

Through the Cracks

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Chapter One: Avenue of Change

I could feel a swell of optimism surge through me, as I stepped out onto the street. I walked tall, I strode with purpose, I held the secret of life in my hands. Nothing, and no one, could hold me back. The beautiful warm sun on my face whispered to me that only good things could happen that day. Negativity and endless soul-searching were not the order of the day. I would think only positive thoughts, and the world would fall at my feet. Positivity would create positivity. The day was mine. I could make of it what I wanted. The warming sun washed away the sea of endless doubts that had interrupted, yet again, my night's sleep. But the new dawn had brought with it a new faith. I was floating on a wave of elation, buoyed by the charm of the new day. Then I saw her. Her pain more than evident. My heart went out to her instantly. Her obvious sadness jarred me back to reality. I had never seen such a desperately mournful expression before, I had no choice but to stop, and ask if all was well. I had been strolling, with great lightness, up Dante street, my new street, towards the neighbourhood coffee shop, when I had seen her. She was sitting on a bench. Well, slumped on a bench, really, with an excruciating look of pain and sorrow in her eyes. She looked terribly in need of help. I couldn't bring myself to just pass her by. Her pain cried out to me, almost calling to me by name. I knew that I had to try to help her. I stopped beside her.

‘Are you alright? Do you need some help?’

She didn't even look up, or acknowledge my presence in any way. I refused to be deterred. I sat down next to her, and tried again.

‘Can I do anything for you? I would like to help you if I can.’

Her reply was mumbled, barely audible.

‘It's too late.’

‘What is? Maybe it's not too late. Do you want to talk about it?’

I probed gently. There was a slight pause.

‘No.’

The few words had come from her mouth, without any change in her expression, or posture. My carefree mood had no effect on her.

‘OK, fine, I will just sit here with you for a bit. If you change your mind, you will find that I am a very good listener.’

I sat down beside her, in silence. She didn’t say another word, so I didn’t push her further, and decided to leave her in peace. Upon looking at her a bit better, I could see that she was a very beautiful woman, probably in her mid 40’s. Her clothes would have been expensive when new, but by then they were slightly worn out. Her long, brown hair had the disheveled look of someone who no longer cared much about their appearance. Her face, although very beautiful, was contorted by her expression of torment. To look into her eyes was like looking into the deepest, darkest pits of despair. They seemed like the eyes of someone who had been to hell and back. Or maybe had still to make the return journey. I really would have liked to help her, but didn’t have any idea how to. She didn’t seem to even want my help. I felt slightly out of my depth. My sea of elation had been dashed emphatically on the rocks of despair. It was a lovely spring morning, with the Italian sun shining splendidly, so I sat there with her for a while, letting the sun flow through me. After what I deemed to have been a suitable amount of time to have shown my solidarity with her, I stood up.

‘I’m off for a coffee now, but I will always be around. I have moved in just down the street. My name is Nigel. If you ever feel like talking, I would love to listen. Bye, for now.’

She didn’t acknowledge my departure.

Slightly unsettled by the experience, I wandered with less conviction up the street to the coffee shop, which was about half way between my place and a park. It was just a local coffee shop, nothing very special, but clean, and well looked after. The interior was fairly much in the same state of repair as the outside, a bit dated, but generally in good condition. The inside walls were painted in a light brown colour, matching nicely the cream coloured ceramic tiles on the floor. The wooden counter was well crafted in what seemed to be mahogany, but stylewise, notwithstanding the great ability of its craftsmanship, it all really spoke to a previous generation. There were wooden tables and chairs lining the window, and a few tables also in the middle of the room. It was a very basic quality of furniture, well made

and solid, but very out of date. That almost seemed to epitomize the whole area. That was really the general impression of Dante street, itself. It was in an inner city suburb. A suburb which had been built well, in its day, but which was by then badly in need of renovation. However, in the coffee shop, the quality of the coffee, and food, as was always the case in Italy, was of the highest standard. They made a delightfully creamy cappuccino, and the brioche were very fresh, and tasty. I approached the delightfully looking woman working diligently at the coffee machine.

‘Morning, can I have a cappuccino, please. Also, a brioche with marmalade, if you have one.’

My carefree outlook on life had returned. It was a day for living each passing moment to its utmost prospect.

‘Sure. I saw you on the bench talking with Rosa, do you know her?’

The woman running the coffee shop was a very pleasant looking woman, of early middle age. Her long black hair, and stylish clothing, gave her an air of classic southern Italian beauty. She had a beautiful face, with very pronounced cheeks, and wore a constant, winning smile. Her tall body was trim, with shapely breasts, and she had a friendly demeanor about her. It was not my first time in the coffee shop, but we had never spoken, apart from the necessary chit-chat required when ordering, and paying the bill. I assumed that she would know all about the goings-on in the area, so I thought that I might be able to find out some information about the mysterious, sad woman, alone on her bench.

‘No, I just saw how pained she looked, and thought she might need some help. But she barely spoke to me. Do you know her? What’s her story?’

A sad, sorrowful expression came over her face.

‘Oh, it’s not a very good one, I’m afraid. Her only child, a son, died just over two years ago now, I think. Very tragic. Together with her husband, she had been running a pretty successful business, importing something or other. But, after their son’s death, it all just fell apart. The marriage went to pieces. They both completely gave up on the business, and then her husband left her, I think about a year ago. She’s been living here for the last 6 months, more or less.’

The explanation more than sufficiently explained her tormented state.

‘Oh, that’s terrible! How old was her son?’

‘I believe he was 18 years old. He had just gotten his motorbike licence. From what I heard he had a bad accident going home, late one night.’

I nodded my head with sage understanding. I had knowledge of such affairs.

‘Right. That’s always a dangerous age for getting out on the roads. Especially on a motorbike. When you are young, and inexperienced, motorbikes can be pretty dangerous. I had a bad accident with one, myself, when I was young. One day when I was riding past a friend’s place, I looked in to see if his car was there, and, just then, a car pulled out onto the road, right in front of me. I hadn’t been watching where I had been going, so I ploughed straight into it. Luckily, I came out of it alright. Just a few bumps and bruises, and a very sore ego. I guess some of us survive those things, while others don’t. There doesn’t seem to be any rhyme or reason to any of it. Just a roll of the dice. For those lucky enough, life just continues, much as before, but with a valuable lesson having been learnt. For those not so lucky, life comes to an abrupt stop, and things will never be the same again. Just a simple, tragic twist of fate. It’s scary really, how easily those things can happen. Does Rosa ever talk to anyone?’

‘For a while some of her old friends would come around. But I guess they are just all getting on with their lives, or maybe they find it too difficult to be with her. She never speaks with anyone. She usually just sits on that bench. It’s very sad. After the business collapsed, they lost their house, and everything. From having been part of a successful, happy family, she has come to this, in a very short period of time.’

As she spoke, she had a concerned expression on her face. Obviously, she was a person who cared for the plight of others. A genuine person living in a world generally possessed by indifference.

‘Well, it’s understandable that they lost interest in their business. After such a tragedy, I doubt that anyone would be able to carry on as before. There’s no coming back from an event like that. Poor thing, I’ve never seen such sadness before. Life can be very cruel, can’t it? It’s just a lottery, really, who survives, and who dies.’

She nodded in agreement, then raised her eyes, and looked at me with a lovely smile.

‘You’ve been in before, haven’t you? Have you moved into the area? Do

you like it here?’

My bleak mood dissipated, and my frame of mind returned upbeat.

‘Yes, I’ve just recently moved in. I love it here. It’s very close to the centre, but it’s nice and quiet. In the evening, I can sit out on my balcony with a glass of wine, and just relax.’

‘In the warm evenings, I put a couple of tables outside, so, if you like, you can have a glass of wine here. I have some nice wines from Sicily, that’s where I’m from.’

‘OK, I’ll do that. I’m Nigel, by the way.’

‘Nice to meet you, I’m Valentina.’

Her cheerful disposition brought a smile to my face.

‘I’ll see you tomorrow then, Valentina.’

‘I’ll be here, bye.’

Back out on the street, a sombre mood set in. Dark thoughts reappeared on my horizon. The weights I carried returned to crush my state of mind. I had gone through some changes myself. Nothing as dramatic as that of Rosa, but difficult enough, nonetheless. I had recently lost my job of many years, and had just moved into the area from another city not far away. I had on paper been made redundant, but in reality I had been kicked out of my job mercilessly, and had been replaced by someone younger, someone who cost the company less. I was a casualty of the modern economic system. The bottom line had been battered on my head, repeatedly, knocking me into oblivion. I had believed myself to have been an integral part of the company, only to discover that to them I was merely a number. A number easily replaced by another number, a smaller number. After many years of total stability, I had had the rug pulled out from under my feet. The solid footing beneath me had turned into a quagmire. I had needed to find a new, stable footing. That was why I found myself in that strange, new land, Dante street. I had decided that being in a new environment could only be good for me. A new beginning. A fresh start, distant from the unexpected extermination I had endured. New places, and new people. I had hoped it would be just the stimulus that I needed to regain a foothold. It was my belief that a strong wind of change would blow away the menacing clouds hovering over me.

If nothing else, I had picked the area well. Dante street was in an area

just outside the city centre, so I could easily walk into town, and the locality was well serviced with all the necessary amenities, like supermarkets, and so forth. The street was in a well established part of the city. The apartment blocks in the area were a bit dated, but each told a story of former glory. They had been built solidly, as was the way in those times, usually with around half a dozen flats in each building. Most of the buildings had three stories. Each flat had at least one balcony, to hang out the washing, and a place to be able to get some sunshine. There was a lot of space between the buildings, with many trees around, giving the area a nice green feel to it. The road was wide, with ample footpaths, and benches placed along the way. At one stage, in its heyday, it would have been a very sought after area. Time, however, had taken its inevitable toll. Its former magnificence long past. By then, people were moving further out, to live in houses with gardens, or to live in newer, more modern flats. The area still had many older residents, those who had lived there for many years. The rest were mostly transient people looking for a cheap flat, in a fairly central location. There was a mixture of single people, young couples, and a lot of foreigners. Most of the flats came furnished, so it was easy to move in, and move out. I assumed there was quite a constant flow of people, like me, coming and going as their situations changed. There were always many flats for rent in the area, opening up as the former residents moved further out, or died, leaving the properties to their children. All in all, it made for an interesting mixture of people. It was the melting pot of the city. Even the name of the street, Dante street, had a great allure. Dante Alighieri was one of Italy's most famous authors, probably the most famous. He wrote extensively about Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory. Mental states that, quite often, we bring upon ourselves. What would my mental state be there, on Dante street, my new home? Would I find Heaven, the harmony I markedly needed, and sought, or would it be Hell waiting to rain down its fires on me? Only the future would answer those questions. At that time I found myself to be existing in a sort of state of limbo. A halfway house. My own easier, less harrowing form, of Purgatory.

The next day, when I was going out for my breakfast, she was there again, on her bench. Something about her was starting to enter into my soul.

‘Hi Rosa, it’s me, Nigel. How are you? Can I offer you a coffee?’

I had decided that every time I would see her on that bench, I would stop, chat a bit, and spend some time with her. I hoped she would appreciate it, even though she rarely spoke.

‘No, but thank you.’

Her answer was so quiet it was barely audible. I sat down next to her.

‘I’m just going to sit here for a while, before going for a coffee. Don’t the trees look lovely at this time of year?’

She didn’t reply, but she half looked at me, with an expression of what I took to be gratitude. I was sure that she was starting to warm to our chats, that is, my chats. It was all fairly one way traffic. Anyway, I had decided that I wasn’t going to give up on her. Society tends to forget about those who have fallen through the cracks. Everyone is so busy working, raising their families, buying houses, and generally living life, that it is easy to never have time for, or even notice, those less fortunate than themselves. With the unexpected changes that had befallen me, I had been forced to re-evaluate my whole perspective on life, and that of other people. I, too, had fallen through those cracks. I, too, had found myself living on that other side of life. That darker, less comprehensible side. Really, it felt more like I had been pushed through those cracks, through no fault of my own. Probably that was the case for most people on the other side of life. Without a doubt no one would have willingly chosen to take that path. Like me, they had unwittingly found themselves to be on an alien terrain. In any case, as I found myself viewing life from those distant shores, I felt that I wanted to understand more about the other people in that strange, unfamiliar, place. What their predicaments were, how life had come to push them, too, through those cracks. Maybe through them, through their stories, I would find answers to my questions. Now that I, too, had strayed off the righteous path, I wanted to understand what had brought others to this new, unfamiliar, place. This new place, with new customs. This new place, where the goalposts had been removed, and the rules were hard to fathom. A mental state where the normal rules of society were no longer applicable. A place where everything that you had once accepted as being constant, had been taken from you forcibly, leaving you in an unfamiliar uncharted land. In this new life I would have to forge a new identity. In an odd way, it was almost

as if I had identified myself with, and had been identified by, the job I had been doing. It struck me as being incredibly strange how that happens. For some reason we are considered more for what we do, rather than for who we are, as a person. The old me was no more. That me had been made redundant. He had been demolished, destroyed by the need to increase profits. That version of me had been discarded with my old life, my previous job, and it was time for me to discover my new self. Who would I become? But anyway, wasn't I really still the same person? Definitely not by society's harsh standards. For those who had taken upon themselves the responsibility for deciding the fate of others, I had become an in-between me. In transition from my previous identity to that which would follow, whatever they may be. In one way it was an exciting prospect, although slightly daunting. To be reborn, to shed your old skin. After having been banished by society's rigorous decrees, I believed, hoped, that I could become whoever I, myself, wanted to be, without that simply being dictated purely by the confines of the job that I would do next. I probably needed to eventually find some work, but I wanted to be identified as being the person I was, not just by what I did. I wanted to discover who that person was. I wanted to discover myself. The true me. The possibilities open to me, in my new variant seemed almost endless. The pathway before me was wide open. There were no chains binding me, no binds holding me back. However, while definitely being somewhat exciting, in some ways it was almost like being faced with a gargantuan challenge, a test that I would have to overcome. A new me was out there somewhere, but would I have the firmness of character to find that new me? In some ways my newly found freedom came with a crushing burden. The task before me was not going to be easy. I looked at my watch. Enough time had passed, so I deemed it was time to get the day started.

'It was nice to see you today Rosa. Bye for now. I'll see you soon.'

Rosa half glanced at me as I stood up to leave. Little as that may seem, I took it to be a sign of great progress in our rapport.

It was time for my tasty Italian breakfast. I had been living in Italy for so long by then that my habits were more like those of my new country, rather than those of my native England. I headed up to Valentina's coffee shop, and ordered my usual breakfast. While working my way through a delicious brioche, and sipping my frothy, creamy, cappuccino, I noticed a rather large

man sitting over at a table with a glass of wine. Wine for breakfast? I wondered if my habits would ever change that much? Alcohol in the early morning? Mind you, it was also something I had seen on my travels through Germany, and other European countries. Workers, from all walks of life, would quite often stop for a beer on their way to work. I had never been able to work out the reason for that. Maybe it was a bit of a cure for a hangover, or possibly it was just a pleasant way for them to start the day. In any case, I decided that I would stick to my cappuccino, for the time being anyway. Who knew? Maybe that was waiting for me, further down the line? In my new life, a life without boundaries, anything was possible. Nothing could be discounted.

‘Lovely cappuccino, Valentina, you are the best!’

‘Thanks, you have a good day now.’

She always had such a lovely smile. It made me feel like she really had consideration for others, a dying value in the modern dog-eat-dog society.

‘OK, bye.’

I felt so free. A sense of euphoria invaded my thoughts. A new day, in my new life. And what a fantastic way to start the day. Italians really lived with great style. It had been a breakfast fit for kings.

I left the bar with great content, and wandered up to the park. It was pretty quiet, being a school day, with just a few mums, with very young kids, enjoying the sunny spring morning. It was just a small suburban park, with a few of the usual things for kids to play on, and some benches for the rest of us to sit on, and watch them, and the day, go by. There were some lovely tall trees around, giving good shade for when the summer heat kicked in, and the surrounding grass was richly green, and well maintained. It was a very peaceful spot to sit, and ponder one’s situation. I sat on a bench next to what I assumed to be a muslim family, by their looks.

‘Morning, lovely day isn’t it?’

‘Good morning. Yes it is.’ answered the husband. Both he, and his wife, smiled at me in welcome.

‘We’re very lucky to have such a nice park here. Do you come here often?’

‘Oh yes, we bring Ariane here all the time. She loves it.’

Their daughter looked at me with a contagious grin on her face.

‘That’s a very pretty name! A pretty name for a pretty little girl!’

Ariane giggled at me, and ran off to the swings.

‘She’s lovely. How old is she?’

The wife smiled at me, and replied:

‘Thank you, she’s 8 years old. We chose that name because even though it is a Lebanese name, it also sounds a bit Italian. My name is Jana, and this is my husband Nassim.’

‘Pleased to met you. I’m Nigel.’

They were all dressed in normal Italian clothes, with the only exception that Jana wore a light, colourful scarf, covering her hair. Her face was young and pretty, and she had a very welcoming smile. Physically, she was very petite. Ariane, a cute little girl with dark brown, curly hair, was running around, back and forth from the swings, to her parents. Nassim was tall, strong looking, and had a full beard. His face, while friendly, carried a serious expression. He looked like someone who was aware of his responsibilities, someone who could be relied upon to shoulder any and all burdens.

‘I don’t mean to be nosy, Nassim, but shouldn’t Ariane be in school today?’

‘Yes, you are right. This morning she said she didn’t feel well, so we kept her at home. I even took the morning off from work to take her to the doctor, but there really doesn’t seem to be anything wrong with her. I think sometimes she gets laughed at, at school, for being dark skinned, and a muslim. It can be very hard for kids, being different from everyone else.’

‘I’m sorry to hear that. Actually, kids can be very mean. Especially with someone who is different. It’s really just in their nature, although I don’t think that they really understand just how hurtful that can be to others. Surely there are other muslim children in her school?’

‘Yes, there are. But not many, and I think they all get picked on a bit. We don’t want to complain about it. We know it’s just kids being kids. She will have to get used to it. This is where we live now.’

‘Jana, was Ariane born here, or in Lebanon?’

‘Here! I was six months pregnant when we arrived.’

‘That’s fantastic. A little Italian girl, then! She’s very lovely.’ I stood up

to leave. 'Well, It's time for me to be off. It has been very nice to meet you all. I'm sure we'll see each other again. I'm always in here, I love this park too. Bye, for now.'

Jana smiled her sweet smile at me.

'Bye, Nigel. It was nice to meet you.'

Nassim gave me a little wave, and called out:

'See you later!'

I walked slowly back down Dante street, towards home. Home... my new home. Everything was different for me now. The place, the people I was meeting. It struck me that I hadn't really fully comprehended just how much different everything would be for me, in my new life. Before I had made my move, I had assumed that life would have been much the same as it had been before, I would just be living in another, smaller city. In reality, everything was totally different. Not in as radical a way as that of Rosa, or Nassim and his family, but everything had now completely changed for me as well. A variation in one part of your life can really have a big chain reaction on your whole life. It can lead to a total transformation. A metamorphosis. Our lives are probably like one big house of cards, and when you pull out one of those cards, the whole house comes tumbling down. Then, when you reassemble it, you find that it has taken on a mutated, unexpected, aspect. It wasn't that I disliked my new life, I just hadn't really understood that the change would be so all encompassing. I almost felt like I was living someone else's life, someone unknown to me. It was going to take a bit of getting used to. On the other hand, I had the perfect opportunity to make some positive changes in my life. The sort of changes that when you are stuck in a rut, repeating the same old routine, day in and day out, you don't seem to be able to make. I could reinvent myself. I could become whoever I wanted to be. Through all the upheaval that life was throwing at me, at least in one area I felt pretty secure. I had been paying into a private pension fund for many years, and that had matured, so I didn't have to worry too much about the financial side of things. Probably I would eventually need to pick up some work, maybe just something part-time, but in the meantime I had plenty of money, and time, to explore my new life. My new life on that foreign landscape known as Dante street.

Chapter Two: Fractures

After passing a restless night, I awoke early. I had vague memories of strange dreams that I couldn't really bring into focus. Dreams that had left me feeling out of sorts. I felt disoriented. I had spent the previous evening out for dinner with some friends, old friends from my former work-place. It would be hard to imagine a more difficult evening. Laying in bed, I was thinking about how strained it had all been. Where once hearty conversation had flowed easily, the exchanges had become static, hard work. The evening had been punctuated by awkward silences, and pregnant pauses. We had all been friends for many years, work friendships that had blossomed into general friendships, but, after I had been made redundant, things just wasn't the same anymore. Those friendships, if indeed that's what they had been, had all started to unravel. Some of my former colleagues stuck by me, displeased with how I had been treated by the company after many years of faithful service. Most, however, seemed to feel that I had become somehow tainted, and that association with me could in some way give a bad impression of them to management. I could be contagious. People I had thought of as having been friends of many years had become unknown entities, people that were difficult to interact with. Had we ever actually been real friends? Or had they all just been friendships of convenience, people who had had something in common, for a certain period? Like ships moored next to each other in a port, before sailing off to other ports. It had almost felt like everyone had just been going through the motions. As if they had felt duty-bound to keep up the pretense of friendship. Probably as time passed, invitations would come with less frequency, my acceptances of any such invitations certainly would be in serious doubt. Maybe that is how it should be? When change is thrust on you, when your life is dismembered, maybe you need to start afresh, in a new place, with new people? It all left me feeling a bit sad, and emotionally drained. I had a shower, hoping that the hot water cascading over me would wash away the discordant feelings

that had taken root in my mind. Feelings that could not easily be rinsed away.

It was uplifting to shake of my despondency, and to get outside, on Dante street, where no one knew my background story, and where no one felt the need to take sides. On Dante street I wasn't a dividing force. I was in a place where a new me could be sown, and hopefully prosper. The spring sunshine on my face filled me with great expectation. After the arduous conversations of the previous evening, I was more than ever convinced that I had made the right move. Renovation, renewal, rebirth. A new, improved version of me would rise from the ashes of my former charred life. A life that had been burnt to the ground around me. A life that had been destroyed effortlessly, without a trace of compassion, simply by the stroke of a pen.

With little surprise I noted that Rosa, as usual, was already on her bench. Did she ever sleep at all? After the strained, painful conversations of the evening prior, it felt good to jump into a jocular frame of mind. I would not be held back. The restraints that had been placed on me in my former life had no validity in my place of resurrection. I could move in only one direction. Forward.

'Hi Rosa, what a lovely day. I really love your shoes. You have great style. I'm afraid I just get whichever ones are the most comfortable. Maybe you could be my style consultant? You could come shopping with me, and help me pick out some trendy new stuff, what do you say?'

She looked up at me, and smiled, briefly. It was a better than expected result. I decided to nudge her, with more force, back into life. She, too, deserved a second possibility. Really, far more than myself.

'Come on, come with me. Let's get a coffee and a brioche into you.'

I half picked her up, she was so thin and light that it didn't take much effort. At first she resisted me, but then she relented, and stood up. With her hand holding onto my arm, we headed up the road to have some breakfast. I felt a power rush through me. I was the defender of the downtrodden, the saviour of the forgotten. Valentina beamed with joy when we entered her coffee shop.

'Rosa, it's so good to see you! Sit down over here, both of you.'

She showed us to a table, by the window.

'The usual for you, Nigel? What about you Rosa? A coffee and a

bricoche?’

Rosa had her head bowed, so I answered for her.

‘Yeah, that sounds good, Valentina, thanks.’

Out on the street there was the usual hustle and bustle of the daytime traffic. Dante street led up to some other roads, all full of flats, and houses. During the day it was quite busy, with residents, and workers, coming and going. At night the street was very quiet, when everyone had returned to their homes.

‘Rosa, I know there’s nothing I can say or do, to make you feel any better, but it would be lovely to have a coffee together, every now and then. Just to have a chat. Hey, I know! We could have afternoon tea. I’m a big tea drinker, and Valentina has a good selection of teas here. Let’s do it. Let’s organise an afternoon tea. When you feel like it, anyway.’

I prattled on with a lot of relentless drivel, just trying to take her mind off things for a while. I would come out with everything and anything, just to avoid any difficult silences. I spoke for both of us. A two sided conversation, coming from just one side. She merely sat there with her head down, or looking out the window, at the passing traffic. She did drink her coffee, but didn’t touch her brioche. After a while, she stood up to leave. She glanced briefly at me, barely making eye contact.

‘Thanks, Nigel.’

As I watched her walking back to her bench, I felt good, empowered. I wasn’t really sure why. Was it because I had done a good deed for someone, or, rather, was it good for me in that difficult phase to see someone who was worse off than me? When we are troubled, with things not going according to plan, is it comforting to see people who are in an even worse situation? The thought of that was somewhat vexing. I mused for a while about how we were dealt cards, randomly, and just had to take whatever life threw at us. I was sure that Rosa, just a few short years previously, would never have imagined that her life would have come to that. Without a doubt her days would have been full, working, planning for her future, and for that of her family. I couldn’t help thinking how unfair it all seemed. I couldn’t help thinking how tenuous life really was. Everything we had, everything we took for granted, was really just hanging by a thread. A thread that could snap, or be cut, in a flash. I was thinking thoughts you don’t have, when life is

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