

Killing them softly with his song

Overflowing with her worries, and with another thing to deal with after the official-looking letter that morning (left unopened on the kitchen table), she trudged disconsolately along the High Street, past the high-end chains and corporate restaurants. She needed a coffee, and time and space to think. There was nowhere there; all the cafés and bars she'd passed had been filled with loud music and louder voices.

A few minutes later, she'd left the bustle of the town centre behind her. She'd reached a run-down part of town, where 70% closing down sales vied with empty shells of 'pound' shops, their floors littered with dust and debris, and uncollected mail, their tattered awnings flapping boldly in the breeze.

By the side of the street, she spotted a chalkboard, propped up against a wall, advertising "real coffee and homemade cake". An arrow pointed towards the adjacent alley. She headed past boarded-up buildings, until she reached the café, its windows sparkling with a radiance at odds with their surroundings.

The roar of the busy traffic had faded to a distant hum. From an open window, came the blissful aroma of freshly-ground coffee, and the strains of a gentle guitar and singer urged her to enter.

She ordered a coffee, and found an empty table. She looked briefly over to where the young man with his guitar was playing. She sat quietly, waiting for her coffee to cool. She closed her eyes. And she listened.

How did he know her so well? He was telling her story, that young man with his guitar. Her fears, her pain. She was trapped in her despair. She couldn't control the tears, which began rolling down her face, ruining the makeup she'd applied so carefully a few hours before, to help her through another day.

Through her tears, she glanced at the young man again. She'd never seen him before, and he showed no sign of recognition as he briefly caught her eye. But she knew, somehow, he recognised her pain and her despair. And she felt his warmth and his compassion. And she began to calm.

As his song continued, she looked around. Everyone sat silently, entrapped in his spell, even the baby, whose crying had now faded into an occasional sob. The café was engulfed in silent tears.

As his song faded into silence, a collective sigh issued around the room. The old lady by the window fumbled in her handbag for a hankie and dabbed her eyes. The man in a high-vis jacket sniffed loudly and wiped his face with his serviette. And the young mother smiled gently as she cradled her baby, wiping the tears from both their faces with the tissue she'd found in her pocket.

And as one, they knew that everything would work out, somehow. He had taken their innermost fears, and eased them. He had given them the perfect gift; he had given them the power to endure, and continue on. He had given them hope.

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Author's Note

Inspired by the song *Killing Me Softly With His Song*, written by Charles Fox (song) and Norman Gimbel (lyrics), recorded by Roberta Flack and others.