

Kindness

It's been a long day. I'd caught an early train to London for a teacher's conference, and now I'm standing on the platform waiting for the return journey. The train chunters in, the door in front of me opens, and a flood of people get out, jostling together with their coats and cases and hats and sticks. The unspoken etiquette is that you let people get off first, so I stand dutifully to one side. But then the torrent stops, and I make a move to get on board.

My foot is on the step when a latecomer rushes out, knocking me backwards in his desire to vacate the train. I'm jolted back onto the platform by his suitcase, and my head jerks to one side, dislodging my glasses. I watch in horror as they fall onto the 'Mind the Gap' sign painted under my feet, and then bounce off the platform and under the train. There is a bright clink as they hit the gravel a yard down. My options rush through my head; they all end with me saying goodbye to my glasses. The jolting passenger disappears, oblivious, towards the exit.

'Hey, can I help?' I turn to see a tall, handsome man of what I'm guessing is Arabic heritage, clad in white robes and a neat skull-cap. He looks to be in his sixties, and remarkably lithe and fit. He's walking with a cane, that is as smart as its owner. I can't help noticing it is topped with a something of a crook.

'My glasses are on the track,' I say helplessly. Without another word, the man lies down on the platform, disregarding his crisp white robes. He works hard with his cane, trying to scoop up my glasses. It's a miracle to me that he can see them at all; I give him a one in a hundred chance of success.

'Okay, okay,' he mutters to himself, excited by the chase. The train departure time is getting ever closer, which is adding to the tension. One or two onlookers have paused, aware of the developing drama. After what feels like an hour, triumph! To my total amazement, the man's cane emerges from under the train with my glasses precariously balanced on its crook.

The gaggle of watchers smile and move on. My glasses are fine, not a scratch. My eyes meet those of the man I have never met before; we don't know each other's names, but there is a connection. I give the man a hug as he smiles broadly, the platform dust turning his pristine look into a distant memory. We say farewell before any embarrassment can kick in.

Years later I can't forget him – he seemed like the kind of man for whom this would be routine, someone for whom kindness was a way of life. I picture him arriving home to his wife, who looks at his robes wearily and says, 'You've been kind again...'