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A Knock at the Door

by Penny Humphrey

I approached the house from the stony lane at the rear. My hand hovered over the rusty catch on the garden gate as I looked up at the creeper clad walls and a multitude of memories burst into my head, quite unprepared to queue up nicely in their efforts to refresh themselves in my mind.

I smiled and cried at the same time and moved gingerly forward pushing hard at the stiff hinges that creaked loudly in protest.

Ted had kept the garden from becoming a jungle over the years but it looked now as if he was losing the battle, the garden needed new life and proper care. A solitary red rose peeped defiantly out of a bramble bush. I held the perfect flower between two fingers and bent to take in its scent. It smelt of Turkish delight just as I remembered from childhood days when I picked all of the rose heads and put them in water to try to make my own sweets and was sent to bed with a smarting bottom.

It was twenty years to the day since I had last visited. I kept meaning to but my last memory of that house was my mother's coffin being carried out of the front door, my father having passed away long since.

The house was left exactly as it had been all those years ago. I meant to come back, of course I did but I just couldn't but then I suddenly felt the most extraordinary desire to come home.

I walked around the side of the house to the front garden which looked a little more orderly and approached the front door. Thoughts went through my mind of Miss Haverham's house and 'Stop all the clocks' and I shivered a little at what I might find inside and whether I could even after all this time, deal with it.

Immersed as I was in my thoughts, I didn't notice that someone was standing by the front gate looking in.

"Excuse me," he said, "can I ask what you are doing on this property?"

The familiar voice startled me and I turned to see my dear old retainer Ted, still keeping an eye on the place. His creviced face creased into smiles of welcome when he saw it was me and we embraced briefly and exchanged a few words before he lifted his cap and went on his way.

I turned back to face the front door and fished for the old key that still hung on my key ring. Would it still fit and unlock the time warp I would find inside? I half expected my mother to call out in her welcoming way, "Hi love good to see you, I'll stick the kettle on and we'll have a nice cuppa."

I wiggled the key into the lock, it turned easily but I felt I should knock at the door before entering; time now owned this house and it might not welcome my intrusion.