and crossed his legs. The confidence that Peter usually exerts was now crumbling at quite a rate. He did not feel comfortable talking about the nature of the decision and the old man saw this clearly.

‘Ok so you obviously don’t want to talk about it. That’s ok.’ The old man helpfully replied after observing Peter’s clear portrait of discomfort.

‘The way I see an important decision is that they can be seen and made throughout your entire life. An importance in a decision can lie in whether you decide to wake up at 5am or 10am or whether you decide to eat salad or bacon. The fact is, your entire life is made up of important decisions and, truth is, you have come to this point in your life because of all of the thousands of decisions that have been made prior to this moment.’

Peter sat there adopting a meditative stance, mirroring the old man, and had absorbed all that he was being told.

The old man continued, ‘Let’s take that young girl found dead the other week as an example.’

At the mention of the deceased girl, Peter became visibly very uncomfortable. His leg began to twitch and he wrung his hands together in a desperate attempt to try to obtain a degree of composure.

The old man continued, ‘She could have decided not to have got on the bus that morning or she could’ve decided against going to that party. These are all decisions she made that ultimately put her in to a situation that signaled her demise. So, in retrospect, every single decision that one makes is of the utmost importance.’

The old man then stopped speaking and Peter was now uncontrollable. The protective blanket of his ego was now shattered and the complexities of his emotions were guiding him now. He kept fidgeting and running his hand through his hair in a desperate attempt to keep calm but the incessant fidgeting just continued to perpetuate the growing anxiety that was visibly portrayed in this usually confident and intelligent man.

The old man then calmly put his hand on to Peter’s leg, which was met with a sudden jump.

He stared into Peter’s petrified eyes and uttered the words in a calm and hushed tone, ‘I know what you did.’