

The House

I remember waiting and waiting in the car, the anxiety and excitement growing as we drove forever north. 'How long now?!?' was bleated out several times and I remember the various toys and books my sister and I had brought along to amuse ourselves on the journey were strewn across the car in the most untidy fashion as we had discarded them one by one when they lost our attention. I remember the cold grey of the sky promising a White Christmas and then arriving at Lake Windermere to the wind and rain – but that didn't matter. As we boarded the ferry I stood out on the deck and listened to the constant hum of the engine as we streaked across the gloomy black water and felt the chill of the icy wind which made me long of our destination. Back into the car and past the house of my hero – Beatrice Potter and along the never-ending, twisty-turny roads lined with thick green trees, standing like soldiers to salute us. Then came our Lake, Lake Coniston and the house could be seen far away on the opposing bank, sitting by itself quite contently on the hillside, as if it was keeping watch over the deep grey waters, and to our right the great mass which rose up out of the landscape - The Old Man.

The mountain was already covered in snow and its yellow-green sides sloping gently down to us like a hand reaching out to help. Finally, finally we arrive, the gravel crunching and dogs barking and we step out and I turn and see everything at once. The gate to the field which runs down to the lake with its tiny wooden peer and the tree with the tire swing and then the great house itself – all its windows holding stories of the past. And through the front door into a narrow corridor and so many voices. Most of them cockney and many of them young children, the smell of clean guesthouse that would surely be ruined within the week as The Currans ran around and ate and went out then came back in and laughed and played and argued. Into the first living room and the heat of the fire welcoming me and soothing my mind after the stressful journey. 'Ping', 'ping', calls me into another living room (at the time there seemed to be hundreds) where all the boys were paying Slam and they invited me to join in with the fun. Countless hours we would spend hitting the small, shiny blue and white ball against the wall and the plasitcy, JJB-sports-shop-smell always surrounded the laughter.

The then was the large room at the back which would hold our Christmas feast with rows and rows of tables laden with a turkey so big it took five of my aunties and uncles and my own mum to shove into the poor oven. But for now it was lined with several soft and squishy sofas. The old fabric hugging you and telling you never to get up as we listened to the Michael Jackson CD over and over again and I remember the Christmas tree which stood in the corner, subtle but never forgotten as sometimes we were allowed to reach up into the scratchy branches and pick a stripy candy cane to lick. The minty taste both sour and sweet and the sticky hands which would have to be washed if they 'wanted to help make the dinner'. When the whole family got together the old sofas seemed to chuckle along with us. Then up the stairs, never the main ones which were regular and boring but through the little door at the back and into the small space with a few book shelves and a pay phone and up the creaking and squeaking steps onto the landing. This is where we locked a door mistakenly and laughed and worried and sneakily asked my uncle to help us unlock it and marveling at the credit card trick and the hush of whispers as nobody ever found out.