

A Word of Advice

By

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EXT. EMPTY HIGH STREET. NIGHT

In an empty high street PETER (29) huddles up in a shop corner, clutching his worn coat around him.

MARGERY (42) walks towards him. She's wearing a smart coat and trousers, and her hair is up in an elaborate bun. She reaches Peter and leans against the railings separating the road from the street.

MARGERY

Excuse me.

Peter glances at her, looking a little uncertain.

MARGERY (CONT'D)

Oh no need to look so worried. I'm sorry but I'm just having a rather long night. I had an office party and my husbands supposed to be picking me up, but of course now he's stuck in traffic and I've got to wait out here for him.

She smiles and pulls out a pack of cigarettes, getting one out and lighting it as she speaks.

MARGERY (CONT'D)

And all of my work colleges have gone home, so I have no one to speak to. So I'm afraid, I may just have to bother you while I wait.

PETER

You want to talk to me?

MARGERY

Yes if that's all right.

Before he can answer she holds the packet of cigarettes out to him.

MARGERY (CONT'D)

Do you want a cigarette? It seems the night for one?

PETER

Thank you.

MARGERY

You look very cold. Are you?

(CONTINUED)

PETER

Yeah a bit.

MARGERY

Well I'm not surprised. It was supposed to be eighteen degrees tonight, and here I am wearing my autumn coat. You just can't trust weatherman can you?

She looks at what he's wearing.

MARGERY (CONT'D)

That coat looks quite warm actually. Much more sensible than mine. I confess I was swayed by my vanity. I could have picked, should have picked a good old-fashioned puffer jacket, but did I? No, of course not, it was a Hobs one. Double the price, half the warmth. Only have myself to blame. So, where's yours from?

PETER

I can't remember.

MARGERY

Men. You're all the same. When I first seeing my husband I had dinner at his one night. He had made everything from scratch; he's a very good cook. And I'm sitting at the table, and he's bringing everything over, when I ask him, "Oh it smells wonderful. Where did you get the ingredients?"

And he freezes. And he goes, "Do you know, I honestly can't remember." And I mean, you know, it could only have been from a couple of places couldn't it. A supermarket, a market, or he grew them. Although we were having chicken, so I couldn't tell you how he could have grown a chicken in his small flat.

Obviously we've moved out now, we don't live in a small flat anymore. But here's my point, men just can never remember where they get things from.

(CONTINUED)

PETER

It was a hand me down.

MARGERY

Oh there you are. Or where you just saying that to shut me up?

PETER

It was a hand me down.

MARGERY

Gosh I hope you got a few other things rather than that coat. Not really the kind of thing you'd pass down to your family.

PETER

It wasn't from my family.

MARGERY

Oh was it from another homeless man?

PETER

Yes.

MARGERY

It does look it. And I don't mean that offensively, but they do usually look the same don't they?

PETER

I suppose they can.

MARGERY

Yes, yes.

She checks her phone and sighs.

MARGERY (CONT'D)

He says he's on some roadblock. Apparently there was a crash and the police are being very unhelpful, not letting anyone pass until they clear the debris. It's awful. There could be people in that queue with a medical emergency. Are they supposed to just wait?

Although I suppose my husband would be able to help. He's a doctor, a very good doctor. Used to work for

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(CONTINUED)

MARGERY (CONT'D) (cont'd)
the NHS, which was, well I'm sure
you can imagine. Private now. Much
better in all situations.

PETER
Better money.

MARGERY
Well yes, yes there is that. That
isn't the reason he changed though.
He'd help everyone for free if he
could. But sometimes you do have to
pay a little more to get the best
possible treatment. And families
who care, they save up and they get
the best possible treatment. They
don't spend it on sky TV and
holidays to Ibiza.

It's much easier to treat people
who want to be treated. And I know
what some people, well a lot of
people would say, they love free
medicine for everyone. Everyone
should be allowed it. And yes it
sounds like a lovely idea doesn't,
except for the fact it can breed
laziness.

But, no I won't get into that right
now. I suppose this could be
considered rather heavy topics for
a first conversation. And it all
started with a text, how funny.

But I mean it can just get rather
aggravating when we're told we have
to love something just because
everyone else does. Well I don't
want to love something just because
everyone else does. If you don't
like something, you don't have to
scream and shout about it, but to
pretend you actually like it? Well,
that's just-

Sorry, I said I wouldn't talk about
it. I can ramble sometimes. It can
get rather annoying. Some people
can handle it some people can't.
You seem to be a very good listener
actually. Has anyone told you that?

PETER

No.

MARGERY

No? Oh that's a crime for them not to. You are a good listener, you really are. You even pretend to look interested.

She laughs.

MARGERY (CONT'D)

My best friend always goes 'oh Margy, you don't look interested at all' and I go 'Kiren' Kiren is my friend; I go 'Kiren, this is just my face'. You know? I just have a naturally uninterested face. It's very annoying, someone can be saying the most interesting things and I look as though I want to fall asleep any minute. And you know if someone is saying something boring, I will just go 'I'm sorry, but I can't relate to this topic. Can we change the subject?'

I'm honest. I'm always very honest. And sometimes they get very upset and say I've been rude, but others, they appreciate it, they appreciate my honesty. Anyway I've rambled on far too long, here, do you want another ciggie? I call it a ciggie, I know it's called a cigarette really.

PETER

No I'm fine.

MARGERY

Are you sure? Oh go on, if you want one, have one. It could be your last chance, and then you'd regret it wouldn't you?

She holds out the pack tantalisingly and he eventually takes one.

MARGERY (CONT'D)

There we are. Oh I'll be naughty, I'll have one as well. Mmm, they are very bad for you. I know they are, but perhaps danger excites me.

(CONTINUED)

She laughs.

MARGERY (CONT'D)

Oh you went all red. Oh I am a
tease sometimes.

PETER

Thank you very much.

MARGERY

'Thank you very much'. You are
polite. I have wanted to ask you
actually, you do seem very quiet
for a homeless man. Usually they're
quite talkative and, well, a bit
drunk, a bit not quite there.

PETER

Well, I don't know if we're all
like that but I've only been
homeless for three months or so.

MARGERY

Oh that isn't long at all, not at
all. Why are you homeless?

PETER

Because I don't have a home.

MARGERY

(laughs)

Oh you're funny. Oh that is a
treat. You caught me out there. But
really?

PETER

I just, had a bit of trouble.

MARGERY

Hmm, it can follow us everywhere
trouble can't it? And sometimes you
just can't outrun it. So people
think there's no point trying. So
why did you choose here as your,
spot?

PETER

I didn't really I-

MARGERY

Well I've seen you here for a
while. You tend to keep fairly
settled. You're not going to get a
job sitting on the ground all day.

(CONTINUED)

PETER

I um, I know.

MARGERY

Do you?

MAN

Sorry?

PETER

Do you know? Because sometimes I think people say 'I know' when really they don't. Opportunities don't just fall into our hands. We have to work for them. We have to really want it.

PETER

Yes I-

MARGERY

Not everything can be given to us as a hand me down. Now forgive me, but as I said I am honest, but when I look at you I get the feeling you don't really want to get out of this mess. And 'this' is really a mess isn't it? I think you want people to pull you out of it and that's just not how it works I'm afraid.

PETER

I really know it's up to me.

MARGERY

Then what are you still doing here?

PETER

You really don't have to worry.

MARGERY

Oh I'm not worried for you. That's not what it is. But I am worried for society. I may not seem it but I do worry a great deal for our society. The rest of the world will have to look after itself but Britain, Britain, needs help right now. I think it's very true what they say. One rotten egg can spoil the basket. Or is it apple than spoils the barrel?

(CONTINUED)

Either way, you, I'm sorry to say, are the rotten apple, and when children pass you, the idea they get in their heads is that, 'I can sit on the ground, and beg for money, and people won't bat an eyelid', and that's just not the way they should be thinking. Not the way they should be growing up. And you know in some countries begging is illegal.

PETER

I don't beg.

MARGERY

I think you do. And when you do get some money, what do you spend it on? I don't think it's going to be proper food or a train fair to a job interview. Whenever I've seen you before you always seem to be clutching a beer.

PETER

When have you seen me before?

MARGERY

And really, I can't see how a can of beer everyday is really going to help you on your way to a better tomorrow. Don't you think?

He doesn't respond.

MARGERY (CONT'D)

Oh right. No I see. I suddenly start telling you truths you don't want to hear and suddenly you're defensive. Not that you've been particularly open anyway. But the whole thing does just irritate me. It irritates me because none of you listen.

PETER

Why should I listen to you?

MARGERY

Because clearly we have made different life choices, and I wouldn't be too presumptuous to say that I made the better ones.

(CONTINUED)

PETER

My life is up to me.

MARGERY

Yes, and what a wonderful life you have. Begging on the streets for pennies.

PETER

(more forcefully)

I don't beg.

MARGERY

No?

She picks up the cup and shakes it, pennies scattering over the ground.

MARGERY (CONT'D)

No of course not. You don't want anyone's money do you? And you haven't been begging for the last three months you've been sitting here. You haven't been asking the same line to passers by, over and over again. It's shocking really how low people can stoop.

PETER

Just leave me alone.

MARGERY

Even your remarks are half-hearted. The others were much more creative.

PETER

What do you mean?

MARGERY

What do you think I mean?

She kneels down next him, glancing down at the street before looking towards him.

MARGERY (CONT'D)

I have a life that you will never have, simply because I respect myself, and try to live in a way that shows that. I try to teach you how to have a little of that respect, no I'd call it more self worth, and you refuse to accept it. I always, always try to help. That's all I've ever tried to do.

(CONTINUED)

PETER

I don't need your help.

MARGERY

You mean you won't take it. But you'll keep staying here won't you? You'll keep sitting in the same spot, smelling of, piss and beer, and asking for money over and over again. Do you know how disgusting it is to have to walk past one of you? I sometimes feel that there isn't any point trying to help you sometimes. My husband tells me that I'm just too kind, and he's right really. If you don't try to help yourself and you won't accept help then there's really nothing anyone can do for you.

She stands up and looks down at him, a thin look of disgust on her face. The pub door down the road opens and a few drunk men wander outside.

MARGERY (CONT'D)

But perhaps you've just had too much of an easy time. In some countries the homeless are treated very badly indeed. Stabbed, beaten up, even killed sometimes. Those countries may seem harsh but perhaps they have it right. If this is all you are, then what's the point of you?

She glances over at the drunk men, looks back at the man then suddenly scratches down her own cheek, leaving deep red marks. She rubs her eyes and rushes over to the men, screaming hysterically.

MARGERY (CONT'D)

He attacked me!

Peter looks alarmed. One of the drunk men puts a hand on her shoulder.

DRUNK MAN #1

What happened love? What's going on?

MARGERY

Oh he, he asked me for money, I said I didn't have any. I usually

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MARGERY (cont'd)
give some but, I, I said no and he
got so angry. So he just-

She gestures to her cheek.

MARGERY (CONT'D)
Look what he did! Look what he did!

DRUNK MAN #2
Right. Where's the fucker?

MARGERY
Oh no please don't do anything. He
might hurt you.

DRUNK MAN #1
He can bloody try.

The men advance on Peter, kicking him to the ground when he
tries to run. Margery watches them, her expression changing
from terror to quiet satisfaction.