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The Small Back Office

by Sue Hitchcock

In 1947 when Annie's younger daughter started school, it seemed an opportune moment to look for a little job to earn a bit of spare cash and she was in luck when Lake's toyshop opposite the library advertised for an assistant. The next morning she called in and was met by the owner, Mrs page, who seemed a reasonable person, for an employer. The pay wasn't much, but Annie loved children and anticipated an enjoyable time.

The shop itself was very small and only stocked the sort of toys people could afford at that time. For general family play there were jigsaws, Ludo, Snakes and Ladders and Tiddly Winks. There were balls and yo-yos for the seven to tens, a boys section with dinky cars, model airplane kits and tiny toy soldiers and a girls section with dolls, tin tea sets, skipping ropes and French Knitting dollies, which were made at home with four nails in a cotton reel in Annie's experience. Besides that there was a central display with airmail envelopes, birthday cards, receipt books, raffle ticket books, pencils and small paintboxes.

“There's one item which will be new to you, Annie. We have the latest thing – ball-point pens.”

Annie had heard about them but had never used one .

“You don't have a bottle of ink. The ink is inside and it lasts for ages. They are quite expensive, but they can be refilled. That will be your job.”

Annie wouldn't let a little thing like that put her off.

“Come into the office!”

The small back room could hardly be called an office. It had a small sink and a gas ring, but was dominated by two tanks on a shelf.

“You see, you can make yourself a cup of tea in here, but what I need to show you is this.”

Mrs Page took a ball point pen which was lying next to the tanks and unscrewed the bottom of it. Then she held it under the small tap on the tank and proceeded to let the ink dribble into the pen.

“It isn't difficult, is it?”

but Annie noticed Mrs Page's fingers had left blue fingerprints on the shelf and maybe there was some ink on her sleeve too.