

Bourne toWrite...

creative writing
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The Small Shop

by Sue Hitchcock

The shop was small, and so was the house, but it was just what Polly was looking for, being in an alleyway just off the high street. The agent offered to get it cleaned up for her – it was full of junk – but Polly declined. Not only had she offers of help from some girlfriends who had set up a decorating firm, but junk fascinated her. There might be treasures here!

In practice, it had been a bit of a nuisance as most of it had been rubbish and a skip wouldn't fit in the alleyway, but eventually it was clean and Polly started to set up the business she was planning. Luckily she didn't need stock as the bank loan would never have stretched to it. Polly intended to sell second hand clothes and accessories, selected with her expert eye from charity shops. She already had a huge collection at her mother's house, in her old bedroom and in the garage.

Finally she was ready to open. With Christmas only a month away passers-by were greeted with a tableau in the window of an angel, constructed of a wedding dress with wings made of the veil. The giant branches of the Christmas tree were made of green feather boas. Women poked their noses in the door and oohs and aahs resounded as they looked at the intriguing bits and bobs inside. Polly's euphoria was dashed as the January doldrums set in, but it was a good time to search the local charity shops, Before selling frocks, she would wash, repair and sometimes alter them and a modus operandi had to be planned.

The shop only consisted of a room with a kitchen and toilet behind. Upstairs was a main room with two windows overlooking the alley and a small bedroom and bathroom.

Polly decided her sewing machine had to be in one window and in front of the other she placed her most comfortable chair for hand sewing, so that she would have the best light. But she had a dilemma in furnishing the bedroom. She had intended to buy a bed, but there had been a strange sofa thing in the bedroom which was too big to get out. It wasn't uncomfortable to sleep on, though a bit narrow and she was not very tall anyway, so she made do.

Her business began to get a reputation, especially when she started to make fancy dress costumes. On her front door window she placed two notices - "costumes made" and the other "look up!" which started a strange dance outside when her regulars would back across the alley to see if she was at her window. If they wanted to commission an outfit, this would be followed by beckoning signals for her to come down.

Soon Polly had enough money to buy a new bed and so she set to work to dismantle the strange sofa. Parts of the brass structure moved but she couldn't find any way of dismantling it. There was a rail underneath which pulled out and tugging it really hard exposed some dials. Polly sat down and examined them as they seemed to face the seat, and cleaned the glass on them. The knob in the middle of one seemed to turn the dial and suddenly the room changed before her eyes.

When her eyes stopped being fuzzy, she could see a lace curtain at the window, glass-shaded gas lamps on the walls and delicate flowery wallpaper. In front of her was a wardrobe with an oval mirror, the door standing invitingly half open. She had to see! Inside a blue and green shot silk, slender frock with beaded decoration fell into her hands and a matching pair of shoes, with pointed toes and Louis heels stood below on the floor of the wardrobe. Entranced by the treasures she was finding, Polly had forgotten how she had got here.

Could she get back? She bundled what she could carry onto the sofa machine and started to fiddle with the dials. Suddenly one twanged back into its original setting and she was home. The clothes however had aged somewhat and her expert repairs would be needed.