

# *My second chance*

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Christmas' lunch 2025, during gift-giving, Carlo is surrounded by his 8 children and 14 grandchildren. Today, after 45 years, he decides to give each child a piece of history that changed his life and soul. For many years he spoke little about it, almost as if it was a banal memory. Now he feels the urge to give his experience to those who, at that time, weren't there, but now are, thanks to the inner change caused by these historical events. It is very difficult to talk about his encounter with Jesus. But Carlo tries to.

Elena, the eldest daughter, opens the envelope and reads her part:

“ The train is forty minutes late. There is a suffocating heat, the train's windows are open, but the smell of sweat doesn't seem to go away. The compartments are full of people of all ages, at each station others go up, until they fill the corridor. Leaving Piacenza I am headed to Taranto, to attend the wedding of my cousin Silvia, uncle Felice's daughter. On the train Antonella, the cousin I grew up with, will join me. Just when the train reaches Cattolica, I lean out the train's window to call her and wave my arms to be seen. She sees me, she gets on the train, and the journey continues in company. We start to tell each other more about our young lives. Antonella tells me about the dream she had exactly that night. One of

those dreams that seemed too real, from which she woke up distressed and in tears. In the dream she ran to the hospital where I was hospitalized, severely ill laying in a bed. I do superstitious gestures and we laugh about it together. Anto and I, we often laugh together, now as then. During the Journey we talk about our projects, our future. Antonella wishes to bear children, many. I think she is crazy, as is Silvia, who is about to get married at just nineteen. As for me, I want to have many girls. I like almost all of them these days and they like me a lot too, at least that's what they say. In my projects marriage and children aren't contemplated. I've got no doubts about it. Many, however, are the doubts that have tormented me for a while, concerning the meaning of life. I don't want to talk about it with anyone. I feel the weight of my parents' expectations and those around me. Everybody tells me to study, to gain a position "unaposition", like grandma Elvira said, but I ask myself: for what? For who? To make money? but the world is full of unhappy rich people! For the glory? But successful people are often very anxious and angry with the world! And then everybody tells me to behave like a good boy, but as time passes by, I realize that I have more defects than merits, that I don't feel up to, that I am extremely fragile. ”

Now It's Chiara's turn, second child, to read her part:

“ Let's go back to the train ride. We arrive in Taranto and the next day there is the big party marked with joy, elegance and smiles. The marriage is sumptuous. Tommaso is a navy officer so, outside the church, we witness the evocative propitiatory rite of the sabre bow: six officers are disposed in opposing rows and unsheathe their sabres which they touch each other by shining in the sun, forming an arc under which the newlyweds must pass through. The last officer blocks the passage by lowering his sable. Only a kiss between the newlyweds can open it. A round of applause breaks out, then photos, hugs, and at the end the lunch is rich and tasty. There are lots of people: young, beautiful and carefree, the world is our oyster. Or at least, that is what people who see us think. But I must admit, I'm quite good at dissimulating. I smile, I have fun, I sing.

But when I'm alone the doubts restart and now have led to a real existential and religious crisis. A crisis that nails me in anguish to the point that I haven't even been able to study for a long time, while my mind conducts always to the same questions: if God is good, like my mom and my teachers' brother Egidio and brother Giovenale said, why does evil exist? Why is there sorrow? And injustice? I search for answers in

psychoanalysis, in Freud and Jung, but the answers don't satisfy me. Religion, its rituals, its rules, its conventions don't give me anything anymore; it is too far from ordinary life, from problems that I'm living or that I see in the world. ””

Paolo, third son, opens his envelope:

“ For some time, I've been attending a group in the parish, the Neocatechumenal. I have started a little out of curiosity a lot out of desperation, also pushed by Don Riccardo. They seem fanatics, but for the first time in my life I discover that my questions are not only mine. Others interrogate themselves with me. And someone listens to us and proposes an answer: the Word, as they say. I agree to try, after all I have nothing to lose, but I'm very skeptical. I confess that I attend this group also because we are mostly young in our twenties and we have a lot of fun together. To God, when I can pray, I ask for a sign. Meanwhile, I just discovered a great passion: the mountain. The satisfaction that I feel every time that I reach a summit erases the struggle, the difficulties, the fear and for an instant also my dark thoughts vanish. I often neglect the Catechumenal Community's commitments much preferring a climb. In the group they call me "Mystère", as if to say, "We

wonder where it is?”. ”

Michele opens his letter:

“ But let’s go back to the story: after Silvia and Tommaso’s marriage I prepare myself to head back to Piacenza with the aim of a major climb in the Dolomites. I must depart the 30th of July, but my uncles convince me to stay an extra day, to see Uncle Felice’s trullo. I clatter, but I stay. The trullo really is special, incredibly fresh, a lot bigger than it might seem from the outside. The soil that surrounds it is dark red, and uncle Felice says that it is difficult to cultivate, but he tries to. He has a small orchard and spends all his time here in the campaign. We sleep in the trullo, during a scorching night, but here it forces us to cover with a light cover. The following night, the 1st of August, I depart. I travel all night and on the 2nd of August morning, with a two-hour delay, I arrive in Bologna. It’s 10 a.m. and at this time I should be home already, but I’m still here, in the central station. The coincidence happens within half an hour, therefore, after calling home to let them know I am late, I go to the waiting room. It’s 10.15 a.m., the room is full of people, suitcases, backpacks and bags of every dimension that obstruct the passage, there is not a single seat free, and I want to read the journal comfortably seated. It’s hot, there

is a smell of sweat and a lot of noise. Finally, a man gets up, and I can sit right there, near what is now the crater. A few seconds and I find myself thrown into the air, tossed around like a puppet, taken by the hair. I don't hear the explosion, but a very powerful electric shock, I see sparks all around, I feel the air frying and immediately after a ghostly silence and dust, dust that clouds the gaze. "Now I die" that's what I thought. It is in that precise moment that my mind goes to my father, to my mother, to God. If God is really that good, he won't be able to give my parents the pain of my death, they could not carry such a heavy cross. I can not die. After forming this thought, everything stops. ”

Now it's Marta's turn to read her passage:

“ I'm alone, the only one on the top of the ruins of a station that is not existing anymore. What happened, I still can't explain it to myself. I don't have a wound, no blow to the body. I still haven't realized I have very severe burns, I'm whole, sitting, pain-free. I stand up. From above, from the top of the ruins, I see the roofs of trains and at my level the station clock which will remain stuck forever at 10.25. While I try to get off, in the silence emerge the heartbreaking screams of those who are prisoners under the rubble and ask for help,

screams that slowly fade and die away. A French man, he holds up a hand screaming “Help!”. I catch it, I try to pull, but I can’t. His left leg is imprisoned under a beam; only his torso pops up, and his face is mixed with the grey ruins. Suddenly, I notice that my hands’ skin is ripped to shreds, I feel tremendously burning, I can’t touch anything without feeling excruciating pain. I answer to that man in french: “Attends, je vais appeler quelqu’un”. I will never forget that man that I had to abandon. I get down and reach the square where I experience the stunned silence and the disbelieving stares of those who were there to work or were passing by chance. My eyes burn. I ask for an ambulance. They tell me to sit and wait. There are more seriously injured people. The police and the firefighters arrive. In everyone’s eyes there is only dismay and disbelief. It seems like too much, to everyone. ”

And now is Maria to talk:

“ That period was a period of massacres: Piazza Fontana in Milan, Piazza della Loggia in Brescia, the train Italicus, Ustica. Terroristic massacres which have as their goal ordinary people. This topic is often discussed, and I find myself thinking several times with anguish: “If I happen to be involved in the explosion of a bomb, I think I’d go crazy, I couldn’t stand it.”

After an initial moment in which someone talks about a boiler explosion, it is clear that it's a bomb. A bomb put by humans, like us. And I am here. Alone. My fight for life begins alone, but soon many others join the rope team. The whole city unites in a solidarity race. When I'm on the stretcher, in the ambulance, I pray. I'm alone. Endless moments. The nurses open the tailgate, outside the chaos is unspeakable. I walk into the lane and my blood runs cold: heartbreaking and inhuman screams filled the corridors, together with the frantic voices of doctors and nurses. They put me in bed, I'm dirty. The smell of burning fills the room. I am on the rack. Soon after, they transfer me to the dermatology department, in the bed where I'll cry and suffer for three weeks. Only much later I will get to know that the doctors would not have bet on my salvation, because of a kidney block. But that will also become the bed of my physical and above all spiritual rebirths. In that bed not only do I fight against death, but I also experience a great inner battle. I wonder about death, sorrow, and I ask myself why so many were taken while I was spared. The look at suffering has radically transformed. I met Christ and I finally encountered God. And I understood how, even in an event like this so dramatic and profoundly unjust, it is possible to renew one's faith and to strengthen hope. ”

Donata reads:

“ There were so many difficult steps, and I like remembering the people that helped me those days. In Piacenza, Don Riccardo called the faithful to pray for me. The upper church was full. In the hospital, I started to get to know all the nurses, many are the doctors and the nurses who return from vacation to help, to give their time and energy. Even patients create bonds that go beyond the defects and the excesses of each. Surely, when we'll be discharged, we'll be back to our selfishness, our whims, but this event can't leave us unchanged. The first days are the most terrible, because of the pain due to burns and the much needed but very painful medications. The nights seem to not end. Beside my bed, Nicolino asks about his wife, who comes from Milan. In front of me, another man asks about his wife, when the explosion happened he was holding her hand. He'll discover, a few days later, that destiny had taken her hand to carry her along. The only one who helped me in rediscovering hope and trust in a funk is Giuseppe, the head nurse. I can't forget his constant smile. Just by seeing him, through my still swollen eyes, consoles me. And then, the arrival of my mother and father gives me courage, they seem joyful and I don't understand why. They explained to me that they came to Bologna

certain that I had been involved in the attack, but without knowing whether I was alive or dead. ”


Serena, the youngest daughter, said:

“ In the following days, the physical pain slowly goes down, I start to glimpse the summit, and we try to keep my spirits up with those around me: we fantasize about adventures and follies from one thousand and one nights. I start to feel a great gratitude to be alive, an intimate joy that becomes increasingly intense. Different feelings alternate: Antonella came and it's pure and simple contentment of the eternal child who lives in me. I don't even feel a fever anymore, joking with her is inevitable, even in the darkest moments. Together we defuse everything. The day of the victims' funeral, that I follow from afar, immobilized in my hospital bed, on the contrary, is terrible. I think about my brothers locked in a coffin, I feel the crying that breaks the dam, the banks don't hold up so I cry, I cry like I haven't done it in a long time. Giuseppe and I hugged each other, sticking together by a common feeling and faith. Also, my parents and Antonella cry with me. Aunt Adriana, Antonella's mother, also comes and reconciles with my mother after years of not talking. The day after, I paused for the first time to look out the window, to see the leaves, the sky, and

I felt peace in me. Finally, I live in the present. But little by little a question arises: why have I, among others, been saved? For a few years after this event, I feel guilty to be a survivor, unlike so many others. What is clear to me today, after a long time, is this: if a person is left in this world even surviving a tragic event, a reason, let's just say a task, there must be. As Don Antonio, my parish priest, told me once he returned home: «Who knows what great things God has spared you for! » Well, now those great things have a name, yours. My life's plans didn't include marriage nor children; I only cared not to give up my freedom. But the experience I told you about, worked within me and bore fruit: I felt my life being given back and this led me to open to give in turn, in a certain sense, to multiply that life. And my weak faith put very solid foundations. So, I give you Elena, Chiara, Paolo, Michele, Marta, Maria, Donata, Serena, this story as a witness of God's greatness and love.

Treasure it. ”





I NEVER LEFT THAT COMPANY.  
I WAS OFTEN AWAY  
TO FOLLOW THEM AND MY  
SONS UNDERSTOOD

YOU CONTINUED FOLLOWING, AND,  
BY FOLLOWING, YOU TEACH OTHERS  
HOW TO FOLLOW.

# KEEPERS!

Set to work to cherish and build bonds

*“That is the one eternal education:  
to be sure enough that something is True  
that you dare to tell it to a child”*

Gilbert K. Chesterton

Our history is a precious novel. The collection of illustrated tales named “Keepers -Novels from Heart to Heart” has the aim to cherish the bonds we have *with* our history and build new ones *for* our history. Authors, witnesses, educators and illustrators pictured the stories of those who lived dramatic events that marked their lives and the history of Emilia-Romagna. They wish to give us, through their stories, an opportunity to discover Truth, Beauty and Justice, enclosed in these “from heart to heart” short stories, being sure enough that “you dare to tell it to a child”.

We like to call these publications “libretti da visita” resting assured that the real deal is to protect bonds: encounters that build up our history, friendships that *won't leave us alone*, relationships that help us to recognize and remain faithful to our human stature. This work becomes an adventure but at the same time a responsibility to commit ourselves everyday to build Peace, because who tells us “stay with me” is the Only One capable of this endless loyalty.



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*Set to work to cherish and build bonds*

is an initiative promoted by Santa Caterina da Siena APS in cooperation with the Region Emilia-Romagna, project financed through the call for the promotion of a Culture of Peace year 2025.

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*Real Heart to Heart Novels*

Script by Antonella Bottazzi

Illustrated by Giovanni Cavicchi



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