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Crisis

by Penny Jones

Looking up she could see that the curtains were closed, and that through the railings on the narrow balcony the plants were unwatered and dried out. Unable to remember the key code she pressed randomly. On the third try the buzzer sounded and she entered the building. The hall and stairwell were unchanged. But when she reached the front door she saw it had been repainted. Blue in her day it was now yellow. No doubt the lock had been renewed but she tried the key anyway. It did not work.

What now? Matthew had not been in contact for a week his mother had told her. Last night's unexpected phone call had set her on edge. Now that she and he were no longer an item, what was his mother thinking calling her? "Who else is there?" his mother had said. Taken aback she had given several friends contact details, Matthew's work number and even the name of his once favourite coffee shop.

His mother had not asked her directly to make contact. Current etiquette ruled this out. Nevertheless she had found herself wishing to get to the bottom of this. Did she still feel something for him? Of course. They had been together for three years and apart for nearly another. But it was still to her surprise that after work she found herself cycling over to the flat they had shared and that she had left many months ago.

She rang the bell but did not expect an answer. No one answered their doors any more. As she was waiting uncertain what to do, the opposite door opened. On the threshold stood Leo, the neighbour who she had shamefully not kept up with since leaving. Leo looked thin and tense and had the air of someone who had not left his flat for a long time.

It had taken her a year to learn to tell the time that would be right for disobeying Lockdown rules. Now that time had arrived and despite being suitably dressed and gloved she was afraid. There was a witness to her actions and she felt unable to leave.

She could tell from his appearance Leo had not disobeyed the rules, but what about Matthew? Leo handed her the spare key. She turned it in the lock and entered.