

**I Like
Small Rooms.**

I Like Small Rooms.

I like small rooms. I especially like small rooms with just one door. You can understand small rooms, there's no hiding places. No need to look over your shoulder. A window's fine, but just one door. The shop had two, of course. One for the customers and another that lead into the back storeroom where we put the donations. Sometimes customers were allowed in there, but only ones that Michael said could. I wasn't allowed to let anyone go in there, but I didn't want to anyway. I didn't like people going in there, they hadn't earned the right, and anyway there was personal stuff in there, not only the clothes and books and ornaments that people had left in boxes and bags, but also our valuables. After that first time Michael let people in the back room I just kept my coat on. Michael told me to take it off in the summer, he said it made the shop look untidy. I pointed out to him that it was a charity shop, that the shop was full of dead people's shoes, shirts and hats and that was what made the shop untidy. Not my coat. He ignored me. He never liked me answering him back, especially when he knew I was right. I got promoted of course, when Michael was gone. I got more responsibility rather than a title as such. Just doing some of the things Michael used to do that

he thought I couldn't. Or rather he didn't want me to do. I knew how to do all those things, of course, I had seen him do them enough times. I knew how to unlock the cash till at the end of that first day Michael wasn't there and I knew to put the money in the safe in the back room cupboard. It was the only time I can remember being alone in the shop in all those years. It felt good, you know, freeing. Like when you took your clothes off as a kid and ran round the house naked when your mum was out. I pulled down the blind and I switched off the lights and the heating and double bolted the back door. And in the morning I did all the other things as well. I carried in the black bin bags of left clothes by the front step and I turned on all the lights and put the radio on. And I didn't just stand about waiting for the first customer. I rearranged the front window. I had never done that before. I'd never been allowed to. It was Michael's job. And, of course, I was worried I wouldn't be able to do it as well as him. He's done it for years, Easter, Christmas, Valentine's, Halloween, wonderful themed windows. I always told him I loved his displays. So I tried my own theme. My theme. I dressed the one stumpy mannequin we own and pulled her over to the window. I put on buff stockings and a lime party skirt. I dressed her top half in a pink shirt and a blue woollen cardie. I called her Sue. I don't know much about fashion, but I like colours and those were the most colourful things I could find around the shop. Sue had never had a head so I couldn't put a hat on. So I left her stood there in the window all day, but it sort of creeped me out, just me and her being there all day and her having no head. Actually it was strange because no one came in until lunchtime. You don't get many people on a Tuesday. Never do. Tuesdays are empty days everyone knows that. But there wasn't even one of the Age Concern ladies from next door or a drop off from Ron who does the hospice rounds. So I spent most of the time brushing the floor and putting the ornaments on the shelves back in the right place. There's things on those shelves that haven't sold for years. I've suggested to Michael more than once that we should throw them away, but he thinks that's disrespectful to the people who donated them. I remind him that they didn't want the things in the first place so won't care if we throw them away. But that's Michael for you. I know he was the manager, and he had managers' worries, but he didn't want to do anything to change the shop. That's the way it is, he'd say, and that's the way it stays. Like in the storeroom. I suggested rearranging the things that came in in a more logical order, a stocking system if you like. Maybe even itemise the things that came in rather than just leaving them in their boxes and bags until we have

room out front to put them out. But he said he liked the old system - even if it meant you could never find anything if someone asked for it. But, of course, with promotion I got to be able to change all that. I had great plans for the shop, Sue and I. Not that I got much of a chance to try them out, of course. Which is a shame thinking about it. Because I'm sure even now with a better stock control system, rotation of products on the shelves and a better way of displaying items the shop could have made lots more money. But I got bored being by myself. Even after one day. Really it was the lack of customers, because I know had I been busy like I usually was when Michael was there telling me what to do I wouldn't even of thought of it. I wanted to sort out the storeroom and I had my plans, and if I'm honest, I didn't think what I had done with the mannequin looked very good. And that annoyed me because I couldn't understand why I couldn't do what Michael had made look so easy all those times. So I grabbed Sue by the waist and dragged her into the back room. I knew Mrs Miller had seen me in the window because I noticed her bobble hat bounce up and down at the bus stop. I thought she might think Sue was real for a minute, except I remembered she didn't have a head so she couldn't possibly. But then she hasn't got great eyesight - Mrs Miller, not Sue. Although of course... So anyway I dragged her out back and tried on lots of other clothes. But whatever I tried on I knew she wouldn't look any good without a hat. Or a head. So that's when I had the idea. And like I say, that's probably what did it. If Michael had been there bossing me about, telling me what do to all the time, I wouldn't have even thought of doing such a thing. So I put Sue back in the window - now wearing a long black evening dress - and went back into the storeroom. And there he was. Just sitting there. As he had been, of course, since our argument the day before. I knew I couldn't wake him, anymore than you can make an old pair of shoes new again, so I just did it. Anyway, I wouldn't have tried to wake him even if I could. He would only start on about how silly Sue looked, or that I had swept the floor wrong, or that I shouldn't have messed with the cash till. So I used the sharpest, longest knife I could find in a canteen of cutlery that had been donated the previous week and cut it off. And, I'm sorry, regardless of what you or Michael or Mrs Miller might say Sue looked better for having a head to put a hat on. I wiped the blood off her with a dress shirt that hadn't sold in all the time I've been there, so I knew it wouldn't be wasted and tried probably as many as a dozen different hats on her until I settled on the one you found her wearing when you arrived. Did she say anything about the

hat by the way? Do you think she might visit me here? I know Michael won't visit. He was never as comfortable with small spaces like this as I am. But I like it. I like small rooms. I especially like small rooms with just one door. Like this one.