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The Landlady

by Candida Lloyd

Tom was overjoyed to finally find affordable accommodation in a desirable part of North London. His new flat was on the fourth floor of a Victorian house on the top of a hill. To get to his front door he had to travel through the rest of the house which was inhabited by the landlady. On the stairs on the way up there were piles of old books, dusty silk flowers in vases, knick-knacks and unopened letters stacked everywhere giving the house an unloved feel. But Tom overlooked this because there was space in the large hall for his bike and he could see the Gherkin from the living room window.

Hayley, his girlfriend did not share his enthusiasm when she visited the night he moved in. "I can't believe you have to walk through someone's house to get here," she said, too loudly for Tom's liking "and you haven't even met her yet! She could be a psycho for all you know."

"She's not," replied Tom "she's just an old lady and I haven't heard a peep out of her yet. It'll be fine."

That evening Tom was preparing dinner and nipped out to the shops for some ingredients. As he made his way down stairs he saw a figure scurry across the landing out through one door and in to another. He decided not to mention it to Hannah on his return.

A couple of nights later Tom was home alone and heard someone in distress. It was a kind of wailing or crying coming from down stairs. He imagined Hannah saying "Don't get involved. You don't know what you're getting in to."

But he went out on to the landing and looked over the bannisters down to the dark entrance hall where the sound was coming from. His eyes struggled to make out what they were seeing at first, but then he rushed down to help.

The old lady was on the floor with the bike on top of her. Her nightdress had ridden up revealing more than Tom wanted to see. He lifted the bike off her and helped her to her feet.

“Thank you so much for coming to my rescue.” she said smoothing down her clothes. Tom told her he was glad to help, wished her goodnight and she disappeared through one of the doors. But Tom was left feeling unsettled wondering how had she managed to get trapped under his bicycle?

A few days later the doorbell rang repeatedly. Tom wasn't expecting anyone, but he travelled downstairs and opened the door to a young man with a bike leaning against his hip who explained that he was the previous tenant and he had come to pick up his post.

Tom found some letters on the stairs and handed them over.

“Thanks mate,” he said, and then gestured towards his bike “has she done the damsel in distress trick yet? Look out, that's just the start of it.”