

Outside

Put the key in the lock. Turn it. Take it out and pull the door.

The door edged open in front of her, hinges creaking, vocalising her escape.

The view had become unfamiliar; as a mere backdrop to deliveries it had been almost invisible. She couldn't believe how long it had been; was it really over five and a half weeks since she'd ventured out of the house?

She glanced back over her shoulder at the familiar and welcoming hallway. It would be so easy to close the door, turn and retreat back into safety.

But the door was open now. She pushed it wider and Life beckoned. It was unseasonably warm and sunny and the bulbs she'd planted last autumn were already pushing up their sturdy green spikes through the ever-present weeds that carpeted the tiny flowerbed. She would have to get out and do the weeding soon. But not today. Today she would concentrate on 'getting out and about again'.

She picked up her trusty walking stick, stepped out onto the garden path and locked the door behind her. Supported by her stick, she cautiously ventured down the path until she reached the pavement. Five steps. It was more difficult than she imagined; her legs, her whole body already starting to ache. Her plan of strolling to the local park disappeared in a flash. She hadn't realised how unfit she'd become.

'Hello, there Debs! Good to see you out and about again! How are you?' It was her neighbour from three doors down, tidying her garden.

Debs waved back. It had been so long since she'd had a proper chat with anyone not distanced by a computer screen.

'Time for a chat, Gloria?' Debs asked hopefully.

'Of course, I've almost finished. Come in for a cup of tea. It's quite warm today, we can even sit in the garden.'

Debs smiled and made her way down to her friend's; so slowly Gloria had already swept up and put away her tools.

'Sorry I've taken so long,' Debs gasped as she reached her, 'I stayed indoors too long, I know that now. I've really slowed down, and everything's hurting.'

'Oh, poor you! Well, it's lovely to see you anyway! Come in, do!'

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She walked easier on her way back, and she counted the steps between Gloria's door and hers. Thirty-nine - only one for each day of her solitude. Although she had actually walked there and back, it was still pathetic. But tomorrow was another day. She decided; she would walk double the number of steps tomorrow; and the next day and the next, until she could walk with ease to the park. She didn't know how long it would take her, but Nature was forgiving. If she missed the snowdrops this year, well then the daffodils would be out. Even if it took until the first blossom trees were already flowering... Life stood in front of her, opening her arms in welcome.

Author's note: based on the title of 'The Thirty-Nine Steps' by John Buchan