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I ended up in Cornwall because I was in crisis and it was as far as I could run

Katie ups sticks to a barn where vintage vinyl and the odd friendly local are the only company

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CREDIT: Jooney Woodward.

I knew little about Cornwall when I moved here on a whim. In truth, that is what attracted me to it. Cornwall is a place with no memories for me. It is not Wales or Somerset or the Midlands, which feel haunted by the years my mother has been ill, going in and out of hospital; not Sussex, where my dad spent his last years deteriorating with Alzheimer's; nor the Peak District where my fiancé was from, where he proposed and we dreamed about moving.

When I left London, so many places felt fraught with memories – but Cornwall was somewhere I could start fresh. We never took holidays here with my family or in my 20s (it was way too expensive, two weeks in Greece cost less). I only knew Cornwall from a handful of visits to Tanya's house and only ended up in Land's End because I was in crisis and it was as far as I could run.

Other people seem drawn to Cornwall for similar reasons. Penzance is literally the End of the Line. Where the train stops, which I am told partly explains why Cornwall has such a serious homelessness problem.

Of the incomers I meet in Cornwall, many seem to have fled here to start again. I meet people who have moved here after a cancer diagnosis, several who've come after a divorce, to hide from an ex-partner or reinvent themselves.

But Cornwall is not just a place for escapism – I want to understand it. It is hard to get to know somewhere during a pandemic – you can't do anything as simple as knock on your neighbour's door or go to the pub – so I start in bed with a pile of books.

I read dry travel guides with listings for restaurants that are all shut. I read Gavin Knight's *The Swordfish and the Star*, about the people living on the Penwith Peninsula, with its outrageous yarns about Newlyn's fishermen. And *The Salt Path* by Raynor Win, who came here after her husband was diagnosed with a terminal illness and they became homeless, so they decided to walk 630 miles of the sea-swept South West Coast Path, sleeping in a two-man tent. In Win's description of her healing journey, I see Cornwall again. I read Lamorna Ash's *Dark, Salt, Clear*, enthralled by her bravery heading out to sea with the crews of Newlyn's fishing trawlers, and Catrina Davies' *Homesick*, her story of moving to Cornwall to live in a shed, an examination of the wider housing crisis. I sit in bed reading as outside the Cornish rain beats down.

I read these diverse stories but in a way they are the same story – of people coming to Cornwall to find themselves. Ash recognises this. Her mother grew up in Cornwall but she did not, confessing: 'I have used this place as an identity that doesn't really belong to me.' Her mother replies: 'I'm a great believer in "You are what you feel you are."' Can that be true?

Charlie Carroll's novel *The Lip* feels different: a Cornishman writing from a (fictional) Cornishwoman's perspective, living in poverty on the tourist-packed coast. Her life weaves intimately close to this place, vesting a lyrical magic over these weather-beaten landscapes. Yet, I am taken aback by the depth of the heroine's anger towards 'emmetts' (the Cornish word for incomers), her stories about locals beating up outsiders and her father's words: 'All emmets look the same to me.' To which she adds: 'They all look the same to me too. Abominable.' And I understand something else I didn't know about Cornwall.

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