

THE FERRY

By ADAM BATES

The position of the sun caused him to appear like a silhouette against the horizon where a thin glimmering of light marked the boundary to where the sea met the lighter blue sky. There had been no ships on the horizon at first and all that could be heard was the tranquil splattering of the waves upon the shore. There were a couple of ships now though, one that appeared to be making its way across the bay and it was just about to disappear from view behind the old man and there was also the ferry.

The ferry was far off in the distance but it caught the attention of the old man. He raised his right hand to shield his vision from the bright Mediterranean sun and he stared out across the sea towards the Ferry. On lowering his hand he leant down and put both his hands into a leather bag that was on the floor between his right foot and his walking stick.

I know I should reply to her, of course I should. It's just, well, the words. What do I say?

The old man sat back into the bench and was holding something which he had taken from his bag. He started unwrapping it, it was a sandwich.

I should have told her a week ago really. But then I did say I wouldn't reach out this time and would just do it. I'm sure she knows anyway, she must have guessed by now as I've not been in touch.

The old man took his time in diligently freeing the sandwich from its cling film wrapping and once he had done so he sat back against the bench and holding the sandwich with his left hand he put the wrapping in his pocket with his right and he then held the sandwich with both hands and he looked at it for a moment.

She might be worried? She has been extremely nice recently and its been wonderful to have developed a relationship with her again. I know, I know, I will reply and just tell her. It should be easier now if she has already started to suspect it. Be honest though too, the words must try to portray some of what I am feeling. That's hard to do too. What am I going to say?

A couple of seagulls had arrived to try their luck and having landed around 20 meters away, were cautiously motioning towards the old man who was now watching them and they were almost directly in front of him. The closer of the two visitors stopped and looked at the old man and the two exchanged eye contact briefly. The old man leaned to his side and, whilst holding his sandwich in his left hand, he used his right hand to free a slice of bread from its container inside his bag. A peculiar thing happened as he did this. The seagull with whom he had been making eye contact, mirrored the old mans movement and tilted its neck to the side too.

Besides, she'll likely be thinking by now that I've not replied for that reason. But how do I tell her? After everything? Especially when she's tried so hard to help me recently.

The seagulls, now seemingly forgetting any prior concerns, strode confidently towards the old man as he tore off a small piece of bread and threw it between the two of them. The old man looked up towards the ferry which was now brimming with noise as it docked against the pier. The passengers chatted amongst themselves excitedly as they began to leave.

I will take my time and make sure I say it the right way. As soon as I am off this ferry I will walk along the sea front and find somewhere to sit down where I can think clearly.

The young man left the ferry and walked along the seafront. There were benches ahead. The first bench was occupied but there was another bench just another 20 meters further on. He walked towards that bench but just as he walked past an old man feeding some seagulls on the first bench he felt an overwhelming urge to stop. It was as though something inside of him was compelling him to do so.

"Join me if you like?" The old man said upon seeing the younger man slow to a stop.

"I...Ok, I will. Thank you," he replied, hesitancy fading into comfort as the words progressed. He took a seat on the bench to the right of the old man. Together they looked out towards the sea. It was a peaceful scene. The sun, now close to the horizon, began to exude a hint of orange and the ferry was now quiet and empty and the sea was calm and it shimmered with a bright glow where the sunlight reflected off the waves. They seemed instantly at ease in each others company.

The old man turned to his right and looked at the younger man who on feeling this gaze looked down at the floor just for a moment before looking back out to the sea.

"Just tell the truth," the old man said. "But the truth as you feel it, not just the words but what that truth means to you also."

How on earth does he know what I am thinking? The younger man thought and perplexed, he turned to face the old man who softly began to smile and in turn it made the younger man smile too.

Having finished their meal, the seagulls now left the two of them to talk alone. The two men both looked out to sea once more.

"It's not that I want to say anything other than the truth," said the younger man, breaking their momentary silence, "it's just..."

“You can’t find the words?” The old man brushed the crumbs from his hands.

“Exactly!”

“I have no doubt that the right words have already tried to reveal themselves to you.”

“How do you mean?” The younger man asked.

“Well, the correct words, those that do not just tell the truth you wish to tell, but which allow you to do so from your heart, those words are already inside you. It is the fear of sending the message itself though that causes you to procrastinate, not the choice of words. The more you think about it, the less you speak from the heart”

“Maybe,” said the younger man.

“Maybe?” The old man seemed surprised at the uncertainty of the younger mans response. “Do you not believe,” he continued, “that when we communicate even by means of the written word alone, there is still an energy and the writers emotions if you like, sensed between the words, between the lines?”

“Yes, I do believe that there is, I am certain of it.”

“When you speak from the heart directly your words will most adeptly portray that pain you feel in having to write them.”

“I guess you’re right.”

“You guess?” The old man smiled as he turned to the younger man and they both let out a little laughter.

“What happened anyway?”

“Ah it’s nothing.”

“It doesn’t feel like nothing.”

“No?”

“No it doesn’t.”

“What does nothing feel like?” At that moment a horn sounded as the ferry began to leave the pier. Both men looked towards it. There were no passengers on the ferry now and the gentle rhythmic chug of its engine subtly reverberated off the shallow cliff face at the side of the bay.

“I can tell you what nothing doesn’t feel like,” said the old man. “It doesn’t feel as you had felt whilst walking over here from that ferry. Or, like you are feeling now for that matter. We do not procrastinate over nothing.”

“Yes, it’s something,” replied the younger man.

They both sat in silence for a moment. The ferry headed towards the end of the bay. The ferry itself appeared mostly dark now, the rainbow coloured lights around the sides of the deck had been turned off leaving a solitary glow from a light inside the cabin.

“You’ve had a near death experience in the past haven’t you?”

The younger man leant forward sharply and turned to face the old man. The old man smiled.

“But that’s not part of it, I know. What is perhaps part of it though is the wrong that was done to you that has led to this situation?”

“Yes, that’s right! How did you know?”

“Never mind that. But it is why you are struggling to find the words because had you not been a victim of such things you would not be in this situation in the first place.”

“Exactly! I have always tried to do what is right and that is what makes it so much harder to bare.”

“God only gives his greatest challenges to those who are worthy of them. Do you believe in God?”

“I’m not sure,” replied the younger man. “I do believe there is something.”

“Well you have experienced divine intervention once, that you are aware of.”

“Yes, at least once.”

“It’s happening all the time.”

“Divine intervention?”

“Intervention and more often guiding. You just have to open your heart to it.”

“Maybe.”

“Maybe, you need to stop seeing yourself as a victim and to see what happened as a blessing. Maybe, you need to focus on what it has given you, rather than what it has taken from you.”

“How do you mean?”

“Its hard to be specific without knowing the details.” He seemed to know everything else the younger man thought. “But look at anything throughout the course of your life so far, have not the greatest challenges you have experienced not later led to the greatest blessings?”

“I guess...”

“Then why would this be different? Why are you therefore, still resenting what has happened to you? Those words would be far easier if you were to take responsibility for the situation.”

“I am not sure you’d feel the same if you knew the story.”

“No? We may not be able to control what happens to us, but we are in control of how we chose to respond. You see, bad things happen to good people because those people are destined to do great things and in order to do so they need those experiences, call it training if you like.”

“Yes that makes sense.”

“Let me ask you this - if you are completely honest with yourself, have all the choices and actions you have made since been perfect?”

“No far from it, but I am not sure who else would even have survived it let alone not be negatively affected by it.”

“Ahh! You are comparing your actions to those of others and seeking justification for your mistakes too. Even if that far from perfect judgement can be empathised with greatly, if it is not perfect it can then be improved upon can it not?”

“I guess so.”

“It is so,” the old man replied. “Your own character will always be impaired when you are holding resentment towards another.”

“I guess you are right.” The younger man leant back into the bench and stretched both his legs outwards. They enjoyed the soothing sound of the engine fading away and they watched as the ferry approached the end of the bay.

“That’s the last time she goes this evening.”

“I know,” the younger man replied.

“But she will be back tomorrow, you can be sure of that. She always comes back tomorrow.”