

In Times of Crisis

by Vera Gajic

“You were doing so well last year and early this year, not that long ago really. I was so happy you were coping with this awful pandemic, you even learnt to use the computer, no mean feat at your age. And not just that but you started writing, that wonderful class you joined, the new friends you made. OK virtual friends but you never know you might have become real friends if you’d met them. I was thinking how things were getting better for you just as the world was looking down. What’s happened?” asked Josie

“It’s all just meaningless,” said George.

“What’s meaningless?”

George thought for a while before answering, wondering whether to spare his daughter the depth of his depression or pretend that he was OK but he knew he couldn’t keep it up so why start, “life, I don’t have any reason for it, not now, I’m too old.”

“Dad age is a number, you are as old as you feel,” replied Josie, she’d heard lots of people say it and it was a bit of a cliché but clichés can be true, that is why they are clichés. What a lot of clichés in one thought – she’d started to drift away from the conversation with her Dad on the phone wondering what she was going to make for dinner, no-one to cook for tonight, she didn’t have the grandchildren to look after so much now that things were getting back to normal. She missed looking after them even if it was exhausting. It gave her a sense of purpose, she realised that was what her Dad was feeling like but worse.

“Are you still there Josie?”

“Yes sorry Dad I’m still here, I was just thinking about something else.”

“I don’t blame you – it is very boring talking to me about my meaningless life.”

“Now come on Dad – enough of that, where is your spirit? You were so brave when I couldn’t come to see you and you were locked down in the home. I’m told you were helping everyone else, where has that gone?” said Josie, wondering where her own spirit had gone. She felt invincible and so needed when her daughter asked her to help when the schools were closed and Helen and Peter had to work, but now she hardly saw them, too busy catching up with life they said. She wasn’t too sure what they meant by that. She’d wondered off again.

“Look Josie any idiot can face a crisis; it’s this day-to-day living that wears you out. The interminable dullness of it. Not like last year when we didn’t know what was going to happen next, glued to the daily briefings. People dying everywhere. It felt like the war, same sort of community spirit, everyone looking out for each other. I couldn’t keep

the carers out of my room, checking I was breathing and didn't have a temperature every two minutes. Made me feel like I mattered."

"Of course you matter Dad, you matter to me," said Josie, realising she hadn't actually been to visit this month, yet she'd made such a fuss that first few months of lockdown when she wasn't allowed to visit. Ironic really, wanting to visit more because she couldn't, or was that human nature. Dad hadn't seemed to miss her so why had she made such a fuss.

"You know, I miss lockdown," said George, "I know it was terrible people getting ill but being in a crisis made me feel alive. I did like the television news people trying to interview me through the window asking me if I missed you, That was funny, I had to make myself look really sad. Thought I did a good job of it when I saw myself on the telly didn't I?"

"Were you putting it on Dad? Didn't you miss me then, was that all acting? Oh you cheeky devil," said Josie though she had to admit she'd put it on a bit on the other side of the window, blubbing about wanting to hold her Dad, even though she hadn't hugged him for years. He was a bit shocked when the restrictions were lifted and she gave him a big hug. Well she had to everyone was watching.

"Just a bit Josie, but so were you," said George

"I know what you need," said Josie, "a dog, I wonder if the home will let you have one, I was thinking of getting one for myself, everyone says they cheer you up."

"They are a lot of work," said George.

"Not that much work."

"More work than having me?"

"What do you mean?" said Josie.

"More work than having me living with you, that's why you wouldn't let me live with you, too much work you said," said George, "but I don't need to be taken for a walk twice a day so I can go the toilet, I can go to the toilet all by myself."

"Do you still want to move in with me now that Peter has gone? I thought it was him you wanted to be with not me?" said Josie.

"Nah, never liked him much."

"You never told me you didn't like my husband."

"Now why would I do that?" said George.

"Well well, you learn something new every day," ah another cliché thought Josie and not true really, she was sure she hadn't learnt anything new for years but this was a revelation. Ever since Peter had left she'd felt useless, apart from looking after the grandchildren during lock-down. She could look after Dad, that would be useful.

“You’re on, I’m coming to get you,” declared Josie triumphantly.

“Hold on a minute,” said George, “I was joking, you want a dog not a Dad.”