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A House to Let

by Maureen Marsh

She drove down the close and parked outside the house with the sign boldly stating 'House to Let'. 3 words that bely a history, a past. Stories of life and Drama woven into threads of time.

A building, the innocent structure of a modest abode. Somewhat tired looking and in need of a lick of paint and a little interest and perhaps it might receive that from the next in habitants. She recalled that it had never received that from the inhabitants that occupied the house as she grew up, all those years ago. A family of females. One mother, 4 girls and a female cat. Oestrogen and the slightly heightened energy of xx chromosomes in enclosed space.

She closed her eyes and could picture vividly her mother, grey haired and worried. Hovering over the stove conjuring up inept meals of vegetables boiled into submission and cheap cuts of meat. She could almost trace with her finger, the piece of tomato peel that remained resolutely stuck to the dining room wall and never removed. The bevy of smells, burnt offerings and coal tar soap pervading the air.

That one ornament, a wooden Donkey sent from Spain to her mother from her brother. Over the years loosing a leg and then an ear and then the other leg, until all that remained was a stumpy torso, yet still holding pride of place on the mantelpiece.

Her mothers legendary DIY skills, which included sticking a piece of chewing gum in a crack in the bathroom basin and placing a stack of books under her sisters broken legged bed. However, the bed still sloped and her sister regularly woke up in a small heap to one corner.

There were never more than 4 light bulbs working in the house, most rooms remaining in the dark, hiding secrets.

Her mother, gentle, slovenly, lover of cats and musical alchemist. Turning a badly tuned piano into a magical vehicle for her majesty and command over the keys.

She played effortlessly and beautifully. The strains of Chopin and Mozart resounding from within the four walls. Playing to an indifferent audience of self absorbed and emotionally hungry children.

Now, of course, she longed to hear that piano, to see that Woman. Imperfect, messy, kind and gifted, joyfully playing that badly tuned piano. She would even be willing to endure the inept meals of sludge like vegetables, the moments of chaos, little girls fighting, tears and drama. A sense that they were all adrift somehow, in a little leaky boat, bobbing along on an indifferent ocean without a captain at the helm.

Her mothers almost childlike face was so very clear in her mind, that tinkling laughter and humour that never left her even in her final illness. There was something somehow so dignified and yet a surrender in her.

A life, unremarkable and yet remarkable. A life difficult and yet divine. A life now gone and yet echos remaining.

Like bubbles arising and popping....life appears and goes and the structures that we hold to be ourselves are false idols....The truth....the essence of her somehow beyond words and mysterious.

She drove away blowing a kiss to that house. A house to let.