

We are in Lulworth as Helen makes the phonecall. July 1998. There is a phone box not far from the inn. I circle around it as she speaks inside, trying to make out the news from a distance, but I don't have to wait long before she hangs up the receiver.

'I've got it' she says. 'They want me to start in September. Are you sure you want to move?'

'Of course' I say. 'This is fantastic, how exciting. You have a job. We're moving to England.'

So in September we are travelling to England again. The car is packed with Helen's cases, our destination a room in a fairy tale cottage in Stourhead. Unbelievable really. In the morning you leave orderly Holland, eight hours later you arrive in picture postcard England.

This time I'm just staying for two weeks. Whilst Helen finds her bearings in the new job, I try to figure out where on earth I have landed. We buy coal to stoke up the old Rayburn - what century is this? - and I cook a slow pumpkin soup. I walk over from the cottage to St Peter's Church, find the bleeding hand in the window that someone told me about, sit in the sunshine between the gravestones. Another day I walk to Alfred's tower. I have told myself to make ten sketches. So I walk, stop and draw. Ten times. In this country I will be an artist. At night we slip into the park and watch the stars over the lake. I go close up to the Bristol Cross, too gothic to bear against the night sky. It frightens me.

Three months later it is my turn to move. In the meantime I have completed my work contracts, dealt with bills, hired a van. For the last two weeks when I had gone to bed I lay there rehearsing packing the van. First the table in, sofa on top, boxes under, fridge in the corner, large canvases carefully to the side. There are only so many items you can virtually load into a van. When I loose the thread I start again, until I finally fall asleep.

5 December 1998 is a stormy day. The van is completely stuffed. Two friends are travelling with me. 'To share the driving' I explained when I asked them, but really it is for moral support. I'm tense throughout my body. In Calais a uniformed officer looks concerned at our van, leaning hard on its tyres. He agrees to let us on board, but insists on metal sheets under our wheels, to spread the weight away from its central point. The propellers start, the air is pumped under the rubber belt. Without hesitation the hovercraft moves onto the choppy waves.

As we pass Stonehenge the sun is setting. It's half an hour from here to Mere, where Helen has found us a flat. I remember when to expect the first sign along the road. Another sign states a 'nearside service station in two miles' and a third, deeper in the grass, mentions Fish & Chips. It's dark when we finally pull up. Our new neighbour Maggie has made us an apple cake. When we open the van doors a favourite water jug that I had bought in a junk shop shatters to the ground, gladly. I have arrived.

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