

The Return of the Key

You're a shadow on the other side of the panes before I open the door to you, a stranger who I don't immediately recognise. Your once-blue eyes are dry and grey. Handsome lines criss-cross a tan acquired further south. With teeth that spell money you produce some kind of a smile. Are you about to cry? But no, it's the black eyeliner. I'm recalling your youthful cheeks. Because words like *love*, *future*, *together* rise in a flood bursting through debris zipping along old channels and I hold out my hand when you proffer the key.

I look down at my hand. My palm holds key-shaped warmth, but my hands will turn blue if I stand here too long with the snow blowing towards me, piling up on the threshold.

Beyond the gate stands the D reg Morris 1000, a chronicle of rust, dull grey and an up-to-date snow 'hat'. On the passenger side a second-hand door is the colour of old blood. How many times did I nearly dislocate my shoulder cranking that handle? After forty-three years the 'shared' car has returned, a prodigal.

I automatically let you in to shelter us both and I shrink back into the wall as you pass me into the lounge, and quickly shut the front door. I point to the settee, low and dark brown, away from the brightness of the standard lamp. I sit nearer the fire, warming, waiting.

The mantelpiece clock ticks on. Your smile is certain, as if you think that all those miles clocked up will make time disappear.