

# The Lock Out

Roddy Phillips

I had a powerful premonition of disaster the moment I unscrewed the handles from our porch door. Either that or it was just common sense, which makes a pleasant change. So when I took the bolt out I laid it carefully on the inside window ledge and made a vivid mental note. It would be just typical of us to get ourselves locked inside the house I thought and told my wife as much.

She laughed and agreed that would be terrible. But since I was painting the door there was little chance of it being closed, particularly with us on the outside. Which would have been just as bad. For a moment I tussled with that scenario, pictured myself struggling to climb in through a window or trying to open the door with a makeshift handle and decided to just leave the bolt where it was.

It was still a mini-crisis waiting to happen. But the main thing was; it wasn't going to happen to me. The day after I painted the door, I went off to buy new handles, so even if the door did shut I would be able to get back in.

"Remember not to close the porch door," I shouted on my way out.

"As if!" called back my wife, meaning of course, as if she would remember not to close the porch door, because that's exactly what she did. About ten minutes after I left my wife suddenly remembered she had to go out and since it had started chucking it down she was concerned the porch was going to get soaked. So she closed the door.

I winced at this point when she later recounted her horrible adventure.

"Now hold a minute," she said her eyes widening, "I'm not as daft as you think you know. I didn't just close the door and hope for the best!"

I waited to be convinced and was duly impressed. Apparently she had made sure she could open the porch door again by sticking her car key into the bolthole and successfully manoeuvring the snib.

Not when the door was closed of course that wouldn't have made sense and not with the bolt which was still lying on the window ledge, but had somehow managed to make itself invisible.

"And do you know what?" she asked hands now firmly on her hips.

"Your car key wouldn't open the door when it was shut," I said.

"How did you know that?" she demanded, but instead of waiting to find out how I knew the car key wasn't going to work she took me deeper into her nightmare of lock-out hell. It was a weird and sometimes strangely wonderful story and if nothing else confirmed my belief that my wife is one of the most ingenious and determined people I know. The reason she found out her car key wouldn't open the porch door so quickly was because the moment she closed it she realised she hadn't actually locked the main front door. So there was nothing else for it, she just had to open the porch door otherwise she would have left our cottage wide open for any passing burglar to stroll in and help himself. The chances of this happening were as remote as our cottage, but as my wife said, as long as there's a chance. This burglar was obviously going to be able to open the porch door a lot easier than my wife. In fact if he had turned up about half an hour into her reverse escape she probably would have been absolutely delighted to see him.

Thinking about burglars her first move was to attempt to climb in through the top of the back room window which was open a tantalising few inches. There was a report a few weeks ago about a monkey that was burgling houses and pinching mobile phones. I doubt if even that petite felon would have been capable of such a tight squeeze. Although if he'd been around my wife would have probably dropped him down the chimney she was so desperate. Particularly when she discovered her head and shoulders were stuck through the window and she remembered we had painted the window frame that very morning. It wasn't wet, just tacky enough to give my wife a

faint white chinstrap. At this point I would have driven to the nearest DIY shop and bought a pair of handles, instead my wife decided she could make her own. She said it came to her as she was trying to pull herself free of the sticky window. Actually she landed on a clothes peg, which she feverishly pulled apart.

She was smirking all the way to the porch door until she discovered the broken clothes peg still wouldn't fit. Undeterred she marched down to our summer house and after failing to find a knife started whittling away at the clothes peg with a pair of garden shears. I had almost glazed over at this point, but her next brainwave pulled me back into the story with a look of stunned amazement.

Realising that there was little chance of her trimming the clothes peg with any accuracy she began hunting around the summer house for anything that resembled a door handle bolt. She must have found something because she paused for dramatic effect and that smirk was back on. Obviously I was meant to guess what she had found but I was hungry and this was turning into an epic so I gave up. She disappeared for a moment and returned proudly holding up a table lamp. Even with a wild and painful stretch of my imagination I couldn't see how a table lamp could be deemed useful to your average burglar, not unless he needed to shed some light on the subject.

"The plug," said my wife, "look at the plug!"

"Ah, right, the plug," I said, after a moment. Potentially the plug's biggest pin could have passed for a door bolt. The problem was how to get the plug unscrewed without a screwdriver. This is where our secateurs came in. Briefly admittedly. Apparently you can unscrew a plug with the point of our secateurs, handy to know if I ever get stuck for a screwdriver.

Unfortunately the small screws inside proved more of a problem. So my wife marched back up to the porch with the plug still attached to the table lamp and shoved the big pin into the bolthole in the door. When it didn't work she whipped out her car key and slipped it in beside the plug pin. At which magical point a country bus trundled passed and slowed down just long enough to allow its passengers an uninterrupted view of a crazed half-painted woman breaking into a house with a rather chic table lamp.

The moment she was inside the porch the bolt made itself visible again and it was all my wife could do not to throw it out across the garden after the bus. The main front door of course was locked all along. That goes without saying because my wife is very security conscious.