

# North by North East

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## Goodbye, Africa

**Banjul, The Gambia, April 2009**

Nathan led the funeral cortege down the slope to the small cemetery which had been used for Christian burials since the *Scottish Mission Church* was established in 1957. Both the church and cemetery were on disputed land; land claimed by a local property developer. By choice, Nathan would have chosen the other larger, official Christian cemetery on the other side of Banjul but his mother had made her wishes plain.

Behind him, the group of mourners were singing *Walking in the Light of God*, requested by Miriam Ndoye on her deathbed. These mourners comprised seven older women and one arthritic octogenarian called Robert Lipton, a man of mixed race who hobbled along on his ornate crutches. Nathan reckoned this remnant congregation would all be dead within a few years. The church was already closed, its roof caved in. Abutting the church was "Pastor Jonathan's Manse". This too was crumbling, tilted to one side with most windows broken, others cracked, confining the twenty-three-year-old to live in what had been the parlour, the room with the best views.

Indeed, the best thing about the derelict church site was its views to the West over Parker's Creek, the reason it was so desirable to the developer who had been scheming for years to get rid of the church and build a luxury apart-hotel complex.

Two weeks earlier, when Miriam Ndoye had sensed her end was near, she had given Nathan his instructions for the conduct of her funeral and the sheave of documents she had been hoarding since his father had returned to Glasgow in 1987, when Nathan was two years old. Reading these files had revealed to him his true parentage. When he had challenged her as to their veracity, she had smiled wanly, nodded and asked for his forgiveness. When he asked for her guidance about what he should do with his life when she was gone, she had grasped his wrist and whispered fiercely:

"Go to Glasgow and find him. Claim your heritage and make something good for me. Do this in my memory."

As if to seal this edict, she had not spoken again, except to pray from time to time in an inaudible whisper until, the previous day, she had closed her eyes and let her last breath escape in a long, rasping whistle.

# *North by North East*

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## *Life before Africa*

### **Banjul, August 1976**

Shortly after the twentieth anniversary of his marriage to Esther Vernon, Pastor Jon Macnab had moved into the guest bedroom of their manse at the *Scottish Mission Church* in Banjul. Esther made no comment; the physical side of their marriage had been stalled for over a decade. In his new sleeping arrangement, her husband was free to 'relieve' himself when the urge could not be resisted.

This new freedom became a sinful habit which Jonathan Macnab did not seek to pray away, as he knew he should. During recovery, already planning another pleasuring, he lay awake raking through his memories as a young man in Glasgow, wondering what would have happened had he not settled on Esther; if his life had taken a different path. However, his palate of sexual encounters was very limited and after a few weeks sleeping alone, his nocturnal thought-life settled to a familiar, fixed pattern.

### **Glasgow, 1954**

Before Esther, there had been only two girls with whom the young Jon Macnab had been intimate and each night he would run the film of the amazing period months from mid-summer 1954 when he was still eighteen.

Sarah was the youngest of the Reverend George Philipson's three daughters. Although Jon knew her quite well in the context of the church and YF meetings, they had not formed a close friendship until one Saturday morning in the local library. Jon had been there from the minute it opened, with his books and papers spread out, studying hard for his re-sit, struggling with Calculus and Statistics. Sarah had loped across on her long legs to whisper her greeting, took a seat beside him, asked what he was doing, scanned his notes and past exam papers and offered her help.

Sarah excelled at Maths and intended to attend university to train as a teacher in the subject. She had coached him, until he finally grasped enough to try again in the hope of progressing into the final year of his Mechanical Engineering Draughtsman's course at Stow College.

During those few weeks on the run-up to his re-sits, they met in the library as often as Sarah could 'escape from 'Colditz', as she had described it. What she had not revealed to Jon, an explanation which would come out later, was that the Phillipson manse was in

## North by North East

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turmoil; Rebecca, Sarah's next older sister, had been sent home from St Andrews University, four months pregnant by a father she refused to name.

When Jon's re-sit results were posted, he had scraped through his first year of the two-year course. Free of studying for a while, he had dared to ask Sarah if she would go with him to see a re-run of the film *From here to Eternity* which was showing at a cinema in Paisley. He knew she would not go to a local cinema with him because they might be 'spotted' and reported to her father.

Sarah had refused. Her father had condemned the film (unseen) as 'lewd and lascivious'. Instead, she suggested they should meet in the vast Pollok Estate now open to the general public, describing a 'secret' location in the woods where she often walked the family dog.

On the Sunday afternoon in question the weather had turned nasty, with gusting winds splattering rain in heavy showers. Despite this, after a short while chatting about his results, they hugged and kissed. Jon was amazed at how passionate she was and dared to unbutton her raincoat. When Sarah did not resist, he had gone to the next step and fondled her breasts through her jumper and blouse. Discovering she was not wearing a bra, the firmness of her small breasts and huge nipples had excited him immensely causing an urgent erection which she had sensed. Pressing herself hard against him, he had felt her 'leap', a phenomenon he had heard discussed by an older man he worked with as an equivalent of a male erection. However, when he had tried to 'go below' she had grasped his hand firmly and hissed, "No!".

Later, still standing hidden in the woods near the main gate, Sarah dropped her bombshell.

"Jon, look, I'm really sorry but we only have a few weeks left, if that. Don't say anything to anyone but my father is moving us to a new church on The Black Isle, near Inverness. I'm not supposed to know but I heard Mum arguing with him about it. It's to happen soon. It's all settled, I heard him say. Oh, you look so sad Jon. That's so sweet of you. But, hey look, I think I can get away on Tuesday. I'm supposed to visit an old lady on Tuesday evenings to do her ironing for a Guide badge but I can pop in and do it right after school. I could be here again at seven o'clock, for about an hour, OK?"

On the Tuesday night Jon should have been at pre-season football training but he skipped it. He had waited until half-past-eight but Sarah had not come.

Later that week he learned her sister had been taken into hospital for an emergency operation. The following Sunday, the church service had been taken by a locum minister. The Reverend George Phillipson and his family moved from Shawlands during the following week.

# North by North East

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Jon had dared to write to Sarah, couching his letter in simple platonic terms, giving banal news of YF activities and planned events. His letter was returned with a note from Mrs Phillipson saying Sarah was too busy with her studies to enter any correspondence.

Nonetheless, the image of the tall, slim, freckle-faced girl with bright green eyes peering eagerly over horn-rimmed spectacles still lingered, sparking the short interlude with his hands fumbling inside her raincoat which he used as a teaser/trailer before running the film memory of the 'main event' with another much bolder girl who was soon to re-enter his life in an unexpected way.

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When Jon got to know Kat McMann, the memory of Sarah was dimming. Most of the good-looking girls in the YF were already 'taken'. The two new girls who arrived that autumn stood out as posher, better dressed, better off, always with money to buy crisps and Coca Cola from the café stall at social breaks. The older one, Avril, was petite with a doll-like face: the other girl Kathleen, was taller with a well-developed body and a long face with her teeth in an orthodontic brace, the first time Jon had ever seen this.

His whirlwind encounter with Kat had started one February evening, the day after Jon's nineteenth birthday. As usual he was last out, locking up the church hall after the Wednesday evening YF meeting. It was dark but not cold or windy. He turned from the door to find his path blocked by Kathleen.

"Avril got off with your friend Bruce what's-his-name. She's been after him for weeks." Pointing to the sky she added: "Look, Jonno, it's a lovers' moon." As he was looking, she slipped her arm around his waist and said, "So, now I'm left all alone, you've just got to walk me home, yeah?"

Kat McMann had done almost all the talking. He learned she was a senior pupil at Hutcheson's Grammar (Hutchie), the local fee-paying school and that they lived in a large stone villa in Pollokshields, nearly a mile away from his own home. Her father was a whizz at stockbroking and her grandfather had been a merchant banker. Her mother owned a share in a florist's shop and had a sports car with a removable roof. Kat wanted to become a doctor or, if she did not get enough Highers, maybe a speech therapist. She did not seem at all interested in his studies aimed at becoming a qualified draughtsman.

They had stood in silence for ages, her back against the rear wall, in the darkness, near her kitchen door. Jon was unsure how to proceed until suddenly Kat leaned into him and they kissed, her hands pulling his head down to her lips. After a few more kisses, she had forced her tongue into his mouth. This 'signal' had encouraged him to take a chance and slip his hands up under her jacket, up inside her blouse, pushing up inside her bra to fondle

# North by North East

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her breasts, only his second time touching bare flesh after a fumbling, exhilarating and tantalising contact with Sarah's upper thigh before she had pushed him away.

Once again, Kat took the initiative, undoing her blouse buttons and releasing her bra for him, whispering, directing his head to her breasts while her other hand sought out his erection, rubbing it fiercely through his trousers, bringing him to the perilous edge of an ejaculation which might make her laugh at him.

When he tried to 'go below', she had apologised:

"No, sorry Jonno. I'm just finishing my period but how about Saturday afternoon? Mummy and Daddy always drive through to Stirling to see Granny on Saturdays. I'll tell them I have too much homework or maybe one of my bad headaches. It's what I always do when I don't want to go. So, come at two o'clock and hide until they drive away then come around to the back door here, yeah?"

Although Jon was the goalkeeper and captain of his works football team which had a match that day, he agreed without protest.

When Saturday afternoon arrived, he allowed ten minutes to be sure Mr and Mrs McMann had really gone then almost ran to the rear of the house. Kat was waiting with the door open, smoking, drinking Coca Cola. Reeking of perfume, her face caked with make-up, she looked like a different person from the girl he had been with a few days earlier. She was wearing a skin-tight dress with a deep cleavage.

"It's an old cocktail dress of Mummy's but she's got too fat to fit into it now. What do you think, Jonno, does red suit me? Can you tell I'm not wearing a bra?"

In her bedroom they played records and smooched, swaying to the music, his hands wandering and Kat rubbing herself against him.

While he reloaded the open fire with coals, she dashed downstairs and came back with tall glasses of what she called gin colas.

"Don't worry, Jonno, it's just ice-cold Coca Cola from the fridge with the tiniest teeny-weeny wee dribble of Daddy's gin in it. As Daddy always says, you must never spoil a drink with ice cubes. Cheers!"

As they drank, she smoked, blowing out through the partially open window. Three times more she scampered off and returned with gin colas. Draining the last drop she saw Jon still had most of his tumblerful left to drink and she grabbed it up and drained it.

'Ugh! Too much Cola!' She sashayed across to the record player, re-loaded the stack of records, turned the volume up, tip-toed back to him, placed her fingers on his shirt button and whispered into his ear:

# North by North East

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"Jonno, don't you think this room is too hot for clothes?"

He found the zip at the back of her dress and tugged it downwards and she wriggled out of it then stepped once back, naked, her hands on her hips, a pose she had rehearsed many times over the last few days standing before her wardrobe mirror, her bedroom door locked. Reaching forward she pushed him backwards and he stumbled onto her bed.

For Jon, who was not a drinker, everything became a long, slow blur dominated by a dim guilty realisation he was acting badly: somehow, he should find a way to stop, to get away in case he made her pregnant. He was also anxious in case he fired too early and spoiled everything.

For Kat, who had tried and failed several times before to get Keith Baxter her former boyfriend, to 'go too far' with her, everything was going to plan. She was following Avril's description of her first time with the Head Boy, Alan Ferguson. According to Avril, if you were drunk enough, the pain would be over quickly then it would be fantastic. By having sex right after your period finished you could never get pregnant. Alan had known what to do, Avril had said, describing the act to her in detail. To Kat it was clear Jon was clueless which was extra nice but frustrating.

After her session with Alan, Avril had then gone on to do it twice in the one night with Eric Bladen at a party then with Bruce Macalinden a few days earlier, standing up in the back close of a tenement near the YF church in Shawlands.

Kat knew if she did not do it soon, she would be labelled as 'a nun' by the others in her form who had already done it.

Fats Domino was crooning *Ain't that a Shame* at full volume.

Jon, wearing only underpants and following 'instructions', was kneeling on the bed with Kat spread-eagled below him. As she had directed, he was sucking her left breast, her favourite, her fingers combing through his curly black hair. She had stuck his left thumb in her mouth and was sucking and chewing on it. His right hand was stroking up and down between her thighs, tickling her 'bush' as she had called it, awaiting her 'permission' to go further.

The music stopped, and the next record clicked and dropped. During the silence, the bedroom door flew open.

Hurling a stream of high-pitched obscenities, Mrs Beryl McMann shot forward, grabbed Jon's hair with one hand and began slapping his head viciously with her other. She hauled him to the floor, now kicking, aiming at his genitals.

Screeching and weeping, Kat ran to the bathroom and locked herself inside.

# *North by North East*

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For Jon, there followed a long period of shouting and being pushed around by both parents. Time after time Mr McMann had growled:

"Did you inseminate my daughter? You bastard! Did you?"

Mrs McMann had screeched:

"Kathleen is only fifteen, you must have known!"

The notion Kat might have been underage had not crossed Jon's mind. Would they report him to the Police?

Ten minutes later, punched, kicked and scratched, Jon was hurled through the front door, still in his underpants, his clothes in a bundle under his arm. The door slammed shut behind him then re-opened and Mr Hector McMann hurled his shoes at him.

Jon staggered away, found a place to hide behind a large rhododendron tree, hopping on one leg. He had not realised he was drunk until he fell into a muddy flowerbed still unable to get his leg into his trousers. In a wave of nausea, the contents of his stomach heaved up. Eventually he recovered, dressed after a fashion and began walking homewards quickly until he broke into a run, driven by the thought the Police might arrive at any minute.

Prior to Kat's gin colas, Jon had only drunk alcohol once before; a glass of sweet stout after a cup final match in which he had saved a last-minute penalty kick ensuring his team won 2-1.

Unfortunately, vomit had spilled onto his shirt and jumper and when he reached Minard Road, his Aunt Ella had smelled this immediately. When his uncle arrived home from watching the football match which Jon had missed without explanation, William McIntyre delivered a long and powerful harangue on the evils of drink, reminding his nephew it was a condition of remaining in the McIntyre household that the drinking of alcohol and smoking of tobacco must be abhorred.

Later, over supper around the kitchen table with his aunt, uncle and younger cousin Colin, Jon promised he would never drink alcohol again.

To 'seal his pledge', the family had kneeled to offer thanks to God in a long prayer asking for God's forgiveness for Jon's 'many and manifest failings'. With his uncle in his stride, all Jon could think about was what would happen if he was reported to the Police for seducing a minor.

Next day, at the Sunday YF meeting, Avril had pulled him aside with a knowing wink and whispered:

# North by North East

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"Kat phoned last night, Jonno. She says she still loves you but she's confined to barracks for a fortnight and banned from attending the YF ever again. She says you've not to try to see her until they calm down. Oh, and she says you're in the clear. Her mother stopped her father going to the Police."

She then added:

"Don't worry, Jonno, Kat has them round her little finger."

A month later, Avril had spread the story that Mr McMann had been given a big promotion by his firm and the family were moving to Edinburgh. By then, however, Kat was already history in Jon's life.

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On the Friday evening after his tryst with Kat, Jon was at a celebration rally in the Glasgow's Kelvin Hall to hear about the forthcoming visit by Dr Billy Graham, the American Evangelist <sup>1</sup>.

By chance or divine planning, Jon was seated beside an attractive dark-skinned girl of mixed race called Esther Vernon. They were both early and before the service started they chatted. Jon learned Esther was twenty-four, recently qualified as a nurse and worked at the Western Infirmary, only a few minutes' walk from where they were seated. Esther explained she had planned to become a primary teacher but had changed her mind because chalk dust made her wheezy. As Esther rambled backwards and forwards through her family and life history, Jon established that Esther's grandfather Charles Harmon was English and had been sent to Jamaica by the Foreign and Colonial Office prior to the First Great War. It was there he had fallen for a local girl called Hannah whom he had made pregnant and was forced to marry. Demoted for fraternising, he was recalled to London, where Esther's mother Verity had been born. After a year, Hannah and Charles had split but the couple had not divorced. Charles was killed in the Great War. Verity was an only child. Hannah was clever and found a job in an Insurance company where she rose to become the General Manager.

At college, Verity had been studying Physics, planning to become a teacher when she met Bernie Vernon. Bernie was studying electrical engineering. Verity had to leave college because Esther was on the way. After the recent War against Hitler, Bernie had landed a big job at Dounreay Nuclear Power Station requiring the family to move to Thurso, in the far north of Scotland. When Esther moved to Glasgow aged seventeen, her parents split. Verity had first moved to London and then back to her mother's family in Jamaica where she ran a small travel company. Esther had lost contact with her father but

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<sup>1</sup> March-April 1955 in Glasgow starting at the Kelvin Hall then travelling throughout Scotland.

## North by North East

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according to a letter from her mother, they had obtained a divorce and Bernie Vernon had remarried a local girl from nearby Wick.

Jon was surprised to learn Esther had only been a Christian for a few months. Esther Vernon did not reveal she had been brought up as a Roman Catholic but had lapsed when she left Thurso for Glasgow nor that she had been driven to Christ by a shameful secret, the details of which he would never learn.

In the social break, Jon told Esther about his older brother David and his wife Margaret-Ann on the island of Tiree, where they had recently taken over the family croft from Jon's mother, Magda.

Like Jon, Esther Vernon was a good listener, in sharp contrast to Kat McMann. She learned his father Donald John had been a ship's engineer whose merchant ship had been sunk with the loss of all hands during a wartime convoy to Russia.

And, like Esther, Jon McNab was a migrant. Aged sixteen, he had come to Glasgow because his Uncle, William McIntyre had arranged for Jon to start in the drawing office as an apprentice draughtsman at Weirs of Cathcart. His uncle was also from Tiree and a very strict Christian but kind, wise and generous. Jon lived with his aunt and uncle in Shawlands and shared a bedroom with his younger cousin. Colin was very clever and had recently applied to Edinburgh University to study Law.

After the rally, Esther invited Jon back to her bed-sit in White Street, Partick, only ten minutes' walk away. Ostensibly, this was to drink a coffee, read the leaflets they had been given and pray together for the success of the forthcoming Billy Graham Crusade.

Two hours later they slipped under the sheets of her single bed.

Despite her recent and fervent commitment to Jesus, Esther was very willing to encourage Jon's "loving and gentle hands" to explore her body before guiding his finger to bring her to a climax while offering him hand-relief to prevent an unwanted pregnancy.

Esther was a virgin, she claimed, and did not believe in condoms.

# North by North East

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## *In the Bleak Midwinter*

From her schooldays, Kat Baxter's best friend and confidante had been Avril Ferguson (nee Steiner). Until her 'conversion' from alcohol dependency, Avril had led a chequered life.

In 1973, aged thirty-three, she was divorced by her husband Alan after he caught her *in flagrante* with his business partner Bruce Macalinden. Already a functional alcoholic of many years standing and a heavy smoker, Avril stared critically at her mirror and admitted she was losing her bloom. In the wake of her divorce, with her financial circumstances much diminished, she was desperate. She sought out her local Alcoholics Anonymous group and began to read about the lives of others who had turned their lives around, many like her who had been cursed by easy wealth and good looks, people for whom everything had been 'easy'.

She accepted the twenty-one day challenge and fought off the temptation, managing to stay sober and clean. Renewing her commitment she survived without addictive substances of any kind for a further year.

During this period back living with her parents, she had taken up jogging, swimming and playing Bridge to occupy her leisure time. In 1975, now sober and bursting with energy and ideas, using a leg-up from her father (a successful wholesale jeweller), Avril set up the *Steiner Financial Advisory Service (SFAS)*. Although it was a role for which she had no proper training, she had always been quick with numbers and, guided by her father, she was wise enough to stick to good quality stocks and shares when giving recommendations.

As her oldest friend, Mrs Kat Baxter (long divorced) was one of her first clients. Kat, who was still at this stage drinking heavily, sought out the wealthiest from her circle of friends and family to extol the virtues of Avril Steiner and SFAS. However, Kat's father Hector McMann had been wary of Avril's new enterprise, rightly suspecting she had been at the root of Kat's drinking problems and waywardness. For this reason, Kat had placed only a small part of her portfolio with her friend's company.

With a mixture of charm and astuteness and by focussing mainly on divorced women like herself, with Kat's informal help, Avril's business began to grow and, as it did, she became more competent and confident. Within two years of starting out, Avril Ferguson was earning upwards of £300,000 per annum.

# North by North East

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In early 1979, when the first signs of her illness appeared, Avril, now thirty-nine, sold out her client portfolio to another firm, passing on Kat's account with it.

When Kat realised her soulmate Avril was ill, she glimpsed her own mortality and agreed to attend an AA meeting with her friend. As each speaker gave their testimony in turn and re-affirmed their vow to remain sober, Kat saw she needed help and remained behind for one-to-one counselling when the meeting closed.

Over the months which followed, she attended AA meetings intermittently. In the summer of 1980, she made her first real attempt to live a 'clean' life. In her first attempt, she lasted only ten days but with Avril's help, she kept trying. Time after time she tried and failed but, encouraged by her AA group, Kat persisted.

Her successful conversion was made in December 1981. Newly forty, after twenty-seven years of increasing dependency since the age of thirteen, Kat Baxter nee McMann was fully sober, free of nicotine and other narcotics. At three months sober, Kat Baxter agreed to drive her parents to the Watchnight Service at Glasgow Cathedral, their home church where she had been married decades earlier, a marriage which had lasted only seven months.

In the dim gloom of the chilly building, as the choir led with *In the Bleak Midwinter*, Kat Baxter nee McMann was overcome by remorse. Closing her eyes and shuddering uncontrollably, she opened her heart to the Holy Spirit, seeking the forgiveness and redemption she had heard of at many AA meetings. Weeping inconsolably, she was led away by an usher, a retiree whose formative Christian life had been in the Gospel Hall tradition.

As a younger man, Tim Hopewell had been involved with the Billy Graham Crusade and immediately recognised her situation. Praying together in the quiet of the Vestry, he provided her with a copy of a leaflet introducing *The Alpha Course - why am I here?* and a *Samaritans' Bible* from his stock.

As the organ blasted out the closing hymn, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, Kat slipped back into her seat beside her parents. The following day, at Hopewell's invitation, Kat was a guest at 'Christ's Big Birthday Celebration' at *Greenview Hall*, an open brethren evangelical church in Pollokshaws. After the service, Kat signed herself up to attend their Bible Study Course, at that time an early version of the ten-week *Alpha Course* starting to gain traction in evangelical churches. It was the start of Kat's slow journey to a full head and heart conversion before the Throne of Grace.

During this transition, as her period of sobriety extended, she was underpinned by her AA group, many of whom had followed a similar path to Christian commitment as a means of making themselves whole through forgiveness. Following Avril's previous trajectory,

## North by North East

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Kat sought release in physical activity, installed a home gym and engaged a personal trainer, a novelty at that time, taking up tennis, joining the Giffnock Lawn Tennis Club and becoming a member at nearby *Whitecraigs Golf Club*. With a 'clean', fit body and vigorously active lifestyle, Kat's libido was now restored and with it, old urges which had been suppressed by alcohol now returned.

Although she knew it to be sinful, she allowed her thought life to stray from the path of chastity by calling up tender memories of Jonno Macnab, the boy of her teenage dreams. When she signed up to the WWMPC's newsletter and read about Pastor Jon Macnab in The Gambia and his request for a typewriter, she began the task of convincing herself God was calling her to service. From Miss Fairgrieve at the *Fraser Society (Fraser Memorial Mission Society)*, she obtained Jon's contact details and at once bought and dispatched the best typewriter she could find to the *Scottish Mission Church* in Banjul, thereby initiating the exchange of letters with her lost love, conveniently ignoring the fact he was already married.

At this juncture, Avril Ferguson's race was almost run. During her friend's final months, Kat had tried in vain to 'save her soul for Jesus' but Avril, who had always denied there was any kind of God, had scoffed at her friend's ministry.

In July 1982, the husk of the once beautiful girl then called Avril Steiner who had once been Deputy Head Girl at Hutchison Grammar School now weighed only 4 stone 3 lbs. Despite high doses of analgesic medication, her body was wracked with the pain of bone cancer. With Kat sitting at her bedside, stroking her hand, Avril turned her face from the dim light filtering through the shuttered window of her private room at the *Nuffield Hospital* and slipped away to face her eternity.

# North by North East

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## A Gift from God

**Banjul, April 1982.**

When the gift arrived at the *Scottish Mission Church*, Jon, now forty-six, had been puzzled. He had been struggling with a worn-out twenty-year old manual typewriter. He appealed in vain to the *Fraser Society* on many occasions for a replacement. Opening the package, he discovered it contained an electric battery-assisted typewriter donated by Mrs Kathleen Baxter, sent under the auspices of the World-Wide Mission Prayer Circle (WWMPC).

The woman who had sent it seemed to be randomly anonymous, at first. However, as he read the perfumed letter which came inside the parcel, he learned Mrs Baxter was 'very happily divorced', and hoped 'Jonno' would remember her as Kat McMann. The shock of reading this name caused his right ear to throb and face to burn with embarrassment. It had taken Jon a while to fit the rather harsh, angular face on the attached photograph with the gauche teenager who had smiled boldly and pouted whenever he looked in her direction at youth fellowship meetings in Shawlands in the autumn of 1954.

Tumbled images of his lightning romance flooded back, making him feel guilty anew. Nonetheless, the memory of that 'so nearly' afternoon was still potent. Discounting his nearly innocent fumbings with Sarah, and apart from the early years with Esther before her health had declined, Kat McMann had been the only other girl with whom Jon had ever been intimate.

Lifting the envelope to his nose again, he closed his eyes and ran the familiar encounter of his escapade with the naked teenager, freezing the frames from time to time at the best scenes, enjoying the tingling precursor to the erection which the lurid memory never failed to stir.

Jon's first simple letter of thanks to Mrs Kathleen Baxter, typed slowly on the new typewriter, unleashed a flurry of scrawled air mail flimsies and postcards. These were interspersed with a more considered series of longer typed epistles, newsy letters, setting out a favourable version of her life, confessing her brief addiction to alcohol and membership of the AA but omitting her previous sordid sex life, keeping the focus on her good works and the many Christian organisations she supported. Towards the end of these newsy letters, she always included a re-hashed version of their long-ago encounter, boldly taking him through what might have been 'if her parents had not crashed their love-making'. With these letters, she enclosed photographs, mostly when she was younger,

## North by North East

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always in swimsuits or tennis outfits. Her request for similar photographs of Jon had been ignored until eventually he had applied scissors to a snapshot of himself on the beach wearing an open-necked shirt and shorts.

This photograph had been taken by his friend Robert Lipton the previous summer at his Silver Wedding celebration party which their friend had organised with a group of church members. The part of the photograph Jon had snipped off would have revealed Esther seated beside him in her wheelchair, trying hard to raise a smile on her exhausted face. Jon did not realise the background of the snapshot also showed a scattering of scantily clad international tourists lounging in deck chairs, most women in bikinis, a few topless. Before sending it off, Jon had nodded to his image, agreeing he still looked 'acceptable' for a man approaching his middle years.

By return airmail, Kat had sent a colour print of herself standing in front of a three-way mirror. In this shot, she was topless, cupping her breasts and pointing her nipples directly at the lens. Wearing a thin red thong, she was leaning forward on yellow stiletto heels, her legs astride a child's rocking horse, her eyes concealed by sunglasses tipped onto the end of her too large nose and pouting glossy red lips. It was the sort of photograph Macnab had seen from time to time displayed on stalls at Albert Market, lurid images at which he had allowed himself only a surreptitious glance.

Later, when he had studied this print more closely, he saw a woman with puffy arms, a flabby tummy and heavy thighs wrinkled with cellulite. Despite this, he found the image immensely arousing, believing it had been taken especially for him.

The print was one of a batch taken before Kat had joined Alcoholics Anonymous, before she had found Jesus, before her expensive plastic and dental surgery. The photoshoot had been organised by a man she had picked up on a lonely binge holiday in Alicante, a trip which a reformed and sober Avril had declined. The man had claimed he was looking for beautiful older women to star in a new film celebrating sun, sea, and romance. Two days later Mrs Kathleen Baxter, still not fully sober but now supported by Avril who had flown from Glasgow in response to her friend's plea for help met with the extortionist. Together, after an acrimonious negotiation, paid a hefty sum to retrieve the prints and negatives which the man had threatened to circulate to her family and ex-husband.

Within hours of sending the photograph to her Jonno in Banjul, Kat had been filled with remorse, wishing she had not given in to her impulse to try to compete with the women Jon had been with on the beach.

Kat's topless photograph was the trigger which led to his 'love-letter-adultery', as he came to think of it. With Esther settled and doped with codeine, Jon became habituated to nightly hand-relief using the spectre of Kat in her thong as his stimulus. In the days

## *North by North East*

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which followed, as he went about his daily round, he found his mind flashing back to her provocative image, often causing embarrassing but enjoyable flash erections.

As their letters flew back and forth Jon became bolder, suggesting Kat might like to visit Banjul, enclosing a list of the best luxury hotels available, explaining everything was very much cheaper, perhaps less than a third of UK prices.

However, in the late autumn of 1982, following six months of intense 'air mail adultery' and after an uncharacteristic gap of three weeks, Kat wrote to decline his kind offer, explaining she had two aged parents to care for and, being fair-skinned, thought it best to avoid the fierce sun of Banjul. In the weeks which followed, her flow of adulterous love letters dwindled.

Jon would never learn she had found another man with whom to share her life.

Faraway in The Gambia, the provocative photograph she had sent to 'her Jonno' was still hidden near his bed and used to call her image to him during his lonely night hours. Had she known this, perhaps she might have defied her father and risked the journey.

# *North by North East*

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## *Lost Years of Happiness*

In the aftermath of Avril's death, Kat had been targeted by one of her friend's business rivals, Robert Wilson, a low-handicap golfer at *Whitecraig's*, part of the Hutchie set but seven years older, a half generation ahead of her time. Wilson was a freelance retail sales agent for various major investment companies selling a variety of bonds and life assurance investment products. Leading a relaxed and care-free lifestyle envied by many, he did a lot of his business through his golfing connections. Full of charm and bonhomie, Bobby Wilson was adept at concealing his true self. Married twice before, he saw Kat Baxter as a rich air-head heiress, an easy mark.

Chubby and short, he was not her usual type. However, without Avril and blinded by desperate loneliness and insecurity, she wanted physical satisfaction, not just romance by correspondence. Quietly spoken and mild mannered, Bobby had an easy way with everyone. He did not smoke or drink and was always ready with a funny quip or story. Flattered by Wilson's persistence, Kat had eventually accepted his advances. Having researched her background, Bobby portrayed himself as a lapsed Christian and was happy to attend church and to sing alongside her in a pleasant baritone.

In bed, she found Bobby disappointing, often soft until she had worked him to fullness. When eventually aroused he was a speed merchant, leaving her unfulfilled, discontented. However, in mixed company with others at the golf club or at dinner parties, he was charming, praising her at every opportunity, making her feel special. With her father's repeated warnings that Wilson had a darker reputation relating to his jaunts to far-flung places with his inner circle of male golfing friends, Kat resisted his repeated offers of marriage.

In this way, the mismatched couple jogged along during the years which followed, sharing their lives and friends, acting as if they were married, sometimes closer than others, enjoying luxury holidays organised and paid for by Kat but still with their own houses, each with keys and clothing in the other's house, for convenience. During a Hogmanay Party at *Whitecraig's*, they became engaged. However, in the aftermath, picking up rumours about her intended, Kat partially reneged, kicking forward the wedding date each time Bobby pressed her.

With their wedding planned for Christmas Eve 1986, Kat Baxter received a warning letter from his second wife Esme, a girl Kat had known from schooldays at Hutchie. Esme was recently married to Kat's former husband Alan Baxter, the couple retired and living in

## North by North East

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Spain. This letter sounded a dire warning, giving details of how Bobby had cheated Esme of her life savings, money he had squandered on drugs and whoring during trips to the Far East.

This letter arrived the day after her fiancé left for Thailand on a golfing break with his buddies from Manchester, nameless businessmen he was coy about. Using her set of keys, Kat visited his Newlands flat which he used as a home office. After a long and thorough search she found his stash of tiny capsules which she recognised as cocaine. Beside these was a small, shallow, rectangular box containing a syringe and six phials of a liquid labelled *Papaverine*, described in an enclosed leaflet as a medical breakthrough wonder cure for impotence. Hidden separately, in the base of a wardrobe inside a shoebox, she found a batch of hard porn VHS videos depicting Thai girls and boys cavorting naked with a group of older men, Bobby included.

From his filing cabinet she extracted her own files which she studied but could not understand. Using his photocopier, she made copies which she took to a meeting with her newly appointed Personal Advisor at the RBS Bank and asked him to carry out an audit of her personal assets. This exercise revealed *Robert Wilson Associates* had been filching money from her at the rate of around £30,000 per annum, selling her fake bonds and other 'sure fire' investments.

Kat would later think of this period with Bobby Wilson as her lost years.

# North by North East

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## Go West to Jesus

Mirielle Ndoeye was born into a small Christian community, part of the Zande people of the Congo living in a village on the outskirts of the city of Kisangani. Over an intense three-week period, her tiny village was attacked by soldiers. Those identified by their neighbours as Christians were hunted down and shot or tortured. On his deathbed, her father had implored:

"Go West, where the Lord Jesus lives, beside the great Sea of Galilee".

As soon as she had arranged her father's burial, the fourteen-year-old Mirielle had fled, the only survivor from her small church.

One thing which distinguished his daughter from others in her small community was that she had excelled at English and had a good command of its tortured spelling and challenging grammar. Later, it would be this attribute which led to her being chosen, shaping the rest of her life.

Her English came from her father Joshua who was an occasional but powerful Christian lay preacher, an enterprise which he juggled with his complementary role as a healer (shaman), offering traditional sung prayers and concoctions of herbs to cure a variety of ailments. Mirielle had never known her mother: her father had steadfastly refused to answer questions about her. Overheard whispers from neighbours suggested she had run away with a rich white man and now lived in a place called Brussels.

Putting the sun at her back each dawn and keeping it on her left shoulder through each day, Mirielle walked until her heavenly guide sank in the West. Her understanding of the Triune God of Christianity was vague. As she travelled, she held fast to her simple faith in a God who was her Heavenly Father, prayed to the Holy Spirit over every decision she had to make and when the answer filled her mind, thanked Jesus 'ahead', for the strength He would give her to obey in Faith. The only thing of value she possessed was a small flask of sandalwood marriage oil which her father used to anoint each bride he married.

Mirielle was tall, strikingly beautiful, with a ready, trusting smile. Throughout her odyssey, she kept herself clean and well-presented. She did not beg but asked for work to pay for food. Most people along the way responded with kindness, inspired by the new life she proclaimed with certainty awaited her.

## North by North East

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Only occasionally had she been forced to give sex in return for help, usually at river crossings or at checkpoints. On such occasions she had submitted passively, knowing if she had tried to fight off these men, she might be killed or maimed for life.

By this haphazard track, over a period of fifteen months, she walked over 6,000 kilometres (nearly 4,000 miles), dodging large centres of populations, skirting forests and sleeping rough. In early March 1983, rake thin and exhausted, she reached the Atlantic Coast to discover she was in The Gambia.

Later, she would proclaim:

"This was God's first miracle in my life. Although The Gambia is the smallest and poorest country in Africa, only here all people are free to worship as Christians."

This was true: although the population of The Gambia was predominantly Islamic, its government had not designated any form of state religion and so Christians were not outlawed or persecuted. In fact, in The Gambia, smaller Christian denominations were largely ignored by the authorities.

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On her second day in Banjul, near the large and bustling Albert Market, she joined a group of girls and women seeking work as domestic servants. She did not understand that nearly all the men and women who were choosing girls like her, ran brothels. What saved her were the words she had scrawled on a piece of scrap cardboard:

"I speak good English"

Pastor Jonathan Macnab had claimed her, paid the fee to the organiser and taken her across town to his church, explaining he was looking for a girl to help him care for his sick wife. The nomad refugee would claim later this meeting with Pastor Jon as her second miracle. Four months short of her sixteenth birthday, when asked her age, she decided to say she was nineteen, in case the man might dismiss her as a mere child.

Doubtful of this assertion but deciding to give her a chance, Jon had smiled. The girl had smiled back openly, warmly, stirring a surge of lust which he suppressed by explaining the cleaning and cooking duties she would require to undertake as his domestic servant. This time she smiled coyly, dipping her head and curtseying, holding her right hand under her left breast. From the clear outline of her large nipple under the thin material, he realised she wore no undergarments. She glanced up and caught his stare and smiled again, her eyes laughing. Flustered, he went on to explain in graphic detail the toileting and caring duties required for his invalid wife.

## North by North East

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Most of what Jon said did not make much sense to a girl unfamiliar with his Western way of thinking. After so long on the road to freedom, all Mirielle was hoping for at this stage was a safe place to sleep and good food to eat. For this she would do whatever work he needed done. He was a handsome man. If he wanted sex, she hoped he would be gentle.

In time, the new nurse and housemaid would learn the fuller story. Nearly three decades earlier and within a few months of arriving in Africa, Pastor Jon's wife Esther had suffered the first of her recurring bouts of chest infections. This chronic illness was eventually diagnosed by a visiting specialist as 'possibly emphysema and untreatable.' During the decade prior to the new girl's arrival, Esther had been confined by her illness to the triangle formed by her bedroom, their tiny bathroom and the 'best' room which Esther insisted must be called 'The Parlour'. When she had the energy, the parlour was reached by rolling herself slowly in a wheelchair. Here, by the window, she dozed and prayed for cooling breezes while staring out over the ocean, in the direction of Glasgow, North by North East.

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When Pastor Jon had picked out Mirielle from the line at the Albert Market, he believed he was doing so with a pure heart. During their slow walk from Albert Market across the chaotic and crowded streets of Banjul to his Church, Macnab listened with amazement to Mirielle's story. When it dawned on him she was starving, they stopped at a stall to buy street food. As he blessed it, he decided to rename her Miriam, to signify her new life of freedom and safety.

Each time this tall waif flashed her smile at him, Jon Macnab realised he was in danger. Unlike other pastors he knew, he had never strayed from his marital bed, despite the many 'offers' he had been made by grateful ladies from his congregation and the surrounding neighbourhood; women who understood his marriage situation and wanted to comfort their tall, handsome but rather sad pastor.

Perhaps it was his nagging regrets at these missed opportunities, combined with the photograph hidden in the Bible beside his bed which made him feel guilty, accusing him of recruiting this beautiful girl for himself as much as for Esther. Looking away, he sought to convince himself that his motive in choosing her had been because of her fluency in English, not her physical appearance.

After introducing Miriam to his wife, Pastor Jon led the girl to her sleeping accommodation, a shed at the bottom of the sloping garden beside the low wall which separated it from their small *Scottish Mission Church* cemetery.

The next day, with Miriam established in the manse and taking the strain, Jon Macnab was once more able to indulge in his hobby of bird-watching, hoping to add to his current

# North by North East

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bag of over 300 sightings from the 540 or so resident and migrant species on offer, an abundance which made The Gambia a hotspot for twitchers from around the world.

This day set the pattern for Miriam and the Macnabs in their new life at the manse. With Mistress Esther toileted, bathed, moistening cream applied to her rectum and private parts, swaddled in towelling nappies, dressed in clean clothes and dozing in her wheelchair by the parlour window, the girl was allowed free range to cook, clean and do laundry for all three of them.

Never in her life had she eaten so well. Within a few weeks the teenager was filling out. Recovering and blossoming physically after her months of semi-starvation, her periods restarted and with this her libido returned sending signals to her private parts, tempting her to touch herself. This was an act her father had repeatedly warned her against, even though she knew from his nightshirt and the urgent knocking of his bedhead against the thin wall that separated their bedrooms that he was comforting himself most nights.

Esther, between bouts of coughing fits during which she hacked up gobs of mucous which blocked her lungs, mostly dozed away her days in an oxygen-deprived delirium. On afternoons when her mistress felt stronger, with Miriam by her side dispensing tea and wiping her brow with a damp cloth, Esther delighted in recounting her memories of Glasgow in the 1950's with its extensive network of whizzing trams, marvellous new National Health Service and glorious parks and gardens.

At other times, under Esther's direction and with occasional help over the archaic language, Miriam read aloud passages from a King James version of the Bible. Although slow at first from lack of practice, within a few days Miriam was reading with increased fluency.

Being inquisitive and quick-minded, she was soon scanning whatever she laid her hands on, being careful to replace everything in the same place and position.

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One day, the day after her sixteenth birthday, while tidying Pastor Jon's bedroom, she accidentally knocked over his bedside Bible to reveal his secret photograph.

This led her to examine his bedsheets and find the familiar crusted stains she knew about from her father's nightly gruntings, soiling she recognised. The discovery Pastor Jon was gratifying himself sent her night hands to explore, releasing her from the pledge she had made to herself when her father had been fatally wounded.

That night, covering her face with a pair of his used underpants, she created an image of Pastor Jon naked and alone in his bed. Using both hands, allowing herself to caress her

## *North by North East*

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body, she sought comfort and release in the once familiar pleasure she had not visited since leaving her village near Kisangani.

Recovered from the rush and the wonderful dizzy, floating feeling in her head, she used his underpants to gently wipe away her wetness. Then, with the upper part of her mind already scheming, she used a dry corner of the cotton material to cover her finger as she teased herself ahead of another act of sinful self-pleasuring.

Recovering, dozing, the teenager was soon refreshed and needy.

Over the course of the dark hours to follow, inhabiting a world of fantasy, Miriam Ndoye sinned by making adulterous love to Pastor Jon Macnab, deliberately and repeatedly.

# *North by North East*

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## *In the Heat of the Night*

The idea of taking in a housemaid to care for Esther had been suggested by Robert Lipton many times. Eventually, when his wife declined to double incontinence, Jon had agreed, lured by the prospect of having more opportunity to go walking, free of the burden of constant caring. It would also provide relief from mediating the moans and groans among his flock. This group comprised mainly grandmothers whose main pastime seemed to be bickering and squabbling about whose turn it was to clean the church or tend its garden and vegetable plot.

Although forty-seven to Miriam's sixteen, Jon Macnab was still in good shape physically. A non-smoker he had held steadfastly to his promise to Uncle William never to drink alcohol. His diet was mainly vegetarian with protein from freshly caught fish and eggs from his hens. If he had a vice, it was strong tea, sweetened with condensed milk, a beverage he drank in great volume. He did not own a car and had never learned to drive. In emergencies, he used his ancient upright bicycle but for everyday excursions, he preferred to walk.

Around the coastline of the Banjul peninsula, the tall, lithe man with a full head of curly, salt and pepper hair was a familiar sight. Wearing a dog collar he loped along, binoculars draped around his neck, a canvas satchel slung over his shoulder to carry his sketching notebook, Bible, water bottle and a few pieces of fruit, his eyes scanning restlessly, hoping for another first. For shade or rain squalls in season, he carried a large white umbrella, a distinguishing totem.

In his private discussions and prayer sessions with Robert Lipton, they comforted themselves with the knowledge that the congregations of other Christian churches in Banjul were also in decline. Almost every home had a television or access to a relative's set. For Gambians, viewing the world of the northern wealthy hemisphere on their TVs had become their new fascination, luring them to materialism and avarice and away from Christianity and sharing.

Despite Esther's many requests, Jon had shunned television, preferring radio. In his former life, lying awake beside a restless, coughing Esther, he had whiled away his lonely night hours quietly listening to the BBC World Service through a single earphone bud, projecting his mind into each situation in turn, praying for those in need and caught up in turmoil.

# North by North East

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Sadly, for his flock at the *Scottish Mission Church* over recent years, their pastor's spiritual life was at a low ebb. No longer did he kneel at his bedside before retiring to ask the Holy Spirit to fortify him for the day ahead.

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Since receiving the lurid photograph from Kat Baxter, his conscience had been dulled by his repeated nightly 'adultery', enjoyed in a now familiar sequence which had become grooved, almost immutable.

It began with his times alone with Sarah, in Glasgow, in Shawlands library, sitting side by side, her left hand casually resting on his thigh, her right holding a pencil, whispering, pointing out his errors of logic and arithmetic on the pages in his jotter and reference books laid out before them on the large, dark wooden table desk in the reading room. At times he had wondered to himself if her hand on his thigh memory was imagined but, gradually, over many reruns he had come to accept it had happened. In this scene his memory extrapolated what had been an innocent action into a new experience in which, her hand hidden from view under the table, Sarah had caressed and teased him to arousal through the material of his trousers, generating a very enjoyable pleasant discomfort caused by his penis almost doubled over inside his tight underpants. In his false memory this sensation was enhanced by the belief that Sarah had been well aware of the power of her caresses.

At this point the lens of his memory camera moved to their meeting at Pollok Estate, a memory enjoyed in slow motion, beginning with their delicious fumbings and eventually culminating with the sensation of her vagina leaping against him, causing him, in his memory, to ejaculate into his underpants, making Sarah chortle with glee at her triumph. Although he knew this ejaculation had not happened, nonetheless the sensation persisted because, for a younger Jon, this 'leaping event' was his first proof that girls found him attractive. After he had replayed this cameo several times over, he would use it to complete himself vigorously, hearing Sarah's lewd chortle as he climaxed.

As the shudder subsided, there always followed a moment of guilt at the thought of Esther lying alone in their bedroom nearby, wondering if she had heard his grunts and groans. In the afterglow he learned to enjoy the rough, dry texture of his bedsheet against his penis and testicles as he wiped away the slick.

With regular practise, his recovery time was short and as he waited he focussed on the sounds of the night birds, picking out their hunting and contact calls and their softly trilled love songs.

Jon began the second round of his pleasuring, using the photograph of Kat hidden in his Bible to initiate a slower masturbation, beginning with their first encounter as she lay

## *North by North East*

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back in the darkness against the wall a few steps from her kitchen door with her school jacket open, her blouse unbuttoned, pulling his head down onto her breasts while he endured her fierce rubbing assault on his penis, an erotic memory which always brought back a feeling of panic that he might pre-ejaculate.

At this stage, holding off from touching himself, he ran slowly through the subsequent Saturday afternoon encounter, conjuring up the dancing and French kissing sequence in her bedroom, action which he now recognised as foreplay, ending when she stepped out of her mother's dress, already naked.

The remainder of this memory, embellished by his lonely imagination, was of a well-formed girl with startling hazel eyes staring up at him from a pillow, moaning with pleasure as she directed his hands, begging him to be gentle and kind to her.

The scene changed. Her eyes were closed. Her finger was in his mouth, a signal he understood meant she was ready and wanted him to make love to her.

In this version her parents were safely in Stirling and they proceeded as planned.

Kneeling astride her, leaning down to kiss and caress her breasts while ravishing her with his eyes, he could feel her torso squirming and pushing up into him while he endured and enjoyed the previously unimaginable thrill of her foraging roughly inside his underpants.

At this point in his reverie, with his hand stroking his penis ever so lightly, he gave way to enjoy a second, more gentle ejaculation which always seemed frustratingly incomplete; this, he reasoned, was because, in the event, he had been dragged from Kat and assaulted by her mother.

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In his new situation, with Miriam to care for his wife, Pastor Jon established a new weekday routine in which he left the manse soon after breakfast to go bird-spotting. Partly this was to indulge in his hobby but he was also aware he was deliberately avoiding his new maid and her bold eyes. As he wandered along familiar paths ranging north and south along the coast of the Banjul peninsula, his mind was now filled with vivid images of the beautiful girl at his manse, a girl who smiled invitingly at him every time she caught him with his eyes on her, causing him to stir, physically while filling his mind with lustful images which he did not attempt to 'pray away' as he knew he should.

In the evenings, as he closed his shutters and dowsed his bedside lamp, it was sinful thoughts of Miriam Ndoeye and not Kat Baxter which invaded his nocturnal fantasies, fuelling his repeated masturbations.

# North by North East

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## Outreach

During her first weeks at the manse, Miriam's thoughts were dominated by the whispers Mistress Esther had confided while her mind was wandering due to lack of oxygen caused by her chronic bronchial illness. During the day in question, Esther had repeated scraps of her confession several times over: *something about a long-ago baby and a hospital*. At first the tale came to the girl as confusing fragments. Although this first telling made little sense, as the daughter of a self-taught preacher-shaman, Miriam understood she must allow her mistress to tell her tale in her own way, without interrupting with questions.

Weeks turned to months and the pattern continued; still the real story was hinted at but never fully revealed, although it was clear to Miriam that Esther was carrying a burden of guilt she wanted to share, a burden that had been bearing down on her for a long time.

Then, one afternoon, in a long, rambling, whispered confession cum prayer for forgiveness, Esther strayed into confidential territory about her marriage. In a disjointed account, she revealed to the teenager how she had first met Jon at a Christian rally in Glasgow and had decided at once to seduce him, describing in detail the scene of their first lovemaking and how, a few days later, she had allowed Jon to penetrate her for short spells before pushing him away, insisting on coitus interruptus, causing frustration and guilt for both parties. The revelation ended with a tearful confession:

"Miriam, Jon doesn't know my dreadful, secret shame. Before I met him, I had a baby to someone else, a doctor at the hospital where I worked. Timothy was very popular, liked by everyone. He was already married but I wanted him. He promised to get a divorce and marry me but only after the baby came. When I was pregnant with my baby big inside me, he wanted to have sex but I would not do it until he promised to leave his wife and live with me. We had an argument, a fight, screaming at each other. He pushed me, I slapped him and he punched me. My baby came three months early. She was tiny and died when she was two hours old. I called her Rashona, after my grandmother. Timothy moved away with his wife and children, back to England where he came from. At the hospital, I knew everyone was against me. Do you understand what it is like to be alone, branded as a slut? I know I should have told Jon but I didn't want to lose him. Jon is a good man. I corrupted him. He deserves a better wife than I have been to him. God has punished me, keeping me from having other babies and inflicting me with my illness. Never again will I be able to leave this wheelchair or hold my beautiful Jon in these withered arms. This is my

## North by North East

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penance and my dear Jon must also suffer with me, left to satisfy himself in the night without a woman to tend his needs."

With Esther's revelation, Miriam prayed constantly and earnestly to God thanking Him for bringing her to her new 'paradise', a place of safety and shelter under the care of a good Christian man. Lying alone in her shed at the bottom of the garden, Miriam viewed her 'adoption' by Pastor Jon as God's third miracle in her life but not one she would ever proclaim.

The sixteen-year-old did not yet know her master was fifteen years older than her father had been when he died. To Miriam, Pastor Jon looked fit and handsome. Everyone agreed he was clever and kind. As she moved about her daily tasks, she felt his eyes following her and, sensing he was needy, when she caught him watching her, she beamed at him. When he smiled back, she felt the heat in his gaze and saw this as an opportunity, reasoning a baby or two from him would secure her future in the Macnab household. As with all big decisions, she prayed ahead as she had been taught by her father, asking God to bless her with a boy child.

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Soon after Esther's revelation, the teenager made her move.

On that first night, doused in sweet-smelling marriage oil, she moved from her hut into the manse, naked under a long purple nightdress she had bought while food shopping in Banjul market. Standing in the darkness, she tapped quietly on his bedroom door. Jon cracked open the door and whispered fiercely, telling her to go away, closing the door and turning the key against her. In response, she had remained outside his door tapping quietly, praying and hoping he would relent. As dawn came, she went back to her own bed, weeping.

This scene was repeated the second night.

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When she came to his door on the third night, naked under her purple nightdress and perfumed as before, Jon was waiting behind the door, opening it before she tapped. He opened his arms and greeted her with a gentle embrace. Holding her face up to him, he kissed her lips fiercely. Breaking off to sob, he whispered as if to himself:

"Heavenly Father, forgive this weak and sinful man."

Believing it was the man's entire responsibility to take the initiative, the girl lay still, almost rigid, as he fumbled with her breasts for a long time until she directed his lips to her nipple while pressing against the nape of his neck.

# North by North East

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For her it was as if she was in a dream. He was gentle and yet energetic at the same time. She wished he had two pairs of lips to suck and lick both nipples at once instead of having to move from one to the other.

Without warning he ejaculated, wetting her tummy and groin.

It was then she realised Esther had been speaking the truth, that Jon had not enjoyed normal married life for many years.

Miriam used her nightdress to wipe them both dry and then lay in his arms. He was very still. She thought he had fallen asleep but after a while she felt his hand on her left breast. She rolled onto her back and his lips found her right nipple. She wriggled, opened her legs wide and raised her knees. His body was shaking. She helped, directing with her hand. When he penetrated her, he was wobbling on his knees. He thrust inside her swiftly and deeply, ejaculating immediately, quivering and vibrating until he had finished.

For the teenager it was the best experience of her life, so far.

Pulling back, he turned away and lay with his back to her, whispering hoarsely through his tears:

"Miriam, this is all wrong. It's God's punishment. Please go at once. Please don't come back ever again. God forgive me."

Returning to her own bed, his semen dripping onto her thighs, she was happy, hoping she might already have the start of a baby inside her, believing if she was pregnant he would not send her away.

The next morning, Pastor Jon had left early, out walking. He did not return until after dark when Esther was already settled for the night.

As Miriam served his meal, he whispered:

*'I will try to make it better tonight, for **both** of us.'*

In answer, she stooped and kissed his lips then fled to prepare herself.

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Over the weeks to follow, they learned how to please each other.

When her periods missed, she offered up prayers, praying ahead for the baby which she had asked for, singing and smiling as she went about her domestic and nursing duties.

Each night, in her shed, as she prepared herself before slipping through the darkness to his bed, she prayed earnestly for God to grant her a boy child.

## *North by North East*

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Her first Christmas in Banjul came and went and still there was no child.

When the baby duly arrived on the first day of September 1984, Miriam wisely did not call him Jonathan, as she wanted to do. Instead she named him Luke, after her favourite apostle. The girl was quickly forgiven by her congregation who considered her pregnancy as a throwback from her previous life of turmoil. Their Pastor, who had no previous record of touching or the like, was not suspected of being the father of the bastard child.

Robert Lipton intervened in his role as church treasurer. The servant girl and her child could not live in the garden shed. Enough money was authorised to fund a small extension bedroom for Miriam and Luke. This was built onto the hidden east side of the manse, connecting to the kitchen through a door which had previously opened into a cupboard.

After Luke's birth, knowing there must be no more babies, Jon used condoms bought in the bustle of Albert Market, his dog collar in his pocket.

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Under Pastor Jon's tutelage, Miriam extended her command of English, enough to master the somewhat archaic language of her King James version of the Bible, a gift from Mistress Esther who could no longer concentrate enough to read it. By trial and error, the young mother also learned how to operate the electric typewriter. Becoming aware how able his maidservant had become, Jon set her the challenge of re-vitalising the 'Outreach Prayer Circle', a group started many years earlier by Esther but almost moribund when Miriam arrived.

Six months after Luke's birth, with Pastor Jon helping her interpret her Bible and correcting flaws in her theology, Miriam was typing out mini sermons which she delivered on Tuesdays and Thursdays to the Outreach group. As the months flew by and Luke became a lusty toddler, Miriam progressed to become the effective, pastoral helper Esther might have been, had God blessed her with better health.

# North by North East

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## By Faith Alone

On the 31 March 1987, the situation changed at the *Scottish Mission Church* in Banjul.

The speed of what unfolded stunned Pastor Jon's small congregation, shaking their Faith and creating a vacuum, forcing Robert Lipton to act quickly, against his better judgement.

A few days after the thirtieth anniversary of the Macnabs' arrival in The Gambia, the print-out of a telex was delivered in a sealed envelope by a runner from *The Gambia YMCA Hostel*. It was from the Fraser Memorial Missionary Society (FMMS). To his surprise, Jon learned the FMMS was now based in Falkirk, not Glasgow where it had been founded. The terse email directed Jon to telephone the Mission Secretary from the YMCA where the FMMS had set up a small telephone credit for international calls.

Jon sensed at once this summons might be an answer to his prayer for rescue and redemption. Although he was still very much enjoying his lovemaking with Miriam, he had a growing fear his nocturnal activities were no longer secret. Increasingly, he had witnessed Miriam speaking to his elderly flock with authority, noting how readily they deferred to her, calling her 'Mrs Pastor'. He was also under constant pressure from the girl to stop using condoms and give her a second boy baby, a brother for Luke.

There was also the uncomfortable dichotomy associated with his renewed exchange of 'love letters' with Kat McMann who, now free of Bobby and back in trim under a strict personal trainer, ended every letter with her plea.

*Jonno, please, please, come home to Glasgow and serve God here. I will help you get settled and we can find a nice place for your wife. Trust me, darling, I can afford whatever we need.*

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At the YMCA, Jon made the call from the privacy of the manager's office. During a hurried few minutes during which he was addressed as "Mr Macnab" he was harangued by an assertive lady called Miss Fairgrieve who spoke forcefully despite a slight speech impediment. Jon gained the impression she was reading from a prepared script, delivering her volleys in forced, staccato bursts.

"Mr Macnab, may I remind you that your 1956 commission to serve in Banjul was for a maximum of forty years."

Jon had no recall of this but did not contend her statement.

## North by North East

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"I am sorry to have to advise that due to a funding crisis and the increasing demands in South Africa, the Society's work in The Gambia must be terminated immediately." With unnecessary emphasis, she added, "Mr Macnab, I hope I do not need to remind you that you are not actually an ordained minister and as such, you have no right of appeal."

Miss Fairgrieve then added her further piece of bad news.

"Mr Macnab, I must stress recent changes mean your listing on our register will be terminated at age fifty-five which I see is in just under four years' time. Assuming you remain with us, this will give you thirty-five years' service and, should you survive to sixty-five, you will be eligible for a small pension. However, you must not set great store by this as our pension scheme is very poorly funded and has been a disappointment to us all."

Miss Fairgrieve then advised his choices:

"Mr Macnab, if you decide to remain in The Gambia, we shall all continue to support you by prayer but we are very constrained financially and cannot continue funding you. This financial discipline must apply forthwith and there will be no monthly transfer to your bank in Banjul next week. I apologise for the delay in advising this. I have been unwell recently and have been overwhelmed by my responsibilities. I must assume, if you stay on, your congregation will rise to the challenge or you will support yourselves from your personal reserves."

Stunned by this assumption that somehow he was rich, Jon did not feel able to defend his position by telling her since accepting his posting to Banjul, he and Esther had lived by faith alone, as Dr Billy Graham had urged all Christians to do. Jon's entire 'emergency fund' amounted to just under four hundred pounds Sterling and a handful of US Dollars, cash money kept in reserve to pay for any urgent treatment Esther may need.

"Your second option would be to return home, to Scotland. Now, Mr Macnab, I see from your record that you have never made a home visit. I think you would find Scotland much changed, not at all the place you once knew when we were all so much younger. However, if you do decide to come, I will do what I can to find you something which suits your talents. Be warned, however, unlike South Africa, congregations here are in sharp decline and finding a suitable church willing to engage an un-ordained minister will be well-nigh impossible. In this regard, I regret I am unable to help: the administration staff of our Fraser Mission comprises me alone and I am most definitely *not* an employment agency. Perhaps the best you might hope for would be interregnum locum duties and medical relief preaching for the Ecumenical Preachers' Organisation (EPO) for which I am also secretary and treasurer. However, Mr Macnab, you must understand the EPO is supported in the main by retired ministers who give their time gratis. You would be no different and so it must be hoped The Lord has already or will in the immediate future provide you and your

# North by North East

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wife with other means of support. If you decide to return, we shall of course provide air tickets as per our contract with you."

Jon heard her shuffle papers and then Miss Fairgrieve continued:

"Your third option, which seems to me to be the most suitable given your experience so far, would be to move to Johannesburg in the first instance and re-train for a posting to one of the many areas of great need in Soweto where the churches are growing fast and clamouring for experience pastors to lead them."

Jon intervened:

"Thank you, Miss Fairgrieve but I must immediately decline the offer of South Africa, My wife is severely disabled by emphysema. She is virtually housebound, has been for almost twenty-five years."

Miss Fairgrieve continued:

"Oh, we have no note of this in our files. I will add her to our Prayer Circle list. Now, Mr Macnab, it would be *immensely* helpful to me if you could give me your decision very quickly. Today, if possible, please, by the end of the week at the very latest."

Throughout this 'transmission', Jon had sensed this ultimatum was coming. His mind had raced ahead to Kat McMann, seeing her as his best chance of support into a fresh start. Kat was aware from his letters of Esther and her condition and had said on several occasions perhaps Esther might thrive better in a care home, like the nice one in Pollokshields, were she had placed her parents.

After a short delay during which he sent up a prayer of thanksgiving, Jon Macnab had made his decision:

"Thank you, Miss Fairgrieve. As you suggest, we shall gladly return to Scotland and serve The Lord there. I have a personal sponsor who has offered to support us on our return. It is clear to me this is God's will. Blessed be the Name of the Lord. I will discuss this matter with my Elders tonight. I think it best if Esther and I travel back home sooner rather than later, to curtail their grief."

Miss Fairgrieve gasped, and he heard her mumble what he imagined was a prayer of relief and thanksgiving. Perhaps she had been steeling herself for an argument, he thought. Then she continued, this time her voice was softer, kinder, quieter:

## *North by North East*

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"Amen! Thank you Mr Macnab. I am glad you are wise in the ways of The Lord, who works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform. I do look forward to meeting you and Mrs Macnab in Falkirk soon. Yes, sadly, you must come to me as I too am more or less confined to barracks. Off course, as you could not know, I am disabled, a stroke. I run what's left of my great-aunt's little mission to Africa from my front room. I will arrange for tickets to be collected by you from Banjul airport and will advise the details by telex as soon as they come to hand. Goodbye, Mr Macnab. May God Bless us all according to His will for our lives."

# North by North East

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## The Lord's Work

When Pastor Jon had returned from the Banjul YMCA after his telephone call with Miss Fairgrieve, Miriam heard him singing "*What a Friend we have in Jesus*", quietly, to himself. When she joined in he laughed aloud:

"Miriam," he said, "The Lord is good. He has answered my prayers. And if you pray to Him in Faith, He will answer yours too, provided you have patience and truly believe."

Miriam had been happy for him and wanted to reach up on her tiptoes and kiss him but she knew she must not. She would kiss him extra hard later. Maybe tonight he would make her another baby.

A few hours later the same runner from the YMCA brought a sealed envelope containing a long telex from Miss Fairgrieve confirming their telephone discussion, outlining provisional details for Jon and Esther's travel home to Scotland. As the man ran up the hill towards her, Miriam had been sweeping the driveway of the church, clearing leaves. She had offered to accept the envelope, but he had insisted he must personally hand it to Pastor Jonathan Macnab.

Trailing the man into the manse, the girl realised there was something odd happening.

Before opening the envelope, Jon closed and locked Esther's bedroom door, closeting himself with his wife. Miriam had loitered nearby, trying to make out what they were whispering about. After supper, the Macnabs had again shut themselves in Esther's bedroom out of Miriam's hearing, where they had remained, talking quietly and praying until nearly midnight.

Later, when she was sure Mistress Esther was asleep, Miriam had crept to Jon's bedroom but he had shooed her away. Fearful she had been discovered by Esther and might be expelled, Miriam spent the remainder of the night in prayer, kneeling beside her sleeping child.

The next day, when Mr Lipton arrived, Jon said, sharply:

"Miriam, take your boy away, I need peace and quiet to speak to Robert about important matters. Stay away until evening."

Banished, she had wandered through Banjul with Luke toddling beside her, whining because he wanted to go home and play with his chickens and hunt for beetles. Fighting back tears, she looked at the candidates' posters for the forthcoming general election

# North by North East

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which everyone said Dawda Jawara would win again. Was the 'problem' which Jon was discussing with Mr Lipton about politics?

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While Miriam was wandering aimlessly among the labyrinth of narrow, noisy streets near the Albert Market, Robert Lipton was sitting in dazed silence, unable to process the *Fraser Society* news.

Esther was shaky on her feet, leaning heavily on Jon. Together they were packing their suitcases.

As his mind stumbled, he could hear Jon talking of the time when the Macnabs first arrived in The Gambia, when Robert's first official act had been to incorporate the ownership of the church and its land in their joint names, establishing Jonathan Macnab as a property-owning resident.

Closing his eyes, Robert Lipton let his mind fly back to the circumstances which had led him to the Throne of Grace.

*In 1952, when he was thirty, Banjul had been the capital of Senegambia, a tiny remnant of the British Empire which would eventually achieve independence as The Gambia in 1964. Now mixed race, the Lipton family were established as part of the privileged elite of Banjul. As a clan they were conservative secular Jews by culture rather than devotion. As the middle son of five boys, at an inch short of five feet with a high tenor rather girlish voice, Robert was their black sheep, a waster, a drinker who had squandered every opportunity put in his way. Despite his diminutive stature he was an amorous gigolo and playboy, spending his nights chasing women, playing cards for money, racking up bar and gambling bills. During daylight hours he was often to be found lazing around at the beach, sleeping off his hangovers.*

*As a last resort, his father Daniel, a moneylender with aspirations of becoming a private banker, decided to try to activate his near dormant links with the Lipton tea family. Warning Robert this was his last chance at redemption, he dispatched his playboy son to Glasgow and paid a tutor to coach him for entry to Glasgow University. With a quick mind Robert soon passed the entry examination. Unreformed, he threw himself into the student life with gusto, establishing himself as a ringleader of a group of younger men who drank heavily, smoked reefers and were hell bent on corrupting as many girls as they could ensnare.*

# North by North East

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*His father had written to an address he had for one of his Glasgow Lipton cousins giving contact details for Robert but there was no response. In fact, the address was decades old and the cousin had moved to Edinburgh. The letter lay in the sorting office in a sack with other undelivered overseas mail. Several years later, during a typhoid outbreak, this sack was sent for incineration.*

*In December 1954, the thirty-three-year-old Robert Lipton's life changed.*

*He was struck down by a severe bout of syphilis with complications requiring surgery during which the major part of his previously largish penis was removed leaving him with a tiny stump. He was treated at the Western Infirmary where he was to remain for many months. Eventually, much weakened, he climbed back to a semblance of his former self. During his slow recuperation he decided he must give up his old life and settled down. In this resolve he was encouraged by Esther Vernon, one of the young nurses who had attended to him when he was at his lowest ebb after the surgery. She encouraged Robert to attend a rally in nearby Kelvin Hall, the venue for the Billy Graham Glasgow Crusade of 1955. At this rally, Esther introduced him to her boyfriend Jonathan Macnab.*

*At the climax of the rally when Dr Graham issued his invitation to sinners to come forward to The Throne of Grace, Esther surged forwards with the others to offer support and counselling to those whose hearts had been opened by the Holy Spirit and were ready for conversion. Meanwhile, the two men remained seated, watching and talking quietly. Primed by Esther, Jon took this opportunity to share his testimony with Robert, telling him how God had blessed him through Esther and how she had transformed his life by her personal testimony and encouragement, emphasising that God always worked through people.*

*As the vast hall emptied, Jon sensed the moment had arrived. Moved by the Holy Spirit, the tearful Robert spilled out the story of his previous life of debauchery, his shameful infection and Esther's part in his redemption. Jon explained this long illness was God's way of pulling Robert up short, of tugging him into His arms. Using the training and Bible text references he had been given, Jon paraphrased a rather graphic rendering of the parable of Mary the prostitute, whom Jesus had called forth, offering her His forgiveness in exchange for confession, repentance and a new life of service.*

# North by North East

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*Robert, his heart fully open to Jesus for the first time, took home a batch of leaflets. In the solitude of his small apartment, he prayed earnestly to God. The following day he bought a King James Bible and read it earnestly, looking up the passages referenced in the leaflets. This marked the start of his true head and heart conversion as the Holy Spirit revealed to him the Word of God made Flesh in Jesus, just as the leaflets had promised.*

*On his third night at the rally, now sitting alone, his face wet with tears under the powerful oratory of Billy Graham, Robert joined the throng moving to the stage. By chance or divine intention, Robert was assigned to a very frail, elderly lady called Mrs Fraser. Under her skilled guidance, Robert Lipton's new life in Christ had begun.*

*In the immediate aftermath of his conversion, the young man from Africa had been challenged by Mrs Fraser:*

*"Robert Lipton, now you have been washed clean by the Blood which continues to flow from the Cross of Calvary, what will you do with the new life The Lord Jesus has given you? What will you do to help the Holy Spirit bring other sinners to His Throne of Grace?"*

*From this watershed in his life, Robert Lipton came to rely on Jonathan and Esther, often spending long evenings in their company, the trio immersing themselves in prayer, Bible Study and singing hymns. Despite their age and cultural differences, the three became good friends.*

*Lipton now began to take his University studies seriously. On the evening of his graduation in June 1956, the three met to celebrate with a simple meal cooked by Esther. By prior agreement with her, Jon revealed their secret.*

*"Praise the Lord, Robert, Esther has agreed to marry me! However, we're keeping this a secret from my brother and his family back home on Tiree. Mum is undergoing treatment for stomach cancer. As you might remember, she lives with my brother and his wife. Although David claims he is Christian, he's not like us. He's closed in his thinking with many fixed prejudices. He's opposed to Dr Graham's evangelical approach and, sadly, he is very strongly against mixed race marriages. If I tell them about Esther, I know David will start ranting at Mum, upsetting her. Esther and I will keep praying for her recovery and keep our marriage plans a secret. When Mum's stronger, we can tell the folks in Tiree, not before. We're saving hard. When I get my certificate, I might get into Rolls Royce Aero Engines at*

## North by North East

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*East Kilbride. My Uncle William says if you work there, you can qualify for a new house from the East Kilbride Development Corporation. Or maybe we'll immigrate to New Zealand or Canada. Esther has cousins in Christchurch and an aunt and uncle in Toronto. As I said, we are praying about it constantly, trusting The Lord to guide us. When we understand what He wants us to do, we will follow in Faith. Please pray for us, Robert, as we will pray for you in Banjul."*

*When Robert Lipton returned to his homeland in September 1956 with an MA (Accountancy with International Law), his branch of the Lipton family was in transition. Daniel's health was failing and his other sons were keen to be rid of their errant sibling. Seeing God's hand at work in this situation, Robert shunned his father's offer of a partnership and gladly signed away his expected share in the family business. Instead, he applied to become a civil servant, one of only a handful of Christians to serve in succeeding administrations.*

*With his pay-off, he bought himself a small bungalow and the block of land above Parker's Creek and sketched a plan for a small church to seat 50, with a simple altar and a tiny vestry. On the day construction began, he wrote to the Fraser Memorial Missionary Society in Glasgow, outlining his intention to establish the Scottish Mission Church in Banjul, asking them to send a suitable pastor.*

*When Jon and Esther wrote to say they were in training and had been nominated to lead his church, Robert saw this as his reward for Faithfulness.*

*To the north of the church building, in its shade, Robert added a church house for his friends. When the Macnabs arrived in February 1957, Jon had immediately declared this house to be his 'manse' and the house became known locally as Pastor Jon's manse.*

*A committed and devout Christian, throughout his life Robert Lipton had remained unmarried, lived frugally, sought to remain celibate and 'double-tithed' his meagre government salary to the church he had founded in response to Mrs Fraser's challenge.*

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Robert was jerked from his reverie by Jon, now standing, looking North by North East to Scotland through the parlour window and singing lustily, "Far round the World".

## North by North East

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When he wheeled round to face Robert, Jon was smiling broadly, a smile Robert had not seen for long years. Normally softly spoken except when preaching, this new Jon was fired up, uncharacteristically forceful, a Pastor Macnab whom Robert had never experienced.

"Robert, let me remind you how the *Scottish Mission Church* came into being when I arrived with Esther in February 1957, sent out by the Fraser Mission at your invitation. Praise the Lord.

"Yesterday, on the telephone at the YMCA, Miss Fairgrieve was one hundred percent correct to remind me that **God works through people!** Through Esther, God spoke to both you and me, each in a different way, to reveal His divine purposes for our lives. In hospital, in your sinful condition when you were despised by those around you, Esther befriended you and took you to hear God's Word as set out so clearly by Dr Billy Graham where we met. At that time, I was just ahead of you to the Throne of Grace. At the Kelvin Hall you met Mrs Fraser, who challenged you to return to Banjul and spread the Gospel here and save souls. He then provided you with the money to make this happen and, as soon the church was ready, the *Fraser Mission* sent us to help you. This is work we have done acting together in Jesus' Name and assisted by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our testament, to some extent at least, lies out there in our little graveyard as the earthly remains of the precious souls of our many friends now safe in Heaven.

"Think of how that came about, Robert. On your knees in the Kelvin Hall when the Holy Spirit entered your heart, your life was changed. You were made new. You changed your ways and when you graduated, you resolved to return here to Banjul. Although penniless, despised by your family, Robert Lipton the wastrel, the playboy prodigal son who had dissipated his father's bounty, a man feared and reviled by his brothers because of his quick brain was made an outcast because of his Faith in The Living Lord.

"Alone, isolated, you held to your Faith and kept praying night and day, determined to hold to place your trust in God alone. Within a few weeks of arriving here, God provided you with enough money to house yourself and build this Church. In parallel, unknown to you, we were already in training with the *Fraser Mission* and when your letter arrived, we were nominated to come here to serve The Lord. When you heard we were coming you used the last of your money to build us this excellent manse. Do you remember that day, Good Friday 1957, when all those people flocked in to our Service of Dedication when we sang "*What a friend we have in Jesus*", "*Far Round the World*" and "*Onward Christian Soldiers*", just as we had done on the night of your graduation?

"Great days, great days indeed. But now, for Esther and me our race here in Banjul is run, our work in this place is over. After three decades, God is calling us back to Scotland to

## North by North East

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serve him there. The time has come for us to rejoice that God has sent Miriam to this flock to continue His Work in this place. **Praise be the name of The Lord! Amen!**"

By rote, his voice lacking enthusiasm, the older man had repeated:

"Praise be the Name of The Lord. Amen."

Taking hold of his wife's hand as she lay on her day couch, Jon said:

"Esther, dear, are you awake? Good. Now, dear, it is time for us to pray for Robert and Miriam."

This method of reminiscing cum prayer session was a familiar approach to crisis and change, particularly when they were up against a difficult problem. Normally both men had found these old memories reassuring, comforting, uplifting. However, as he listened to Jon Macnab chortle over old highlights, Robert Lipton's heart was hollowed out by a feeling of dread, a sense he was being deserted by his Saviour.

As was his way, Robert openly expressed his fear and anxieties before The Lord, praying in a squeaky, nearly inaudible whisper:

"Dear Father God, this is too heavy a burden for me to carry alone. You know I cannot preach and pray with authority, as Jon can. My role in Your service has always been to organise and support, never to lead. Dear Father God, as Luke tells us in chapter twenty-two, on the night of His betrayal Jesus said: *Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but Thine, be done.*"

Lipton had buried his face in his hands.

Jon had knelt before him, enfolding him, hugging him:

"Please, Robert, please don't cry. Robert, are you listening? Please. This call home to Glasgow is clearly God's will for us. Perhaps there we can find better medical advice, get Esther back on her feet again. Esther and I have held this up to the Lord in prayer and he has placed certainty in our hearts. This is truly God's will. Our time of service to The Lord here in The Gambia is over. We are stale, worn out. We need to gather ourselves and then, when we are renewed, God will lay before us His new plan for our lives. I'm sure Esther and I will be needed elsewhere. God will decide and we shall obey, as must we all."

Esther, who was fearful of this new energy and forcefulness in her husband, interjected:

"But Jon, where would it be? I don't know if. . ."

"Esther, dear, please, *of course* we don't know where. Perhaps Glasgow? The Lord will speak when He is good and ready. Now Robert, *of course* you are not required to preach or lead. Look to Miriam for those tasks. *Listen*, Robert, you've heard her preach. You see

## North by North East

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how she deals with people, even the awkward ones. She has been blessed by God for His Work in this place at this time. Miriam is your partner now, Robert, not me. Is she not brighter than all three of us put together? It seems obvious now she is the perfect one to take His work forward. Think about this from her point of view. In her situation, where else can she go?

"Robert, pray for Esther and me as we move ahead to our new life of service in Scotland or wherever God sends us. In our turn we will pray for you and Miriam, constantly. *Africa for the Africans*. Isn't that what we have all been saying for years and quite right too. Surely this is what The Lord has had in mind all along. Surely you can see that Miriam has been sent to us, sent here to this very church to do God's will. Look at the timing of it all, just perfect!

"Now, Robert, time is short. We must get organised, get the papers in place for Miriam, make her fully legal. Miss Fairgrieve said she is hoping to get us flight tickets within a few days. We fly first to Amsterdam, she said, then perhaps by ferry to the UK and on to Glasgow."

"But Jon, the girl is so young and she is . . ."

"**No, Robert!** We've been over this. Come, man, let's go to my Vestry and leave Esther to rest. We shall bring this matter before the Lord in prayer and then we shall act. Come, my dear friend. **Now!**"

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Many hours later, after several trips back and forth to the solicitor in Banjul, the necessary paperwork was completed. As Robert rode downhill on his old bicycle into the gloom at the end of a long busy, fretful day, he was passed by a runner from the YMCA, a man he knew well, who was able to tell him he was carrying two single seat tickets for the Macnabs, for the early flight to Amsterdam. Blinded by tears, Robert continued to his home where he spent the night in prayer.

When Miriam returned to the Manse she found Pastor Jon locking two scruffy suitcases, the ones she knew he had brought from Glasgow when he first came to The Gambia. He was wearing his best dog collar, smartest suit and shiny black shoes, the outfit he wore for funerals and weddings.

Reaching out to take hold of his hands, she was hurt when he refused her touch:

"Pastor Jon, what is happening? Where are you going? Is Mistress Esther going with you? Have I done something bad? Is this because of Dawda Jawara?"

Looking over her shoulder, avoiding her eyes, he said:

## North by North East

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"Miriam, please go to your room. You must **not** interfere. And try to keep your child quiet. Mistress Esther needs to rest, so leave her alone. I will tend to her needs. Now, I want you to take this wrist watch. Esther wants you to have it, as a memento. Every time you look at it, please think of us both kindly. God has called us home to Scotland. Robert will come early and explain everything to you. I'm sure you will rise to the challenge. You are a strong, clever woman and God has blessed you with many skills. This is your chance to serve Him. *Africa for Africans.*"

Jon shooed her away and closed Esther's bedroom door behind her, turning the key. Later, she heard him moving around in the kitchen. Later still, she heard his quiet prayers but was unable to make out their full meaning except that the word 'Glasgow' was repeated many times.

Holding her son close in a protective hug, Miriam had sobbed herself to a restless, troubled sleep. She was wakened by the lights of a taxi which flashed through the little window of her room as it climbed the hill to the mission church through the pre-dawn darkness. With Esther and their cases already in the taxi, Pastor Jon, still unable to meet Miriam's frightened, tear-filled eyes, looked northwards over her shoulder:

"Miriam, God has called us home, back to Glasgow. It is time for you to take over. The Work of The Lord must go on. *Africa for Africans.*"

Miriam unable to speak or think, watched in disbelief as the taxi drove the Macnabs away to the airport to catch their flight.

Watching the aircraft disappear northwards into the early morning sky, knowing that the Macnabs were aboard, Robert Lipton was forced to accept the fact that without 'Pastor' Miriam Ndoeye his little church would die, making a mockery of his life's work.

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Two hours later, the man Miriam would come to call Uncle Robert, walked up the hill, wheeling his bicycle towards the tall, slim girl who was standing outside the Manse staring down the snaking dirt track, not yet able to take in what had happened.

They met and hugged:

"Miriam, my dear, dear child, dry your tears for this is a glorious day in your life. Come, girl, come. Make us some Pastor Jon tea and we will sit in the parlour and pray to our Good Lord to send His Holy Spirit to enable you and I both to meet this challenge. Come, girl, come. Hear me well, Miriam Ndoeye, what we shall discuss today must remain only between us and The Holy Spirit. Come, girl, **come**. I have arranged for your Outreach ladies to care for Luke today, so you and I may talk and pray undisturbed. I will tell you everything

## North by North East

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of my life. In your turn, you must tell me everything of yours. There can be no secrets between a brother and a sister bound in service under The Lord."

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By lunchtime, Miriam was beginning to understand the enormity of what was happening to her. From now on she must lead 'her' congregation, helped and guided by Uncle Robert. He explained about the forms to have her naturalised as a Gambian citizen to enable her to serve as Pastor of the *Scottish Mission Church*.

Under his guidance Miriam Ndoye endorsed the affidavit which Robert Lipton had prepared the previous day. This was a form already signed by Pastor Jon. He then produced the application forms which he and Pastor Jon had signed. It had been a horrible rush to get his Dentist friend as a man with professional qualifications to attend the British Embassy with them where all three signed the host of forms required.

Initially, Dr David Jammeh who knew the rumours about Macnab, the girl and her love child, had been reluctant to endorse the proposal to install Miriam Ndoye as the new pastor and did so only because of his close friendship with Robert Lipton who had volunteered as her sponsor.

The final document which Miriam signed that morning was a further application form to obtain a Gambian birth certificate for her child, also signed by Robert Lipton, David Jammeh and previously endorsed by Pastor Jonathan Macnab.

In his supporting affidavit, which Miriam was not allowed to read and had signed unseen as directed by Lipton, Jonathan Macnab had stated he was the father of the illegitimate child birthed by Miriam Ndoye. Although Robert had long suspected this to be true, he had begged Pastor Jon not to expose his reputation in this way, promising his friend he would look out for Luke, make sure he got a good education and, when the time was right, do his best to get him a good job.

Jon had refused to accept this advice, saying only his declaration of fatherhood of Luke was his parting gift to Miriam.

With all the forms signed, Robert and Miriam had then prayed diligently through all the problems they could envisage, a process which needed most of the day. Only when he was leaving did Lipton come to his decision. He delved into his Gladstone bag which passed for a briefcase and dug out a shiny red purse which had belonged to Esther.

"This is for you and your church, Miriam. It is more than half of all the wealth Jon and Esther had. Spend it wisely, prudently, like the Five Wise Virgins in the Bible. In time, when the Lord is ready to answer our prayers, He will make provision for you, but only if you serve Him faithfully. Until you prove yourself to me, Miriam, I will withhold my tithes."

## *North by North East*

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Mounted on his bicycle, preparing to set off down the hill, he added, but without meeting her eye:

"Miriam, there must be no further bastard children. Your congregation will not forgive you a second time, not without Pastor Jon to protect you."

Before he could leave, Miriam placed her hand on his shoulder forcing him to meet her angry gaze:

"Please agree, Uncle Robert, next Sunday I will re-baptise Luke as Jonathan Luke Ndoye Macnab in honour of Pastor Jon. Please get my son's birth certificate in this name."

When Miriam opened the red purse later, she found a mixture of Bank of England notes totalling £200. There was also a £100 note issued by the Clydesdale Bank in Glasgow. This banknote, Uncle William's wedding gift received three decades earlier, had been seen by Jon and Esther as a staggeringly generous amount and they had resolved to save it for use only in a dire emergency.

# North by North East

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## A Fresh Start

During the flight to Amsterdam, Esther suffered a severe respiratory attack, losing consciousness. The *Royal Air Maroc* plane was diverted to land at Marrakech airport where it re-fuelled and departed within a few hours, leaving Jon alone to make arrangements for his wife. Esther died in hospital two days later without regaining consciousness. Within hours, he was presented with an invoice in the amount of \$850 US and told that without payment he would not be allowed to reclaim his wife's corpse.

Local bureaucrats were obstructive - Christian burials for non-residents were prohibited in Morocco.

The local air freight firms insisted he must pay in advance for transportation of the coffin. The basic cost would be \$1,268 US plus any charges due for paperwork demanded by the UK authorities.

When Jon telephoned Miss Fairgrieve he discovered he did not have travel insurance and that she did not have funds to cover this contingency, suggesting he contact the British Embassy in Rabat. As the capital was five hours away by bus, to save time and money, Jon decided to telephone instead. Trevor Stack from the British Honorary Consulate told him that in such circumstances, he was authorised to offer an emergency loan provided the recipient could produce a guarantor for the debt amount. He went on to advise Jon a cheaper way to transport his wife's coffin back to Scotland would be by sea and road.

Jon's next call was to Miss Fairgrieve, recounting his discussion with Stack and asking if she would underwrite this loan or suggest someone who might be able to help him out of his predicament - perhaps another charity.

Her response was terse, guarded, non-sympathetic:

"Mr Macnab, speaking for the *Fraser Society* I very much regret I must say no, immediately. You must understand, we, by which I mean me, operate on a shoe-string budget. However, be assured we shall hold you and Esther up to The Lord Jesus in our prayers. I am just about to transmit a round-robin email to the World-Wide Mission Prayer Circle and will add a special footnote with a synopsis of your position. Thousands of people will soon be praying for you. Please remember Mr Macnab, God works through people."

Isolated, depressed and angry, Jon closeted himself in his cheap hotel room and tried to shut out the haunting calls to prayer from the minaret of the nearby *Ben Youssef Mosque*.

# North by North East

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Trapped in limbo with his future controlled by the need to bury Esther or find a way to get her coffin to Britain, he engaged in an intermittent prayer vigil but was unable to concentrate; his mind kept whirling ahead to explore the possibilities being free of Esther might open up for him.

At one point, filled with self-loathing at his lack of remorse at Esther's death, he sought out the snapshot of Kat with the intention of shredding it before flushing it down the toilet pan. When he looked at it for what he intended would be one last time, his mind set off again on its familiar path and he crawled from his knees onto the bed, lay back and allowed his mind to follow its well-worn night groove to its inevitable outcome. In the guilty aftermath his only comfort was, being a widower, what he had done was no longer spiritual adultery. Any grief he had once had for Esther had been long used up over her decades of decline.

Three days later Stack was telephoned by Mrs Kathleen Baxter who described herself as a very close friend of Mr Macnab and most willing to help him. Stack was happy to pass the buck and provided the contact telephone number for the hotel where Jon Macnab was holed up.

After a long and rather risqué telephone chat, Jon agreed to accept Kat's help on the terms she outlined. Within an hour she had transferred a generous cash sum to the bank in Marrakech recommended by the British Consulate in Rabat. On production of his passport, funds would be released directly to him without the need for a consular loan.

With money to oil the wheels of commerce and bureaucracy, eight days after leaving Banjul, Jon resumed his journey with Esther's coffin in the hold somewhere beneath his feet. He was now flying to Glasgow through Heathrow rather than Amsterdam. For the first time in his life, he flew Business Class, a luxury 'commanded' by his benefactor, who told him she wanted him to feel "fit, rested and energetic" when he reached her.

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At Glasgow airport on the afternoon of Friday 24 April 1987, Jon was smothered in kisses by a stunning, super-fit looking woman wearing a full-length white fur coat, teetering on yellow ankle boots, these ruffed with red fur.

While wiping the lipstick from his face and lips with a perfumed handkerchief, she gushed:

"Glory be Jonno, you look marvellous! The Good Lord has answered our prayers. Praised be the Name of The Lord! And goodness me, I'd forgotten, how tall are you?"

"Six-foot-two."

# North by North East

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"Ooooh, Jonno, give me another cuddle!"

She then whisked him to Gleneagles Hotel in her Mercedes coupé. Once they were alone in their luxury suite, she double locked the door then threw off her coat to reveal a curvy body, sheathed in a red, clinging dress.

As she minced towards him she said, huskily:

"Right Jonno, shall we try again? This time without Mummy and Daddy interfering."

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After clearing customs at Heathrow, Esther's coffin had followed Jon to Glasgow by private ambulance. Two days later, by special arrangement and with no one in attendance but the furnace operator and crematorium manager, her now putrid remains were committed for cremation at *The Linn Crematorium* in an after-hours ceremony attended only by her husband. Kat remained in the Mercedes ready to drive them back to Gleneagles. The next day, Esther's ashes were scattered in the Garden of Remembrance by a member of the crematorium staff, part of a batch from the overnight running of the furnace.

Over the following two weeks, during a non-stop shopping spree, Jon was kitted out with a new wardrobe to cover every occasion. He learned Kat had recently become a keen golfer and, having fought her handicap downwards she was now on the brink of single figures. Although he had not played since leaving Tiree over forty years earlier, Jon discovered he was still quite good. A golfing holiday in Spain was soon in planning, as part of their pre-honeymoon celebrations. Esther Macnab nee Vernon was rapidly fading from memory.

During their extended stay at Gleneagles Hotel, Jon and Kat had become reacquainted and were now both head over heels in love. When Kat asked him to share her life and her home, Jon readily agreed.

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Three months after her death, a short, invitation only memorial service was held in *Glasgow Cathedral* to celebrate the Life and Work of Esther Macnab. Miss Fairgrieve sent her apologies. Jon did not know any of the attendees nor that the event had been sponsored by an unexpected grant to the *Fraser Society* from Mrs Baxter who wished her donation to remain anonymous. Some weeks later at *The Linn Crematorium* and without ceremony, a small plaque sent by the *FMMS* was mounted on the Wall of Remembrance.

ASHES TO ASHES

IN MEMORY OF ESTHER MACNAB NEE VERNON

# North by North East

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WHO SERVED FROM 1957 TO 1987

AT THE SCOTTISH MISSION CHURCH

IN THE GAMBIA

PRAISE BE THE NAME OF THE LORD

DUST TO DUST

For Kat, the memorial service at Glasgow Cathedral in July 1987 was intended to punctuate the end of his sad marriage to Esther. After the service, as she drove them home to her Art Deco mansion on the exclusive Broom Estate in the fashionable Glasgow suburb of Whitecraigs, her mind was already whirling ahead to their forthcoming wedding planned for her forty-sixth birthday on 17 November. While she drove, Kat phoned the Turnberry Hotel from her recently installed mobile car phone, an adapted version of a conventional office handset.

During their few months together, Jon had heard her make similar calls to other people and had asked her, gently, why she felt it necessary to try to dominate them.

"Jonno, you must learn to understand how these things work. To get what we want, we must keep maximum pressure on Reception and Concierge Services. These people resent us, simply because we are rich. Mostly they are small-minded and can be terribly obstructive in their dreadful petty ways, throwing up barriers whenever they can. Please note, my dear gentle Jonno, I am never rude or hurtful, just demanding and fully prepared to pay for what I want. One simply must be forceful, as ever it was for our sort."

He closed his eyes and pretended to snooze while Kat insisted on speaking to the duty manager to check again the early availability of dates for a *small* wedding for around 80 attendees, most of whom would require superior rooms for their overnight stay:

"And Raymonde, do check your people have noted my soon-to-be-husband and I require the *largest* bridal suite on a three-night package, with two rounds of golf each day and caddies dressed smartly and clean-shaven. *Please*, Raymonde, not those awful louts dressed like tramps, smoking who knows what. Do you have these dates in your diary? We shall be married in Glasgow Cathedral on my birthday. You should have all the details from my letter. Check you notes, please. After the ceremony, we shall drive up to join you at noon for our wedding reception."

She listened but there was no reply.

"Raymonde, are you there?"

This call had ended rather unsatisfactorily because the connection 'dropped'. To cover her irritation, Kat moved on to inform Jon of the details for the pre-wedding family get-

## North by North East

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together she was also planning. She was determined this event would be held at the *Sherbrooke Castle Hotel* where her parents had been married. Annoyingly, Shirley-Ann, the in-house events manager was being 'difficult' by repeatedly refusing to agree to an early Saturday afternoon into evening slot for a simple high tea affair.

The stern, no-nonsense woman had so far proved immovable, suggesting family celebrations could be hosted only during mid-week slots as weekends were reserved for full wedding packages only. This was Kat's fourth or fifth attempt to bend her to accept her request.

"It simply must be the Sherbrooke, Jonno," she explained. "As you know, Mummy and Daddy's care home is nearby, and they simply do not travel well, what with their commodes, Zimmers and such-like. That girl Shirley-Ann is a witch!"

At a toot from a car behind, Kat slammed the handset onto the cradle and stabbed down on the accelerator, wheel-spinning away from the traffic lights.

"Jonno, are you listening, dear, this is important."

Jon smiled, nodded and turned himself towards her. Watching her animated face in profile, he could see the tiny scar lines where the plastic surgeon had re-cast her face closer to classic beauty. When he had complimented Kat on having such perfect teeth, she had beamed, "a smile created by a genius in Zurich".

Pretending, with his mind wandering, he 'listened' patiently as Kat explained for the umpteenth time, the additional plan she had in mind for a second pre-wedding get-together for other family and friends at Turnberry (no parents) on the day before their wedding. At each cue, Jon had nodded attentively while his mind drifted to the following morning when he planned to walk to the Pollok Estate in the hope of seeing newly arrived jays which had been reported on the local radio station.

Kat's voice jerked him back to the present:

"Jonno, has your brother David replied from Tiree?" Jon shook his head. "Jonno, it's simply not good enough. You must try harder to get him and his family to commit to our celebrations. After all, apart from your *wonderful* cousin Colin McIntyre QC and his delightful special friend Dilvan, we have no others from the Macnab side joining us for *anything*. Jon, are you *sure* you don't have *other* family or friends you can think of? *Surely* you must have a few hidden away from your past who could bolster your side? Otherwise it will seem as if I'm to marry an orphan!"

Presenting a serious and concerned look while telling a white lie, Jon promised he would write again. This was not the first deception he had proffered. Under Kat's heavy cross-questioning, Jon had revealed a highly edited version of his life with Esther Vernon but

## North by North East

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had not revealed she was coloured. He had not told Kat he had lost contact with his brother David nor that he was a Wee Free Christian who had been violently opposed to Jon's first marriage to a woman of mixed race.

Inwardly, Jon grimaced again at the way David had declined to attend his long-ago wedding by sending a blistering letter, recently re-discovered among the bundle of papers he had brought home from The Gambia, tucked into the notes for his first ever sermon on arriving in Banjul:

*To Jonathan Macnab,*

*Brother in The Lord and of my own flesh,*

*I beg you to desist from this foolishness and stop interfering in the affairs of other countries. Leave God to do His Work through Africans themselves.*

*You have been grossly misguided by that charlatan Billy Graham, a man whose crass manipulation of the Word of The Lord is inspired by Satan. Our Good Lord attended to His business in Africa over a hundred years ago when he sent out my namesake. If Billy Graham is so sure this needs to be done, why does he not go there himself to preach? Tell him to leave us Scots alone to serve The Lord in our own land, according to our own traditions.*

*Tell your friend DOCTOR Billy Graham, (DOCTOR of what?!!) the it was we Scots who were first to take the True Gospel to America to counter the falsehoods spread by the French and Spanish and their Popish ways.*

The letter had rambled on in a similar vein for many pages including many obnoxious, racist remarks about Esther.

It had concluded:

*Now you've failed your engineering exams, get yourself home here to Tíree. Can't you see you need to buckle down and help us*

## North by North East

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*make a living, instead of indulging yourself by jaunting off to meddle in the lives of the peoples of The Gambia which, it seems, are so poor, you could get yourself a spare woman for a bag of sugar, far less than a decent bottle of malt whisky!*

*Yours, in the Name of The Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom everything that was made is sustained by His Holy Spirit from the Beginning and without End,*

*David Livingstone McNab.*

*PS. Our mother died two weeks ago and is now held in the Arms of Christ awaiting the day of The Resurrection when we will meet her again in Glory."*

Thirty years on, David's pages of vitriol still pained him. Jon had ripped the letter into tiny pieces before throwing it into the toilet pan and flushing. Given the fast scrawl which had been used, Jon wondered if his brother might be mentally ill or had, perhaps, taken to drink, the curse of Hebridean living.

Unaware of this letter, Esther had written faithfully to Jon's mother every month enclosing a copy of her prayer leaflet, "News from The Gambia" until these epistles lapsed in the early seventies. No one from Tiree had ever replied.

# North by North East

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## Letting Go

During the final countdown to the wedding, Kat went on a week-long shopping spree to London with her golfing partner Eloise Small who was to be Maid of Honour and recently promoted to become her current best friend. Before meeting and marrying her third husband Frank, Eloise had once owned a ladies' fashion boutique in Glasgow's West End. In retirement, Eloise had set herself up as a style guru and consultant.

Free to set his own agenda, Jon decided he would visit Shawlands. He had never learned to drive and so walked from Whitecraigs through Clarkston to Newlands then along Kilmarnock Road until he was in more familiar territory. As he neared his old haunts, he was disappointed to see how things had changed, particularly the litter which swirled around the streets.

Viewed after a thirty-year absence, everything seemed tawdry, garish, impersonal, grasping. There was advertising everywhere, on hoardings, shop windows, even on the sides of buses. The familiar trams were gone and their tramlines with them. Buses competed for road space with cars and trucks, their drivers often honking impatiently. Side-streets were constricted by vehicles parked on both sides, some bumped up on pavements, blocking them. Front gardens to tenement buildings were mostly untended, unloved, some used as auxiliary storage areas for discarded household objects.

When he reached his home church, he discovered it had been converted to a plumber's DIY merchant store cum sanitary furniture showroom. This explained why the prayer support letters and increasingly intermittent small donations had finally stopped eighteen years earlier. At the sales desk a girl wearing a name badge entitled "Louisa" explained she had only worked there for a few weeks. Louisa, Jon learned, lived in East Kilbride and did not know anyone local, confiding, in a whisper, she was hoping soon to get a job in *Centre One*, the tax office. He tried asking a few passers-by about the church but was met with shrugs of indifference.

He walked on to Minard Road and stared up at the top-floor tenement flat where he had lived with Uncle William and his family. Both his aunt and uncle were dead; Colin lived and worked in Edinburgh. The flat's windows needed washed and the paintwork on the frames was flaking. Garish pink curtains were fully closed. There was a security door at the entry: it was ajar, the lock broken. As he climbed the stairway of the common close, the sharp smell of spices assailed his nostrils, reminding him of Albert Market. The door to the McIntyre flat, which had once been dark green, sanded then re-painted with care every

## North by North East

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two years, was now badly overpainted in purple. A long thin piece of red card was thumb-tacked to the door, its list of eight scrawled names indecipherable.

As he trudged home to Whitecraigs, he realised while he had been away trying to help the poor of The Gambia, their counterparts from other Commonwealth countries had asserted their right of abode and had taken the opportunity to improve their lives by coming to Britain. Although this was something Robert Lipton had told him about over recent years, Jon had not appreciated how much it would impinge on Glasgow. Only now did Kat's repeated comments make sense:

"Jonno, what you must realise is that Glasgow nowadays is simply not what it was when you went away to do your good works. Take Pollokshields for example. Swathes of it have been ghettoised by immigrants living together as large family groups in very squalid circumstances. We try to help, of course we do but they are fixed in their ways, no matter what we say and do to help. What they do to their young girls is disgusting, cutting them to trap them into subjugation. It's about culture, Jonno, not just religion."

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The day after Kat's return from London, while she was doing a work-out in her home gym, guided and encouraged by Anna-Maria, her personal trainer, Jon wrote to the *Fraser Society* to offer his resignation, thanking them for their support.

In his rambling epistle, he chronicled the meagre achievements of the *Scottish Mission Church* during his time in The Gambia, adding as much gloss as his conscience allowed. With uncharacteristic forcefulness, he highlighted the contribution made by his co-worker, Miriam Ndoeye, emphasising she was a true Christian who was both competent and trustworthy. He did not say she was an eighteen-year-old unmarried mother with an infant child, a refugee from the Congo with no papers or formal qualifications.

In this letter to Miss Fairgrieve, Jon explained the unusual arrangement whereby he and Robert Lipton, the church secretary, had "conveyed guardianship of the church congregation and its property "indissolubly" to the care of Miriam Ndoeye." What he did not reveal was the ongoing dispute about the land upon which the church and cemetery had been built.

Although Kat had had someone set him up with home study complete with a PC, printer and photocopier, he had not yet learned to use these modern aids and had written his letter longhand. He did not keep a copy. After he posted it, he slipped off his 'honourary' dog collar and decided he should accept Kat's offer and take a course of driving lessons. Life as he had known it was over. He had done his bit for Christian Mission and was no longer sure he fully believed God's promises as proclaimed by Billy Graham in the Kelvin Hall thirty-two years earlier.

# North by North East

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The following week, a letter arrived from Miss Fairgrieve to say she had written to Miriam Ndoye on behalf of the FMMS explaining while no funds could be afforded in support of her continuing work at the *Scottish Mission Church in The Gambia*, the *Fraser Society* would continue to pray for her and had added the new Pastor's name to the list of those supported by the *World-Wide Mission Prayer Circle (WWMPC)*.

A few days later, Mrs Kathleen Baxter read the article about the new woman leading the *Scottish Mission Church* in Banjul. In another flush of generosity, she telephoned Ruari, her personal account manager at the Royal Bank, instructing him to establish a standing order for £2,000 payable annually to the *Scottish Mission Church*. A cheque book must be issued to Ms Miriam Ndoye. Payments to the Church were to be initiated on the anniversary of her forthcoming wedding and in perpetuity on each anniversary.

"Ruari, this entire arrangement must be done in such a way as to remain anonymous which, as you well know, is a rule of Christian alms-giving."

Despite his best efforts, this task took the eager young man many months to achieve. Each time his telephone beeped, Ruari tensed, fearing it might be another call from the demanding Mrs Baxter, the woman who never listened to reason. He need not have worried: his tormentor was fully occupied chiding and cajoling others to ensure her perfect wedding.

Months later, a cheque book was eventually issued by the Central Bank, a move which the bank authorities had resisted as, under its unwritten protocols, the issue of cheque books was 'restricted' to males.

On that day, the newly-weds, Kathleen and Jonathan Macnab were aboard the QE 2, heading through the Panama Canal bound for Alaska then Hawaii and Japan on the third leg of their round-the-world honeymoon cruise.

With each new experience, Jon's three decades confined to a few square miles on the Banjul peninsula of The Gambia began to feel like a dream, a dimly remembered sepia film of someone he had once known.

# *North by North East*

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## *Marching in the Light of God*

On her first night alone with Luke fast asleep by her side, Miriam Ndoeye lay on her back and stared out the window to the star-studded sky, holding back her tears of disappointment at Jon's desertion.

Earlier she had counted the money three times over, an unbelievable sum for a girl who had previously had no money of her own.

Closing her eyes she thought back to her first day since arriving in Banjul and decided to 'count her blessings' and 'pray her thanks' in accordance with the mantra of both her father and Pastor Jon.

Miriam knew now that if he had not chosen her at Albert Market when she had arrived in Banjul penniless and starving, she would almost certainly have become a brothel maid and might already be dead of the new illness called AIDS that was killing such women.

To help settle her mind, she rose, crossed to the Vestry in the church and sat at her typewriter to set down a list of bullet points for reference and as a prayer guide:

- She had Luke, a big strong boy child already able to run like a gazelle and chattering like a bird. Luke had a quick mind and was interested in how things worked. Maybe he would grow to become a clever man like his father.
- She felt fit, filled with energy, fully recovered from her long walk West to Jesus and the birth of her child.
- She 'owned' a good strong house with a kitchen, a bathroom, three rooms and a garden full of vegetables and fruit bushes. This meant she was now much richer than most of her congregation: she must be careful not to show her pride.
- Crucially, she knew she had the backing of Uncle Robert and, she felt, most of the women from her Outreach meetings.
- She had a good typewriter (the gift from the woman called Mrs Baxter) and a good bicycle, much better than Uncle Robert's. (This bicycle, a silver wedding gift to Pastor Jon from his congregation, had been seldom used as he preferred to walk.)
- If she was extra careful, with £200 she could live for nearly a year, Miriam reckoned. If she was faithful, God would find a way to fund her work. Was the £100 banknote from 1952 still valid currency? She would ask Uncle Robert and if it was, she would try to keep it for Luke, as a gift from his father.

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## North by North East

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Many months later, when an airmail letter arrived from Scotland addressed to 'Pastor Miriam Ndoeye', she was elated. It was the first letter Miriam had ever received. What Uncle Robert had promised was coming true.

The letter from Miss Fairgrieve stated that the *Fraser Society* was now passing the authority to lead the *Scottish Mission Church* in Banjul to Pastor Miriam Ndoeye and that her work was to be upheld by the prayers of the WWMPC. This acronym meant nothing to her or to Uncle Robert but they agreed it must be an important and powerful body. Filled with hope, they prayed that the WWMPC would send them funds to replace those withdrawn by the *Fraser Society*.

The following Sunday, during a Service of Thanksgiving, Lipton read out the letter to the congregation. This news was greeted with loud applause and an outbreak of hymn singing. During the service, Robert and his Elders endorsed their sister Miriam Ndoeye as their new pastor.

Later, when they were alone in her vestry after this service, Robert Lipton gave her a large strong, brown envelope which contained the Gambian Citizen Registration Certificate for Mrs Miriam Ndoeye and a Birth Certificate for her 'nephew' Jonathan Luke Ndoeye Macnab. The envelope also enclosed Robert Lipton's outstanding tithes, in full.

Shaking her hand, he said:

"Miriam, you have met the test God set for you. Praise be The Lord."

"Thank you, Uncle Robert. I declare before The Lord, I promise to do my best to honour the trust you have bestowed on me."

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In fulfilment of her pledge, Miriam established a new regime for her life.

Each weekday after breakfast, the toddler Luke was collected by the Outreach ladies and returned to Miriam two hours before sunset. His carers called him Nathan. At first, Miriam complained but after a few months she too was calling her son Nathan, after his father.

However, Robert Lipton insisted he be called Nathan Ndoeye and **not** Macnab.

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When Nathan Ndoeye was five, Uncle Robert paid for his 'nephew' to attend the recently established Banjul American Embassy School (BAES). Progressing through the years he proved to be an obedient, hardworking pupil although not deemed good enough to be

## *North by North East*

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streamed to go on to university. In any event, such a university education was unaffordable to Robert or Miriam.

On graduating in August 1997 from BAES, Nathan Ndoeye applied successfully to the Central Bank of The Gambia (CBOTG) as a management trainee. At his interview, he had impressed the interview panel with his quiet and confident manner, his perfect grammar and his near perfect English intonation.

His graduation certificates showed he was 'excellent' at Arithmetic and English, 'very good' at Sciences and 'moderate' in French. Perhaps most importantly, his main sponsor was Robert Lipton, a man famed for his honesty and incorruptibility. Further, Ms Miriam Ndoeye, the aunt with whom the young man lived, was an exemplary customer who never abused her account by issuing cheques without supporting funds in her account.

As a strictly secular organisation the Central Bank of The Gambia which employed people from a range of backgrounds, did not question Nathan about his Christian Faith and, following Uncle Robert's advice, the young applicant had not volunteered this information.

# North by North East

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## *In God's good time*

In August 1988, while the newly-weds were flying home on Concorde to Heathrow on the final leg of their journey home after their round-the-world honeymoon, ninety-two-year-old Hector McMann contracted a norovirus infection. After a three-day struggle to restore him, he was removed to the *Nuffield Hospital* where he died the next day, judged to be 'heart strain' due to the viral infection.

Jean Dalglish, the owner and matron of the Sherbrooke Everglades knew Kat had planned a final week in London with Jon and decided to withhold this sad news. To avoid drawing negative attention to the care home, Jean also persuaded her twin brother Walter, the care home's attending physician and co-owner, who also worked at the *Nuffield*, to sign off Hector's corpse as '*death from natural causes caused by a weak heart*'. The certificate made no mention of the viral infection and in any case, Hector had been knocking at death's door for several years.

Two days after Hector McMann's demise, while the Macnabs were flying from home from London, Beryl McMann, now a few weeks from her ninety-seventh birthday, died of an overdose. No one had realised she had been saving up her sleeping pills, waiting for the right opportunity. Once again, Walter was persuaded to certify her client's demise as '*death by natural causes*'.

On Kat's return the cover-up story unravelled with post-mortems, recriminations and threats of legal action against the Dalglish twins.

Six weeks later, following a short service in Glasgow Cathedral, the nonagenarians were buried side by side in the McMann family tomb in Glasgow's Necropolis. Since the couple had outlived most of their contemporaries, both the church and graveside services were attended by less than two dozen people, most of whom were solicitors for the various interested parties and representatives of the various charities the McManns had supported, the latter group doing their best to ingratiate themselves with the former, hoping to learn if their organisations were to benefit from the Estates of the recently departed.

The process of reaching this 'settlement' was not straightforward, involving Kat in dozens of meetings with the interested parties and their solicitors and agents. During this hiatus, Jon noticed that Kat seemed to revel in the various controversies and contentious issues these meetings generated. He concluded, privately, that her professional advisors were

# North by North East

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deliberately provoking her in order to create more paperwork and meetings thereby generating more fees.

To prepare his ground, Jon met with his cousin Colin, learning for the first time Colin and Dilvan had a quarter villa in Kelvindale, which they considered to be their main home and a flat in a town house in Edinburgh's prestigious Charlotte Square.

In their first serious 'head over heart' discussion since their marriage, Jon outlined to Kat his plan to break the settlement deadlock. After a wrangle and a long prayer session, Kat agreed to step aside and allow Jon to lead the negotiations. To achieve this, through Colin, they arranged for Jon to have a temporary Power of Attorney, giving him the authority to speak and sign on her behalf. As agreed, Kat then flew off with Eloise on a three-week jaunt to Milan, Paris and Berlin in search of new outfits to wear during the forthcoming Christmas and New Year party round.

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On Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> November 1998, a meeting was convened by Jon in the Session Room of St John's-Renfield Church of Scotland in Kelvindale, in the heart of Glasgow's well-heeled West End, a building located opposite the *Nuffield Hospital* where Hector McMann had spent his final hours.

Jon was in the chair, tea and coffee was on hand and a caterer was in place to serve a snack lunch later. These arrangements had been orchestrated by Dilvan who had a brother who was the *maître d'hôtel* at the prestigious *One Devonshire Gardens*, located nearby.

Prior to attending, the fifteen other participants had been asked to reserve a two-day slot in their diaries although, in the calling notice, Jon Macnab had expressed his wish that:

*'In calling this meeting, I very much hope that with goodwill and common sense, we shall reach a 'final settlement' without further delay, hopefully in a single session.'*

Recalling the drama at the long-ago Billy Graham nights at the Kelvin Hall, Jonathan McNab decided to dress up for his role as mediator and chairman. Wearing a dark grey suit with a bright purple shirt and crimson dog collar and a black robe with a crimson satin lining, Jon Macnab called the gathering to order and opened proceedings with a short prayer, standing before them holding his Bible close to his chest, commanding their attention in a loud, slow, bass voice:

"Heavenly Father, please guide our hearts and minds as we meet to resolve the issues before us today. Help us mere mortals to see Your purpose and plans for that part of Your great wealth with which you have entrusted my dear wife, Kathleen. Praise be the

# North by North East

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Name of The Lord who has devolved to me her Power of Authority to represent her in proceedings and settle these issues quickly."

He held his Bible open on the flat of his hand:

"In First Peter, Chapter Three at Verse Ten, Your Holy Word tells us: *Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.* At Ephesians Chapter Four, Verse Twenty-Nine, we read: *Do not let unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what is helpful for building up others according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* In Proverbs Ten, Verse Nineteen, You remind us, *Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues,* and at Psalm Thirty-Four, Verse Thirteen, we are commanded, *Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies.*"

After a short pause, he concluded with:

"Come, Holy Spirit and enter our hearts and minds that we may discern The Lord's purpose for us here today. Praise be the Name of the Lord. Amen."

Seated, his eyes scanning the faces slowly, he continued, speaking more quickly, more forcefully.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, please, today and henceforth, I ask that we all speak and write only words that are clear and helpful, no legal hyperbole, no padding. Use simple unambiguous words which will help us to bring these matters to a fair and swift conclusion. I have discussed the main issues of contention with my wife and with my cousin Colin Macintyre QC.

"Please take a copy and circulate to those around you.

"This single page lists *the only* items my wife I wish to contend and resolve.

"You will note that the actions regarding the medical anomalies surrounding my wife's parents passing are no longer an issue. These matters have been settled fairly, amicably and in the strictest confidence.

"These eight bullet points, comprise one hundred and sixty-three words.

"Please take a few minutes to scan this list and then, one by one we shall pray our way through these points with the aim of resolving them fairly, hopefully today."

As Jon had expected, a tall, rotund, balding man called Fraser Urquhart rose, cleared his throat, smirked and said:

"My dear, dear Mr Macnab, I do not think you fully grasp the importance of the interaction between these issues. You mentioned anomalies. Let me assure you there are

## North by North East

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many, many other anomalies missing from this list which need to be sorted out. Really, my dear chap, I believe you have gravely underestimated the difficulties we face. We are all in this together. Time is pressing. Our friends at HMRC are pressing. Speaking as your wife's solicitor and tax advisor and, without revealing any secrets, I can advise this meeting I have many clients in similar circumstances, fighting the same battles and I can assure you, this settlement will take many months to resolve, if not years."

"Mr Urquhart, I can see you are a busy man. I think perhaps our best way ahead will be without your further input. Please withdraw, now. Thank you."

"I'm sorry, are you dismissing me?"

"Yes."

"This is outrageous. I have worked for the McMann family for nearly thirty years."

"Yes, I am aware of this and yes, on behalf of my wife, I am dismissing you. Thank you and good day. May God Bless you according to His will."

"Preposterous!"

The man gathered his papers, stuffed them into his briefcase and rose to leave, his eyes down, muttering under his breath.

"Mr Urquhart, will you please collate all papers in your possession relating to the McMann portfolio in date order and have them delivered to our home. Shall we agree Friday noon, please, which gives you three clear days? Thank you. With this delivery, please render your final fee invoice and provide an itemised accounting of all the hours you have billed over these last months. I shall also need photocopies of your time sheets and diary entries to back up the hours claimed. Thank you."

The door slammed.

Jon moved his eyes slowly, stopping at each face. He saw defeat, not defiance.

"Ladies and Gentlemen. Let us address item number one. Shall we pray?"

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The final settlement was signed off by all parties thirteen days later, on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> December 1988.

The Estates of both of Kat's parents were settled, due taxes paid to the Inland Revenue, bequests distributed and professional fees settled, leaving Kat with an estimated personal fortune just short of £17 million. This sum excluded her parents' holiday villa in Tenerife, a rambling property situated in the hills above *Los Americas* with a spectacular

## *North by North East*

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view of the Adeje coast stretching from *La Caleta* in the north to *Los Cristianos* in the south.

The deeds of this property had been transferred to Kat when her parents first became residents at Sherbrooke Everglades when it had become obvious the frail and incontinent McManns would never again benefit from winter-sun breaks in The Canary Islands.

# North by North East

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## The Golden Years

Although Jon was part of Kat's tennis and golf crowd, his main pastime was bird-spotting. Now with a small car of his own, his equipment included the best binoculars, a high-zoom monocular and an array of tripods and monopods to accompany an expensive SLR camera with a full set of lenses. He held membership of the RSPB, the British Trust for Ornithology and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. After a tentative start, he had established himself as a regular contributor and was in dialogue with the editors of their magazines, supplying short, pithy articles illustrated by his own photographs, including insights gained from his years roaming the Banjul peninsular, gently promoting The Gambia as a worthy destination for keen twitchers.

With his own PC and home office/study, Jon Macnab had re-established contact with Miss Fairgrieve, part of a growing band called *Global Christians Online* signed up to AOL. Perhaps because of this easy access, he was now called upon in emergencies to act as a locum preacher, a task which he enjoyed, allowing him to re-polish his old sermons, giving him an opportunity to retail his adventures in The Gambia to fresh audiences.

Free of the responsibility of her parents, Kat set about refurbishing their Tenerife property as a second home, a place to escape from the dull, wet Scottish winters to play golf and tennis in the sun in the south of Tenerife where records showed it rained less than ten days a years and, even then, seldom for more than a few hours at a stretch.

However, Kat Macnab found the process frustrating as the local builders and Architects were, she thought, small-minded, unable to offer the sort of grander vision she was hoping for. In the end, after a few years of stop-start projects, her enthusiasm waned and she started to look around for a ready-made new build replacement even though everyone said she would never find a better location than *La Tranquilla*.

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In this manner their golden years slipped past with Kat clinging to sobriety by attending her AA meetings twice weekly and keeping up a demanding gym regime under a series of personal trainers in a quest to maintain her slim, lithe body shape, hopping from one new fad diet to the next.

In October 1996, now approaching her fifty-fifth birthday, she fought off her wrinkles by undergoing 'maintenance' plastic surgery in Zurich and spending hours each week under

## North by North East

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whatever new local beautician was reckoned to be the best, even travelling to Edinburgh on a regular basis for sessions with a woman who titled herself *Professor Derma*.

Maia Smith-Adams was a Kiwi with Aboriginal roots, originally from Waiheke Island, a short ferry ride from Auckland. On first arrival in Scotland as a twenty-five year old, Maia had worked as an auxiliary nurse at Glasgow Royal Infirmary before discovering her talent for creating home-made unguents and pungents to restore aging skin to a youthful bloom. With perfect dusky skin, *Professor Derma* was a stunningly attractive and openly lesbian woman in her mid-forties. These long and expensive skin therapy sessions were not limited to facials but could include entire body treatments including all over massages (with optional extras). And, for clients suffering from the change of life, the supply of HRT pills (which she purchased by mail order from Amsterdam).

At sixty, Jon seemed unchanged, little affected by his advancing years, still fresh faced and thriving on his simple vegetarian diet supplemented by eggs and fresh fish, drinking only tap water and strong tea laced with condensed milk.

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With their tenth wedding anniversary approaching, Kat began planning a grand celebration. She would invite Eloise and Frank Small as house guests to *La Tranquilla* for six weeks to include Christmas and New year. In addition, she would book five-star hotel rooms for a further twelve couples to join them for two weeks of golf and tennis. With Jon's help, they set up a Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet which they used to devise mini-league tournaments for the sixteen participants to make sure they enjoyed plenty of exercise.

Once again, *La Tranquilla* became her focus of attention with its dowdy appearance, old-fashioned bathroom arrangements and the lack of a proper swimming pool. Despite her best efforts the property had not been much improved since her parents had died. Kat was determined to give it a further make-over ahead of the celebrations.

While this plan was being discussed, in response to a call from Miss Fairgrieve, Jon had agreed to act as interregnum minister and pastor for a small, troubled church on the outskirts of Kilmarnock, a short drive away over the Fenwick Moor. Despite what he had heard from Miss Fairgrieve, he was surprised to discover the congregation was lively, comprising mainly unmarried mothers most of whom were unwaged, people living on benefits. The previous minister had absconded with one of these young mothers who had abandoned her three children to her childless sister to move with the man of her dreams back to his hometown of Alabama where he had been promised an assistant pastor's position in his former Southern Baptist Church.

Although Kat had initially agreed to Jon's extended voluntary work, when she saw how much time was involved and understood the nature of the work he was doing, home visiting

## North by North East

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young single mothers to counsel and pray with them, she had complained. Under pressure, Jon had given all parties two months' notice of his intention to withdraw, even if a new full-time minister could not be found.

Only when her Jonno was safely back in his familiar routine of birdwatching and playing the occasional round of golf, was she able to relax and re-focus on *La Tranquilla*. Then, on a mad whim following a session with *Professor Derma*, Kat began an email dialogue with Maia's cousin Roger Anderson, an award winning Architect whose studio was on Waiheke Island. As Maia had informed, Roger designed bespoke luxury homes for clients who wanted only the very best.

Initially, Kat had invited Eloise to join her but the Smalls were already booked on a five-week relocation cruise from Los Angeles to Australia via Hawaii.

Jon, who did not enjoy flying, thought the idea of traveling half way round the world to find an Architect was bizarre, counselled her against this trip. After days of trying to persuade him, she ignored his advice, made arrangements with Roger by email and flew First Class to Auckland via a stopover in Singapore, arriving in late January 1997.

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When she returned six weeks later, she had dropped off the wagon of sobriety. Her tall Highball tumblers of Coke were again being laced with Vodka. Although she pretended to attend her usual AA meetings, she was using the time to shop for alcohol hidden around the house in various secret locations.

During Kat's absence, Miss Fairgrieve had persuaded Jon to take on the post as temporary minister at the *Christian Outreach Fellowship*, a thriving family church based in the Kilmarnock housing estate called New Farm Loch. This had been a nineteen-sixties council-owned housing development which had morphed into a mix of council tenants and private home owners. Jon's new charge now incorporated the majority of the young mother's from the previous church which had collapsed after his departure, information he withheld from Kat.

Explaining his new situation and steeling himself for Kat's objections, she had merely smiled and disappeared into her gym. When he returned in the early evening, she was already asleep, in the larger of their guest bedrooms. Next morning she explained she was suffering from 'abdominal cramps', caused by her change of life.

Over the ensuing weeks, these new sleeping arrangements persisted.

Jon eventually learned her trip to New Zealand had been only partially successful. Roger Anderson had prepared sketch designs based on her photographs but he was unwilling to

## *North by North East*

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drop his other clients and move temporarily to Tenerife to supervise the upgrading of *La Tranquilla*, she claimed.

There were no further discussions about the grand ten-year anniversary celebration.

The Macnabs' Golden Years were over.

# *North by North East*

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## *Falling from Grace*

Since his divorce from Serena Ahuja, Randy (Randal) Crawford had been plying his trade as a Tour Guide cum Golf Companion cum Time Share Sales Agent on Tenerife for around fifteen years. Through Time Share selling he spotted the opportunity to promote himself as a freelance Interior Designer and Project Manager.

Randy had been the second child of an unmarried mother living in the New Farm Loch council estate on the outskirts of Kilmarnock. Trapped by poverty, he had dedicated himself to golf. With help from his mentor, the local Church of Scotland minister who saw the boy's talent and paid for his fees and tuition, Randy had been junior champion at Old Prestwick GC. This was where Abhik Ahuja was an avid golfer and aspiring committee member. Ahuja was a businessman who owned a string of fast food outlets including seven McDonald franchises in Scotland and four in England.

Abhik had signed up Randy Crawford on a one-sided contract as his agent then got the teenager an unpaid job as a pro shop assistant at Turnberry GC and put him on a PGA apprenticeship. Serena, who had been coached by Randy, had fallen head over heels for him. Unfortunately, Randy failed to make the grade as a pro golfer, becoming a philanderer and using his golf trips abroad to act as a mule for a local drug dealer, trapped into doing so by the need to feed his habit.

After the divorce, with her father's help, Serena had quickly found a new, more reliable husband and added two further children, both boys to the three girls Randy had fathered during their six-year marriage.

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When Randy met Kat in May 1997, he was thirty-nine, almost two decades younger than his latest 'mark'. From a distance he judged her to be in her late forties although when he was closer, he revised this upwards by a few years. For him, pursuing business with rich, lonely women with the likelihood of sex as a side dish was a well-trodden path. To keep fit and rid his system of the residues of alcohol and cocaine after a binge, he played tennis and squash. On his better days, he could still play scratch golf over any of the courses on Tenerife.

From the grapevine at the exclusive tennis club, Randy had learned Mrs Kat Macnab was in the market for an 'Architect' and decided to make his move. He also knew she was here alone, that she was from Glasgow and was loaded.

# North by North East

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As she saw the tall, blond younger man with a perfect golden tan approach, Kat checked and saw he did not wear a wedding ring. With his hot eyes appraising her, she sat more upright, tucked in her tummy and offered a bright, open, inviting smile. At the same time, sensing the danger and reminding herself of what had happened in Alicante, she resorted to praying away the surge of desire she felt flushing through her, wondering if this was a side effect of the 'new lease of life' pills she had purchased from *Professor Derma*.

'Hi, are you Kat Macnab? I'm Randal Crawford. As you can guess from the accent, I'm Scottish. I was born in Glasgow but we moved about a lot, Kilmarnock, mainly.'

'Yes. I saw you playing just then. *Very* impressive. In this heat, you must be exhausted. Would you like a drink, to rehydrate?'

Kat waved towards the bar and a young waitress minced over on high heels wearing a short, tight dress which did not flatter her bulging tummy folds or huge thighs and calf muscles.

'Thanks. That looks nice, what is it?'

'A Virgin Bride, everything but the gin. I'm an alcoholic.'

Turning to the girl, Randy nodded, 'Two more of those please, Marianna. Put it on my tab, thanks.'

'Sure, Randy.'

'So, you're Randy?'

'Yes, by name and by nature. Sorry, I couldn't resist. Corny but it still gets a smile, occasionally. So, were you?'

'Was I *what*?'

'A Virgin Bride?'

'Mmm, no. Does such a person exist, outside the Bible?'

'Yes. I was married once and we refrained until our wedding night. I was seventeen and Serena was twenty. Her father was a very strict Hindu and when he caught us stripped and about to have full sex for the first time, he made us promise to abstain for six weeks on condition we would get married in full Hindu style. After that, the brakes were off. Or, maybe I should say, the breeks were off. We were like rabbits. Great times. Six years, three kids, all girls and then, well, perhaps its best to draw a curtain, eh? We all have skeletons in our wardrobes, yes?'

## North by North East

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"Yes. Okay, I'll trade. I was married once to a man who was very jealous, demanding, always checking up on me. I should never have married him but Daddy insisted. But the baby died. All my babies died. Something in my womb. Can't be helped. Anyway, Keith Baxter was a scoundrel who posed as a kind and generous man, so everyone thought. During our divorce he took almost half of what we owned, most of which I had brought to our marriage. If it hadn't been for Daddy, I would have been a pauper."

He looked at her rings:

"So, you're a divorcee?"

"No, I remarried. My husband is a minister. He was in The Gambia as a missionary but when his wife died, he came home to Glasgow and we started over. D'you know, Randy, what you just said, that you and your wife were 'nearly lovers'. That happened to me too. Mummy and Daddy were supposed to be out for the afternoon but they came back and caught us. Jonno was roughed up by Daddy and thrown out and that was the end of our romance. I was only fourteen but he thought I was older. He was the first boy I really loved and now we are married it's perfect."

"Perfect?"

"Yes, perfect. Praise The Lord."

"Ah, so you are an evangelical?"

"Yes, are you a Christian, Randy?"

"No, still a sinner. My sister was an evangelical but she ran off to America with her pastor. I've lost touch with her now."

"Ah, poor girl. What's her name? I'll add her to my prayer list."

"Biffy. She was Christened as Elizabeth, but she was always called Biffy, after my Gran."

"So, tell me all about Randy Crawford."

"Maybe later. Look, I like to be upfront. I'm here to offer to help you, with your refurb project. I understand you own *La Tranquilla*, yes? I hope you don't mind but I poked around it the other day when you were playing golf and well, it's a bit tired and old-fashioned, yes?"

"Oh, so, are you an Architect?"

"No, among other things, I'm an Interior Designer and Project Manager. I've got a good reputation. I can give you a string of references. Given a few days' notice, I'll arrange to take you to a few of my previous projects to see them, if you like. I pride myself that I

# North by North East

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can guarantee one hundred percent satisfaction in every department, more or less. Why don't we have a look at your place now, make a start?"

He watched as she looked away, a small smile playing on her lips, her finger twisting her wedding and engagement rings. After a slight pause, she turned back, beamed a smile:

"Yes, Randy, why not? Off you go and shower and change and I'll go ahead. I was thinking of eating here but what if I grab a few steaks and salad things from the supermarket?"

"Right, Kat, it's a date. See you in an hour, yes?"

"Yes, Randy! Oh, the code for the gate is 0-1-2-3."

"Yes, I know. It's only the same code used by about half of the gates around here. Now that's something we should upgrade as a priority. We can't have a stunning woman like you living up there all alone without first class security, can we?"

He saw the disguised gasp, the tell-tale shine in her eyes and the red flush at the base of her neck and knew he had clicked.

As they stood, Randy stepped forward took hold of her upper arms, leaned in, pecked first at her left cheek then her right while murmuring, sotto voce:

"Let's make a night of it, Kat, shall we?"

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When Randy arrived, Kat was naked under a flimsy beach throw, perfumed, her hair and make-up perfect. Without ceremony or discussion, she led him straight to her bed.

In the afterglow, she saw him sniff a line of coke and accepted his offer to share. From the boot of his car, he brought a large box containing a selection of wines, spirits and mixers.

Three days later, they emerged from their binge and dosed themselves with paracetamol and gallons of water. Side by side at the gym in the tennis club they purged themselves and resolve to stay clean and stick to sex only.

She needed a hairdresser and beautician and Randy suggested *Amore Sempre*, a salon run by Arianna Bugatti, who was originally from Scotland. *Amore Sempre* was exclusive, taking on new clients only by recommendation, which Randy arranged. It was expensive but top drawer, he warned, first choice by many of his other wealthy clients. Each client was treated as an individual, like Royalty, not one of a gossiping crowd.

Sticking to their resolve of sex only with no drugs or booze, over the next week Kat and Randy worked on their plans for *La Tranquilla's* refurbishment and made first contacts

## North by North East

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with the tradesmen who would do the work, discussing timescales and budgets. Randy would earn a fifteen percent fee, discounted, he told her, from his standard rate of twenty percent. Not discussed were the kickbacks he would receive from the contractors and suppliers carefully chosen from his approved list. At his suggestion, to pay fees and contractors' invoices while she was back in Glasgow, a bank link from Mrs Kathleen Macnab's RBS personal account was established to forward moneys to *RC Associates*.

By dedicating themselves to sex, playing golf and tennis and working out at the gym they remained clean. However, two nights before Kat was booked to fly home to Glasgow, the lovers succumbed first to coke and progressed to alcohol. This binge lasted almost two months. In her more sober moments, avoiding direct telephone conversations by using texts, Kat promulgated the big lie, telling Jon she had contracted a dreadful chest infection exacerbated by laryngitis and could not fly.

When they crawled up into sobriety, Kat demanded they must part and avoid further direct contact. Randy was familiar with this 'kiss-off', as he thought of it. After some haggling which ended in a sex fest, he sealed the deal by getting Kat's agreement to pay a retrospective 'design' fee of 10,000 Euros to cover their seven weeks together and an assurance of his vow of silence. Unlike the Alicante sting, there was no threat of photographs or videos. Both were happy to settle. Although Randy had enjoyed his interlude with Mrs Kat Macnab, he was tired of her demanding attitude and was ready to move on to fresh flesh, hoping for a rich widow who was still premenstrual, without the hang-ups of sudden mood swings.

Despite the circumstances in which these arrangements were conceived, while charging around twice the going rate for a project of its style and scope, Randy Crawford and his tame contractors did an excellent job.

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Free of Randy, during a further week working out strenuously at the tennis club gym morning and afternoon and swimming a hundred lengths during early mornings and late afternoons in her new infinity pool, she spent her solitary evenings on her knees by her bedside in sincere prayer, rededicating herself, determined to stay clean and faithful to her Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fully recovered, Kat's return to Glasgow coincided with the appointment of a new lady minister at the *Christian Outreach Fellowship* and Jon was again free to play golf and tennis with her.

With her system free of addictive substances and by doubling up on the new higher strength pills from *Professor Derma*, her libido was restored. Sparked by her memories of her erotic encounters with the accomplished Randy, Jon found his wife suddenly re-

## *North by North East*

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energised, demanding sex three or four times a night and again before breakfast and on occasion during their siesta interludes between morning golf and afternoon tennis.

For the happy couple, it was like a second honeymoon.

# North by North East

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## The Grim Reaper

The revamped version of the Macnab's anniversary celebration at *La Tranquilla* was back on the agenda. However, a few months after Kat's return from her extended romp with Randy Crawford, tragedy struck her inner circle of friends.

During a golfing trip to Turkey, a party from Whitecraigs Golf Club was travelling in a minibus which suffered a brake failure. Amid screams of terror, the vehicle entered a downhill hairpin bend at speed and soared off into a crevasse to become a blazing inferno two hundred metres below. Eight of the twelve who had been earmarked to attend the Macnabs' tenth wedding anniversary on Tenerife had died in the calamity.

Kat and John were on a touring holiday in Florida with Eloise and Frank, playing golf and tennis. The news of what had happened did not reach them for many days. The following day, trying to avoid thinking about their loss, the foursome booked a 'snorkelling with dolphins' experience. Eloise, a strong swimmer, dived deeper than the others.

After a worrying delay, she failed to surface and the alarm was raised. The inexperienced teenager designated as their underwater guide and safety man, dived repeatedly to investigate. It took him an hour to locate Eloise entangled in a 'ghost net' which had been lost by a seine net fishing boat during a storm many decades earlier. Trapped with her was a collection of marine corpses including a sea turtle and the remains of a dolphin, both in the final stages of putrefaction.

At a stroke, Kat's golf and tennis crowd had been decimated.

It took nearly three weeks of bureaucratic bumbling before Eloise's body could be repatriated. During this period, Frank, who had been dry for ten years, turned to the bottle. Still in denial, he refused to attend the crematorium, locking himself in his home theatre. The entire responsibility fell on Kat and Jon.

Only Phil and Maggie remained but at the memorial service to mark the tragic losses, the couple announced they were moving to Sydney to be closer to their only son who was married to a local girl. Harry had recently become a naturalised Australian and their daughter-in-law Donna was expecting their third grandchild. Phil and Maggie had decided on a fresh start in Melbourne and were looking forward to helping with the grandchildren.

The day after the church service, Frank Small sent a text saying he was planning to sell up in Whitecraigs and move to Bangkok to find a Thai bride. He refused to answer his phone and would not respond when they rang his doorbell. His garden, previously his pride

## North by North East

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and joy, was badly needing weeded and there were dandelions, daisies and buttercups flourishing in what had been his showcase lawn.

A few days later he was found dead by his cleaning lady, judged to have died in a diabetic coma.

The ensuing months passed in a blur. The Macnabs tenth wedding anniversary celebration was cancelled. Disoriented without her intimate cohort, Kat stopped playing daily golf and dropped out of the ladies' tennis round-robin league. For weeks at a time she suffered bouts of sciatica which made it impossible to move without codeine to dull the pain. Physiotherapy proved fruitless. Indoors, she walked with a three-pronged stick. On the few occasions she ventured outdoors, she clung to Jon for support.

Despite repeated pangs and longings, she resisted, remaining sober and clean, apart from the codeine.

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Christmas and New Year passed with visits to Glasgow Cathedral followed by a short mid-week break in January to Gleneagles, a trip which had not proved successful as Kat decided she could not face the stares she drew in the Dining Room and reverted to eating her meals in their suite. Now sixty-six, her general health was in sharp decline.

From overuse of telephones, she was almost deaf to normal conversation in her left ear. What had been low-level white noise tinnitus flared to rage in both ears. She capitulated and was now wearing an expensive, state-of-the-art in-ear hearing bud concealed by her new hairstyle. This device was temperamental, whining and screeching painfully, consuming batteries at the rate of two a day. Although the bud was almost invisible, the flesh-coloured behind-the-ear transponder was large, heavy and, she thought, obvious. Self-conscious and fearing she might be classified as 'decrepit and deaf' she was wearing her hair longer which made her look much older, she complained.

The after-effects of her earlier brutal cosmetic surgery and daily top-up sunbed tanning were causing her skin to distort and sag, subjecting her to intermittent facial spasms, causing ripples of excruciating pain to sting her lips, cheeks and nose.

Without Eloise to support her and determined not to reveal her fears to Jonno, she made a painful trip alone to London for expensive consultations with a raft of Harley Street's new breed of cosmetic surgeons. Each consultation followed a pattern, starting with a round of embarrassing and invasive questions about her previous drinking and smoking habits, questions which she did not answer truthfully.

Under high-powered cameras and blazing lights, a detailed map of her face and neck was produced as a video. She was pinched with a pair of sterile tongs linked to a computer and

## North by North East

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asked to record her pain level on a scale of one to ten. Sub-dermal samples were removed under local anaesthetic for laboratory tests. These revealed she had used Botox injections on a regular basis, a fact the patient had denied in earlier questions. It also revealed she was using high-dosage Hormone Replacement Therapy, part of her raft of pills supplied by *Professor Derma*.

From each expert in turn, the analyses of these tests concluded her skin was aging fast and losing elasticity. To her severe disappointment, not one consultant was willing to attempt further surgical nip and tuck remodelling. In carefully couched and oblique medical jargon, they told her the earlier 'sculpting' form of surgery she had undergone was an approach which would no longer be allowed, except in facial reconstruction after car crash or burns trauma cases.

Each expert in turn counselled she must 'accept and manage' her situation using painkillers, anesthetic skin wipes and by applying the specially formulated and uber-expensive creams and lotions which they peddled. They stressed repeatedly, she must avoid the use of sunbeds and always use sunblock when exposed to even moderate solar radiation. Botox injections and HRT pills must be avoided at all costs.

Two weeks later and thousands of pounds poorer, she returned to Glasgow depressed, feeling old and weary. Although she went through her morning hair and make-up rituals as before, the face she was titivating looked pale, lined, sagging. Kat Macnab was no longer the vibrant, healthy woman she had been a year earlier, before her trip to New Zealand. Without her HRT pills, she lacked energy and motivation. She felt the life which she had once enjoyed had been snatched from her and, for the first time in her life she understood why people might contemplate suicide.

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To escape the ghoulish scrutiny of her remaining friends and acquaintances, Kat decided they should move permanently to Tenerife where she would start anew, make new friends. Although her Jonno was reluctant, Kat was adamant, increasingly tetchy and demanding. After many hours of prayer together, their move was agreed on condition they would buy a bolt-hole three-bedroom penthouse flat in a new development on Ayr Road, with a large double-glazed veranda to the rear giving views south and west over Rouken Glen Park.

For Kat Macnab, her planned life changing-move to Tenerife would prove to be a bad decision.

However, for her Jon, it would provide a wonderful opportunity to add to his bird-spotting list and a chance to bag any unusual passage migrants blown off course while on route between Europe and Africa.

# *North by North East*

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# North by North East

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## A Tranquil Life

In late August 1998, Kat and Jon Macnab sold up her Art Deco house on the Broom Estate in Glasgow's fashionable suburb of Whitecraigs and completed their move to Tenerife.

In her new life in the sun, Kat decided she would not reveal to strangers she was an alcoholic in remission. She had not attended AA meetings since Eloise's death and had been fighting her drink pangs for months, struggling alone, praying intermittently and pleased that she had not confessed her predicament to Jonno who, she felt certain, would have placed her under close surveillance.

Still reeling from the fact they were the only survivors from what had once been a lively and vibrant social circle, Kat had adopted a mantra under which they would live out their remaining years more quietly and find a way to serve their Lord in Tenerife. Free from the dire news of doom and gloom which had seemed to fill the BBC Television news broadcasts night after night in Scotland, she decided to terminate her satellite TV channel subscription. Instead, she would watch videos of her favourite films.

She knew the sun could be fierce in the height of summer but they would use these months to take up ocean cruising, a hobby which would suit Jon, she told him, giving him global bird-spotting opportunities to which he merely nodded, failing to respond this suggestion with any degree of enthusiasm.

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In their first few months at *La Tranquilla*, they threw themselves into the novelty of living full-time in Tenerife, making longer car trips to explore the island in greater depth.

While they waited for Kat's vintage *Lotus Esprit* to be shipped to Tenerife, they rented a basic *Volkswagen Golf* similar to the one Jonno had owned in Whitecraigs. Kat soon decided it was too small, too claustrophobic and she insisted Jon exchange it for an automatic VW Passat Estate.

When the *Lotus* arrived, she quickly realised a right-hand drive car driven on the 'wrong' side of the road was beyond her capabilities, particularly on the narrow, winding mountain roads when faced with local vehicles approaching at speed or overtaking aggressively, horns blaring when she slowed down entering a bend.

With its rear-wheel drive and sports suspension, the *Esprit* was difficult to handle on the loose surfaces such as the climb from the main road up to *La Tranquilla*. Jon was soon the

## North by North East

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main driver with Kat assuming the role as their navigator, providing a constant stream of un-Christian-like comment on what she saw around her, focusing on the often decrepit smallholding cottages she called 'squalid hovels' and the equally scruffy villages they passed through.

To himself, Jon wondered what she would have thought of his former 'manse' in Banjul.

By phoning the Mercedes dealer in Glasgow where she was well known, she ordered an open-topped Mercedes sports car, a left-hand drive model with an automatic gearbox. Many months later when the vehicle arrived by ship from mainland Spain, there was a horrible kerfuffle surrounding the importation documentation. Delivered to her door still in its crate, she discovered it was not Sky Blue as ordered but Polar White. To compound matters it was a British right-hand drive car with a manual gearbox. With her weak knees, occasional twinges of sciatica and deteriorating eyesight, it was Jon who took up his duties as their chauffeur, a complete reversal of their previous situation in Glasgow where Kat had always driven when they went out as a couple.

The plus side for Jon was he was able to plan their outings around bird-spotting opportunities, dropping off Kat in nearby towns and villages where she went shopping for clothes, shoes and knick-knacks for their refurbished home.

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Despite her promise to herself, Kat made little effort to cultivate new friends. In part this was due to lack of physical energy which made her listless, sapping her will. Undiagnosed, she had developed type 2 diabetes. Slowly, day by day, avoiding her inner voice which demanded she push herself forward, she retreated into a world of best-seller novels, watching and rewatching films like *Poldark*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Fatal Attraction*, her all-time favourite, letting her mind drift to reconfigure the images portrayed into memories of good times with her old crowd.

In this lonely, closeted existence, the effect was to leave her sad and guilty, throwing up health fears, despairing at her aging appearance and lack of mobility. No longer was Kat Macnab nee Baxter nee McCann the self-confident, grand dame who demanded attention and projected herself in company.

When she tried to pray about her secret worries, asking for help, God remained silent.

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The religious fervour which had driven her during the early years of her 'perfect marriage' to Jon Macnab had faded. Kat had hoped the move to Tenerife would, somehow, restore their sex life but it did not. Despite what she had told Randy, the Macnabs' marriage had not been as perfect as she had prayed for and expected. Towards the end

## North by North East

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of their third year together, during her perimenopause phase, she was plagued with hot flushes, night sweats and sleeplessness. Her breasts were tender and her favourite right nipple was subject to weeping blobs of slippery grey mucous. Without warning she would suffer internal twinges and tenderness in her private parts which might last only for a few minutes or could persist for days before fading to restart after a uncertain period of respite. Perhaps unrelated, her recurrent lower back pain became a constant companion, making her crabby, unapproachable.

This deterioration in her previously excellent health had occurred shortly after her family GP had retired. His practice had immediately merged into a local health centre where she had become a number, not a person, seen by whoever was on duty. None of the new breed of GPs was willing to act as her 'private medical advisor', for a fee.

*"No, ye'll huvtae try elsewhere," the gum-chewing, overweight, tattoo-ed receptionist had advised brusquely, before pointedly sliding her office window closed."*

There had been a second honeymoon flush of sexual activity when Kat discovered Professor Derma and her pills and a third bout of fervour on her return from her solo trip to arrange the refurbishment of *La Tranquilla*. However, this renewed and sometimes desperate need for sex evaporated with the death of Eloise who, with Frank had become members of her AA group, substitutes for Avril as Kat's confessors and confidantes.

Since the trauma in Florida and the tragedy of the bus crash in Turkey, Kat had again rejected Jonno's nocturnal approaches. In addition to her menopausal issues, she was suffering from sciatica, she claimed.

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During their first weeks in *La Tranquilla*, lying by her side awaiting his opportunity to offer comfort but wary of saying anything in case she turned on him, he remained mostly still and silent, waiting as she wriggled restlessly or gasped in pain before heaving herself upright to switch on her bedside lamp and to try to read herself to sleep.

On other occasions, when she seemed more approachable, he would offer comforting words and gentle cuddles, ignoring her attempts to block his wandering hands while dreading her vicious words:

*"No, Jonno. NO! Stop pawing at me. Look, why don't you sleep in the spare room where you can jerk yourself off without having to wait until I'm asleep. Actually, it's disgusting, listening to you grunt and groan like a schoolboy. And the stench is obscene. And who the hell is Sarah? Go on, get away and give me peace."*

## North by North East

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On other occasions, despite her alleged sciatica, she would suddenly throw back their duvet to flounce off to spend the rest of the night watching the stars from a lounger, covered by a lightweight duvet.

In July 2000, as the second anniversary living permanently in Tenerife approached, at her formal request, he moved to a guest bedroom never to be invited to return.

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After a few further months of living as a monk, and without ever discussing their situation, Jon moved his clothes and books into 'his' bedroom, still praying this would be a temporary arrangement, hoping when her menopause subsided, she would want him again.

From his experience in dealing with his Outreach ladies in Banjul, many of whom had suffered similar mood swings and intimate physical problems which they had often divulged to him in graphic detail, he knew there was little he could do to help. The mysterious restorative balm of TIME would heal her, as it had for countless others down through the centuries. His only course of action was to WAIT while making the best of the situation. After the menopause, she would recover and, in theory, their tranquil, comfortable life in Tenerife would return and they would go on as before.

Jon Macnab would never learn that in addition to her physical issues, Kat was also suffering from the recurring shame of her adultery with Roger Anderson in Waiheke and her romp with Randy, a man who, she believed, was still out there somewhere in Tenerife snagging other women like herself, a man who might try to blackmail her if he ran short of funds.

For Kat, with hours confined to her own company by her incapacity, there was also the churning remorse for her lost years and the knowledge that if she had been more careful about her health, she would not now be suffering.

Perhaps from his experience of counselling the bereaved over three decades, Jon Macnab should have recognised her suppressed 'survivor's guilt' and the three questions it always threw up:

*Why had she been spared when Avril and Eloise and all the others had been taken?*

*How could a loving God allow this to happen?*

*Perhaps there was no God after all?*

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In making her escape to Tenerife, running from the memories which had haunted her in Glasgow, Kat Macnab had chosen to remove herself from her previous outer circle of

## North by North East

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friends, acquaintances and support infrastructure; her personal trainer, her beautician, audiologist and podiatrist. Nor had she registered with a personal medical advisor in Tenerife. Despite the advice from Harley Street, she had persisted with Botox 'maintenance' injections under Arianna Bugatti at *Amore Sempre* but, so far, had shunned the pick-me-up pills which were on offer.

In her new less cosmopolitan world, a holiday island of transients where she was probably one of the richest permanent inhabitants, the effect was to create a sense that somehow she was less important, not more so, as she had assumed would be the case.

What she needed was someone like Avril or Eloise but she did not know how to find her.

Many years later, Jon Macnab would think back to those months and realise that he had missed a crucial intervention which might have saved their marriage.

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By asking around, Jon had discovered the *Tenerife Godspellers*, a small evangelical band of British ex-pats which numbered a core group of around twenty plus a constant swirl of curious holidaymakers. The *Godspellers* met twice a week in a rented room which had once been the upstairs dining area of a large beachfront café. The downstairs area had been converted to an amusement arcade. The group's leader was Ewing Taylor, a clever but modest man who, like Jon, had attended Shawlands Academy. Decades earlier Ewing had been a high-flying Associate Partner at KPMG Accountants, based in their Glasgow office, before the oddly matched couple had sold up to make the move to Tenerife, hoping the slower, simpler life would suit his wife Imogen, who suffered from creeping Multiple Sclerosis.

Like Jon, Ewing had also knelt before the Throne of Grace during the Billy Graham Glasgow Crusade in 1955. Although older than his wife by seven years, he was fresh-faced and looked younger. A keen jogger, he was as fit as a fiddle. A slow, stilted preacher and a poor singer with a unreliable high tenor voice, Ewing was, however, an accomplished musician. With Jon to preach and lead the praise with his fine bass-baritone range, they made an effective duo. For his part, Jon felt very much at home at the *Godspellers*, their approach to worship, teaching and testimony reminding him of his early days in Banjul. Within weeks of Jon's arrival, word spread and the *Godspellers'* numbers began to grow.

In private and in public, Ewing gave thanks to his Heavenly Father, claiming the former missionary Jon Macnab had been sent to Tenerife to do His Holy Work.

# North by North East

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## Imogen

Curiosity more than a desire for Christian fellowship took Kat Macnab to a few of the group's happy-clappy services, raucous, undisciplined praise led by Ewing on his accordion, concertina, guitar or electric piano/organ. By contrast, Kat found these ex-pats too brash and unsophisticated for her taste and soon stopped attending. What she disliked most, she told Jon, was the nature of those attending, the core members always diluted about three to one by transients, most of whom were inquisitive holidaymakers or African street traders and their families, obviously poor and clearly prospecting for a helping hand-out of money or food.

When Ewing's wife Imogen telephoned to offer to meet for lunch, Kat was wary but intrigued. She knew Imogen suffered from advanced Multiple Sclerosis which had confined her to a wheelchair for the last decade during which her weight had soared to obesity proportions.

They met at a small Italian style café/restaurant in *Las Americas* called *La Banca* which, Imogen explained, was owned by one of the elders in the *Godspellers* and specialised in non-alcoholic cocktails. When Kat arrived, Imogen was located at a table overlooking the shore and next to the disabled toilet. Observing this bulging woman confined to her motorised wheelchair and so reliant on others, Kat could not imagine how she could bear such a life of dependency, raising the spectre for Kat of what might happen if her spinal pain flared to unbearable proportions. Almost from the outset she regretted accepting the invite.

"Hi, Kat, thanks for coming. This is Vittore, who owns this wonderful place."

Hearing Imogen speak for the first time stirred a vague memory which Kat could not pin down.

The tall beanpole of a man, overtly gay, dipped his head and lisped:

"Mrs Macnab, welcome to our little restaurant. We are so pleased to have you and Jon added to our little group at the *Godspellers*. What can I get you to drink?"

"Try his 'Virgin Bride', it's delicious. That's what I'm having."

"Fine. Thanks."

"Kat, you won't remember me from Hutchie, do you?"

"Sorry, no, not at all."

## North by North East

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"I was in first year when you were Kathleen McMann in your final year. You and Avril Steiner were our heroes back then. We all wanted to be like you, pulling the boys, driving to school in cars of our own. Then you disappeared and well, you know. Look, I know about Keith Baxter and the baby you lost. I lost a baby too once, at twenty weeks. A wee boy. I still think about him every day, pray for him. Martin, I call him. He would have been thirty-nine, had he lived."

"Yes. My condolences. Look, Imogen. This isn't going to work. I'm glad we met but, well, I'm not that person anymore. I've had, well, issues, and if you don't mind, I'll skip lunch, thanks."

"But, Kat, please. Look, I'm sorry I tread on your toes just then. It's just so rare to meet someone from Pollokshields, someone with the same background. Please stay. I'd love to wander down memory lanes with you. We must have so much in common. Please."

"Your drinks, ladies."

"Thanks, Vittore. You're an Angel" said Imogen. "Give us a few minutes before we order, please."

The young man beamed, dipped in a half bow, and swirled away balletically to mince back to his welcome station by the door.

"What do think? Delicious, yes? I was a heavy drinker once but, like you, I was saved by Jesus. It was all so long ago but I still get pangs. How about you Kat, any recent wobbles?"

"No, I've been strong, especially since I found Jon. He's my rock."

"For me it's Ewing. He really is a saint. Look, I try to keep my weight down, but, when you're in a wheelchair all day or trapped in bed all night, well, food seems like the only solace. We have a system of pulleys and harnesses for toileting me and bathing but Ewing is amazingly strong and very gentle. I simply couldn't survive without him. I hear you have sciatica?"

"Twinges. Not so bad. Not compared to you. Anyway, if you don't mind Imogen, I'll leave our little chat at that. By-bye."

"But you haven't even tried your cocktail!"

"I've had a Virgin Bride before and well, not that it's any business of yours, it led to temptation."

"Yes, our Randy! By name and by nature."

"What?"

## North by North East

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"It's okay Kat, your secret's safe with me. Now Randy, who could resist, eh? He is rather dishy, isn't he? Did you know he's back in Glasgow? Married a girl from St Aloysius. A rich widow. Bernadette Feeney, as was. I played hockey against her. Her husband had that string of betting shops. Died in a car crash, I heard. She has a place on Gran Canaria but it's up for sale. That's where they met. I hear they're moving to Portugal so I expect that's enough to remove your temptation, yes?"

Kat rose to her feet, slung her backpack onto her shoulder, then picked up her purse, phone and car keys. Leaning forward, she hissed:

"Got it! You're Imogen Priestly, the girl who was selling condoms and pep pills and nude photographs of black guys with huge penises to all the first years at Hutchie. So this is how you get your kicks nowadays, is it? Or is this about blackmail? If so, this can work both ways so take heed and stay out of my life. ***Goodbye and Good Riddance.***"

# North by North East

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## La Caleta

Due to *La Tranquilla's* remote location, it had always proved difficult to get dependable people for domestic cleaning, laundry and to do odd job maintenance work.

The original garden had been landscaped years earlier by her father in accord with his idea of a natural garden using plantings of cactus and other succulents which had thrived in the thin, dry, volcanic soil, creating a vista that could have served as a set for a spaghetti western. Because of the steeply sloping gardens to the front and rear, getting competent gardeners was an ongoing problem.

The new remote-controlled entry gate was located at the lower end of a steep winding dirt-track road rutted with potholes. Most taxis refused to respond to requests, even when bribed by the offer of a double fare.

Another factor, Kat complained, was the booming noise from the *Las Americas* nightlife which seemed to be much worse than she remembered, an issue which soon became her new obsession. There was also the problem of wind-blown litter, particularly plastic shopping bags which became entangled in the cactus planting.

Weary of this struggle, Kat decided the property was too large and too remote. Although pleased with the refurbishment, now that she was no longer fit and active, she judged *La Tranquilla* to be vulnerable, despite their new CCTV-based security system.

Unstated, as she moved around from room to room, she was haunted by vivid flashes of guilt from her unrestrained sex and bingeing with Randy.

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After a long, tiring and frustrating search, they found a development of luxury homes nearing completion above the fishing village of *La Caleta*.

Kat immediately fell in love with its stunning showhouse perched on the escarpment of a plateau overlooking a golf course and tennis complex. There were new tarmac roads and a large parking area to the rear where the three-car garage was shaded by the house.

Inside and out, everything was on one level, no difficult stairs to negotiate. The infinity pool was smaller but had an outdoor drench shower and a WC and urinal cunningly concealed behind a BBQ and utility area. There was also a semi-recessed hot tub cum jacuzzi with stunning views of the coastal strip stretching the entire length of *Costa*

## North by North East

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Adeje to *Los Cristianos* and beyond to the airport. To the west there were views of the cloud-topped rain-forest island of *La Gomera*.

The maintenance of the surrounding landscaping for the external development was part of the deal, based on a monthly contract fee with the option to upgrade to include weekly maintenance of the internal private garden area and cleaning and servicing of the pool and hot tub. A further option offered a six-day, two hours per day internal cleaning service with two maids working side by side. Everything was modern and swish and all furniture and fittings including crockery and cutlery, pots and pans and cooking dishes were top of the range and included in the asking price.

After a haggle, the developer agreed to sell them this fully furnished showhouse, lured by the offer of *La Tranquilla* in part-exchange, seeing the opportunity to upgrade the access road and build a rash of time-shares properties on the extensive sloping garden area below the main building.

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With four en-suite bedrooms, the Macnabs' new home was almost as large as *La Tranquilla*.

The developer had named the house *Serenity*, a name which Jon liked. For Kat it evoked the memory of Randy's first wife and insisted they change it to *Bellavista* because of its stunning views. This turned out to be a poor choice as there were already three other nearby houses called by this name, causing difficulties with taxi pick-ups and deliveries of goods ordered from mail-order catalogues.

With the addition of bidets and larger walk-in showers to all *en suites*, the fitting of mirrored sliding door wardrobes and re-paving of the external areas with expensive Italian ceramic tiles, they were not finally settled above *La Caleta* until the spring of 1999, at last free of the noise and bustle of living above *Las Americas*.

Their new home came with a large sun deck with a high wrap-around tinted glass screen to shield it from sea breezes and protect it from excessive solar radiation. The double glazing to the main building was also tinted, incorporating motorised roof ventilation panels and automated blinds to shade the interior from excessive sun. In their first weeks it was on this deck that Kat spent her mornings pedalling slowly on an exercise bike while singing along off-key to psalms and hymns, plugged into her *Walkman*. Afternoons were spent on a sun-lounger with a best-seller, skinny dipping in the pool to keep cool. She learned about 'meditation floating' from a magazine and, occasionally, indulged in gentle swimming which, she claimed, gave relief from her back pain.

From Monday to Saturday the maids came in the mornings to clean the house and change the bedlinen, do laundry and ironing. The gardeners came in a team of four or five, worked

## North by North East

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steadily and left, chatting to themselves. The personnel who visited changed regularly, under a management policy which did not want the owners to presume proprietorial rights over their staff.

In his new and more settled life at *La Caleta*, Jon took to walking the coastal paths or riding his bicycle into the steep hills in search of new species for his growing twitcher's list. Later, showered, in beach shorts, he took up station on the open balcony which fringed the deck, spending his late afternoons and early evenings searching the skies for raptors and watching the swirling parascenders landing expertly beside the gaggles of sunbathers clustered around a busy beach bar a mile away, just beyond *La Caleta*.

When Kat was in the mood, their main form of entertainment was eating out, mainly in *La Caleta* with its good selection of restaurants, most serving freshly landed seafood. On occasion they would spend a few nights away in hotels in the cooler, wetter north of the island, using their trips to seek out different culinary experiences, eating in small, local restaurants off the beaten track, places most holidaymakers would never find.

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Their first weeks reeled forward slowly but relentlessly into months and years and the pattern of their lives seemed fixed, almost rigid as Kat and Jon settled to a dull routine, seldom talking, often eating alone, still mostly polite to each other but becoming almost strangers while sharing a luxury home where everything worked smoothly in a dull, repetitive, well-oiled groove.

Throughout this latest upheaval Jon had been praying earnestly this move would settle Kat. By the Summer Kat seemed calmer, less snappy and grumpy and he allowed himself to hope that soon, perhaps, they would be able to resume normal marital relations. In this he was again disappointed just as he had been during nearly three decades with Esther in Banjul. A feeling of *déjà vu* persisted when she had directed the removal team to set him up in a bedroom of his own. This barrier felt like a partial divorce, almost like a legal separation in which they were forced to remain under the same roof.

In response, he redoubled his prayers. Nothing changed, and over a few months, he let go of his hope of sharing a bed with Kat and reverted to self-pleasuring, seeking comfort in his dreams of old but deliberately blocking images of Kat and Esther by diverting his focus to his fumbings with a teenage Sarah in Pollok Park and his adulterous nights with Miriam in Banjul.

This was a second revisiting of his old sinful habits which had re-started at Whitecraigs while Kat had been in New Zealand.

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## North by North East

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From around this time Jon was drifting away, becoming detached, as had happened with Esther in Banjul when he had been rejected, banished to sleep alone. Mornings were an opportunity to escape and wander freely, festooned with his bird-spotting gear, cameras and lenses, dressed as he had been in The Gambia but minus his dog collar and now with an expensive rucksack, a water bottle and a Tupperware box containing a salad with boiled eggs and fresh fruit.

For Kat, when she was feeling stronger, her mornings were spent shopping or at *Amore Sempre*. Unable to cope with the traffic and parking, she used taxis. Now she understood the set-up, she always insisted on the proprietrix, a small, dark-haired wiry woman in her late thirties. Over time, Kat learned Arianna Bugatti had moved to Tenerife from Falkirk with her family when she was eight years old. The beauty shop, which had been her mother's business, targeted rich, older women like Kat, each client dealt with individually, in separate sound-proofed booths where personal fears could be expressed and intimate requests made without being overheard.

In time, Kat learned that, in addition to HRT pills, Arianna could also supply cocaine and other recreational drugs. In her third month living at *Bellavista*, as an established client, the offer was made, obliquely. After a short hesitation, Kat had declined. Two days later when she called for an impromptu pedicure and leg waxing, the offer was renewed and this time she accepted.

Kat's first choice was amphetamines, a drug she had used in the past when she and Avril had partied hard. In her current fragile mental condition, this drug made her anxious, not warm and fuzzy as she had expected. On Arianna's recommendation she trialled a different approach, changing to diazepam with added cocaine to snort if she needed a boost. Kat knew from her past she must insert the diazepam directly into her rectum for rapid comfort, using a double doze at night to help her get over to sleep.

Sunday mornings became the high point of her week. With Jon away for most of the day at the *Godspellers'* and no intrusions from maids or service workmen, she allowed herself to party on snorted cocaine, starting as soon as he left, keeping a firm track of time to make sure she was 'down' before Jon returned. This required a double or triple doze of diazepam, swallowed at the last minute possible with copious drafts of iced water.

These first steps back to her previous life were fraught with anxiety, knowing from testimonies heard years earlier at AA meetings in Glasgow that she was verging on a full-blown relapse.

Kat McMann's secret drinking started three weeks after buying her first supplies of drugs from Arianna.

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# North by North East

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One evening, sitting alone on the open terrace wrapped in a shawl watching the summer sun set over *La Gomera*, high after her third line of sniffing coke with a weak Vodka Coke to wash it down she felt herself sliding down into another dark reverie. Jon was away overnight, playing geriatric floodlit tennis in the north of the island, part of the *La Caleta* team. Why had he not phoned? Checking her phone for messages, she realised that it was 17 November, 2001, her sixtieth birthday.

Fearing she would end her days as a cripple from sciatica or die of cancer like Avril, Kat said aloud:

*I must have another Vodka Coke, a long, strong one. And why not? Eh?*

Kat drove through the gloom to the local supermarket. On her return she started drinking, playing music from her Walkman, dancing wildly and singing disco songs, defying the warnings which sounded in her head. By midnight she was comatose in her bedroom, the empty Vodka bottle hidden under her pillow.

Soon she was drinking two to three bottles a day, hiding her supplies in secret locations, disposing of her empties away from the house, in public refuse bins.

Jon, who had kept to the pledge made to Uncle William on his knees at Minard Road fifty years earlier, did not quite understand what was happening to his wife, misreading what he saw. With no personal experience of living with a devious alcoholic, he believed she had turned a corner, that her new, stronger painkillers were working

This delusion had been reinforced when she had claimed:

*"Oh, Jonno, there you are at last. My new pills are so wonderful. My back pain is under control at last. I can get a good night's sleep for the first time in years. So, forgive if I seem woozy from time to time, it's worth it, I assure you. Did you have a nice time in the hills today? Have you spotted that Eurasian Sparrowhawk yet? I've had a lovely time, floating in the pool, and sunning myself on the deck. Off you go and shower now, there's a dear. I'll get myself a Cola. Do you want one too? Or will I make you a large pot of strong Pastor Jonno tea?"*

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Kat's end came suddenly, on the last Wednesday of September 2002, close to the anniversaries of the Turkey and Miami tragedies and Frank's suspected suicide.

Late morning, while Kat was pretending to be asleep, Jon set out in a minibus with the club team on a two-day trip to play in a seniors' golf tournament at *Real Club de Golf* in the north of Tenerife.

# North by North East

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Kat started drinking as soon as the maid left.

By mid-evening, she was very drunk but out of diet Cola and low on Vodka.

In her stupor she felt confident she could make it to the late-night supermarket only a mile away, even though she hated driving in the dark.

At the sloping roundabout located at a confusing interchange sited under the coastal motorway, in error she swung round in a clockwise direction and exited onto the motorway off-ramp and put her foot down, accelerating into the path of a construction truck.

Her flimsy *Lotus Esprit* sports car was crushed to pulp.

Her mangled body took many hours to extract from the wreckage, piece by piece.

In his initial autopsy report, the coroner declared she had died instantly, without pain.

The forensic medical expert, commissioned by her life assurance company and flown in from Madrid, concluded that apart from the evidence of drugs and alcohol, Mrs Katherine Macnab had advanced cirrhosis of the liver and a small tumour embedded in her spine at node L3, the area where the nerves transit to sex organs.

# North by North East

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## God's Bounty

In the autumn of 2002, Jon Macnab was alone again.

Many who did not know his age would have guessed he was much younger than sixty-six. Tall, slim and athletic with a calm, outgoing nature, he made friends wherever he went. Apart for his lonely nocturnal 'adultery' when he had been shunned by Kat, he had avoided the many offers which had come his way during the years he had been caught up in the frantic whirlpool of her social life.

Picking up the pieces ahead of the funeral and memorial service to be held in Glasgow Cathedral, he decided to rent a small car from Glasgow Airport, using the booking facility at the *La Caleta* tennis club concierge desk. At the point of entering his pin number, he suddenly wondered if his credit card would still work as everything to do with money was in his wife's name. Jon had never been party to Kat's financial affairs, happy to accept that, by God's grace, there would always be enough. From her repeated complaints, he knew she had often been disappointed by poor investment performance, changing advisors on a regular basis.

*"Jonno, Daddy always used to say wealth is hard to keep, that you have to get the best people to help you. But they're all rubbish, every one of them. No one has ever matched the performance of Avril Steiner and I could always understand what she told me was happening. This last lot talked and talked for hours. By the end, I was more confused than when they started. Stay away from them, Jonno. They're poison, like the moneylenders Jesus scourged at the Temple."*

He guessed, if he were lucky, he might garner a few hundred thousand pounds by selling the villa, although he was not sure if Kat owned it. During the final negotiations with the *La Caleta* developer, from which he had been excluded, there had been talk she might lease the property as a luxury time-share to recycle her capital into the proposed *La Tranquilla* time-share development.

To help him sort out his affairs, he asked Ewing Taylor for help, knowing he helped expats sort out their financial and tax affairs. This was the first time the two men had discussed such matters. At that stage, Jon knew little of Ewing Taylor's professional life and experience.

# North by North East

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Later, he would realise this odd-looking man had been sent by God to help him secure the McMann bounty which he would soon control.

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It took Taylor six months of to-ing and fro-ing between Tenerife, Glasgow, Edinburgh, London and Guernsey to unravel Kat's tangled web of investments and cancel the hundreds of standing orders making donations to various needy causes, some of which had folded years earlier or were moribund. Jon Macnab signed Ewing's cancellation list in good faith, unaware he was cancelling the annual standing order for £2,000 to "SMC, Banjul", an ongoing act of largesse which Kat had long forgotten and about which Jon knew nothing.

During this waiting period, the *quid pro quo* was that Jon would oversee the care Imogen needed while Ewing was away on his travels. Two strong local women, paramedics, were employed and trained to use the various pieces of equipment. The scenario mirrored what he had done for Esther but was much more physically demanding. When she died, Esther had shrunk to only six stones from her original fourteen. Dealing with Imogen who confessed to eighteen stone but in fact weighed twenty-three, was a totally new experience.

With Ewing away and, authorised visit Imogen as required, Jon was on standby duty to cover the long night hours, ready to respond to her telephone calls and ride his bicycle through the darkness along the coastal path from *La Caleta* to the Taylors' adapted flat at *Los Cristianos*.

They also spent many hours together, Imogen on her motorised ride-on buggy or driving her adapted Transit van accompanied by Jon to help her mount and dismount which ever mode of transport was most appropriate. From the Taylor's flat, with Jon on foot they often made their way along the coastal walkway or, using the Transit, they toured the island, Jon with his binoculars and Imogen using his long lens digital camera and tripod, their mission to 'bag and snap' new species to add to his twitcher's tally from Tenerife's list of five hundred or so residents and visitors.

Forced to socialise every day for up to a week at a time while Ewing was off the island, Jon soon learned from Imogen's hints, some of the lurid background to Kat's life, details his wife had withheld from him, including her 'alleged' infidelity with Randal Crawford.

Randy was a man Jon had heard a lot about during his brief time at his first church at New Farm Loch where he had been told that as a teenager Randy Crawford had, it was alleged, fathered five bastard children to three women, two teenage sisters and their mother who was the assistant cook/chef at Old Prestwick GC.

## North by North East

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From his Outreach ladies in Banjul, Jon was well-used to hearing corrosive tittle-tattle retold as 'truth'. Given the autopsy findings and the empty Vodka bottles and drugs he had found at *Bellavista*, he judged what he was being told by Imogen might contain a grain of truth but chose to believe she was exaggerating to shock him. It was evident this garrulous woman enjoyed lurid gossip, making him wonder who else she had told about his alleged cuckolding.

Steering her away from tales of Kat and her misdemeanours, Jon learned as a child Imogen had been a promising ballet dancer but her widowed father Wilson Houlihan had insisted she study Pharmacy, to set her on course to inherit his growing chain of chemist shops dotted around Glasgow and its satellite towns. On graduating, she had joined him in the business as his partner and co-owner, relegating ballet to a hobby, realising that she was too tall (and too heavy) to make it a successful career.

Her father, Jon learned, a compulsive workaholic was driven by his ambitious to expand his empire. For years he had been planning an aggressive take-over of a rival chain owned by the Brunswick family, this smaller empire now led by Edith, a spinster he had attempted to woo when they studied together.

What Wilson did not realise was Edith was a closet lesbian, a fact that Imogen had easily discovered but held in reserve to use, if required.

Judging the time was ripe, after asking around, Wilson Houlihan had employed KPMG to help him manage the take-over. By good fortune Ewing Taylor had been appointed as their mentor and guide to manage the acquisition process. Imogen claimed God had interfered. Ewing, then forty, was twelve years Imogen's senior. After his initial appraisal, Taylor had impressed the Houlihans with his alternative proposal which pointed to a better way. Instead of attacking their rivals, her father was persuaded to smooch Edith Brunswick into a swift, friendly, low-cost merger. Using his KPMG contacts, Ewing sourced capital which would upgrade the new enterprise by refurbishing and rebranding their thirty-five outlets.

Over a hectic three-year period, Ewing (now seconded full-time from KPMG) and Imogen (now titled Business Development Director) had jointly managed the Business Transformation Process, falling in love during the period. Sadly, her father had died of a heart attack before he could reap the rewards of his endeavours.

Although diminished by her illness, the trace of Imogen's former statuesque beauty was still evident. Why, he wondered, had she chosen the almost dwarf-like Ewing when she must have had other more handsome suiters? On first hearing, Imogen's simple tale of 'girl falls for older man' sounded plausible but Jon's experience as a pastor suggested there would be another story she might confide, in time.

# North by North East

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One day, sipping their drinks at a quiet café overlooking the beach at *El Duque*, watching family groups splashing in the sea and building sandcastles, Imogen opened her floodgates:

"Jon, I know your heart must be breaking at the loss of your wife. Like me, you have no children, something I miss dreadfully. This is my personal cross which I must bear, and rightly so. To lose someone dear to you can be lifechanging. It certainly was for me, with Dad. May I tell you something in complete confidence?"

"Yes, of course. Shall we order you another coffee, or would you prefer a mineral water?"

Settled, she began slowly but her words were soon tumbling out and he sensed this was a tale which had not been rehearsed, crafted and refined by many tellings.

"Before Ewing came into my life, I was a heathen of the worst sort. I started smoking at a summer ballet school when I was thirteen. It may shock you to learn back then everyone in ballet smoked, even the dance tutors. It was the culture, to help stave off starvation and stay slim. By age fifteen I was drinking gin, vodka, you name it, and sometimes we took pep pills. I've often wondered what was in them, if that was what kicked off my MS. Of course, all this behaviour was hidden from Dad. You see he was a heavy smoker too so he did not smell it on me. Most evenings, when he was home, he spent his time poring over his accounts, sipping steadily from a bottle of malt whisky he always kept on the desk beside him. Later, when I was older, after I was with Ewing, I realised Dad had been a functional alcoholic. I'm not sure if my mother was an alcoholic, she died when I was four, drowned in her bath. Dad said she fell asleep, listening to the radio.

"Anyway, when I went to Strathclyde to study Pharmacy I was already on the pill, the contraceptive pill. Dad got them for me and gave me the father-to-daughter lecture, of course. You see, that's another thing about ballet dancers, they are, well, shall we say, 'very tactile'? Suffice to say, we enjoyed each other physically, boy on girl, boy on boy, girl on girl, sometimes a threesome or more, a melee of sex. Madness. Because we were on the pill, no one thought of using johnnies, not back then. SDTs, sexually transmitted diseases, were rife. Yes, you guessed, I was the 'go to person' for medications. Like everyone around me, I was addicted to sex.

"Anyway, suffice to say I had dozens of boys. With Dad almost never at home or when he was there always shut away in his study, working, drinking, smoking, he thought my lovers were just friends, visiting. Of course, yes, we made a show of the boy or girl leaving but then they would sneak back in and creep up to my room. Next morning, Dad was always up and away early or on Sundays, closeted in his study. Apart from his occasional attendance at Masonic Lodge meetings, he had no hobbies, no pastimes, no friends, only business

## North by North East

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colleagues who he drove hard to get the best margins, people I could see despised him. He was a handsome man who could have found another wife or girlfriend but I think he repressed his sexual drive and diverted it into business ambition.

"Of course, as soon as I was seventeen I had my own car, a Mini. I used to drive my lover or lovers out to our house in Eaglesham. Dad accepted us, never questioning what we were doing. Never complaining of the noise or mess we made, partying. Even from the age of fourteen I usually had a guy sleeping over for a long weekend and Dad would come home, collect some papers, swallow a cup of coffee, smoke a few cigarettes and leave without realising my sex partner was locked in my bedroom.

"Once, when Dad went on a Pharmacy refresher course down to England, I had a guy living with me for the week. He was a married man with a wife and three kids. Ralph was the chief administrator of the ballet school. Anyway, let's just say I was lucky not to catch any STD's, at least not anything that's ever been discovered. Trust me, with the onset of MS at the age of forty-three, I think I've had every test there is."

"Imogen, why are you telling me this? God has wiped your slate clean."

"Yes, Jon, I know he has. This is about *you*, not me. Hear me out."

"Oh, sorry. Carry on, please."

"Anyway, the point is, when Ewing was first appointed by KPMG I asked them to find someone else. I just could not stand his looking at me."

"Because of his eyes?"

"Yes, Ewing has 'rapid horizontal nystagmus' often called Dancing Eye Syndrome. It's congenital in his case and its why he had a vasectomy when he was eighteen. Anyway, when Dad found out what I had done, asking for Ewing to be replaced, he went ballistic. You see, Jon, if you had checked Ewing's CV back then, you would have seen he was top of his class in every exam he ever took. At the time we got Ewing, he was KPMG's best young prospect, their youngest Associate ever. You see, Dad was very pally with the KPMG senior partner at that time, through the Masonic Lodge. Of course, Ewing can't drive but, so far, I can still manage, so we're lucky on that front. Or, as Ewing would say, quotes:

*"Imogen, we are richly blessed in The Lord."*

"So, Imogen, are you saying you're not a Christian? Does Ewing know?"

"You've got it wrong, Jon. I am a Christian but not as happy-clappy as Ewing about it. You see, he's from a Brethren background. I was a nothing background. Before Ewing, I had only ever been in any church at weddings and funerals. However, I do think of myself as

# North by North East

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a *practical* Christian. But the point is, how did we get together, why did we get married? You've been itching to ask me, right?"

"Well, I did wonder, but *God* works in mysterious . . ."

"Yes, I bloody KNEW you were going to come out with that one. It's what we Christians are supposed to tell each other when we don't know what to make of our situation, right? *God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform*. D'you want to know something, Jon? Although I'm sick of it being trotted out like a mantra, I've come to believe He does. Yes, *God* does work in mysterious ways. And I believe he is working right now, as we speak, using Ewing to prepare the way for you, Pastor Jonathan Macnab, the man who spent thirty years in The Gambia and who keeps his secrets to himself, unlike Kat Macnab nee McMann and previously Baxter.

"You knew Kat before we came here?"

"Yes, from school, by reputation. But let's not go there again. I probably said too much the last time. This is not about the past, it's about you and your future. But first, the rest of my gory, horrible story and how *God* saved me."

"Imogen, as I said earlier, you don't need to tell me about your sins. *God* knows about everything we have done, both good and bad. If you have confessed to Him and have repented, that's it. You don't have to go over it again, do you?"

"*Corrrrrrect!* But this is about you, Jon, not me. Let me tell you how I got together with Ewing, or, quotes

"*How he saved me for The Lord.*"

But first I need to use the loo. Too much mineral water. So, come on, you need to help. Don't worry, I'm not 'sensitive', just eternally grateful I'm not incontinent, at least not yet."

Re-established, over the next hour, Imogen unfolded her tale and Jon learned:

During the three-year rebranding and upgrading project she had not coped with the stress. Soon she was chain-smoking (up to eighty a day) and drinking half a bottle of brandy a night to unwind, to get to sleep. At weekends she binged until she conked out. When Ewing, watching from the sidelines, gently chided, she had responded with verbal attacks, calling him parsimonious.

Her crescendo, her life nexus occurred when the pressure came off and the upgrading roll-out was over.

## North by North East

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Ewing was back at KPMG and she was running the new company, shadowed by her father who was trying to wean himself off his eighteen-hour working days, taking golf lessons with the ultimate aim of trying to get his handicap down to single figures, planning to buy a place in Tenerife and retire to play golf in the sun.

It was not to be. On the day the company was listed on the stock market her father had died of a heart attack on the golf course.

Imogen had been devastated. After the funeral she had got blind drunk, mixing brandy with tranquilisers to escape the pain. In the early hours of the next morning, she had telephoned the Samaritans. By luck or divine intervention, her call was taken by Ewing. He caught a taxi out to her luxury apartment overlooking the Botanic Gardens in Glasgow's West End where he sat with her, prayed with her, explained the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it was written in the Bible and as the Lord had written it in Ewing's heart.

As she sobered up over that weekend, she had fought back against his pursuit of her for The Lord. But the death of her father had changed her. Over a six-month period, Ewing Taylor had led Imogen Houlihan to the Throne of Grace. During the months which followed as she studied on the Alpha course, Ewing had supported her through each crisis by prayer and counselling. Slowly, steadily she moved to a deeper head and heart commitment.

In a bold move, on her thirty-fifth birthday, she had asked forty-seven-year-old Ewing Taylor to marry her. He had refused her at first, explaining while he loved her deeply, he felt she deserved someone better than him, also revealing he had been snipped. Praying, they had moved beyond this stage, discussing IVF with donor sperm as the alternative way of having children. By the end of the long afternoon they were planning a simple wedding, to be held as soon as possible.

They found a building plot near Fenwick (where Ewing's extended family lived) and began to build their dream home. There was enough land for horses, stables and kennels where Ewing's sister could expand her dog-boarding business.

Life was hectic and Imogen was constantly tired.

The first IVF cycle did not 'take'.

During screening ahead of the second cycle, the early signs of MS were misdiagnosed as chronic fatigue syndrome (ME). They decided to trust God and defy the odds. Their foetus was six-months old when it self-aborted. Imogen's ME accelerated and soon she was walking with sticks and, finally, her condition was diagnosed as MS.

## North by North East

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Facing the future, they decided to sell their share in the pharmacy chain and move to Tenerife. The excess money from their shares was now secured in a charitable trust used to fund medical research seeking a cure or treatment for MS.

"We saw our money was actually God's and had to be put to work for Him. 'The Ultimate Client', as Ewing calls Him."

They had recently decided to focus this giving on Strathclyde University where the research team in Pharmacology were hopeful of a breakthrough. Ewing's cousin's daughter, Dr Delilah Wishart, was heading up the project.

"Jon, as you know from Ewing's updates, you are soon to become a very wealthy man. The reason I have told you my great tale of woe is to encourage you to do likewise, to give your new wealth away and to do it wisely."

"Ah, so that's what this is all about, you are fund raising on behalf of the 'Ultimate Client'?"

"If you like to put it that way, so be it. Practical Christianity, remember? Anyway, Pastor Jon Macnab, now you have our story, I will trust you not spread it around. As you know, we live here quietly, a disabled couple, living under God's supervision and without any showiness. Yes, we have enough to get by and hopefully the work we are doing with our little group is what God intends for us. But I have prayed about you, we both have, and we think you must move ahead, find God's true purpose for your life. Each of us is called to serve The Lord in many ways. You see, Jon, I saw the signs. I saw your life with Kat was somehow off-key. I tried once to connect with her but she rejected me out of hand. Jon, forgive my boldness. In your marriage, were you both walking with The Lord? Truly? Or were you treading water, telling yourself you had done your bit, served your time. Jon Macnab, surely as a Christian you know our service to The Lord must go on until we draw our last breath, yes? Face it, married to Kat McMann, you have been living a selfish, self-indulgent life. You are sixty-six but anyone looking at you would think you might be as young as forty-five. God has a purpose for you. Get down on your knees and ask him what He wants you to do. And as you pray, ask yourself:

*Could you envisage Jesus living as you have lived, married to Kat?"*

# *North by North East*

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## *Lost and Found*

At the final meeting with Ewing Taylor, when Jon signed the stack of legal documents before two local lawyers from Santa Cruz, Tenerife's capital, two from Gibraltar and two from Guernsey, he was staggered to discover he had inherited £12.3 M net, after tax and fees. The major part of his assets and liquid capital were now registered in a secure account in the Channel Island of Guernsey, for tax reasons. For working capital, a further £200,000 in ready-access cash had been lodged in an account with the Clydesdale Bank, in Glasgow.

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After a period of reflection and prayer, Jon decided to return to Tiree, back to his boyhood roots and attempt to salvage his lost family.

Walking due West from the Tiree Lodge Hotel at Gott Bay towards the family croft, he was amazed to see hundreds of what he took to be windsurfers 'flying' across the huge Atlantic waves. The sand dunes which had been deserted when he was a boy were dotted with garishly painted camper vans.

When he found the Macnab croft it was a ruin, the roof gone, fences broken with no sign of livestock.

As he turned away, a voice called from high on the dune above him.

"Jonathan? Jonathan Macnab? Is it really you?"

The tall, slim woman called her collie to heel, skidded down the slope and loped across the machair sands towards him. She was carrying a collapsible tripod attached to a camera with a long lens. Her vivid green eyes pinged back the memory from the summer of 1954 when he had been cramming for his re-sits in the library, her hand resting on his thigh. As then, the sight of her caused him to stir, making him feel a sense of guilt and loss.

Her hand shot out:

"Jonathan Macnab. My God, you've hardly changed, lucky man. Still the same big head of curly hair, same blue eyes, same long sad face. Aha, there, now that's much better, a smile at last. So, Jon, do remember who I am? Is it the hair colour? I always fancied red. This is burgundy, straight from a bottle, as it were. Goes with the eyes, right?"

As she pumped his hand with great enthusiasm, the dog growled.

# North by North East

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"**LIE DOWN**, Samson. Good boy!"

"Sarah. Sarah Philipson. My goodness me. How long is it?"

"No, Jon, I go by Sarah Wishart, previously Sarah Hillison. But yes, Sarah Philipson, if you like, since I'm single again. And you, Jon? Married with a large tribe of kids, I suppose?"

"No, widowed."

"Poor thing you. Come on then, come along to our van and meet Delilah. She's not kiting today, recovering from a strained shoulder muscle."

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Over the next few hours Jon was gently 'interrogated' by Sarah and her daughter and gave up most of his story, edited to put him in a good light, omitting all reference to his adultery with Miriam or his inheritance from Kathleen's death.

In return, he learned the Wisharts were on Tiree for a kitesurfing festival: the camper was borrowed from one of Delilah's co-workers. Dr Delilah Wishart was in her third term as a research fellow in the Department of Pharmacology at Strathclyde University. Mother and daughter lived together in Glasgow's West End, beside the River Kelvin in a new development which had once been the HQ of BBC Scotland. Delilah was currently saving for a flat of her own.

At this point, Delilah made her excuses and left with Samson to watch her friends kitesurfing, giving Sarah the freedom to tell her tale.

The year after the Philipson family moved north from Glasgow, Sarah had gone to Cambridge University to study Maths where she had married a man called Edwin Hillison. He was twenty years her senior, an expert on computers and head of the university computer lab attached to the Maths Faculty. Together, Edwin and Sarah had started a company called *Sylvan Surfers* which offered training DVD's and online computer advice aimed at the fifty plus sector. Five years later they had sold it to an American investor. With the proceeds they 'retired' to South Africa, where Edwin had his roots. Their plan was to establish a vineyard. This had not happened because, being of mixed race, Hillison had been blocked by those who controlled the South African wine industry.

Two years into their new life in South Africa, Sarah met Alexander Croft, a man with Scots ancestors, he had claimed. They had become adulterous lovers and when Delilah was on the way, she divorced Hillison and married Croft. Croft's business was the import and supply of mining equipment, the reason he gave for his constant travel around the world to source, test and purchase equipment for his employers.

## North by North East

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By a fluke, Sarah discovered from a secret stash of his papers, that Croft's real name was Alexandr Kroffice, an agent for a Czechoslovakian arms manufacturer, living under the name of Alexander Croft on a 'bought' passport.

Disgusted and ashamed at the deceit he had perpetrated on her and scared at what Croft might do if he discovered he was unmasked, she fled with Delilah back to her mother still resident in Rosemarkie on the Black Isle, north of Inverness. This was the village where her father, now dead, had been the local minister since their move north from Glasgow. His small church had closed in the mid-sixties following the merger with its sister church in nearby Fortrose.

Once settled back in Scotland, Sarah had changed their names to Wishart, after her maternal grandfather, part of her ploy to put Croft/Kroffice off her trail.

Living with her mother in Rosemarkie and, after re-training, Sarah got a job teaching Maths and Computing at Fortrose Academy. At that stage, her mother was slowly becoming paralysed by MS and Sarah and Delilah were her main carers. Working through intermediaries in Edinburgh and after a five-year and costly international legal battle, her annulment was finalised, freeing her from her sham marriage to the fake Alexander Croft. However, the major part of her former wealth from her time with Hillison was much diminished, shuffled by devious bankers in Johannesburg until the remnant was finally re-patriated. When her mother died, Sarah had moved to Glasgow where Delilah was at university.

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The following day Delilah was recovered from her muscle strain and went off to the beach with her friends leaving Jon to show Sarah and Samson around all his old haunts.

By talking to locals, none of whom he recognised, and by consulting church records, he discovered David and Margaret-Ann had remained childless. From the lady in the Post Office at Cornaig, he learned the Macnabs' marriage had ended spectacularly when David took up with a windsurfing girl ten years' his junior and they fled the island to New Zealand where her parents owned a deer farm. Margaret-Ann had moved back to her roots in Oban and was living with a former boyfriend, a man who worked on CalMac Ferries, a widower with two children, now grown up and away to live in Glasgow.

It seemed to Jon the only family member he had left was his cousin Colin McIntyre QC who lived in Edinburgh with his companion, a younger man called Dilvan whom he had met on holiday in Sri Lanka. Dr Dilvan MacLeod Bhattacharya had once been a world-class squash player. A British Sri Lankan holding a British Passport with UK residency rights, Dilvan had studied Sports Science at Loughborough University and was now a performance coach working under the auspices of the Scottish Sports Council.

# *North by North East*

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A few days later, when Sarah and her daughter left for *Glasgow*, Jon accepted their invitation of a lift in their camper van. As they travelled, listening to Sarah and Jon sharing their passion for birdwatching and photography, Delilah smiled, thinking that perhaps at last her mother had found the man she deserved.

By the time the camper reached *Glasgow*, Sarah and Jon were planning a trip to the bird-watching hot spot of *Gibraltar*, to add to their twitchers' lists.

# North by North East

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## ***Walking in the Light of God***

From 1987 when she took over from Pastor Jon, with great energy and prayerful dedication, Miriam Ndoeye persisted as their pastor, leading her dwindling congregation, subsisting on the anonymous money which arrived by God's grace each Spring in her bank account and whatever money came from her people.

In March 2003, when the much-needed annual transfer of £2,000 from the anonymous Royal Bank of Scotland donor did not arrive in the account of the *Scottish Mission Church*, Robert Lipton guessed this was caused by changes in the banking system he had read about, something to do with tightened security on international transfers linked to drug smuggling. He counselled patience and prayer, saying the matter would eventually rectify itself. Miriam's desperate appeals to the Central Bank resulted in a stern letter reminding 'Mr' M. Ndoeye 'he' did not qualify for an overdraft.

In the run up to this devastating situation, Robert Lipton had become increasingly fearful that the days of his small church were numbered. The 2001 attack on the Twin Towers in New York had caused further ripples of disruption with many tourists afraid to travel overseas. The economy of The Gambia was badly hit. Tourism slowed, prices rose sharply, people were thrown out of work.

At eighty-two, Robert was now retired, struggling on his small pension. As a result his monthly tithes to the SMC were meagre, supplemented on occasions of dire need by gifts from the last of his savings.

Miriam prayed and fasted but God did not answer.

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Over the years Nathan had sprouted, growing out of his clothes every six months. His school fees had drained her savings until all she had was the £100 note issued by the Clydesdale Bank in 1952, part of the money left to her by Pastor Jon, a sum which she was saving as Nathan's inheritance. The Central Bank examined the banknote and confiscated it as a fake. Robert Lipton wrote to the Clydesdale Bank. In her reply, the official advised the note had probably time-expired but may be redeemable if presented to their Head Office in Glasgow. Lipton then wrote to the Central Bank enclosing a copy of this reply. Grudgingly, after many weeks of wrangling, the £100 banknote was delivered back to Miriam over-stamped with the word FAKE, smudged, in indelible red ink, on both sides.

## North by North East

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Miriam was forced to face a new reality. To make ends meet, she reverted to the approach remembered from her time helping her shaman/pastor father. Concealing her identity by dressing as an itinerant Arab woman, wearing a hooded shawl, bangles, rings, amulets and garish make-up and hiding her eyes behind large sunglasses, she took a covered stall at Albert Market. Here she dispensed herbs and healing potions, adding a liberal sprinkling of benign shamanism with mumbled incantations in her mother tongue.

Gradually she gained a reputation for 'fortune-telling' or, as she termed it, 'life guidance'. Her consultations were aimed at helping people deal with personal crisis. Most of her regulars were women, three even from her own congregation who did not recognise the garishly dressed woman whispering to them in broken local dialect. Many came to her with tales of bereavement and marital abuse or of family members addicted to a variety of substances such as tobacco, cannabis, illicit drugs concocted from a mixture of coloured sugary syrup with added painkillers and tranquillisers called 'sleepers' or to 'poppers' based on ecstasy and its clones. A few even admitted to making and using home-made alcohol, a shocking taboo in a dominantly Muslim country. Some regulars she judged to have borderline mental illnesses. All came hoping for a quick fix to give relief and a better life. With her years of experience as a pastor, this counselling came easily and soon she was sought out by regulars, mainly women and a few 'weak' men needing reassurance to cope with their fears and emotional needs. Within a few months, she was earning enough to get by, juggling this new life with her duties to her congregation, hiding her behaviour while praying for forgiveness.

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Nathan, now approaching his nineteenth birthday, graduated from his secondary school with a full raft of A grades and the accolade of a special certificate which stated:

*Jonathan Luke Ndoye Macnab*

*Most promising pupil, 2003.*

Throughout his schooling, Nathan had been an outstanding student.

Coached by Robert Lipton, he had 'perfect' English and a keen interest in Mathematics, Science and Computing. During his early years, Miriam and Uncle Robert had hoped and prayed a way would be found to send Nathan to a higher college but the funds required were beyond them.

Lipton used his influence and called in favours to get Nathan a post as a junior teller in the Central Bank, seeing it as the best he could do for his 'nephew'. When his superiors spotted Nathan's potential, he was enrolled on the bank's internal training system and placed in a small team dedicated to upgrading the bank to achieve internationally

## North by North East

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recognised digital banking status. In this endeavour they were competing to outdo the banks of neighbouring countries and so help attract inward investors.

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Later that same year, in her clandestine role as a street trader, Miriam met Albrecht Utottu, a man of Afro-Belgian origin who sold fake watches and 'real diamond' jewellery from a stall nearby. Utottu was tall, handsome, spoke good English in a warm baritone which reminded her of Pastor Jon.

In early 2004, aged 37, Miriam's years of chastity ended.

Albrecht and Miriam became regular lovers, slipping away separately after the market closed to meet at his comfortable apartment on the topmost floor of a villa which housed a discrete high-class brothel frequented by the elite of Banjul. Clients were both male and female. This brothel fronted itself as a chiropody centre, and for innocents, podiatry services were indeed available. The brothel girls, Albrecht advised, were all 'clean and healthy', checked regularly by a Doctor who was a part-owner of the establishment.

Unknown to Miriam, because he was discreet and gentlemanly, Albrecht attracted many other 'respectable' women like herself to his bed, including his landlady, his long-term lover. Unfortunately for his many ladies, whenever he was allowed, Albrecht shunned the use of condoms as 'unmanly'.

Miriam's relationship with Albrecht continued undetected until about the middle of 2007 when Albrecht transmitted the HIV/AIDS virus to Miriam. Within months he was dead and the 'safe' brothel had closed, wiped out by the disease.

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Shocked, ashamed, afraid and feeling the first effects in her body, Miriam gave up her stall at Albert Market and turned again to God, praying night and day for forgiveness and healing, while taking heavy doses of her own potions, hoping for a 'miracle' cure of the kind her congregation and market stall clients had sought from her down through the years.

During the months which followed her self-diagnosis, her feelings of weakness accelerated. Miriam was losing weight and suffering from blinding headaches. Frequent night sweats were coupled with viral colds. Chronic mouth ulcers meant she could not preach with the same power.

A very few in her congregation, some who had witnessed these symptoms in their loved ones on the same trajectory, accused her of lewd behaviour, 'behind their hands'. As Mrs Pastor's end approached, one by one they turned from her and from God, believing there

## North by North East

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could be no hope for anyone blighted with this 'plague', no matter how long and hard they prayed for healing.

However, most of the dwindling membership, now less than thirty, viewed her illness only with sadness and resignation, believing she may have contracted it in the normal round of her pastoral visits.

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When the rumour spread to the property developer Mohamur A-Sharif that Pastor Miriam from the *Scottish Mission Church* had HIV/AIDS, he was quick to act. Over many years A-Sharif had lobbied the local counsellors to have the church demolished and the land re-zoned, claiming it had been built without permission.

By dropping unfounded hints to his many influential contacts, Mohamur fuelled rumours that Miriam Ndoeye and Albrecht Utottu had been operating a brothel, citing the now defunct address where Utottu had lived. When A-Sharif learned from his informants of Miriam's subterfuge, he spread new rumours, openly accusing her of also operating a 'shaman stall' at Albert Market where she had recruited prostitutes and referred clients. Several unscrupulous stall-keepers were paid to circulate a further indictment, claiming they had witnessed her practising voodoo spellcasting and selling illegal drugs disguised as healing herbs.

In late October 2007, the *Scottish Mission Church* was struck by lightning during a great storm. The roof structure was destroyed, causing the party wall between the church and the manse to bulge and lean precariously from vertical. This was seen by many as God's judgement on its pastor and the local community turned against her.

A-Sharif stepped up his campaign, petitioning the local council to have the premises closed and fenced off on safety grounds.

Too unwell to leave her bed, for many weeks Miriam had been unable to lead the worship. Week on week the numbers who met in the open air beside the ruined building to hear Robert Lipton preach and stumble over his long and often incoherent prayers, were now a remnant, less than twenty souls. Eventually, under pressure from the council, church services were suspended.

Tended by Nathan and Robert, Miriam, now confined to bed, was rake thin, confused and isolated, avoided by those from her congregation who feared infection by contact. During the final months of her struggle, she was tended only by Nathan.

Uncle Robert, now racked by arthritis, struggled to make even the short walk from his taxi to her bedside.

## North by North East

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With Miriam in final decline and Uncle Robert no longer in a position of influence in the local council, A-Sharif stepped up his campaign, adding the new assertion that under Miriam Ndoeye, the church had been used for illegal shamanistic rituals involving 'raising the dead' claiming that the lightning strike was the final proof. In a risky move, he bribed a council lackey to place an order before the Urban Buildings Commission demanding the *Scottish Mission Church* be demolished on grounds of safety.

Although disliked and suspected of illicit money laundering at extortionate rates, nonetheless A-Sharif was an important customer of the Central Bank of The Gambia, and he made it clear to its hierarchy he wanted Nathan Macnab sacked.

Fearing what was being planned, Robert Lipton again raised the issue with Banjul City Council Headquarters about the missing title deeds which proved he had purchased the ground on which the *Scottish Mission Church* had been built in 1957. However, these papers had disappeared mysteriously from the city archive shortly after Pastor Jon and Robert Lipton had rejected A-Sharif's first offer to buy the church land in the early 1980s.

In retaliation, A-Sharif arranged for the old man's house to be burgled and his church ledgers and papers stolen. Fortunately, the perpetrators had been amateurs and they had not found Robert's briefcase containing the small cache of documents he held in safekeeping for his 'sister' Miriam and 'nephew' Nathan.

In a separate move, A-Sharif bribed several members of the Urban Planning and Economics Committee to petition for his re-submitted application for the site above Parker's Creek to be re-considered. This was supported by glitzy architectural models and drawings and a video showing an animated fly-over of what the development would look like. The local media began to talk it up, saying A-Sharif's development was needed to bolster Banjul's fragile economic recovery.

Mohamur's next move was to persuade the chairman of the Urban Affairs Committee (one of his cousins) to propose an order to take over the land and relocate the unauthorised graves from its cemetery and re-inter the bodies in a new plot beside the existing official Christian cemetery. By law, this order must be approved by the Full Council. However, not for the first time, A-Sharif met stern opposition. Over many years A-Sharif had gained a reputation of bullying and corruption and, in the constant turmoil caused by political infighting, his application languished on their pending list, classified as 'trivial'. This was a favourite approach used by the ruling cabal who detested 'A-Sharif the fixer', mainly because of his ostentatious wealth.

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## North by North East

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In November 2008, in 'a re-organisation of resources', claimed as necessary to combat the developing international monetary crisis, Nathan was declared 'surplus' and asked to resign. He was advised, in confidence by his team leader, that if he did so voluntarily, he would get a good citation from his superior officer, if not, he would be sacked.

On advice from Robert Lipton, Nathan resigned.

The following day he was offered a cash pay-off equivalent to six months wages provided he signed an NDA (non-disclosure agreement) which must also be counter-signed by Robert Lipton. His team leader told him this payment was in recognition of his years of excellent service but that it must never be revealed as other redundant staff might clamour for similar compensation.

Once signed by both Nathan and Robert Lipton, this document was subsequently passed to A-Sharif by his cousin.

In the bank's personnel records, an equivalent cash amount was noted as '*missing believed stolen by Nathan Ndoeye Macnab*'. This file was sealed, available only to higher officers should a need arise to act against Macnab and his mother's estate.

Once again, a copy was passed to A-Sharif who now resumed his moribund campaign to redevelop the grounds of the *Scottish Mission Church* at Parker's Creek, an application which continued to languish in limbo, still blocked by the Full Council.

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On the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2009, Miriam Ndoeye, the refugee from the Congo who had arrive in Banjul in March 1983 not yet sixteen, a few weeks before her forty-second birthday, gave up her fight, turned her face towards the parlour window and looked North by North East to Glasgow. Whispering a prayer asking for Salvation, she closed her eyes for the last time.

Nathan, fearful of what his future might bring, knelt beside her bed, praying for guidance.

# *North by North East*

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## *North by North East*

**Glasgow, May 2009**

Nathan Macnab was part of a long line of late-evening arrivals from the KLM flight from Schiphol, Amsterdam. He had been travelling for nearly a day but was alert, his hands sweating and his throat dry. In his hand he held his new UK passport and supporting documents carefully arranged in a slim folder by Uncle Robert.

In error he had joined the wrong queue and was now at the rear of a sizable group of Non-EU travellers waiting to be processed at Glasgow Airport's Border Control.

In his wallet he had 4,000 Gambian Dalasi (less than £70) in a mixture of notes issued by the Central Bank of The Gambia. This was a rounded-up sum from a prayer meeting in Uncle Robert's house where those present had donated from their poverty to support his mission to save their church. He also had \$10 US (in single dollar notes), three Euros (coins) and the vintage £100 Clydesdale Bank note which still displayed the faint red outlines of the word FAKE, front and back.

This banknote had been handed to Nathan during his 'preparation' by Robert Lipton who had held it in safekeeping for Miriam, to be given to her son on her death. It had been inside a sealed envelope with a sparse note, informing Nathan it was a gift left for him in 1987 by his father Pastor Jonathan Macnab when God had called him back to Glasgow.

Nathan's passport and visa were fresh from the British Embassy in Banjul and he was still praying to God his thanks for the anxious hours he had spent at the embassy, still unaware how the application process had been 'eased' by Uncle Robert.

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**Banjul, five days earlier.**

Robert Lipton had been meticulously careful to renew his own UK passport at each twist and turn of The Gambia's changing status within the British Commonwealth. He accompanied his 'nephew' Nathan to the embassy in the role as his legal advisor and sponsor.

They had sat in the crowded, noisy waiting room for nearly two hours until their number showed on the screen. As they rose to approach the public counter, they were called to a side door by a forbidding lady wearing a hijab. Nathan felt this was a bad sign, fearing things would not go well. Without speaking, she led them through a series of corridors to

## North by North East

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her private office where they were invited to sit. Nathan began to relax when she telephoned her assistant to provide tea and cake.

What Nathan would never learn was that Robert Lipton had prepared the ground for this meeting at the British Embassy, both by prayer and by making a visit to his Dentist.

Mr Lipton was known to Mrs Thiaw as the kind man who had worked for the local council and who had helped her father and his brother to get their licence to operate a private dental clinic. Both men had qualified and trained in the UK and had served years working for others gaining experience. Although they had every entitlement to establish such a business, they had fully expected to have to pay substantial bribes and had been surprised when Lipton had refused their 'gift envelope' without even opening it. Over the next two decades Mr Lipton had supported subsequent bribe-free applications to allow Mrs Thiaw's family to expand their business.

Robert Lipton spoke for Nathan, explaining the nature of his nephew's application for travel to the UK hoping to study accountancy, outlining the young man's previous employment at the Central Bank of The Gambia, presenting a copy of his citation until resigning to care full-time for his mother until her death. Mrs Thiaw nodded but did not speak.

Lipton then opened his ancient battered briefcase and removed the file with the application forms for a passport and travel visa. These were already completed and notarised. Mrs Thiaw scrutinised them, smiled and nodded her approval.

Lipton then added Nathan's supporting documents which included his birth certificate, his mother's naturalisation certificate and the letter of commission sent by Miss Fairgrieve to Miriam Ndoeye from the *Fraser Memorial Mission Society* in 1987. Reading these Mrs Thiaw raised her eyebrows and a frown of concern flashed across her face. For the first time she raised her gaze from her desk, checking to be sure Nathan's blue eyes matched those in his passport photograph.

With great delicacy, Lipton explained the nature of the relationship which had led to the conception of Jonathan Luke Ndoeye Macnab, explaining that, given his mother's role in the community, the young man had always been titled, *Nathan Ndoeye* and not *Nathan Macnab*, as his birth certificate clearly stated.

When asked for the name and address of his sponsor in the UK, Lipton stated, in good faith and after prayerful consultation with The Lord, he believed Pastor Jon Macnab lived with his uncle, Mr W McIntyre, at Minard Road in Glasgow. This address had been discovered by Nathan in his mother's synoptic records where Miriam had noted key information abstracted from the batches of letters left by Esther and Jon in their haste to catch their flight to Scotland.

# North by North East

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Lipton passed her the application fee and she issued a receipt from her computer/printer which she signed in a slow, old-fashioned neat hand.

"Please wait here, Mr Lipton, Mr Macnab. I will have a word on your behalf with my higher officer. I will do my very best for you."

She was gone over half-an-hour during which Uncle Robert and his nephew prayed quietly for The Lord to send His Holy Spirit to intervene on their behalf.

When she returned, Mrs Thiaw was upset:

"Mr Lipton, I regret to advise you that to accomplish this application I am required to ask for an additional administrative fee of \$2,000 US, in cash. I am very sorry."

Robert Lipton delved into his briefcase for a second time and after some fiddling removed an envelope which he sealed and passed to her.

This amount knocked a big hole in the sum Robert Lipton had reluctantly begged from his estranged nephew Albert Lipton, the ambitious young man who now ran the family business which had morphed into an expanding stockbroking and investment management outfit. In return, Robert had signed away the deeds of his house where he would be allowed to live rent-free until his death unless the loan was redeemed with due interest at ten per cent per annum.

Thankfully, there would be enough remaining from the amount borrowed to pay for Nathan's flight.

"Yes, Mrs Thiaw. I had hoped for a lesser charge, but this is the amount I had been advised to expect to pay."

Visibly relieved, the woman said:

"Please, wait, Mr Lipton, Mr Macnab. I will strike for you while the iron is hot. He is anxious to be on his way for a Bridge match. Hopefully I should have your travel documents within the hour. I will send more tea and cake. If you need a toilet, please ask my assistant to escort you."

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At Border Control at Glasgow Airport, the small crowd of Non-EU travellers shuffled forward and Nathan moved with it. When he stepped up to the officer, the man stared into Nathan's blue eyes. Nathan saw the puzzled look, a common reaction from strangers.

While the man sifted through the folder of supporting papers, Nathan looked across to the exit and tried to imagine what lay ahead.

# North by North East

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As he checked the passport the officer said, casually:

"Mr Macnab, do you have accommodation arranged for your visit?"

Coached for this question by Uncle Robert, Nathan replied:

"Yes, sir. I will hope to be staying with my father and his uncle, William McIntyre in the district of Shawlands. My great uncle was born on the island of Tiree, which is to the North and West of Glasgow. He works for a company called Weirs of Cathcart which is a short walk away from Shawlands. My father also worked there, before he was called by The Lord Jesus Christ to preach His Gospel in The Gambia."

The officer pushed the blue button under his counter to alert his supervisor.

"I'm sorry, Mr Macnab. Please repeat what you just told me, for my supervisor, who is now monitoring our discussion."

Nathan stumbled through the re-run, hoping he had got it right.

"I see, Mr Macnab. So, your father's uncle? What age is he?"

Nathan was sweating. This was a trick question. How old could he be, this uncle?

In The Gambia 6,000 kilometres (4,000 miles) away, Robert Lipton had gathered as many Christians as he could muster, a total of eighteen, including a few from other churches. They were squeezed into the living room of his home. It was close to midnight and they had been praying and singing in relays since Nathan embarked on his journey seventeen hours earlier, praying the young man safely to Scotland to find Pastor Jon and get help to save their church from Mohamur A-Sharif.

At that precise moment they were singing Pastor Jon's favourite hymn, in English, unaccompanied:

"*What a Friend we have in Jesus. . .*"

In Glasgow, wisely, Nathan decided to continue to tell the truth and shame the Devil.

"I'm sorry, sir, I do not know. My father left The Gambia to come home when I was two years old. I am his illegitimate son, but he knows I am coming. My Uncle Robert Lipton, who is a graduate of Glasgow University, wrote an email to the missionary society, from the YMCA in Banjul, to tell them I am coming today, to find him."

"Aha. What society is this, please?"

"It is called the *Fraser Memorial Missionary Society*. It is based in the town of Falkirk which we think is in the Stirling area. We believe the secretary of the society is a lady called Miss Fairgrieve. This Society was founded in 1901 by a rich Christian lady who lost

## *North by North East*

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both her husband and her son in the Boer War in South Africa. My Uncle Robert met her once, in Glasgow, at the Billy Graham Crusade. It was in 1955 when Mrs Fraser was very old. Maybe nearly a hundred years old. During the Boer War she was trying to . . ."

The desk phone light flashed, and the officer held up his hand:

"Excuse me, Mr Macnab."

With his head down, he said:

"Yes, Paul, shoot."

The officer listened and scrolled his laptop to the CCTV feed which streamed images from the Arrivals meet and greet area. He spotted the group holding a long red/blue/green banner in the colours of The Gambian national flag overprinted in white letters:

"Welcome to Glasgow Jonathan Luke Ndoeye Macnab"

The banner was held at one end by a tall, slim young woman with a collie sitting to heel, the other end by a shorter, fit-looking black man with a shaved head. Standing between them was a slightly stooped very slim man with a full head of curly, greying hair. This man towered a full head above the others. He wore an elegant grey suit with a purple shirt and a dog collar. His right arm was looped around the waist of a fresh-faced hippy lady who had scarlet hair, his left arm around the shoulder of a distinguished man with a small moustache and goatee beard dressed in a three-piece pin-striped suit. The officer recognised this man immediately as a senior member of the Scottish National Party.

The officer then zoomed to a close-up of the face of the curly haired man and saw his blue eyes then glanced once again at the face of the young man standing before him.

"Right, Paul, gotcha," he said, dropping the handset onto its cradle stirrup.

Folding the papers inside Nathan's passport, he handed the bundle back to him.

"Welcome to Scotland, Mr Macnab."