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No Place Like Home

by Sally Handford

Oskar can't say this. "There's no place like home". He'd be hard put to call the place where he lives "home".

It's a great rambling Gothic mansion, or as they call it in Eastbourne "Soft Gothic", though I can't say that I know the difference between that and I suppose what you would call "Hard Gothic".

Whatever, it's one of those massive mansions festooned with turrets, gables, curlicues, windows of great length or width, inset with stained glass in a kind of baronial style, roofed in fish-scale tiles so loved of the early developers of the Meads area.

Oskar has the whole place to himself. An inherited family house little changed from the first days of its occupation. It has all the attributes of neglected old properties – the damp, the rot, the webs. It also has vast unheated rooms, a kitchen that would be familiar to Mrs. Bridges, were it not for the un-loved, un-scrubbed, dusty atmosphere. It was a monstrosity of a house, a setting for some Gothic horror.

So that the horror of what I'm going to tell you should come as no surprise.

I'd met Oskar a few years back at a cricket match at Saffrons. We got talking about the rather slow scoring game and had tea together in the interval. He was a bit of a film buff, as was I, so we met every once in a while at the Curzon Film Club.

We'd been meeting for about a year or so when he asked me if I'd give him a hand to move some old urns in the garden which had cracked in the winter frost. I said yes and wondered how big these things were if he couldn't move them himself.

And that's the first time I saw the house, with the rather fanciful name of Manderlay. No nothing to do with Du Maurier. His grandfather had been in India and met his wife in Manderlay. I found the house spooky – damp and cold even on a sunny spring day.

I was surprised Oskar lived alone as there were enough rooms for him to rent out a few. But. As he said, it was so neglected that no-one would want to live there.

I wondered that Oskar wanted to keep it on. A developer would snap it up. But, I never said this to Oskar. It seemed like a subject he wouldn't welcome.

How old was Oskar? Well, I'd think a good 15 years younger than me, maybe early 30s. I felt sorry for him going back every night to that bleak place and then, making his evening meal in the dungeon of a kitchen. He had no television or music, just an old radio still on FM. It made me sad to think of a young man living like that.

But, of course, that's before the scandal broke. Oskar, mild and seemingly harmless had murdered his parents. Oh, way back when he was just a youth of 16, something had happened, he'd snapped and killed them. And, yes, cut them up, butchered them and disposed of the pieces. Unfortunately for Oskar, those urns we'd dragged and rolled to a corner of the garden had split open and the foxes had found the remains. It was a femur bone that they'd left on a neighbour's patio that gave him away.

Poor Oskar, I really felt sorry for him. He lost his liberty and the house stays empty and neglected waiting for him to come back one day. If ever.