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## The Small Back Room

by Lesley Dawson

There it was behind the scullery door, hidden in a corner. It looked just like all the other cupboards in the house, made of cheap post war chipboard with a keyhole in the bottom right hand corner. Where was the key? It must be on the key ring found in my great aunt's capacious black handbag, which was still attached to her arm when she arrived at the Emergency Ward in the hospital. These keys, now in my possession, I tried each in turn, trying to match the key to the size of the keyhole. Having eliminated all other keys and opened doors, drawers, boxes and cupboard elsewhere, this must be the right key.

Imagine my shock when on opening the door, I found a veritable grocers shop. Piled up on shelf after shelf were cardboard boxes, tin cans and packets of every kind of food you could imagine. I remembered that my aunt had been an inveterate hoarder. Margaret Thatcher would have been proud of her. However most of this stuff had been here for years before the Iron Lady ruled at Westminster. Some of it I could just remember from the 1950's when I began to pay attention to brands and prices because my mother sent me to the corner shop with strict instructions of what to buy and make sure I brought the correct change home.

I tried once or twice to fool her into believing that prices had gone up and sneaking a few pennies to buy a sherbet fountain. Somehow mum always knew I wasn't telling the truth. Maybe it had something to do with the yellow coating on my tongue.

Auntie Annie, as she was to us kids, was my grandmother's best friend. She rarely seemed happy and I never saw her smile. When I grumbled at having to visit her, my mother told me to be nice as auntie was a widow, whose husband had committed suicide in the 1930s and whose only son never came to see his mother. We were all the family she had. This was why I had her keys. My mother had instructed me to start to clear the house as we had heard nothing from her son.

The contents of the cupboard represented times past when food was scarce and people bought when things were available and were on sale. Some items were still available today such as Bisto, tins of corned beef and Ovaltine and others, such a spam, Camp Coffee, Brooke Bond tea, sugar lumps and tins of evaporated milk I hadn't seen for a long time. What were we going to do with all this stuff? It couldn't be used as it was way, way out of date, by some decades. The containers were from the days before sell by dates but the rust on the tins and the collapse of the cardboard boxes and seeping out of their contents were not appealing. They would all have to be dumped in the dustbin.

At this point, in swept a tall man, a few years younger than my mother, wearing a pin striped, double-breasted suit. "Hullo. What are you doing here?" He frowned as he saw what I was doing. "Stop that immediately. I have arranged for a company to come in and clear all the contents of the house" Having said this he left, assuming that his instructions would be carried out. So, this was Auntie Annie's son. He couldn't even be bothered to clear his mother's house out himself. After satisfying my curiosity about what was at the back of this small back room, I went home fuming to discuss this horrible man with my mother.