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There's no Place like Home

by Candida Lloyd

We had arranged to meet on the sea wall. Something had prevented me from inviting her to the holiday cottage I had rented with my family for a late, summer break. I waited, enjoying the orange, evening sky, when I heard shingle crunching behind me. I turned to see a huge, round figure approach. Her arms protruding from the sides of her torso, as if she had been inflated with a pump.

We embraced. How lovely to see you! You are just the same! Let's go in, shall we?

The awkwardness between us which was so exposed outside was now absorbed by the noise and warmth of the pub.

What can I get you? she asked. Fancy some pork scratchings?" I was reminded of her humour. She had always been a laugh.

We looked around for a place to sit. I was aware of the smallness of the room. The low, beamed ceiling and the tables so close together. How would my friend navigate her way on to one of those tiny stools? I thought of Alice in Wonderland after taking the 'drink me' potion.

We settled on a bench near the fireplace.

I can't believe it's been twenty years! We reminisced for a while about working in the cheese shop in London together. About how we'd weighed our heads on the scales when we were bored, served the customers in American accents, and screamed after Christopher Walken had come in to buy some Buxton Blue.

Tell me your story, she said. How has your life turned out? I began to tell her, but a man carrying drinks pushed past causing her to knock her pint over. The beer spilled on the table and down my front.

“It doesn’t matter, I’ll get a cloth and another drink,” I said.

The thread of my story was lost, and talk turned to her recent divorce. There was no warning. Out of the blue, he pressed for it all to happen as quickly as possible and for as much money as he could get. No children, because he didn’t believe in them in this polarised society, consuming the earth’s diminishing resources. Her world had imploded and now she was making connections with her past. She likened it to Peter Pan finding his shadow.

Outside the sky was filled with millions of stars as we walked back along the seafront.

“This is me,” she said as we reached a van parked facing the sea, “I’m a flibbertigibbet,” she continued, “travelling here and there, looking for somewhere to start my life again. I don’t use a light inside the van because I don’t want people thinking I’m a lady with a van, but I can use my laptop.”

“Goodnight. Keep in touch. So lovely to see you.”

I continued walking the few hundred yards to my house. I could see the yellow glow of the light inside the kitchen and could smell cooking as my daughter opened the door.