

A New Year's Resolution

By : Tui

"He knew he was angry the minute he pulled the door shut behind him. It was not so much the sense that he had been done wrong; it was the sense that he had been misunderstood when all he had wanted to do was to say something that he had been feeling for a long time; to tell the truth, or at least what he believed to be the truth, because it was how he felt." After a sudden outburst one Sunday, over lunch with his friends, a young man reflects upon friendship.

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He knew he was angry the minute he pulled the door shut behind him. It was not so much the sense that he had been done wrong; it was the sense that he had been misunderstood when all he had wanted to do was to say something that he had been feeling for a long time; to tell the truth, or at least what he believed to be the truth, because it was how he felt.

He pulled his scarf tight around his neck to trap the nipping wind out, and walked briskly down the street, across the road, and down the boulevard. Why was he walking so quickly? He didn't know. He felt a little silly. What if he were to run into an acquaintance? They would ask him why he was in a hurry, and he would answer that he wasn't, well, he might answer that he was, but it would be untrue, to avoid having to explain, and then he would miss out on a potentially nice conversation because he was just trying to be polite, not attention-seeking, or talking about his problems with people who didn't care, unless maybe they did, but he doubted that for some reason. He walked right down the boulevard, and up the high street, the Christmas lights still dangling above shop windows, stretched across the street like scrap metal dangling in the wind; they weren't lit up, and it was mid January, and the stupid tree looked even more stupid now that it had been stripped of its tinsel apparel.

Funny that, how several Sundays ago he had come with his girlfriend to do some last minute Christmas shopping. The whole street packed with people, kids screaming, mobile phones ringing. He remembered the look on his girlfriend's face when they tried to queue to buy a hiker's backpack - ultra light, the kind real hikers take with them up in the mountains - a gift for her brother, who wasn't a real hiker, but they had seen the backpack and thought of him, and when they went to pay, some woman had barged into the queue right in front of his girlfriend, who had waited approximately ten seconds - just enough time to allow the poor woman to retract from the queue and apologise - but obviously the woman had not intended to apologise at all, and his girlfriend had politely tapped the lady on her shoulder and reminded her that they had got their first, and that she had better move to the back of the line or else - and then let out a shriek of dry laughter upon realizing that the woman in question was one of her clients. He remembered the look on the woman's face when she realized she had been caught in an act of ruderie by someone she paid good money to teach her how to be a better human relations manager; a situation so ironic it made him feel numb. And now the whole street was silent. Feeling numb - that was an interesting and somewhat oxymoronic concept. He pondered upon that a little as he stepped over the holes in the road made by the tramway construction workers. His fingers felt a little numb. He had left without his gloves. He heard his girlfriend's voice in his said saying: - ah, you see, you should have taken your gloves - , and it made him smile. She had seen how angry he was. But there was nothing she could have done. It was his anger to deal with. And he knew he had her approval in this matter; sometimes one just has to explode.

He reached the wheel - a kind of London Eye - but of course this wasn't London, and it was empty. There was a teenager sitting in the little cabin in front of the wheel. The teenager was sending text messages, his eyes riveted on the glaring screen sitting on the counter. For a moment, he considered riding the wheel. But he took that thought back immediately - he was ridiculously scared of heights. He stood for five minutes, staring at his numb fingers, then up at the tramway construction site, then up at the clear blue sky, then back at the youth, who was still absorbed by his virtual conversation. The apparent stupidity of the

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teenager suddenly caused his teeth to clench â this sometimes happened to him when he felt particularly irritated; his jaws would become rigid, and he would experience an almost irrepressible desire to bite down on something hard, and break it. But he was afraid of heights. His jaws unlocked. Why purchase a ticket when he knew he wasnât going to ride the damn wheel. The youth put down his phone and looked up.

â Can I help you?â

Suddenly, he felt compelled to give the boy an answer. He couldnât back down now. Today was a new day. He made a gesture with his head, as if to say yes, and took a step forward.

â Thatâll be 4 euros.â

â Rip off,â He thought, but refrained from verbalizing that thought, placing the coins on the counter.

â Over there.â The youth pointed over his shoulder without turning his head.

He got in the line. There were a couple of other people there. There was a mother with her two children, a relatively old man, and a couple of teenagers. He wondered what their motives for riding the wheel on a cold Sunday afternoon could be, especially the old-ish man. He wondered what his motives were. To do something heâd never dared, perhaps.

When the wheel stopped â it didnât actually stop; it just slowed down so that those riding it before could get off, and those who were waiting to ride it could get on â he obeyed the loud lady who shouted at the teenage girls in front, something about not standing up while the wheel was in motion. She instructed him to take a seat on a plastic bench, and told him not to move. He felt almost protected in the little shelter. It was not a cabin, because it was not closed; there were metal bars in front of him and behind him. He felt safer than he thought he would, considering. Then the whole structure jerked forward, and his shelter was swept off the ground, and tugged upwards. Fear set in.

â Donât look down,â He told himself.

Behind him to his left was the river; a gigantic strip of water stretching far ahead of him â he wanted to turn around so that he could see what the river looked like behind him, but he didnât dare. Fear gripped him as he realized how far above the ground he actually was. He stared at his feet, awkwardly propped against the metal bar in the middle of the carriage. Droplets were shaken off the roof of the carriage as the wheel continued to turn, and he felt a few fall onto his neck where his scarf had been loosed. To look up or not to look up, that was the question. Now the carriage had reached the top, and stretched out before him was the whole city, minute, but recognizable. He could see the cathedral, and the three bridges, and the high street with its lone wonderers. He swivelled round in his seat, clutching the metal bars with both hands, and took in the view. The river was glistening as the winter sun lit up the town from west to east. It was mid afternoon, or perhaps late afternoon â he had not seen the time go past. He wanted to point to the basilica, but he was alone. A friend with whom he could have shared this experience would have been most welcome. The anger had passed though.

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As the wheel began its descent, he huddled in his seat. The wind had risen, and his temporary belvedere was swaying very slightly. Nothing felt safe, and yet he felt very sure that his hour had not yet come. He knew he had flown off the handle at lunch. He hadn't planned to have a showdown in the dining room between cheese and desert. The funny thing was that he'd woken up at 6am feeling restless, and he'd told his girlfriend. She had suggested he go back to sleep for another hour or so, but he had said he felt rested and had insisted on getting up. Arthur had arrived early, which was unlike him, and instead of causing him to feel elated, it had made him feel even more restless. He had come with a woman—a new girlfriend presumably (Alison, his own girlfriend, called Arthur's women his mistresses; it had become something of a joke). Although the woman's presence—Ellen, her name was—had been unexpected, it didn't seem to bother Alison, who had passed comment about having prepared way too much food anyway, and upon having taken the lady's coat, set about preparing the table for an extra mouth, it had bothered him. In fact, it had eaten him up little by little as the lunch had gone on.

The ride he had just paid for was comprised of three whole rounds. The carriage swung past the loud lady, and as it rose for the second time, he observed the joggers migrating across one of the bridges. He and Arthur used to jog there when they were students. Arthur used to go on about some band he was listening to at the time, so much so that it used to irritate him, but never for long. He would jog with one ear-phone in his ear, and the other one dangling in the wind, and every so often, he would hand the dangling ear-phone to his friend and say something like "wow, listen to that guitar solo". He would marvel at Arthur's enthusiasm—not because *he* never got enthusiastic about things; he used to sit for hours on end, the same Rolling Stones record playing on a loop, shuddering almost as the melodies operated their magic—no no, he knew what it felt like to be overwhelmed by the beauty of music—but for him, those moments were rare, and when they did occur, it was as though God himself had turned up on his doorstep and asked him if he could stop by and have a beer. Arthur had good musical taste, but he was more eclectic; he lapped everything up from electronic to rock to indie rock to classical—although, in Arthur's own words—classical can be a real pain in the arse; you name it, he had listened to it, and he raved about it. Perhaps that was what winded him up earlier at lunch. Perhaps it had always winded him up. Perhaps it explained why Arthur had so many friends and so many mistresses. Perhaps he just liked everyone and everything. Perhaps that was why he kept declining his invitations, because he always had someone better to see, and instead of just saying "no, sorry, that day doesn't work for me", he would wait until the last minute—until someone else, often a woman, turned up on his doorstep, or presented him with a new album to listen to, and then he would cancel.

Now they were at the top again. A cloud cupped the sun, allowing only a thin ray of light to dance on the river below. It was raining a little too, as it had been before he left home in a rage. The wind picked up, and he felt small drops of rain on his cheeks. This time, he was not afraid. He did not want to look out and admire the view. He relived his earlier outburst of anger. Had he really said all those things to his friend's face? He could hardly believe it. It was so unlike him. He had stormed out of the dining room and into the kitchen, and his girlfriend had followed him, and put her arm around him, and he had shaken her arm off, and then apologized for having shaken her arm off, because it wasn't her fault, and he had picked up a random glass of flat coca cola and downed the inch left at the bottom of the glass thinking it was port, but feeling pleasantly surprised upon realizing that it was in fact coke. But the anger hadn't passed, and he had gone back into the living room, and the two men had argued bitterly, although Arthur had smirked and joked about his friend being drunk, and being unreasonable, and that he didn't understand where all this aggressiveness had suddenly come from. One thing had led to another, and Ellen had been called "just another woman Arthur's sleeping with", and Arthur had been called "a bad friend", and as he sat seventeen metres above the ground, he knew this was all trivial, and that the two men would stay friends, and whether or

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not Ellen would choose to forgive him for his â cruel wordsâ didnâ t matter in the slightest, because he had said what he had had to say, and he knew he was right â at least, he had told the truth, and it had to be the truth, because it was how he *felt*.

This year had been hard for him. His job situation was tricky. Many a time, he had jogged across the very same bridge he and Arthur had jogged over as students, and he had thought back to his own innocence. Life was cruel then too, of course; one wonders what one will become, and struggles to try to be popular. But friendship wasnâ t something one had to make an effort to maintain back then; it just was, wasnâ t it? â Or was it?

In the carriage in front of him, the teenagers were smoking. He could smell the scent of tobacco rising, or falling, he couldnâ t tell exactly where they were because he didnâ t want to look down. They were talking about a friend of theirs, he gathered, someone who had â cut themselves off from the rest of the groupâ for â no apparent reasonâ . There was a depreciatory tone to their conversation, and one of them added with condescension, â I think he might be depressedâ .

Perhaps he was depressed too. And perhaps he had cut himself off from his friends willingly too. That was how he had felt these past few months, like a bad friend. But after his outburst this lunchtime, he felt completely liberated. Arthur hadnâ t called him once to see how he was doing, not even after he had heard about him losing his job. For months, he had cultivated the idea that he was not interesting enough for his friend Arthur. He had never voiced this thought, but it had plagued him a little from time to time, and on rainy days, especially after having done food shopping in that crowded dirty food mall, it gnawed at his pride. He had called Arthur to make plans several times, he had introduced his girlfriend to Arthurâ s wife â now ex-wife â in the hope that they would be able to resume their friendship and that their respective ladies would be able to do ladiesâ things together. Sadly â although he had never cared much for Arthurâ s ex-wife â that relationship hadnâ t worked out, and what with him losing his job, and the self-interrogation surrounding such a personal crisis, the two old buddies had not kept in touch. Perhaps he had expected too much of Arthur. Perhaps nobody was wrong and nobody was right. Still, accusing his old friend had suddenly made him feel very alive. It made him want to listen to classical music.

â A pain in the arse, my foot!â He thought.

Leaning back against the metal railings, he gazed up at the sky. The wheel was on its final turn now, and now he felt fine. He would get off the ride and go home. Maybe Arthur would be gone. Maybe Ellen would be gone. Alison would be there. They would have tea together. He would probably have to apologize. That would be alright. He didnâ t mind saying he was sorry, if it was for the sake of keeping everyoneâ s feelings intact. He had had his moment of glory. And none of it mattered anyway; whether Arthur chose to remain friends or not, whether they ever went for a jog over the bridge again.

The loud lady steadied his carriage as it glided onto the platform. He got off the ride, and stood up straight, stretching his arms and legs as though he had been cramped in a car all afternoon. He didnâ t notice much of the walk home. He was almost impatient to get there.

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