

The Small Back Room

by Penny Humphrey

I have had a recurring dream ever since I was a child. The format changes a little the older I get but essentially it is always about moving into a house where I find a wooden door tucked away somewhere downstairs. When I open the door there is a narrow corridor which leads into an enormous room, sometimes with elegant Baroque furniture, always deep burgundy and very ornate. There are Ormolu tables around the edge of the room and the velvet curtains are closed leaving an eerie light. Sometimes I dream that the room is completely bare.

The smell of years of neglect and mustiness hang around this room but it is by far the largest room in the house and I feel both excited to have found it plus a sense of urgency to bring it back to its former glory.

Oddly the floor in my dream room is always naked concrete which is turning floury on top as the surface wears away.

I see another smaller door in the corner of this room and this leads straight into a small back room with a sink and cupboards.

As a child it was always just me moving in but since I married it was Ray and me and although he is no longer here, in the dream it is still both of us moving in.

The house is always a hive of activity, there are plasterers and electricians and painters in all of the other rooms but the Baroque room never quite gets started on before I wake up.

I might not dream about the house for a year or two but it always comes back to me eventually, just as it did a couple of weeks ago.

As usual we walked in ahead of the Removals van and as usual we found the two rooms but this time there was a difference. In the small back room we could hear loud ticking and on further inspection discovered an Ormolu Death Clock in a cupboard under the sink which I pulled out and placed on a table.

It began ticking louder and faster and then suddenly stopped. When I opened the back there was no movement inside just the signature of the clock maker etched into the clock door.

We ran out of the rooms and I woke up.

I wonder if my dream will pick up from that point next time or whether that will be my last visit to the house.