

A House to Let

by Marion Umney

Cornwall. I never fully understood why I felt so much at home here. I was a London lass through and through and yet there was something about Cornwall that wrapped me in warmth, mystery, a different sense of being, like a magnet drawing me in.

I wasn't looking for somewhere to rent, but as I turned the corner there was something familiar about the house that made me draw a breath, something tugging away in the corner of my mind – a memory. I'd never been down this lane before I was sure of that, yet I knew I'd seen the house, but where?

There was a man in the garden putting up a sign – “To Let”. I didn't want to rent a house here but...I stopped and got out of the car. It would do no harm to look.

“Morning. The house is to let? Could I take a look around?”

The more I wandered around the house, the more disoriented I felt. I knew this house I was sure of it, but I was equally sure I'd never been there before.

The owner chatted. The house had been almost derelict for a bit, after the old lady who had lived there for years died. She'd been a bit eccentric, a loner, no family it seemed, although some of the old folks said she had family who had disowned her. Mabel something, Davenport?

I stopped in my tracks as my memory turned itself on its head. My Grandmother's photograph. That's where I'd seen the house. She had spoken so wistfully of her sister Mabel – “she sent me that secretly after father turned her out. I missed her so much,” Granny had confided in me in a whisper. I dared not ask any more.

As a child I imagined Aunt Mabel had done something unspeakable and later, after Granny died there was no one to ask.

“I’ll take it,” I said, much to the owner’s surprise. Little did I know that the secrets I would find in this house would turn my understanding of mine and my family’s past on its head.