

Walk me through the rain

First Love

Born on the Isle of Skye, like many others walking in the rain was embedded in Miriam Macleod's DNA.

Wearing her new oversized gaberdine coat and sou'wester she was loitering at the corner, hoping for a chance to speak to the new boy she had heard was staying with Minnie Walker. He definitely looked like a good catch.

In August 1962, both newly enrolled as first year pupils at Portree High, the youngsters had been an item from that first encounter, walking home and chatting then waving to each other across the rear gardens from their upstairs bedrooms.

Because his parents' croft was miles beyond Milnavaig (over two hours away by tractor along a rough track then a service bus to Portree) Hector Sinclair was in digs with Minnie Walker, his maternal grandmother whose council house backed onto the Macleods identical property separated by two scruffy gardens and a thick 'hedge' of impenetrable brambles.

Over the previous year Miriam had morphed from a thin, flat-chested girl to a tall, curvy young woman. Hormones had been coursing through her body for months, making her uncharacteristically bold. Miriam had always been a schemer, a keeper of secrets, unlike Sarah, her older sister by five years who was a talker, ready to promote herself at every opportunity.

In her newly emerging body and wearing make-up applied before classes in the school toilets, Miriam could have easily passed for an older girl, maybe even sixteen. This make-up, forbidden at home, had been a gift from Sarah who was away, studying in Glasgow.

Before Hector, Miriam had snogged a few older boys from the pipe band group, following them into the dark corner behind the community hall where they rehearsed. Mostly she had found them rough and smelly. She hated the taste of stale tobacco. None of them seemed to know what a girl wanted. But, following advice from Sarah, she solved her problem by unzipping them, feeling her own rush when they squirted into the tissue she held ready in her left hand. Miriam still had the hand me down home-made stapled booklet called 'Big Cocks' which she had sold to Miriam for £5 before she went off to Glasgow to study. Having the real thing in her hand had made the booklet redundant. Miriam had sold it to Freda from 3rd year who had a 'shop' in the girl's toilets.

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Soon to be fourteen at Christmas, Hector had been held back for an extra year at his primary school, judged a 'slow learner'. He was tall, lean, fair haired and strongly built with dark blue eyes and spoke with a slow, deep voice. He did not smoke and always had minty breath. He was already shaving and could have passed for sixteen or even older. A perfect Viking, she thought.

Pretending to have no previous experience of forward girls, Hector remained quiet and allowed Miriam to do the talking, wondering where this would lead. However, he was not the innocent that Miriam had imagined from his reactions.

Hector had been getting by at nights on erotic memories of Elaine, the twenty-something hippy girl who had been living as part of a loose commune of squatters about a mile from his parents' croft.

Elaine was a herbalist, a guru. She had been to India. Her father was a merchant banker and she had a newish Mini, and her own small caravan. Hector had met her while she was picking herbs, down on her knees. She had looked up at him with bright eyes and asked:

"Hector, how old are you?"

"Twelve and a half! Oh my God. How absolutely delicious."

She invited him back to her caravan for herbal tea, sitting opposite in her mini skirt, her bare legs apart, displaying her pink panties, grinning, her eyes bright. Her voice 'tinkled', he decided later.

Elaine quizzed him about himself in minute detail as if researching a story she would tell later, asking about his family, his younger brother Callum, five years his junior, everything about his life on the croft, about his school. Did he have a girlfriend? Did he have a boyfriend?

When Elaine closed the curtains, stripped naked and reached for his zip, he had ejaculated, wetting his underpants.

*"Ah, so you **ARE** a virgin Hector. Here, use this damp cloth. That's it. Come and lie beside me and suck my nipples."*

Lying in his arms, Elaine smelled of a perfume that was different; patchouli oil, he learned later.

Their encounters, almost every day when she was 'available', had lasted all summer but when the autumn rains set in, she drove off, heading to Spain, she said, leaving

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the caravan as a gift to another girl called Nannette who was shorter and plumper but equally keen to serve him herbal tea.

Miriam liked to flirt and touch, resting her right hand on Hector's inner thigh, stroking then rubbing his bulge, hearing him groan at the moment of release and enjoying the sight of his wetness spreading as she felt herself climax. Both enjoyed this 'sinful' behaviour and he willingly went with her to more remote places where, well-hidden from view or discovery, she unzipped him and was ready with a tissue.

Their routine developed when she moved his hand onto her naked crotch, hoping he knew what she needed. Tutored by Elaine and Nannette, Hector was ready to meet this challenge. It was then that Miriam Macleod realised that Hector Sinclair was the one she had been waiting for.

He was amazing, bringing her to a climax slowly, teasing her as she had learned to do for herself while slowly flipping through her Big Cocks booklet with the curtains closed and a folded magazine jammed under her bedroom door.

As everyone knew, Minnie was as deaf as a post and a great reader, usually in bed with a hot water bottle for her sore back by seven o'clock at the latest and snoring loudly within minutes, as Hector had confirmed.

Both youngsters saw an opportunity.

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In the third week of their romance, working to her plan, Miriam ran home from school and baked scones, taking a small batch round to Mrs Walker as if they were a gift from her mother. During her visit, with Minnie asleep in her chair, she sneaked upstairs with Hector to inspect his bedroom where they kissed, cuddled, touching naughtily while making whispered plans.

He had lovely warm hands and knew how to touch and suck her breasts without hurting.

She wanted to ask if he had a previous girlfriend, if she was still around. But she held back, concentrating on his family and hoping he might, in time, admit to previous experiences. Wisely, Hector kept his memories of Elaine and Nannette for the time of the month when Miriam was 'unavailable'.

The following evening, Miriam told her mother she was going to the far side of Portree to visit a few new girls from her class. Instead, she signalled to Hector from her bedroom then raced round to Minnie Walker's where he was waiting to open the front door and smuggle her upstairs. A few minutes later, they were naked, sharing Hector's double

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bed, using a Durex from a pack of three bought from Freda whose mother worked in *Boots the Chemist*. In the main bedroom downstairs, Minnie snored on, blissfully unaware.

During the months to come, the couple continued with their secret romance, learning to take great care never to be seen together in public or at school which might have led to an intervention by her parents, banning her friendship with Hector.

In an intense flood of sexual passion, their first year rolled by. Had her mother noticed, Miriam's face was prone to smiling, usually after teatime as she dressed in her dark blue gaberdine trench coat to set off to visit her new (fictitious) school friends, Allison, Annette and Amy, incomers whose parents were running B&Bs, escaping the rat race on the mainland. Miriam now had a Timex watch with an alarm function, a birthday gift from Hector setting it to be sure she home before her eight o'clock curfew.

Sarah, who 'projected herself' as a 'brainbox', had moved to Glasgow to study at *Jordanhill College* which meant Miriam had their shared bedroom to herself. This was a blessing as Sarah was a real nosey parker. Her sister's more or less continuous absence, occasionally broken with a few short visits home, meant Miriam was able to keep her friendship with Hector a secret from her parents, allowing their romance to continue undetected over that first winter and for several years to come.

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During his second summer break at Portree High, Hector Sinclair found a job stacking shelves in the Co-op and stayed on with Minnie Walker over the school holidays. His brother Callum had sprouted and was now working alongside his parents on the croft and helping with the creels, harvesting prawns, crabs and the occasional lobster to sell to local hotels and B&Bs.

Miriam Macleod found a job washing hair and sweeping up in a hairdressers. Both teenagers had opened secret bank accounts, saving hard for their future when they planned to go on to study in Glasgow. Based on information from others at their school, the pair had already discounted Inverness as 'boring and backward'. Glasgow was definitely the place to study and enjoy the freedom they sought.

The years rolled by and still Hector and Miriam continued to meet in secret. For two summers, Miriam worked in a shoe shop and was their cleaner after the shop closed.

At the end of year 3 they had both in turn refused the option to leave school, each teenager encouraged by their parents to stay on and try for the new O-Levels and Highers now on offer during years 4, 5 and 6. Their careers teacher organised a three-day trip to Glasgow and they traipsed around various FE Colleges and Universities collecting brochures and application forms.

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Aged sixteen, Miriam got a 'position' as a Saturday girl and occasional weekday holiday relief assistant at the cosmetic counter in *Boots*, alongside Mrs MacAuley, Freda's glamorous mother.

Hector had moved on from the Co-op and was working in a summer job in a large DIY supplies store on the outskirts of Portree, mainly cutting timber to sizes supplied by customers. Early in this new position, Hector had learned to insist that customers must check his version of their measurements before the final cut, a system which worked well for all parties.

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When Sarah came home for a short unannounced visit, she saw them walking hand in hand, Miriam leaning her head into his neck. Hector and Miriam's romance was soon common knowledge. Her parents knew Hector was a steady reliable boy and, now Miriam was sixteen, they gave their tacit approval.

However, she no longer had the freedom she had previously enjoyed. Miriam was now watched to make sure she did not have the opportunity to 'stray'. Her focus must be study, study and more study after the example set by Sarah. After a few near misses when they might have been caught, their meetings fell into a pattern, usually a week apart on Thursday nights, shoehorned into the interval after her mother left for her Church Session meetings and before her father returned from his early pipe band tutorials with younger members.

When these opportunities coincided with her 'availability', Miriam was always excited and needy but after the first quick rush, she found these furtive sessions were less romantic than the previous, longer, slower meetings when their couplings had been teasing and erotic. Hector agreed this new arrangement was frustrating but they could see no alternative.

It was at this point they began to talk obsessively between themselves of what it would be like together in *Glasgow*, in a flat where they could enjoy sex behind a locked door whenever they felt the urge.

On her visits home, Sarah, who seemed to be able to read the signs of their 'frustration', was clearly the expert in these matters, and stressed repeatedly how hard it was to find good accommodation at an affordable rent, adding grandly that she would 'put in a word for them' with the other tenants in her flat when she gave it up.

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Hector set his sights on an HNC in Quantity Surveying at *Glasgow College of Building and Printing* while Miriam hoped to get into Pharmacy at the *Royal College of Science and*

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Technology (which would become Strathclyde University in 1964). However, they had been repeatedly warned they would need good grades to get into these courses.

Later that year when Sarah returned for a short visit she was very full of herself. She was now a secret smoker, puffing away at their bedroom window and in a bus shelter two streets away. Smoking in the Macleod family was strictly taboo.

The night before she returned to Glasgow, lying in bed alongside Miriam, Sarah bragged about her steady Saturday job in a ladies dress shop in Partick where she worked year round and during the summer break to earn enough to be able to pay the rent to keep her place in the flat she shared in Baliol Street near Charing Cross.

When Sarah departed for Glasgow, there was another change.

Hector became a welcome visitor at the MacLeod's kitchen table, mainly on Sundays, sometimes accompanied by his grandmother Minnie Walker, adding the complication of her profound deafness.

Going forward, led by Miriam, both youngsters negotiated a new arrangement in which they were allowed to study at Minnie Walker's Kitchen table most nights, insisting they were focussed on getting good grades to be sure they got into their courses in Glasgow. After a few weeks, Margaret Macleod reluctantly agreed and the timescale for the nightly sessions was set for 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm, the new slightly later curfew deadline.

This arrangement suited Margaret who, with her needles clacking, churning out lemon baby cardigans for orphans in Africa, had her Kitchen radio set permanently to the BBC Third Programme, reserved for classical music and highbrow discussions, providing snippets she retailed at her office over the following days.

In this new arrangement, the teenagers did pretend to study but only until Minnie was asleep when they crept up to enjoy the remaining time under the sheets.

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Reality Check

As Miriam had dreaded, Hector flunked all his O-levels and could not progress to Highers. After all these hard years of forcing himself under her gentle coaching, he had nothing to show for his dedication.

The reality was Hector had always struggled with reading and writing. Unknown to him or his teachers, he was dyslexic (moderate) and had mild dyspraxia, terms which were not in common use at that time in mainstream education. Encouraged by his parents and Miss Jannice Tomley is personal guidance teacher, Hector resolved to try harder. Miriam also promised to continue to support him and Sarah said she would try her new techniques when she was visiting Portree.

By contrast, Miriam had fared much better, gaining good grades in O-Levels in English, History, Geography and Arithmetic but failing in Chemistry, a terrible disappointment. The next year she went on to gain Highers in English and History, missing out narrowly in Higher Maths, gaining a poor pass in her O-Level Chemistry re-sit.

Realising her ambition to study Pharmacy was probably out of reach, she felt utterly deflated. After a long discussion with Miss Tomley and later at home with her parents she was persuaded she must choose another option.

Encouraged by her mother, the teenager decided on a new plan.

Mrs Margaret Macleod, who worked as a senior secretary in a solicitor's office, had a refurbished IBM Seletric typewriter she used for church work and compiling the monthly church magazine entitled *The Tribune*. Over that summer of 1966, while Hector was at the croft in Milnovaig helping his parents and Callum, Miriam was home-taught to type accurately, achieving a consistent speed of around 55 wpm and eventually mastering dictation at around 120 wpm using Pitman's shorthand. Margaret was the main wage earner; her husband Donald drove a Post Office mail bus.

Both of her parents encouraged her to aim for a career as a secretary, seen at that time as a job for life.

During their final year at Portree, with Hector getting special help from Miss Tomley, hoping to get enough O-levels to get an apprenticeship as a Joiner, Miriam took crash courses in French and Commercial Studies adding a good O Level in Typing and Shorthand and a Higher in French.

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As Miriam had expected, Hector again flunked his exams. Nothing she said seemed to nudge him out of his doldrums and he disappeared from her life moving back to the croft in Milnovaig.

Miriam had a further meeting with Miss Tomley who made various telephone calls on her behalf. Miriam had the qualifications she needed to gain entry to *Anniesland College*, presenting her with the opportunity to escape from dull and dreary Skye and its high winds, constant downpours and its swarms of vicious summer midges.

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After a period of sulking at the croft, Hector was back at the DIY store working full-time, back living with his grandmother.

At what would turn out to be their final parting, Miriam spent the night with Hector, in his bedroom with two packs of three Durex and a small bottle of aromatherapy oil. Her cover story was she was staying over at a farewell party two hours away at the SYHA hostel at Glenbrittle while she was in fact at Minnie Walkers's upstairs bedroom, less than three minutes' walk from her own home.

The next morning, at their parting the teenagers had pledged their undying love, sketching out a plan where Miriam would return to Skye with her qualifications and look for a job as a secretary. Hector had saved nearly fifty pounds and was planning to get an old van and look for work as an apprentice with one of the local builders.

Somehow, after her two years at college, they would find a way to get together again, and perhaps get a car to help make their romance work. Perhaps they could find a plot of land and build their own dream home.

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On the day after Miriam set off for Glasgow, Sarah returned to Portree, hoping to find a post as a Primary Teacher.

At the council offices, Miss Sarah Macleod endured a long and searching interview but another more experienced married woman was preferred.

As a sop, they offered Sarah a post as a classroom assistant at Knockbreck Primary, a school about an hour's drive from Portree. Margaret Macleod insisted Sarah must accept this post, contending it was a good stepping stone. Sarah resisted until Margaret eventually revealed she had insider knowledge. Their Minister's wife, Mrs Anita Pollock, who was assistant head at Knockbreck, had pulled strings on Sarah's behalf while secretly assuring Margaret there was a vacancy in the offing as her Primary 2 teacher

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was four months pregnant. For a contribution to petrol costs, Mrs Pollock would give Sarah a lift to and fro.

Sarah accepted the post as an assistant, quit her secret smoking, took driving lessons and began saving hard, planning to buy a red Mini with a white roof, if she could find one she could afford.

Writing to Miriam with her news, Sarah promised she would keep a close eye on the tall, handsome Hector and warn Miriam if anyone was trying to steal him.

Sarah bragged she was dating Sergeant Steve Denholm, a recent transfer from Inverness, a man who had joined their church, a man Margaret Macleod deemed to be a 'good catch'. Looking at the snapshot Sarah had sent, Miriam was not impressed: Steve looked too small to be a proper policeman and she nicknamed him 'the Corgi'.

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Glasgow

Arriving in Glasgow alone, Miriam found the city noisy, brash, confusing, daunting. Refusing to admit to being afraid, she followed Sarah's well-thumbed A to Z guide and eventually found the flat near Charing Cross. In the surrounding area, the early signs of construction were evident, paving the way for the new M8 motorway which would lead to the demolition of the Grand Hotel and other buildings nearby.

The flat was on the first floor at Baliol Street, near the corner with Woodlands Road. Although this street had once been grand, it was now down-at-heel, dowdy, crumbling.

At the first pull of the bell chime, the door flew open and Miriam was confronted by an elegantly dressed older female with a haughty, disdainful demeanour, a woman who gave her name as Alice Graham¹. Miriam judged her to be as tall as Hector and maybe twenty five, perhaps older. She was strikingly attractive with a beautiful Mediterranean complexion, dark brown eyes and shining chestnut hair.

Alice inspected Miriam slowly, saw her tatty holdall and said:

'Ah, yes, Sarah's sister, but you are taller and with more clever eyes. And how is she?'

This woman had a slight accent, not French, perhaps Spanish, Miriam thought.

'Fine. She sends her best regards.'

'Do you have the £5 she borrowed from my brother Juan?'

'No, she must have forgotten.' Miriam opened her purse. 'Here, I'll pay it for her.'

'Grazie! Now, I need a £20 deposit as a surety to cover breakages and I need £35 up front to cover your room rental and overheads until Christmas. Oh, and strictly no smoking anywhere inside.'

'I don't smoke. I hate it actually. And sorry, I only have another £15 just now but I'll go to the bank first thing tomorrow and make a withdrawal.'

¹ Much later Miriam learned that Alicia Garcia had changed her name to Alice Graham after fleeing from Vigo to escape a purge by Franco on students (deemed to be intellectuals). Aged sixteen, without a passport and very little money or possessions, she had hitched a lift as a deckhand on her uncle's deep sea fishing boat. Disembarking at Troon, she did various café jobs before spending finding a post as the sole assistant to a Mrs Graham who ran a large B&B establishment. When her employer retired, Alicia Garcia aged nineteen, now calling herself Alice Graham, made her way to Glasgow to study typing and shorthand.

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In her Bank of Scotland savings account Miriam had a balance of just over £200, including a £15 parting gift from Hector and a £50 'booster' from her parents.

'Did Sarah not pre-warn to you about the money due?'

'No, she must have forgotten.'

'Yes. Sarah. Forgetful was more than definitely her style. Well I hope you are more thoughtful. I had to chase her up for money at every time.'

Miriam held Alice's stern gaze until, gradually, the tall girl's face softened into a small conspiratorial smile.

'Sorry, I know I can be a bit of a dragon but somebody has to be in charge, *agreed?*'

'Yes, I can imagine that's needed. My Mum is very strict too. Makes all the rules and enforces them.'

'Okay Miriam, I think we'll get along fine. Look, I'm away for a few days but my brother Juan will answer your questions. This way, please. Go ahead into the Lounge and I'll send him through. Oh, so you know, as the newest member of our happy band your will be on cleaning duty for the Lounge, Kitchen and Bathroom for the first two weeks and then it will rotate to the others. I look after the finances and keep records so you will be off duty for six weeks then back on again. On Thursdays, the landlord's mother comes and cleans the entire flat and changes the bed linen and towels. Oh, so you know, she is also his spy and reports back on us so we all muck up together on Wednesday evenings to tidy up and wash all the dishes and hide dirty clothes and so on to give the impression of being perfect tenants. Good flats in this area are very hard to find. Now, so you know, we all cook for ourselves and have designated areas in the refrigerator and the food cupboard. Oh, when you are on your two week rota, your will provide two pints of milk per day and keep the tea caddy topped up with Brooke Bond. I'll pay you for that at the end of your two weeks, okay?'

'Sounds good to me.'

'Right, wait here while I wake up my brother Juan. That young man could sleep for Spain. Okay? So, Miriam, I'll see you on Sunday night. Okay? So, tomorrow, please give to him what you owe to me, Okay?'

'Yes, and thanks. This is such a big flat. It's truly amazing.'

'Yes, I agree to you. Adios!'

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The front door banged and Miriam moved across to the huge triple bay Lounge window and watched her stride off. Alice Graham was carrying a large shiny leather holdall, a dark cherry red colour. Like her outfit and shoes the holdall looked new and expensive. Miriam would learn later she had a boyfriend in Edinburgh who was a newly appointed university lecturer in the medical school.

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When Juan eventually appeared, smiling shyly, half-asleep, Miriam thought he was gorgeous. He could only be Alice's brother, with the same dark brown eyes and shining chestnut hair, held back from his face by a short ponytail, like a hippy.

He was still in his pale blue and white striped pyjamas, yawning, reminding her of Hector, although Juan was not as tall, just under six feet, she judged. Shrugging, he picked up her holdall and led her to her study bedroom, the smallest in the flat, she discovered later. This tiny room had originally been for a live-in maid until the area went into decline and the original well-to-do owners moved out to the suburbs, to escape the noise and smog from coal fires and to have a garage beside their bungalows or villas to park their cars.

Juan smiled, shrugged apologetically and pulled the door closed.

Miriam sat on the bed, wondering what she had let herself in for. From the way Sarah had described the flat and its occupants it was supposed to be 'perfect' but Miriam did not have that feel about it, not yet anyway. She reminded herself she had to adapt and make the best of it, her mother's philosophy in any difficult or unknowable situation.

There was a small corner washbasin and a school desk which looked as if it was from a primary classroom, much too small to be useable. Her room was directly through the wall from the communal bathroom. She could hear Juan splashing and singing something Spanish. The thought of him naked, soapy and slippery, aroused her strongly.

Could she risk spying through the bathroom keyhole?

She opened her study bedroom door and looked into the L-shaped hall. The front door was directly opposite. This door led out through storm half-doors to the communal staircase, the door she had entered about half an hour earlier. One of the others who lived here could enter at any time and catch her on her knees.

Back in her room, checking from her small window, she realised her room was wedged into the corner of the adjacent building, overlooking a back court area with dustbin shelters. The entire area was scruffy, uncared for - not unlike her own back garden in Portree.

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In time she would learn this corner never saw direct sunshine and was dim even with the over head lamp turned on.

On the plus side, the bed was clean and comfortable. The carpet square looked newish and there was a hint of lavender furniture polish. There was a slim wardrobe with double doors and a set of four drawers hard by its side, with just enough space for the room door to swing back against the wall. She unpacked her clothes and stuffed her ancient holdall in the gap between her bed and the side wall. Still in her travelling clothes, she lay back on the bed and closed her eyes. It had been a long journey, three buses to Glasgow and a tram to Charing Cross.

Juan's singing stopped and she drifted off into a dwam.

In her half-awake daydream she was walking along a high clifftop, looking out to sea then down onto a shore of golden sand with white-topped waves collapsing and racing ashore again in a mesmeric action of surge and ebb, repeat after repeat.

A tall dark haired man and slightly smaller fair haired woman walked side by side, holding hands, walking away from her, their faces hidden.

Ahead of them two boys ran along the edge of the bubbling surf, pulling kites into the sky.

She could not hear their words but it was clear they were happy, contented.

Her dream faded and she fell into a deep, sound sleep.

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Juan

Juan chapped her door, bringing her back to reality.

'You take cuppa tea? Or coffee to Alicia's expresso machine? I have Tunnocks Teacakes she buy to me.'

During the rest of that afternoon and evening Miriam learned Juan was studying for a PhD at Glasgow University, only a ten minute walk away. He showed her his bedroom with its desk, home made from an ancient kitchen table with a enormous sheet of plywood screwed onto it.

It was heaped with books in English and Spanish including an English to Spanish translation dictionary in two huge volumes, his most precious books which had been specially ordered for him by Alice ².

She learned his topic was:

"Are Paradors a good idea and why is Franco promoting them so strongly?"

While he told her about it in jerky English, Miriam looked around his room. He had a full-sized double bed, neat and tidy, no clothes lying around, not like Sarah when she was at home. No signs of a female presence. In a corner was a straw wash basket with a lid. He saw her looking at it.

'Ah, you need clothes to do wash? Laundry shop next street. It cost much. I use machines at Union, for do male only, sorry. Alicia no let any do wash in flat.'

In the early evening, they shopped locally at a strange shop he called a 'Deli', a new experience for her. Back at the flat they made a simple meal together, spicy vegetables with diced chorizo, a spicy sausage which was new to her. He produced a bottle of red wine. She sipped about half from a small goblet and left the rest. It was her first ever experience of wine and she found it too sharp for her taste. She liked Vodka with Coke, but only a small one, she told him.

It was a warm night and still light. They walked along to nearby Kelvingrove Park then into the grounds of the University to his Department where he showed her his cubby hole study area. They crossed the brow of the hill to the University Library where he showed her his designated carrel with his name displayed on a side wall. This carrel was

² Girault's, *A Dictionary, Spanish to English and English to Spanish*, in two volumes comprising a total of 1400 pages.

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located close to the reference books he used. On the floor, under his desk there was a large locked cage fixed to the floor. This cage contained books, magazines and newspapers the Librarian had requisitioned for him from various external sources, loaned on condition they must not leave the Library.

While he was talking, Miriam realised Juan was becoming steadily more fluent in English. Perhaps earlier he had been unsure of her, shy. She wondered if, despite his good looks, he might be lonely. For her part, she was dreading him asking her about her course at *Anniesland College*, which, by comparison, seemed so mundane, almost trivial compared to his more academic studies.

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Later, back at Baliol Street, Miriam sipped her first espresso. It tasted too bitter until Juan added first two, then three sugar lumps. The zing from the strong caffeine 'hit' was exhilarating.

Within a few minutes Miriam was babbling away about her life on Skye, her summer jobs, her studies and bemoaning her inability to conquer Maths and Chemistry which had led to her failed ambition of becoming a Pharmacist.

Juan was a good listener, smiling and frowning in equal measure.

'But you do to French, that is very good. You can type and take dictation, like Alicia. I need help to you. I need my, you say 'scribbles?' type-ed up to good English for Professor Oorkart.'

He showed her a business card:

Professor Donald Anderson Urquhart, Department of Political Geography

'How you say to this, please?'

'Juan, look, I would love to help but I can't. I have to devote myself to my own studies. And why ask me? Why not ask Alice?'

Juan became agitated. His garbled explanation jumped around but the gist seemed to be:

Alicia was employed full-time for a Professor of Heart Surgery who worked for the NHS and also freelance from private consulting rooms nearby, at Woodside Place. Alicia was his personal assistant and could transcribe his voice machine tapes and knew all the correct spelling of the complicated medical jargon. Yes, Juan had pleaded with her to help him but she had refused, at first saying she was too busy and her Professor was demanding and she could not risk him finding her typing for others. Later she had

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admitted she found his topic and the references to Franco too disturbing, stirring up a past she was trying to put behind her.

Alicia was proud of her appearance and had a special hairdo every week. Her employer paid her well and she liked the best clothes, the best of everything. She did not charge Juan full price for a double room. Twice a year Uncle Fernando gave him money to fund his studies. This money was paid to Alicia and she paid his bills and gave Juan *dinero de bolsillo* (pocket money) each week on a Friday. He lived on a tight budget, living cheaply and saving every spare penny.

'Miriam, Alicia she do kind to me. I ask her get typewriter to you to you do me essays and write-ups, okay?'

'Okay, so long as I don't risk failing my own studies.'

Juan beamed:

'I know you good person, do to kind to me.'

'Look, Juan, I would need a good typewriter. And before you ask, I can't type anything for you at the College. I could be kicked off the course for that.'

'Yes, yes. Good. When I not be here, use to my desk, okay? Sarah never study in that room you get to do, okay? I never see her study, Sarah. She party person. Drink beer and whisky, smoke. No, I not like to her, sorry to say. But you, no, I like much to you. You do to me like a good person. I see it to Alice for good typewriter. Please, I much, much need you do to help me. Please, please.'

'Okay Juan, I'll help when I have time. But I need to find a job of some kind, to help pay my way, you know? Sarah told me about a shop where she worked. She marked it on her A to Z, said I should ask for Mrs Corrigan. I'll try to find her tomorrow.'

'You say Sarah do a job? Yes, maybe but she do secrets, Sarah. Yes, Sarah do many secrets.'

'Really?'

'Alicia say me many times:

"Maybe Sarah has rich boyfriend hiding somewhere but her business is her business."

'Actually, Juan, that doesn't sound like Sarah at all. She was always keen to promote herself.'

'Okay, but it is true to her. You still type to me?'

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'Yes Juan, I'll help you but only if I have time. I'm very used to the IBM Selectric typewriter, if Alice has one in good condition. They can be temperamental.'

'An IBM Selectric. Spell to me please, I do on paper for Alicia, okay?'

Miriam noticed he wrote in an untidy scrawl, left-handed like Hector but in a much smaller hand.'

Studying it, he added:

'Alicia call to me tomorrow. Eight o'clock, maybe. She like check me up. We have secret telephone she pay for. To speak Raphaele her Edinburgh boyfriend. She keep in a cupboard, lock-ed all time. I have a key. Thursdays we put in box to hide to Mrs Masterton.'

'That reminds me, I should telephone my Mum, let her know I am here, safe and sound.'

'Miriam, you not to use public box near here, okay? **Never.**'

'Why?'

'Use to 'ladies of the night' do calls from men friends, Alicia say.'

'Oh dear.'

'Look, Miriam, you ask to me, you use Alicia's phone, okay? Free to typing, okay? Sarah use-ed Alice's phone sometime to call mother. She talk long. Forget to pay. Miriam, you no pay, use free, okay?'

'Thanks. Yes, I'll keep it short, promise. My Mum, well when she gets started, well, Sarah will have told you, I suppose.'

'The cousins use too, sometimes.'

'Wendy and Janey?'

'Yes. They big noisy. Viola and Cello. Like cats, no? Come home room. Practice. Go concerts all time. Lock room. Mrs Masterton has key, only.'

Miriam learned a week or so later from Alice that Wendy and Janet were students at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music ³. They were members of several orchestral groups with weekly rehearsals on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays plus Saturday and Sunday mornings.

³ Which became the Royal Scottish of Music and Drama in 1968 and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in 2011.

Walk me through the rain

Juan told her the cousins had a huge collection of special orchestral LPs which he had examined while Mrs Masterton was cleaning the bathroom, having left their door open with their curtains pulled back and window raised to let in a breath of fresh air.

He said normally the cousins kept the bedroom locked and their curtains closed at all times, even when they were at home. Although they were not actively unfriendly, they did not encourage conversation. Apart from their screeching rehearsals, Miriam thought of them as ghosts, often present but seldom seen.

Another oddity which was hard to miss was that they used the bathroom together for normal functions as well as longer sessions for hair washing and soaking in the bath, often for an hour or more, using up all the hot water and leaving a rim of scum on the bath.

It took Miriam a few weeks to discover the 'cousins' were lovers. She had seen this before at school, Kat and Mary, two girls who skulked around together, holding hands when they thought no one was watching. Everyone knew they were kissing and cuddling, sharing a toilet cubicle. Kat and Mary were gorgeous but had not the slightest interest in boys. They left school at fifteen and moved to Edinburgh, disappearing from Skye, never to return.

Walk me through the rain

First Steps

On the following Wednesday, (30th August 1967), Miriam enrolled at *Anniesland College* and was issued with her matriculation card, course syllabus and timetable, learning she had two full afternoons free for 'private study' on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

In the canteen, Miriam sat with Morag (McCann) and Cathie (Green), drinking milky coffee and eating empire biscuits. Cathie insisted on paying from her fancy leather purse which was stuffed with five pound notes. These two girls from her course lived in the nearby council house suburb called Knightswood, only a five minute bus ride away. They lived next door to each other. Both were only children, no brothers or sisters. Cathie's mother worked in a funeral parlour and her father drove a hearse.

Chatting, sharing backgrounds, Miriam soon learned her new friends were totally consumed by swimming. Morag's mother worked in the Office at a place called *The Western Baths*. Both girls had been members there since Primary 6 and had been in the competitive swimming squad for many years, travelling to galas all over the West of Scotland and further afield.

Morag was a tall girl with huge broad shoulders and strong muscular arms. She had a smiling round face under a thatch of short curly red hair. Cathie was a head shorter with a thinner, wiry build and a long anxious face with short dark hair, almost black. Both were newly eighteen but to Miriam they seemed much younger.

'Do you swim, Miriam?', asked Morag.

'Sorry, no. There are no public swimming pools on Skye, not even sea-water pools. I always thought I should try to learn just in case I fell in, messing about at the harbour in sailing dinghies.'

'You are so, so right, Miriam. Everyone should learn to swim. And it keeps you fit too. My Mum says it's the best form of exercise anyone can take.'

Cathie added, 'Morag, we could ask your Mum to get Miriam a place in the 'Learn to Swim' class, eh?'

'Yeah, now the schools are back, there should be a space available. The next session starts on Saturday at ten o'clock. My Dad runs it and I help out sometimes. He always says he can get anyone swimming confidently in ten weeks. I'll ask Mum to get you a swimmer's pass and you can drop by anytime you like to practice. There is always a lifeguard on duty.'

Walk me through the rain

'Would it be expensive?'

'No, Mum can swing it.' Morag winked, nodding her head towards Cathie, adding, 'She'll say you are a niece, she's done it before.'

Cathie chortled, 'Which means it will be absolutely free!'

'Free sounds good. I'll need to buy a swimsuit.'

Cathie said, 'I'll give you one of mine. I've got loads of them and we are about the same size. Anyway, they're stretchy. Do you like black or red or yellow?'

'Eh, yellow, please.'

Morag said, 'Good choice, suits your blue eyes and golden hair.'

Miriam gave Morag her name, date of birth and my address.

'No, not Skye. Where are you staying in Glasgow, so she can send you a letter of introduction.'

Miriam gave her Baliol Street address, watching to see if they reacted: they did not.

'Just present the letter when you arrive.'

Cathie added, 'I'll leave the costume for you at Reception. Towels are provided free.'

Morag said, 'We are away at a gala on Saturday but my Dad will look after you. He works there as the Pool Supervisor and maintains all the equipment and so on. He used to be a ship's engineer.'

At a stop near to the College, the three girls caught the bus along Great Western Road to the top of Byres Road and took Miriam to the entrance of *The Western Baths* on Cranworth Street just opposite Vinicombe Street.

Before parting, Miriam asked them about Sarah's fancy dress shop and showed them the cross she had made on the A to Z.

'It must be *Catherine's of Partick*,' Morag said. *Catherine's* is very, very exclusive. My Auntie Maisie buys her clothes there. Uncle Trevor is a Solicitor and they don't have kids so she can afford it. She just swans around all the time, getting her hair done every week. Pots of money, actually.'

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When Miriam eventually found the huge shop, she stood outside looking in at the ball gowns and the fancy top end dresses and accessories, trying to choose the right words to say and wondering how Sarah had managed to get a job in such a posh shop.

Walk me through the rain

Later, she realised she must have lost track of time.

'Hello. Have you spotted something you like? We have clothes for younger ladies inside. I'll show you, if you wish?'

'Oh, no, no. Sorry, I could never afford such lovely garments. They are completely beyond my budget. I'm a student at *Anniesland College* and I'm hoping to get a part-time position as a sales assistant, if you have any vacancies.'

'I'm Bernadette Corrigan, the Owner of this shop. Are you from Skye, by any chance?'

'Yes, I'm Miriam Macleod. My sister Sarah worked here. She's back in Skye now.'

'Ah, yes Sarah. No she didn't actually work in the shop but she did model clothes for us at a few of our fashion evenings. For each new season, we do roadshows in the richer areas, like Pollokshields, Giffnock and Newton Mearns and Milngavie. Miriam, you definitely have the figure and looks for modelling, if you're interested?'

'That sounds wonderful but I've no experience.'

'I'll teach you and you'll be part of a group and the others will show you. Are you free tomorrow evening? You can come along and watch first time out. I'm sure you will be fine. Maybe we'll be able to persuade you for the second half of the show, after the caviar and sherry?'

'Yes, that sounds so good.'

'Here Miriam, take this five pound note and go round to *Jannetta* in Byres Road and say I sent you. Explain yourself and she will book you in for three o'clock tomorrow with the others for a full make-over. Come here with them at five and we'll have a light meal and then head over by coach to Pollokshields to set up and rehearse our catwalk show. How does that sound?'

'It sounds amazing. Please, what would I get paid?'

'Miriam, that five pound note is for you. Mary, who calls herself 'Janetta', is my sister. I'll ring her and tell her to expect you. Your treatment will be charged to my account.'

'Oh, thank you very much Mrs Corrigan. Should I wear anything special?'

'No, Miriam, just as you are will be fine. We provide everything, underwear, nylons and so on which you keep for the next show. After the show the garments you've model are dry-cleaned and placed on the sale stock rail. You and the other models will have first pick at a good discount. Here, take my business card and show it to Mary. Ring me if you have any other queries.'

Walk me through the rain

'Thank you very much indeed.'

'Good, all settled then. See you here at five tomorrow.'

'Excuse me, do I walk along that way to Baliol Street.'

Miriam noticed her puzzled frown. 'Yes, about twenty minutes on foot. Or catch a bus to Charing Cross.'

'Thanks. I'll go round and see *Jan-*, eh, *Mary* first. Bye-Bye.'

'Miriam, you are very well-spoken and that's a lovely accent. If all goes well with the modelling side, I'll see if we can fit you in as a Saturday girl, okay?'

'Yes, please. I did work in a shoe shop in *Portree*, so I know how to speak to customers. I would love to work in such a nice shop like yours.'

Walk me through the rain

Mavis

When Miriam arrived back at Baliol Street she was about to use her key to open the door to her new first floor flat when an older girl flounced down from the upper landing, smoking a freshly lit cigarette, chewing and popping gum. She was smartly dressed in a pink PVC raincoat with a tie belt over a bright red trouser suit and a black blouse revealing a deep cleavage. She wore bold make-up and strong perfume, dangling earrings with dyed blonde hair held firmly in place with hair lacquer.

She smiled at Miriam. 'Hiya, Ah'm Mavis. You look like sumdae Ah ken, like. Whit's your name?'

'Miriam. Miriam Macleod. I've just moved in here with Alice and the others.'

'Gotcha! Yoo're frae Skye. So yoo're Sarah's wee sistur, then?'

'Yes, she's back home in Skye now and hoping to get a placement as a Primary Teacher.'

'Aye. Ah Wish Ah hid the brains fur a joab like that. But Ah bet the pays crap, eh? Nothin' like a joab as an escort, eh?'

'No, Teaching is quite well paid and the holidays are good too.'

'Aye, right, if ye say so. Onyways Miriam, Ah'm in a bittae a rush, see ya around, eh?'

From the close entrance, she heard Mavis say:

'Hiya Juan, So, ye've stull no' been up tae see us fur yer freebie huv ye? Still playin' hard tae get, eh?' There was a peel of raucous laughter.

'Hi Mavis. Nice raining coat to you.'

'Aye, thanks. See ya!'

Miriam waited for Juan at the open door. He smiled as he passed her, heading for the Kitchen:

'Tea or Coffee?'

'Tea, please. I bought some Scotch Pies and a tin of beans and potatoes and carrots, enough for both of us.'

'Thanks.'

'So, Miriam, I think you meet to Mavis?'

Walk me through the rain

'Yes. She said she was friendly with Sarah.'

'Yes, just so you know, Mavis is bad person. I say Alicia Sarah is one to them. You know, upstairs.'

'Upstairs? What's 'upstairs'.'

'A place men to visit. A *burdel*. Sometime is men wear smart suits. Most is old and sad. Some is our bell pull. It happen you?'

'You mean a brothel?'

'Yes.'

'And you think Sarah was working there?'

'Yes. Sarah is *discreta*. Alicia never find it. Only me.'

'Oh my poor sister. Why did she do this? Thank goodness she is back in Skye.'

'I sorry to tell to you.'

'Juan, did you think I was planning to take her place? You know, upstairs?'

'**No!** I see you too good woman, Miriam. Different at Sarah right to first moment. Aha, here come Alicia. We talk more, later, yes?'

'Yes. Juan, I have good news to share. I have a job!'

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Later, Juan and Miriam slipped out quietly and walked in silence through Kelvingrove Park to stand near to the ornate fountain. Miriam had been waiting for Juan to mention Sarah and her involvement with the brothel but he remained silent on the subject. Miriam remembered what Alicia had told him:

"Maybe she has rich boyfriend somewhere but her business is her business."

To fill the silence, Miriam told Juan my good news about meeting Morag and Cathie and the modelling try-out job for *Catherine's of Partick* and the possibility of a Saturday job as a sales assistant.

'I too have good news!'

'Okay, what is it?'

'Today I get to you typewriter. It IBM Selectric. Alicia gives letter to me to take to man to shop. She know him. She tested. It good. She pay man to shop. Good price. It heavy. I

Walk me through the rain

have in bedroom. You type essay for to me? Tonight? *Please?* I need quick to Professor OorKart. I have good paper to Alicia to give.'

Miriam checked her watch. It was ten minutes before eight.

'OK Juan, let's do it now.'

'Gracias. Muchas gracias.'

He leaned forward and kissed her forehead:

'Ven, vamos rápida. Yes?'

He put his arm around her waist and they walked smartly back to Baliol Street and settled in his bedroom where she asked him to recite his notes in English while she paraphrased it in shorthand then rattled out a first draft.

The sound of her typing was masked by the cousins rehearsing.

Juan returned with coffee and Tunnocks Teacakes.

'Alicia, she talk Raphael on telephone. He is Glasgow. She go out to stay at him tonight at his friend house. His friend is London two days.'

After the third draft, Juan was happy and although she did not fully understand what it was about, she was sure the grammar, syntax and spelling was accurate, double checking the spelling in his dictionary. The body of the text was 1,995 words, just under his 2,000 word limit. She had counted it three times to be sure.

He read it through slowly, a huge grin on his face.

It was almost dark outside. He drew the curtains.

She stood and checked her watch. Three minutes to midnight. Across the hallway the cousins were silent, probably asleep. He moved closer, pulled her to him. She raised her lips and closed her eyes. His kiss was soft at first and then urgent, his hands slipping up under her blouse, expertly caressing and tugging at her nipples. After a few minutes he slipped away to lock his bedroom door then began undressing, folding his clothes neatly and placing them on a chair, his back to her, slipping into fresh underpants, pulling back the bed covers and lying down, aroused, expectant, grinning.

She opened her small handbag, slipped out a three-pack of Durex, dropped in her Timex watch then snibbed the catch and clicked off the overhead light. The room was dim and warm. Miriam wondered who else had shared his bed before her. Whoever it might have been it had definitely not been Sarah, she thought: Juan had made that plain enough.

Alicia's phrase returned:

Walk me through the rain

"Maybe she has rich boyfriend somewhere but her business is her business."

Walk me through the rain

No Great Loss

On the Sunday evening following her first night sharing Juan's bed, Miriam locked herself in the telephone cupboard at Baliol Street and dialled her mother in Portree. She had written a few short postcards to Hector at his parents croft but had not received any replies. Looking at her Timex she shuddered, guilt rising to redden her cheeks.

Sarah answered, hamming up in the posh voice she had almost perfected, mimicking Mrs Pollock, their minister's wife.

'Good Evening, this is the Macleod residence, how may I help you?'

'Hi Sarah, is Mum there?'

'No dimmy, she's at church, it's six o'clock. Daddy went with her. It's just me and Hector here, watching tele, cuddled up on the settee.'

'Hector? My Hector?'

'Sorry, no. He's my Hector now. You see he's back with his old Granny across the yard now he's working at that DIY place again. I wived to him and we did a sort of strip tease at first. I took off my blouse and he took off his pyjama top and well, you know how it goes. He told me all about your cosy wee arrangement and well, I must admit, it's working well for us too.'

'Well Sarah Macleod, you are more than welcome to him. Tell Mum I'll ring back tomorrow night. And don't worry, your Glasgow secrets are safe with me. Goodbye slut. In fact, goodbye forever.'

Miriam sat in silence for a long time, seething until she realised she no longer wanted Hector, not after what she had found in Juan.

She relocked the telephone handset in the drawer and slipped out into the hallway. Juan's door was ajar and he was lying on his bed, reading a thick book. Alice would not be back until around ten o'clock. Detouring to her room, she opened her handbag, took a three pack of Durex, dropped in her Timex and snapped the catch shut.

She checked her make-up and hair, refreshed her lipstick, squirted a little *eau de cologne*, smiling at her vanity mirror.

The cousins were in the bathroom, chatting quietly, splashing and giggling.

Walk me through the rain

Moving on

The next two years flew by.

Miriam learned to swim and decided to join *The Western Baths*. Morag's mother had arranged a student membership at half the normal rate. Miriam swam most mornings on her way to college, using the facility as a staging point in her day, doing thirty lengths followed by a cool shower, taking time to do her make-up and hair before heading along on the bus to *Anniesland College*.

This routine proved to be a good move. Another regular early morning swimmer was a single woman in her late forties called Susan. They established a friendship and began meeting once a week, breakfasting at the *University Café* on Byres Road, swapping stories and discussing fashions current at *Catherine's* where Susan became a regular customer.

Miss Susan Mills was a Senior Nurse/Administrator at the *Glasgow Family Planning Clinic* at Claremont Terrace, a ten minute walk from Baliol Street. A few months into this new friendship, Miriam explained her relationship with Juan and revealed her concern that she might 'slip-up' and become pregnant. Susan provided a form and guided Miriam with appropriately worded responses then fast-tracked her application. A week later Miriam attended an evening session at Claremont Terrace and was issued with a repeating prescription for *Boots the Chemist* located at the corner of Union Street and Argyle Street, a large bustling shop where the teenager was anonymous.

Susan strongly advised Miriam should insist Juan continue to use Durex as a safeguard against STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) providing a series of information leaflets.

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Over her years in Glasgow, Miriam established herself as a successful Saturday sales assistant at *Catherine's* and continued as a model for their fashion roadshows on Thursday evenings. During college vacations, she worked at *Catherine's* from Wednesdays to Saturdays. Over the period since arriving in Glasgow she had been saving hard. On advice from Susan, she opened a high-interest savings account at the HQ of the Glasgow Savings Bank located at Ingram Street where she accumulated just over £500. She kept this separate from her Bank of Scotland account which still hovered around £200.

The girl from Skye had also acquired an impressive wardrobe of good quality fashion garments bought from *Catherine's* bargain rail with matching shoes, sandals and boots in various lengths and styles. Mrs Corrigan had often told her she could go to London or

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Paris or Milan and easily get a position as a proper catwalk model for a fashion house, offering to provide letters of introduction to a few of her more influential contacts.

From Elsie, the beautician at Janetta's, Miriam had learned how to look after her skin and hair and had a range of toiletries which she kept in her Italian leather fashion rucksack, a birthday present from Juan for their first Christmas together, bought in the expensive shop in town where Alice had purchased her holdall.

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The last few months at Baliol Street raced by.

As her final exams approached at *Anniesland College*, Miriam was confident of success. She had been first in her class tests throughout the two years of her course.

A third draft of Juan's PhD submission had been completed and submitted to Professor Urquhart in April and the final document in triplicate was lodged in May.

Over many months while she had been transcribing his scribbles and reading and redrafting his words from her shorthand notes, Juan Garcia's command of English had steadily improved. Coaching him, helping him speak more fluently, Miriam had encouraged him to read aloud each draft from start to finish, patiently and gently correcting his pronunciation, both of them consulting his huge English to Spanish dictionary to embed the meaning of words and phrases he stumbled over. By early June when his viva (oral examination) with the external adjudicators took place, his spoken English had vastly improved, reaching a standard almost equivalent to Alice's.

Helping Juan had been a two-way learning process and Miriam now had a good working knowledge of his Galician version of Spanish. In private they often changed from English to Spanish and back again during the course of a discussion.

Juan passed his viva with flying colours and was scheduled to graduate on Friday 4 July 1969.

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They celebrated this milestone with Alice and Raphaelle at *The Rogano* in Exchange Place, enjoying a fixed price menu entitled 'A Scottish Seafood Extravaganza' which included lobster, prawns and mussels with a selection of edible seaweed, garden greens and sauteed potatoes.

Raphaelle insisted on paying, explaining that he and Alice had recently become secretly engaged and were planning to marry within a few weeks, before it became evident they had a baby on its way.

Walk me through the rain

Outside, as they said their goodbyes, Juan wondered aloud:

"That was the freshest and tastiest seafood I am ever tasting. Perhaps one day I will take up to fishing again. Uncle Fernando has promised he will leaving his fishing boat up to me. I was used to work with him when I was being a youngster."

Back at Baliol Street, alone, (Alice had returned to Edinburgh with Raphaëlle), Juan produced an impressive ring with a large pale blue sapphire and, on bended knee, popped the question Miriam had been longing to hear.

'Miriam, I am choosing this particular ring because its colour matches to your beautiful eyes and because the lady assistant has telling me why the sapphire is a good choice.'

Juan passed her a card from *Beaverbrooks*, the most famous jewellers in Glasgow, located on Argyle Street, directly opposite *Boots the Chemist*. This was a shop she knew well, where she had often stared through their windows at expensive rings like the one she now wore.

The card stated:

A sapphire in an engagement ring signifies loyalty, faithfulness, and sincerity, rooted in its deep blue colour evoking trust and eternal commitment.

It also represents wisdom, mental clarity, protection from harm, and nobility, drawing from ancient beliefs in its powers for good fortune and resilience in relationships.

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On the day after Juan's graduation, Miriam's Diploma arrived at Baliol Street by First Class post, confirming she had been awarded 'A' Grades in all her subjects.

Wendy and Janey announced they were moving to Cologne in Germany on scholarships to try to further their careers.

Alice gave notice that she intended to give up the rental on the flat at the end of July. She was recently engaged to Raphaëlle and planned to move in with him in Edinburgh now that his tenure as a Lecturer had been confirmed in writing.

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She offered to put in a good word for Miriam with her current employer but Miriam and Juan had been hatching a different plan.

Walk me through the rain

Over the Sea

During her first year in Glasgow, Miriam had travelled home to Portree only once, stressing in her telephone calls the importance of her job at *Catherine's of Partick* and emphasising she needed her wages to keep herself 'afloat'. Christmas and New Year in particular was always a very busy time and during her summer vacation from *Anniesland College* she was needed for 'holiday cover' at *Catherine's*.

The whole truth was, Miriam was not keen to see Hector, unsure what they might say to each other. Another thought haunted her - *had Sarah been fibbing about stealing Hector?* Miriam had stopped sending him postcards and had sold his Timex gift watch to a girl on her course. She then told Juan a white lie, saying she had 'accidentally' lost her watch, leaving it in the ladies toilet at *The Western Baths*. Juan had bought a replacement, one that was waterproof, stainless steel and self-winding and could be worn while swimming.

Miriam hated the idea that Hector had shared their secret but she knew that Sarah was an accomplished inquisitor, in the mould of their mother. Nor did she want to meet Sarah after their awkward telephone call. Miriam knew she had made assumptions. Perhaps she had got it all wrong calling her sister a slut, a horrible word which she regretted.

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During her time in Baliol Street, on her Sunday night calls home, she always reminded her mother she was limited to a maximum of ten minute, setting the timer on her replacement watch.

These calls home were dominated by her mother's news of church and local gossip about the goings on in her office and what their neighbours were doing. During the early weeks, nothing controversial was raised and Miriam judged (wisely) that Sarah had not shared the details of their rancid exchange on that horrible Sunday evening.

In the course of her 'on air' broadcasts, Margaret Macleod had shared only a few tantalising snippets of Sarah and her progress:

"Sarah has a fancy Mini. Your Daddy helped her with a loan although he doubts she will get around to paying him back. He still sees her sometimes when he's on his rounds but his manager is pushing him to do more and more every month. And the roads are dreadful with tourists in summer. The foreigners drive on the wrong side of the road. Maniacs."

"Sarah has more or less moved out, renting a room in a cottage near the Broadford Hotel, which is handy for her new school where she is hoping to get a promotion to Infant"

Walk me through the rain

Mistress. She used to drop in at first. She had some of her clothes here. She leaves her laundry with me now that I have a twin tub."

"When her landlady went to the care home we heard off the grapevine Miriam is trying to buy the cottage from the son but he wants to sell it at a stupid price to a retired man from Manchester. The whole place is being infested with English who seem to have money to burn."

"Miriam, the other day I checked your bedroom and I realised all Sarah's clothes and bits and pieces are gone. She had been here when we were both out. Not a word of thanks or explanation. Ungrateful besom."

*"Miriam, our Sarah has become a woman of mystery. A phantom, your Daddy says. She never comes to see us and she never telephones. It's like when she was in Glasgow all over again. At least **you** always call so we know you are still alive."*

Otherwise news of her sister was sparse. There was no mention of Hector and the 'nice policeman' ('the Corgi') had moved again, this time to Edinburgh to join the CID.

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Her visit first return to Skye took place in early July 1968 (when she knew Sarah was in Fife on holiday). Miriam stayed only a few days (Monday to Thursday).

Since moving to Glasgow she had lost contact with her year group at Portree High and her other friends from the Church. She knew from her mother's Sunday night calls, they were almost all working on the mainland, mainly Inverness, some in Edinburgh and a few in London.

Staring from the bedroom across the backyard, there was no sign of Hector at Minnie Walker's house.

When her parents were out at work, pretending to be 'Fiona', (a fictitious girl from his class at Portree High), Miriam telephoned the DIY store to be told Hector had moved to work as a kitchen hand at the Broadford Hotel. Being helpful, the office lady, who spoke with a broad Glasgow accent, added that he had a caravan located in the grounds of a cottage nearby and, unasked, recited slowly the telephone number for the hotel, information Miriam did not bother to write down.

On her second visit in July 1969, Miriam was reminded how difficult it was to travel home, involving several bus changes to reach the ferry at Kyle of Lochalsh then the slow start-stop journey on the mail bus to Portree. It was a slow boring journey, sitting just behind her father who insisted on having long, pointless conversations with every joining or departing passenger while others shouted from behind, adding their tuppences' worth.

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Then Mrs McAuley boarded and sat across the aisle from Miriam.

"Oh, there you are. The wanderer returns. We heard from your Mum you were coming. Do you know my Winifred (Freda) has landed herself a fantastic job in Edinburgh as a tour guide taking busloads of Americans around telling them about Scottish Castles and Lochs using a microphone. The tips are *enormous* and she gets to stay in fancy hotels. One man asked her to marry him and go back to Los Angeles with him. Carlos Miquel. He's in films, he said. Not that old, mid-forties, she said. He still writes to her, offered to pay her fare to fly out to visit him. First Class. He sent a photograph of his house. It's gigantic and has a swimming pool, a big one. I've always thought Winifred could be an actress so I said why don't you . . ."

Miriam fixed a smile and tuned out.

On arrival at her family home, Miriam took a long lazy bath and then 'floated' downstairs in her fleecy pyjamas to join her parents for a 'welcome home meal'. Her mother had never been interested in cooking. They ate a puff pastry steak pie from the butcher's (which was delicious) with 'brown' mashed potatoes (oversalted and boiled to death with their skins on then drowned in milk, making them into a disgusting watery sludge). There were hard roundels of undercooked carrots and garden peas from a tin. To celebrate her return, there was a short crust apple tart from the bakers (also delicious) and proper ice cream from the café.

After the meal they settled in the Front Room with mugs of sweet milky tea. Instant coffee with powdered milk had been tried years earlier and rejected as it gave Margaret indigestion and constipation, she claimed.

When her father went back through to clear up and wash the dishes, Miriam surreptitiously slipped on her engagement ring.

Flashing it theatrically, Miriam announced her 'big news'.

Margaret was clearly surprised. Recovering, she said she would make a special announcement in *The Tribune*, due out the following weekend. This proposal was not received enthusiastically by Miriam who said:

'Mum, please, don't go mad. Just keep it simple.'

Adopting the composing mode she had evolved when making suggestions to Juan for his thesis, she added:

'Look, why not say something like:

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Miriam has met a nice young Spanish man called Dr Juan Garcia and they have become engaged. They are moving to his home town of Vigo in Galicia on the north west coast of Spain.

She added:

Miriam has a Diploma in Shorthand and Typing with distinction. She is also proficient in spoken and written Spanish and plans to establish herself as a translator and language teacher.

'Miriam, is that actually true? Did you really get a 'distinction'? Can you really speak and write Spanish?'

'Mum, Yes! and Yes! Look, this is me, Miriam speaking to you, not Sarah with her fantasies.'

The tension was relieved when her father returned with more tea and *Wagon Wheels*, huge, sweet, gooey biscuits which Miriam had almost forgotten about.

They listened while Margaret sounded off about proposed changes to allow ladies to become Elders at the Church, a notion she was 'most firmly against'. This morphed into a discussion about the proposals for a new bridge to the mainland, and that she had been appointed as the secretary of 'A Bridge for Skye' pressure group, reciting at length the long list of the people she had written to and what she had said. Now her mother was in 'broadcast' mode, she might continue for hours if not deflected.

Throughout this long harangue, Miriam was waiting for questions which never arrived:

Miriam, why on earth are you moving to such a God forsaken place?

Is that not where that awful dictator General Franco is in charge?

What do you know about this man Juan Garcia? I take it he is a Catholic?

Surely the whole point of getting your qualification is to get yourself a good job with prospects?

Is your job at that fancy dress shop worth holding on to? Does it pay enough?

Miriam wondered if Freda McAuley would be mentioned.

When her mother ran out of steam, she showed her parents a full sized framed colour photograph of her in the cloisters at Glasgow University accompanied by his sister Alicia, and her fiancé Raphaëlle di Marco.

Despite repeated requests from her mother who wanted to borrow it to show to her colleagues at work and her friends at Church, Miriam refused point blank, explaining it was her only copy and that the gilt frame was expensive.

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Her father cleared away the mugs and plates, leaving her alone with her mother.

It was during this further exchange that Margaret overstepped the mark:

'Miriam, that Alicia one looks as if she is in the family way. Are you expecting too?'

'Mother, how dare you!'

Miriam deliberately banged the door behind her. It was a good excuse to escape upstairs where she packed her travel rucksack in readiness for a quick departure early next morning. While waiting - with her father's early starts, her parents were seldom up later than nine o'clock - she wrote a brief note to leave on the Kitchen table saying she would write in due course and send photographs of her wedding.

When she could hear her parents snoring, she crept downstairs and telephoned to book a taxi from the bus stop at the harbour to catch the morning ferry to Kyle of Lochalsh and retrace her outward journey of the previous day. Although this taxi would be expensive, it would be worth it, giving her a few bonus days with Juan to help him to finalise plans for their journey to Vigo.

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Settled on the bus heading back to Glasgow from Kyle of Lochalsh, Miriam took out the sheet she had typed from her notes. Led by Juan, they had studied the maps and other sources at the Mitchell Library, an exercise he hoped would help her imagine what each part of their journey might entail.

Glasgow to London - straight line about 345 miles direct, around 400 miles by train.

London to Southampton - about 80 miles by train.

Ferry to Bilbao about 700 nautical miles (just over 800 land miles).

Bilbao to Vigo by train - 350 miles.

Although the straight line distance was only around 1,000 miles, their journey would total around 1,630 miles.

At school, Miriam had been told many times that Scotland was on the western edge of Europe and it surprised her to discover Vigo was more westerly than Glasgow by about 200 miles, jutting far out into the North Atlantic Ocean.

Miriam had planned to discuss all this with her parents, to explain that she and Juan had thought things through and to assure them she had enough money saved to see them

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established in Vigo. She had also wanted to explain Juan had close relatives, particularly his adoptive parents, Uncle Don Fernando and Aunt Doña Annamaria.

According to Juan, Galicia was generally warmer than Scotland. Although it did not benefit from the Gulf Stream, it was warmed by the North Atlantic Drift which in turn meant the waters around Vigo were teeming with fish.

Like Glasgow there was always the chance of rain in summer but generally it was light, more settled. Vigo was seldom very hot, not like the beach holiday towns in the south of Spain. From September to March it could be wet and windy, sometimes with gales for a few days at a time. Sleet occurred but snow was very rare. Winter temperatures were normally above freezing but on clear nights there could be ground frost and icy roads.

Year round, people generally lived a more outdoor life and congregated in the streets in the evenings to walk and talk, eat ice cream, drink coffee and catch up on gossip.

The main thing which amazed and intrigued Miriam was that the population of Vigo was around 190,000 people compared with only around 7,500 residents for Skye, information which Juan had found listed in the University records. These records showed the island's population had been in slow decline since WW2. By contrast the population of Galicia as a whole had remained steady at around 2.7 million despite the steady drain of families to other parts of Spain and Europe and to America, seeking political freedom and hoping for a better life.

Despite Alicia's dire warnings, Juan was much more optimistic about their future living in Vigo. From typing his thesis over its many drafts, Miriam could list his final summary by heart:

The restoration of existing Paradors and the creation of new Paradors is a positive measure, creating employment and encouraging tourism, particularly benefiting Galicia.

Tourism is the main growth area in the local economy as it brings hard currency to the region, a goal which Franco has consistently pursued with great vigour, visiting Galicia each summer and touring the area to promote his vision.

The development and promotion of The Camino de Santiago, The Way of St. James leading to Santiago de Compostela is a crucially important development, attracting well-heeled tourist from all over the World and bringing in hard currency to the Galician economy.

The Franco Stabilisation Plan and his Government's long term promotion and funding of industry for the area has been successful. This can be evidenced by

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the thriving network of canning factories focused on fish like sardines, tuna, and seafood as well as some vegetable preserves.

Inflation has dropped in recent years and the Galician economy has benefited.

The entire north coast of Spain is set for growth but these initiatives are being hampered by a lack of skilled labour.

Education and training must be a key focus over the next decade.

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With the trip to Vigo now imminent, Miriam's mind was swirling with the story of Alicia and Juan Garcia and how they had arrived in Glasgow. When Alicia had discovered they were lovers, she sat with them and shared the story of her journey into exile.

Sadly, Juan and Alicia had been orphaned as small children. Their parents had resisted the Franco regime and had been imprisoned, where they died of tuberculosis. Fortunately, their aunt and uncle kept them safe from Franco's War Orphan programme which would have sent them to a Catholic Church Orphanage or to be adopted by 'approved families' sympathetic to the Franco regime, both options which usually exported orphans far from Galicia.

In her early teens, Alicia had been outspoken. She had organised a protest rally, making her a target for Franco's bureaucrats who controlled the police. She had narrowly escaped arrest by hiding at Annamaria's smallholding. Uncle Fernando smuggled her aboard his fishing boat and they sailed along the coast to France, a five day journey, to his younger brother, Uncle Manalo (Manuel) who was settled there, living in exile and married to a local girl. Manalo was a train driver and took her to Le Harve where he had a cousin Uncle Xose (Joseph), who smuggled her to Troon on his much larger deep sea fishing boat.

Later, when Juan graduated from the *Universidad de Santiago de Compostela*, he replicated Alice's journey to Troon where she met him, took him to Baliol Street and helped him make his application to study at *Glasgow University* as a PhD student.

Juan had explained that Uncle Fernando and his wife Annamaria were around sixty years old but still in good health. Supported by his five-man crew, Don Fernando Garcia made a profitable living from inshore fishing along the rocky coast around Vigo in his purpose built vessel, *La Estrella de Galicia (The Star of Galicia)*, the largest and most impressive vessel in Vigo harbour.

With her sister Carme (Carmen), Annamaria had a half share in a market garden smallholding growing vegetables, soft fruits and sweet table grapes, smaller greenhouse

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tomatoes and larger outdoor varieties in various colours known locally as *tomates beefsteak*. This market garden had been Annamaria's family home where her widowed sister Carme Martinez lived with Luisa, her surviving spinster daughter. Carme's husband and their other three children had succumbed to a typhoid epidemic in the 1950s.

As a trio, Annamaria, Carme and Luisa, ran a thriving market stall, located near Annamaria's waterfront home where they sold their garden produce alongside Fernando's daily catch. This productive garden was located in a lush valley a short drive from the harbour. As a girl Annamaria had taken their produce to market with a donkey cart. Nowadays she drove a Citroen AZU van (based on the Citroen 2CV car), sourced in France by Manolo and delivered on his annual summer visit.

Alicia had a photograph which showed it in its original grey but Juan said it had since been repainted by Luisa with a white bonnet, blue doors and the high sided boxy rear load compartment in a vivid green, three colours associated with Galician history and prominent at traditional fiestas.

He had talked about Galician street music and dancers, explaining it was a bit like the music and dancing they had enjoyed at the *Highlanders' Institute* near the Mitchell Library. Miriam had previously explained that she had been enrolled by her father in the junior section of the *Isle of Skye Pipe Band* which rehearsed in Portree, practicing on a chanter, leaving the band before progressing to full-sized bagpipes. Juan said Galician bagpipes were called *gaita galega* meaning 'pipes with a bag', with tuning which produced a higher, shriller sound than Scottish bagpipes.

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Reeking of tobacco and pipe smoke, the cold, damp bus trundled on, moving slowly alongside the series of lochs leading to Fort William, stopping occasionally to pick up or drop off passengers.

Huddled in her old gaberdine school coat, looking out from her misted window seat at the blustery rain raising white waves on the loch they were passing, Miriam wondered how Juan's family and friends in Vigo would react to his choice of a Scottish girl as his fiancée. Her mind strayed again to her unspoken anxiety.

Would they try to put him off their impending marriage? Did they have someone else in mind for him, someone local, the daughter of a friend?

Searching through her handbag for a packet of minty chewing gum, she realised she had left her small bottle of contraceptive pills in the bathroom at Portree. Smiling, she wondered if it mattered. She knew all forms of contraception were strictly forbidden in Spain. In any case, she was hoping to persuade Juan that they should try for a baby as

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soon as they were married. She was sure a baby would be welcomed by his family, sealing their marriage. As it had been doing for months now, her mind centred on the idea of having a baby.

The bus swayed along.

Miriam stared unseeing at the rain smeared the windows, closed her eyes and slipped once more into a familiar reverie:

In her half-awake daydream she was walking along a high clifftop, looking out to sea.

There was a shore of golden sand with white topped waves collapsing and racing back to repeat and repeat.

A tall dark haired man and slightly smaller fair haired woman walked side by side, holding hands.

Ahead of them two boys raced along, pulling kites into the sky.

She could not hear their words but it was clear they were happy, contented.

Her dream faded and she fell into a deep sound sleep.

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When Miriam Macleod slipped into the flat in Baliol Street, her overnight visit to Portree had been bracketed by two days of hard travelling. She was longing for a long, hot bath and something interesting and tasty to eat and a nice glass of smooth red wine before an early night.

Juan greeted her with a tight hug and a long, long kiss.

'You mother she call three times, demand speak to you. I say you not here. The man at GPO come take handset away. I forgot this.'

'Good. Very good. Tomorrow we can use the office telephone at *The Western Baths*. I want to see Mrs McCann and leave a farewell message and thank you card for Morag and Cathie. And I need a swim. I'll sign you in as my guest.'

'No, I prefer sea to swim, more refresh. After book ferry to Bilbao, I go Subway to station book our sleeping bunks, okay? Mrs Kennedy, was start her big clean-up for new tenant. Alicia room and cousins room she say 'out of bounds' to us. I give help them and she say okay, we allow to stay to next Thursday, no longer.'

'Who is Mrs Kennedy?'

Walk me through the rain

'Our new clean lady. Flat is sold to new landlord.'

'Oh, Alice didn't tell me. Did she know?'

'Maybe, not sure. Let me show you what I have bought for us, for both of us.'

Beaming, Juan opened a largish, shiny bag with many side pockets and a long shoulder strap to reveal an impressive camera and its three lenses. He fitted a lens and handed the camera to her.

'A Minolta?'

'Yes, a Minolta SRT 101. It is with TTL -Through The Lens - focus. The 'bundle' give to us three lens with normal, wide angle and zoom. This is most reliable camera model in world. It say this in magazine they give to me. I take already photographs of all our favourite places. I use slide film. *Williamsons* do rush job for me. Get tomorrow. I show you with hand viewer. You remember, I tell to you Luisa have projector and screen for slide show, for Bible Teaching class?'

'Juan, was it very expensive?'

'It was 'bundle' at £85. I buy at sale of *Williamsons for Cameras*, you know, near our end at Sauchiehall Street. They nice people. They gave to me bonus, free camera bag and ten rolls of print films and ten rolls of slide films.'

'Juan, where did you get £85?'

'Alicia slip to me £100 before leave to Edinburgh. She say we must to buy *good* camera to send to her photographs of our wedding.'

'Juan, why did you not tell me you were going to do this, spend our money like that?'

'Yes, Miriam, I do it with impulse. I am sorry you angry. It was last day of sale, last Minolta in shop. You were Skye. You know I am hope for lecturer position at the *Escuela des Artes e Oficios* (a technical/vocational school in Vigo). You know *mi mentor, mi supervisor de curso de Universidad de Santiago de Compostela* has promise to me help with *carta de respaldo* (letter of endorsement). This camera will be important tool. Luisa will help me. She taught to Alicia long time ago.'

'Does Luisa not have a camera you could use?'

'Not good one like Minolta. We share to Luisa. She careful. She creative. She teach to us. You know photography is important life skill for modern world, good teaching.'

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'Yes, I do understand and I do agree but please, Juan, we have to be very careful with our money. You know we agreed to try for a baby soon so we *must* keep our spending in check until we can start earning a living, find an income.'

'Don't worry, my darling Miriam, Uncle Don Fernando help us, all time. He rich man.'

'Juan, I'm glad you have a family we can fall back on but I like to be self-sufficient. You know that.'

Juan smiled his winning smile and wrapped his arms around her, sought her lips. They hugged and kissed again and the tension eased between them.

'Miriam, please not to worry. It all work out. I put immerser to heat bath to you. We drink coffee? Alicia leave her percolator to us. Raphaelle has better new one. The money of his died uncle in Milan has come from *el abogado del testament* (the lawyer of the testament). Raphaelle di Marco is rich man now. I too will be rich one day.'

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The stage was set.

Miriam now had a British Passport in her maiden name. Juan thought this was a good idea, a protection against General Franco and his 'bureaucracy'. They would go through customs separately. Although he thought it unlikely, the border control clerks at Bilboa might have his name on their list as a missing person, a traitor, watching for his return. If there was a problem, they would get a message to Uncle Don Fernando and he would bring his boat, pay an easement (a bribe) and take them to Vigo.

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On Thursday 30 July 1969, they took a taxi to the Post Office in George Square a sent a huge trunk ahead to Vigo. This trunk contained most of their clothes and shoes, Miriam's IBM Selectric and a copy of Juan's PhD thesis and a few of his most precious books including both volumes of his huge English to Spanish dictionary.

They walked a few hundred yards to Glasgow Central Station with sleeper tickets for London Euston, planning to catch a ferry from Portsmouth to Bilbao the next day. They had reserved a two-berth inside cabin rather than share a cheaper four-berth cabin or pay for a more expensive outer cabin.

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Vigo

The pair arrived in Bilbao on Tuesday 5 August 1969, mid-morning.

They disembarked from the ferry separately, as if they were independent travellers.

Dressed in a business suit and carrying a briefcase with a cream coloured raincoat and a tightly rolled umbrella draped over his right arm, Juan wore the haughty smile he had practiced and offered a battered British passport which showed he was "Professor Donald Anderson Urquhart". This expensive fake had been procured on the black market by his Uncle Don Fernando and posted to Baliol Street.

If questioned Juan would explain (in English) he was due to attend a Conference in Bordeaux in two days' time. If further questioned, he had a copy of his previous mentor's paper entitled "Recent studies of the integration of agricultural practices in Britain and their applicability to Europe".

Juan's ruse worked. Taken to be another weary bureaucrat, his passport was stamped and he was waved through with a knowing, deferential smile.

Dressed as a dowdy travel worn tourist wearing a beige linen knee length skirt and a pale green blouse and darker green cardigan with her holdall by her side, Miriam had infiltrated a student group and shuffled forward to the custom's kiosk chatting to an American girl beside her. Judged to be another itinerant hippy who must be tolerated under the new rules, her shiny new British passport was inspected, a blank page selected, stamped ferociously and handed back without comment.

'Muchos gracias, Señor.'

'Bienvenida a España, Señorita', this time with a smile.

As agreed the pair met at the *Basilica de Santa Maria de Begona*, towering clearly above the ferry terminal. From here, they walked through busy streets to the train station and caught the next train to Vigo.

In the ladies toilet at Vigo station, Miriam changed into her chosen outfit, brushed her hair and did her make-up, taking care to make it perfect. For Miriam, this was her moment, her opportunity to impress. From Vigo station they walked to the market square near the harbour. The afternoon was warm and sunny with a pleasant onshore breeze.

Miriam Macleod from Skye held Juan's hand and they progressed through the busy streets. Wearing wraparound sunglasses, her fair hair in a long ponytail, she held her chin high, acting the part of a haughty film star. She was sheathed in a figure hugging

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Christian Dior inspired A-Line knee-length cotton dress in pale blue with a lightweight cream coloured cardigan draped over her shoulders, cat-walking slowly and elegantly on cream sandals with mint green mini-heels to match the edging trim on her cardigan.

This was a favourite outfit from *Catherine's* bargain rail. She had others in the travel trunk which, she hoped, had already arrived.

As planned, she turned men's heads and drew whispered comments from women and girls she swished past.

Annamaria and Luisa were serving the last of their customers for the day as the market was closing. Miriam was hugged and kissed by both women and Luisa was sent to fetch her Uncle Don Fernando from *Villa Marina*, his family home located high above the harbour.

As they were unmarried, it was decided that Miriam should live with Luisa and Carme while Juan with stay with his aunt and uncle. Miriam knew she was probably pregnant but had not yet shared her news with Juan. She desperately hoped their wedding would happen soon but Juan had warned her it may take weeks to arrange.

He had explained the background to his home church which had been undergoing a period of unrest and change since the death of the previous pastor Edmundo Woodford, an Englishman from Surrey who had led the congregation for decades until his death in 1966 aged 75. Protestant churches throughout Spain were believe to harbour Republicans opposed to the Franco regime. Like other non-conforming religions they had been persecuted by Franco's bureaucrats for decades.

Although this was true, Juan had said Catholic churches had also been oppressed by the regime.

Like all Dictators, Franco did not tolerate 'other voices'.

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Iglesia Pi y Margall

Early on the following day, Don Fernando accompanied Juan and Miriam to a meeting he had arranged with Tomaso Watson, the new Pastor of *Iglesia Pi y Margall*, a small independent church named after the street of the same name and located close to the fish market and docks. This church was designated for Protestant worship, where Don Fernando and Doña Annamaria were members. Juan and Alicia had been Baptised there as children by Pastor Woodford.

Tomaso Watson (aged 42) and his wife Arianna (aged 41), were incomers to Vigo who had arrived five years earlier. In 1847, (known as 'Black '47'), the original Watson family came to Galicia from Glasgow at the height of the Potato Famine in Britain. Carried as fee-paying passengers onboard a Portuguese deep sea fishing sailing vessel returning from Troon with a hold full of *bacalao* (salted cod), they settled in La Guarda, a small fishing community far to the southwest of Vigo, close to the Portuguese border.

The original Watsons, John and his son Thomas, were Protestants from the Methodist tradition. On arrival, they became members of a small group of like-minded Evangelicals which met in an *Iglesia de la casa comunitaria* (a Community House Church).

John and Thomas had brought with them printing skills and equipment. Within a decade, through hard work and sharp business acumen, the pair had established a thriving printing business, producing mainly small booklets, publicity material and religious tracts as part of their evangelical outreach. Later, 'resisting the evil of the Franco years', the Watsons printed subversive republican tracts in both Galician Spanish and their 'remembered form' of English, a language which they had clung to steadfastly down through the decades.

During these post WW2 years of Franco's oppression, Tomaso Watson and Arianna's Sanchez (a seamstress) had been a close couple but her family were devout Catholics and had steadfastly opposed their marriage. The years rolled by, the matter unresolved.

On the death of his widowed father, Tomaso took over the business and employed Arrianna's cousin Umberto Sanchez as his foreman. Umberto was married to Arianna's second cousin Catarina and both husband and wife were skilful and diligent workers.

When Arianna's widowed mother died, Tomaso and Arrianna began making plans to elope, to make a fresh start. The fishing community grapevine had suggested that Pastor Woodford at the *Iglesia Pi y Margall* in Vigo may be able to help them. The impetus to make this move arose when Catarina died in childbirth due to excessive blood loss, leaving

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Umberto with seven older children to care for. The infants, twin girls, were healthy and immediately baptised as Isobella and Teresa to protect their mortal souls.

Umberto, was already a proficient deputy, a skilled typesetter and capable businessman. As part of the agreement to sell the printing business to him, Umberto Sanchez was pleased to be relieved of the responsibility of his two new infant daughters and was confident that Arianna would make a good mother.

In the spring of 1965, Tomaso and Arianna set off for Vigo with their adopted children, still unmarried.

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In Vigo, they sought out Edmundo Woodford who was pleased to have found a man who spoke fairly good English and who was a true believer. Edmondo's wife Elena was unwell with bronchitis. Arianna volunteered to nurse her and Woodford invited them to stay at his house. Woodford was also in poor health and Tomaso Watson became his Deputy.

With the help of Don Fernando Garcia, Woodford's church secretary and most trusted supporter, Tomaso sourced a modern printing press and set himself up as a one-man operation along the lines of his previous enterprise in La Guarda, thereby establishing himself as a legitimate businessman.

Pastor Woodford and Don Fernando Garcia guided Tomaso and Arianna through the bureaucratic maze and, after 'closed door negotiations', the incomers from La Guarda were eventually granted licences to marry, thereby legitimising the twins whom they passed off as their own.

The congregation at *Iglesia Pi y Margall* was in slow decline and Tomaso Watson received only a meagre payment for his pastoral care inputs. From the outset Arianna needed to find work to help support her family financially. After a few false starts, she established a good reputation for *traballo a destajo* (piece work), working for smaller ladies fashion houses, mainly alterations and occasionally making entire garments *hecho a medida* (tailor made) for 'special occasion' clients.

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The day after their arrival in Vigo, armed with this foreknowledge imparted by Uncle Fernando, Juan and Miriam went with him to meet Tomaso Watson.

During a long morning session while they drank 'black Scottish tea' without milk or sugar, and crunched on home-made 'ginger snaps', (baked to a recipe brought from Glasgow, Tomaso said) Juan and Miriam gave a carefully rehearsed version of their story, asking Tomaso if he could help them to find a way to marry.

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After a short prayer, Tomaso left them to visit the *Ayuntamiento* (Town Hall).

While they waited, Arianna returned home and was introduced by Don Fernando. More tea and ginger snaps were offered but politely refused.

Miriam played with Isobella and Teresa while Arianna concentrated on her work, her replacement Singer sewing machine (an electric model) whirring in the background.

Whistling off-key, Tomaso arrived, smiling broadly and bringing the necessary forms, advising cheerfully:

'Once more our God works in mysterious ways, my dear friends. Aye, I think we can speed your application. As I explained, you will need to fund a *bajo la mesa* (a payment paid under the table). Aye, we are blessed. Under God's hand, it has come to pass that our *Encargado de Registro Civil* (official Manager) has been lingering in hospital for many weeks recovering from stomach surgery. Sadly, he is not expected to live. Aye, and our *Interino*, (temporary Deputy) is a man with many children and a spendthrift wife. The dear man has many, many pressing debts. For a *morbida* (easement payment) he seems to be willing to smooth our path. But first we must complete the paperwork.'

Thomas guided Juan and Miriam through the form-filling process which he counter-signed as their *garante* (Guarantor). He then accompanied the young couple to the *Registro Civil* located within *Ayuntamiento*, where they completed a further series of forms, paid the official fee of 500 pesetas and were granted a *Certificado de Non Impedimento*, (Certificate of No Impediment to Marriage).

While this slow pantomime was being acted out, Don Fernando Garcia sat outside in the sun, closed his eyes and prayed.

For an additional (unofficial) payment of 7,000 pesetas (about £40, equal to a month's wages), they were issued with two marriage certificates, a *Certificado literal de Matrimonio* (a full wedding certificate) plus a *Certificado de Matrimonio en Extracto* (a short form certificate). At Miriam's whispered request, Juan paid a further unofficial fee of 1,000 pesetas for two photocopies of each of these documents, one copy to be sent to her parents in Portree, the other to Alicia with colour prints of their wedding photographs.

With the official business concluded, Tomas left them to return to his wife and children. Juan and Miriam met Don Fernando at the far side of the *Piazza Ayuntamiento* where hugs were exchanged, hands were shaken. They went to directly to Uncle Fernando's house where Annamaria had been praying for a successful outcome. Here they celebrated by drinking coffee (milky and sweet for Miriam) and eating *Bica*, a dense but soft cinnamon scented sponge, a Galician delicacy.

Walk me through the rain

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The religious confirmation of their civil marriage was celebrated in a simple service at Carme's smallholding on Saturday 9 August 1969.

Juan wore his graduation suit and shiny black shoes with a white carnation in his button hole. At twenty-seven, he was in his prime, assured, debonair, chatty and witty and funny, the centre of attention at the ceremony then holding court at the reception which followed when they changed into less formal clothes. It was a side of Juan which Miriam had not seen before and she was pleased for him and for herself for having made such a good marriage.

Miriam wore an elegant but rather dowdy tailored day dress bought from a mid-priced Vigo boutique on the Rua do Principe. There was a small discount as Arianna was a 'friend of the shop', regularly doing piecework for the owner Doña Maria Garcia, the older sister of Fernando. Miriam learned later that Don Fernando was actually the owner of this business which he had started years earlier to give his sister status and a hobby she enjoyed.

Doña Maria with her younger sister Carme and her spinster daughter Luisa were also a longstanding members of the *Iglesia Pi y Margall* congregation and were present at this private marriage confirmation service.

Seated in her wheelchair, now 76, Doña Maria, was one of the oldest residents of Vigo. She was a happy, jolly old lady but clearly frail and prone to falling asleep and was present only for the initial part of the proceedings after which she was taken home by Anita her maid, a fierce lady in her early fifties who drove an elderly Citroën ID 19 with its 'shark nose', a lime green model with a white roof. Juan explained this car was owned by Don Fernando, given on loan to his sister who needed two sticks to walk more than a few paces.

The Bride's wedding outfit was made from a serviceable wool blend, medium weight, more autumn than summer, fashioned in pale mauve, styled for 'just below the knee', making it suitable for future church or business occasions, she had been advised. This was complemented by a fitted jacket in a darker shade of mauve with pale grey low heels, (retrieved from their trunk which had finally arrived two days before).

Even this dowdy outfit could not detract from Miriam's stunning figure and shining complexion. Her dainty ears were adorned with pearl earrings borrowed from Luisa and a tiny Pill Box hat in striking pink with her hair cropped to an ear-length pixie bob (she had soon discovered that Vigo was subject to many days of windy weather making long hair a constant trial).

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Everyone agreed she looked like a film star, perhaps a younger, blonde version of Sara Montiel ⁴. At twenty-one, Miriam Macleod was in full bloom and, surrounded by her new family and friends, she was finding that her Galician Spanish was coming to her lips more naturally.

Assisted by Isobella and Teresa Watson as flower girls, Luisa was Miriam's *Dama de honor* (Principal Bridesmaid), all three in matching full-length dresses in a pale yellow taffeta made for the occasion on Arianna's Singer sewing machine.

Luisa, who was also the photographer, used her tripod and the novel delay timer mechanism on the Minolta to ensure she was included in all the main shots.

Wearing a white dog collar and a purple shirt, Pastor Tomaso Watson officiated, conducting a proper Christian wedding.

Simple gold bands were given and received. Hugs, kisses and handshakes were exchanged as each member of the wedding group streamed past to acknowledge the newly-weds and wishing them "*Felicidades!*" (congratulations), "*Que seáis muy felices!*" (may you be very happy), and hopes for a bright future such as "*Que tengáis un buen futuro!*" or "*Que vuestro futuro esté lleno de felicidad!*".

Each person in turn passed a sealed envelope containing a cash gift to help the young couple establish themselves. These gifts were immediately collected by Carme for safekeeping. (The following day, Miriam was astonished to learn they had received nearly 100,000 pesetas (£600). Juan said the major part had most probably been gifted by Uncle Don Fernando who, Juan confided for the first time, was probably one of the richest men in Vigo.)

At the *El Banquete de Bodas* (wedding reception/festa) the guest list was limited to Uncle Fernando and Aunt Annamarie, Aunt Carme and cousin Luisa plus Tomaso and Arriana and their twins. The crew members of *La Estrella de Galicia* with their wives and children were also present making a total of thirty-six.

Luisa took colour photographs and, after a short delay for printing and framing, copies were sent home to Portree together with a copy of their wedding certificates, stressing they had been married by a Protestant Pastor with Scottish roots.

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Sara Montiel began acting at 16 in Spanish films then starred in Mexican cinema during its golden age. Montiel broke into Hollywood in the 1950s with roles alongside Gary Cooper and Burt Lancaster, becoming Spain's first major female cinema star despite her limited English.

Walk me through the rain

The food was followed by the arrival of a local group of musicians who played and sang and danced, encouraging the Bride and Groom to join them.

The evening ended early to be sure everyone was home by eleven o'clock at the latest to comply with a recent police curfew following a rowdy fight between visiting supporters of *La Coruna* and the local *Celta Vigo* fans.

Juan and Miriam spent their honeymoon night in the original cottage about 500 metres from the main building where Carme, Annamaria and Luisa were staying.

On the Monday after their wedding Juan and Miriam visited the *Correos y Telegrafos* (main post office) where they sat in a queue for two hours to make a long distance call to Alicia and Raphaele in Edinburgh, promising they would send the wedding photographs and copies of the wedding certificates soon.

Their good news was dampened by the news that Alicia had lost her baby leading Miriam to once again withhold her own news from Juan.

Walk me through the rain

Circle of Life

Doña Maria Garcia passed away silently in her sleep three days after the *El Banquete de Boda* to celebrate the marriage of her nephew to the foreign girl.

Miriam and Juan were living with Carme and Luisa at the smallholding where they had established themselves in the cottage, a ten minute walk from the main house.

It was early morning, around eight o'clock, when Annamaria arrived, driving the large green and white-top Citroen, tooting the horn. Anita Alvarez was a passenger, her face buried in a towel, weeping, distraught, inconsolable.

The story unfolded. Anita had wakened suddenly, before dawn, with a strange feeling that there was something amiss. She had crept into Maria's bedroom to find her mistress unresponsive. Hoping this was another temporary seizure, Anita had called their *o médico de cabeceira* (private General Practitioner) who had arrived within minutes. Sadly, Maria Garcia had been dead for several hours.

Don Fernando Garcia was at sea and was not expected back for several days, planning to land his catch at La Guarda where the prices were said to be higher as the local fleet (mainly smaller vessels) had been confined to harbour by a period of bad weather.

Luisa went off in her van to collect Tomaso Watson who arrived and examined the medical certificate, nodding. After a short discussion, Luisa drove Tomaso to the *Ayuntamiento*. Juan accompanied Tomaso as the male representative of the Garcia family, bundled into the rear beside the garden produce already packed, ready for the market stall.

On payment of an easement, the necessary paperwork was completed quickly.

At the smallholding, Miriam, unable to follow the rapid Galician Spanish accurately and confused by the turmoil, was relegated to become a bystander. To make herself useful she made fresh coffee and laid out Bica for the others.

Annamaria drove off in the large Citroen taking Anita back to Doña Maria's apartment located over the shop to prepare the body for the coffin prior to transfer to *Iglesia Pi y Margall*.

Juan and Luisa returned with the paperwork required to enable the cremation of Doña Maria's corpse. Juan explained the urgency and encouraged Miriam to wear her most sombre outfit. Luisa gave her a black veil. Over the next period, Luisa drove them in relays to the church where others had gathered with the coffin set on a trestle in front of the tiny altar.

Walk me through the rain

As the senior male, acting in his Uncle's place, Juan assisted in the short committal service after which they trailed the coffin on foot to the crematorium reserved for Protestants and other non-Catholics.

By late afternoon, they were all back at *Villa Marina*, preparing a list of invitations for the memorial service to take place the next day at *Iglesia Pi y Margall*.

From Juan, Miriam had learned that this 'rushed' procedure was normal for Protestants who, unlike Catholics, were not encouraged to bury their dead in cemeteries or indulge in elaborate religious ceremonies.

On that first day, immediately after the cremation, Juan and Anita had walked from the church to *Modas Maria* located near the city centre to post a notice that the shop would be closed until further notice.

A message had been sent to the harbour at La Guarda but so far there was no sign of *La Estrella de Galicia*. There had been another bad storm and perhaps Fernando had decided to return to Vigo.

Two days of waiting followed.

Miriam was suffering the early stages of morning sickness but had still not shared her news.

At *Villa Marina*, Annamaria was locked in her bedroom. Her market stall was tended by Luisa, selling only fruit and vegetables but no fish.

Anita, now partially recovered, had taken charge at *Villa Marina*, preparing meals, seeing to the two maids, organising cleaning and laundry.

In the wake of Doña Maria's death, rumours about the missing Don Fernando Garcia spread like wildfire.

On the third day *La Estrella de Galicia* limped into Vigo harbour, its gear and rigging damaged, its fish holds empty. A great storm had blown them almost to Vigo before changing direction and taking them out to sea, far from land. During the struggle, Fernando Garcia had stumbled on his weak knee and fallen overboard, lost at sea.

Juan went immediately to the harbour and with the authorities the matter was discussed and the paperwork completed, signed first by each member of the crew and countersigned by Jose Maria Perez (Pepe), the deputy skipper, a forty-two year old family man who had served under Fernando Garcia since he was a teenager. The entire crew were heartbroken, numbed, fearful for their future, dreading their boat might be sold. When the harbour officials left, Juan remained on board and had a long meeting

Walk me through the rain

with them and asked them to be patient, telling them he would work out a solution, reassuring them he did not intend to sell *La Estrella de Galicia*.

Since arriving back in Vigo, Juan had discussed this issue with his uncle who had advised he intended to promote Pepe as the full skipper when he retired.

Together they had inspected the damage to the boat. Juan tasked Pepe to have her hauled out and checked thoroughly for possible unseen damage to the hull, propellor and steering and to make plans for any repairs and re-fitting, asking him to have the crew repaint *La Estrella de Galicia* as a sign that it would soon return to service.

Before leaving, Juan made his first important decision, asking Pepe to take charge as full skipper and recruit a junior deck hand to complete the required complement. They shook hands on the deal and agreed to review Pepe's wages and catch share at a later date.

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That evening Tomaso and Arriana Watson called at *Villa Marina*.

Those present were Annamaria, Juan and Miriam, Carme and Luisa and Anita, in her role as assistant manager of *Modas Maria*. The gathered in the *o comedor* (Dining Room).

Anita had prepared a modest *banquete de bodas* (post funeral meal).

Tomaso stood, clasped his hands in front and closed his eyes and adopting Galician Spanish, prayed:

Loving Heavenly Father, at times of tragedy we cannot see why you allow us to suffer. Yet we look again to the Cross of Calvary where your Only Begotten Son hung and died to set us free, to redeem us that we might enter Heaven free of our burden of sin.

Praise be the Lord!

Give us strength to live out the rest of our lives in obedience and to be ever ready to accept the challenges you place before us.

Listen to us as we offer up our silent prayers and ask for your guidance.

This we ask in Jesus Precious Name,

Amen.

Speaking in formal Spanish he added:

'*Juan, tienes una lista de temas que deberíamos tratar.*' (Juan, you have a list of topics we should address.)

Walk me through the rain

Juan circulated a document with a named copy for each of those present.

It had been typed by Miriam, first in Spanish with a transcription below in English.

My dear Uncle Fernando is dead.

However, we have the testimony of the crew who witnessed his slip when the bow swung violently, saw him bang his head on the gunwhale and stumble over into high waves. Hampered by the storm, they searched the area as best they could but did not find him.

We may never find his body.

Tomaso and I have spoken to a man called Don Ramon Varela Lopez, an Abogado (Solicitor) at his office near the Calle del Principe. This man has wide experience of similar accidents at sea and the ramifications which arise. Don Ramon suggests the official certification of Uncle Don Fernando's death might take six to nine months after which the terms of his Will can be progressed to a conclusion.

I, Juan Garcia, have been designated as his sole heir.

There is a codicil which places on me the burden of caring for my adoptive mother Annamaria and sharing the net proceeds of Uncle Don Fernando's estate equitably with my sister Alicia. This particular requirement will take time and ingenuity to resolve as Alicia is probably still on a list of disruptors, rebels. The topic of my sister can be discussed verbally but we must not put anything in writing. To do so would put everything at risk.

In terms of the day-to-day operation of Uncle Don Fernando's business interests we are fortunate that my Aunt Annamaria can sign cheques for the many business bank accounts which operate under the main account where the profits and losses are summarised on a month-by-month basis. I have already discussed matters with the bank and they are taking steps to authorise me and my wife Miriam to countersign cheques and bank transfers.

My uncle was a generous man and I have inherited many investments in local businesses, some large and some smaller, such as *Modas Maria* which was fronted by my aunt Doña Maria Garcia, now sadly also deceased. Her death adds another complication as her Will made Uncle Don Fernando her sole heir to this business.

What I did not know until I opened my uncle's safe is that Don Fernando Garcia has built up a 78% stake in the new cannery recently renamed as *Conservas Masso* which is well-run and is generating good returns.

Walk me through the rain

This cannery already employs over a hundred and fifty workers and has established itself as a major supplier to Catalonia and the rest of Spain, France and Portugal. I cannot prove this, but I believe Don Fernando invested in the original version of *Conservas Masso* to encourage the cannery to expand and provide greater job opportunities for local people.

The other two main assets which I have inherited are this house, '*Villa Marina*', and his fishing boat, '*La Estrella de Galicia*'.

We must expect a long and tortuous legal process ahead of us over the next year or so but meanwhile, we must keep our businesses running. This means we need to open '*Modas Maria*' soon, get the market stall running again, get '*La Estrella de Galicia*' back to sea and fishing profitably.

We must not dishonour Uncle Fernando's heritage by letting these enterprises which we now control directly to fail from lack of effort and energy.

Please do not discuss the information which I have just provided with anyone outside this room. May I add that the positive balance in Uncle Fernando's main account is substantial. We must be bold enough to use it wisely and put it to work without delay.

I know my uncle trusted and respected all of you, that he regarded you as his family. I too will be depending on each and every person in this room to support me, to help us all succeed as a family and continue his legacy.

Finally, please pass your copies to Miriam who will burn them later. Thank you.

'Now Anita, I believe there is food?'

Anita rose, dipped her head and moved to the temporary serving bench and removed the napkins which covered the loaded plates.

'Tomaso, will you bless God's bounty that we may eat, please?'

Walk me through the rain

Modas Maria

The newlyweds were now living in *Villa Marina*. Annamaria had chosen to move to live at the smallholding with Carme and Luisa.

As the new head of the household at *Villa Marina*, Miriam had inherited Maria and Josepha Manoli, middle-aged spinster sisters. Before leaving, Annamaria had revealed their secret, explaining they were not actually sisters but *parejas lesbianas* (lesbian partners) a fact they kept hidden from others adding that although they could be taciturn they were otherwise good workers. These two ladies had been at *Villa Marina* for three decades. They had lived in the villa for the first few years but at Annamaria's request, Fernando had found them a small apartment in the next street. Like Anita, Maria and Josepha were incomers from Transmano about thirty kilometre from Vigo and all three had attended the same convent school as teenagers.

In theory, following the daily routine established under Annamaria, the Manoli sisters should arrive before breakfast and stay until after the dinner dishes had been washed up and put away. However, when Fernando was away fishing, they had been less prompt and now, with a new 'child' in charge they began pushing the boundaries trying to find out if Miriam had the mettle to scold them.

In her daily visits, Anita saw immediately what they were up to and asked if she could move into *Villa Marina*, making the excuse she was finding it lonely in the apartment above the shop. The house was large and spacious and Anita chose the rooms the sisters had once occupied, near the Kitchen, by the rear entrance.

From school days Maria and Josepha knew Anita had a waspish tongue and after a few 'corrections' they quickly settled to deferential obedience and went about their duties cheerfully, singing and chatting to each other.

Miriam also discovered that Anita had a quick mind as well as a sharp tongue. She was glad to have Anita available as her buffer and adviser on the many differences she was discovering. Juan was now away for long periods each day, unavailable to answer her queries as they arose. Anita often seemed to understand instinctively what Miriam needed to know.

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A week on from the meeting with the extended 'family' group, at around three o'clock in the morning by the fluorescent dial on her stainless steel watch, Miriam's baby was no

Walk me through the rain

more. Juan had slept on unknowing as she sat in the huge family bathroom, weeping, bereft.

Later, mid-morning, Miriam Macleod Garcia and Anita Alvarez were alone in *Modas Maria* with the front door locked and the blinds drawn to protect the stock from the fierce sunlight. The office was dim and warm, humid, with a slight odour of decay and urine. In her final years, Doña Maria had been 'leaky'. The carpets were threadbare, badly needing replaced. Indeed the whole shop was run down, old fashioned, like the garments on their display mannequins. With the safe open, the business ledgers spread out on a long table, Anita had been explaining the ordering process, shaking her head while looking at the lists of items Doña Maria had selected from the Madrid trade catalogues for the forthcoming Winter and Spring collections.

Miriam had held her sad news to herself.

Anita Alvarez, who was addicted to coffee, always slept poorly. She had heard her new mistress weeping in the night and sensed what had happened.

Seeing the shadow of sadness flit across the girl's face, Anita reached out her hand and touched her wrist then held it, squeezing, her head nodding:

'Miriam, you are much young yet. Not worry. There will be another baby soon.'

Miriam smiled, nodded, blew her nose and dried her eyes.

'Thank you. Please don't tell anyone. I was keeping it a secret but it was not to be.'

'Yes, I keep secret to you only. Best for all persons not know. Now, Miriam, Juan explain-ed to me you work-ed in a fashion shop like this in Glasgow. Yes?'

'But Anita, I know nothing about ordering stock. I was just a salesgirl and sometimes modelled clothes. We had a monthly catwalk show to help our customers make good choices.'

'Yes, Juan tell me this. He should not have do this but he show me your wardrobe, your fancy clothes. Please do not tell him I tell to you. I think it be secret to me.'

'It's all right Anita, Don Juan told me this shop has not made money year on year since it started. He said Uncle Fernando was subsidising it.'

'Yes, this true. Doña Maria was some better when young but she had stroke maybe twenty years ago. Well, you can see for you self. We old-fashioned, out of date. Before go fishing Don Fernando he tell to me he make plan for you, for 'take-charge' to *Modas Maria*. I before already know this. When he come already with invitation your wedding, I do wrong. I was outside door. I listen he explain Doña Maria his plan. She no understand.'

Walk me through the rain

She no see you yet. I think you want rid to me. I angry, fear. After this day, I watch-ed you from street. I already hate you, God forgive me. Yes, it true, I jealous. I always be *flaco como un galgo* (as skinny as a greyhound), *pieto chato* (boring), *con pocho pecho* (flat chested) . No boy look to me, speak me. Ever.'

'Oh Anita, I did not realise!'

'No, it okay. I used. I need explain you. When you come here with Arriana for wedding outfit, you so beautiful, so elegant, so perfect. That dress I sell you, it bad dress for you. I have better one. I hidden. This was bad thing.'

'Oh Anita, how horrible for you. I am so sorry you have been lonely for so long.'

'I wrong on you, Miriam. You good person. You kind everyone, even Maria and Josepha when you say 'please' and 'thank to you' and they are, you say it 'hosca' (sourly, surly) ? Miriam, you forgive me? We work together? Make *Modas Maria* success? I need work, Miriam, I need work. I must work.'

'Yes Anita, of course. Yes. Please. Surely you must know I could never make this business a success without you. And I have a question, if you are willing to answer it. How is it that your English is so good?'

'My mother was English. She painter, artist, from Edinburgh. She came paint our coasts our hills, our harbours. She fall love my father. He manager at post office. My speaking is to old use, I feel it bad. I need speak more. I was one time, how you say. *Fluent?* We speak only English, I get good. I promise.'

'No Anita, we shall speak in both Spanish and English for my practice too. Then we both improve, yes?'

'Yes, this good thing. I agree.'

'Anita, just one small correction. Edinburgh is in Scotland, not England.'

'But Scotland is in England, yes?'

'No, they are side by side, like Portugal and Spain.'

'So my mother Margaret was Scottish, not English. That means I am half-Scottish.'

'Yes. And my mother is also Margaret and my father is Donald, which means I am all Scottish. But, well, going back in time, who knows. The Vikings were everywhere, in the past.'

Walk me through the rain

'Ha-Ha! Yes, it can happen. I make us some coffee? In Galicia, we like coffee black and strong and sweet but you like coffee with milk added like we give to children and old ladies. I go and get milk for you.'

'Wait, please, Anita. This telephone, can it make international calls, to Glasgow?'

'Yes. We used have *Cable Inglés* (Cable & Wireless) make easy. Now we have 'fight' *Correos y Telégrafos* to get call. We think they listen, report what we say. International calls are *mucho, mucho dinero* (big, big money). We still have an account from years to make telephone London and Paris. After stroke Dona Maria lost her speech for a few years and we start use Madrid catalogue. They just add cost for nothing and everything is a year or more out of date.'

'Let's try the telephone anyway. I'm sure we could make it work.'

'Miriam, I have idea to you. We could try the telegraph service. The telegraph is much cheap to telephone. I explain. At school, I was the Chess Club. Most weeks I was top but Manolo was good as well. His mother was English too and he has good English. His full name is Manuel Rodriguez Carro. He used to work as Big Boss for *Cable Inglés* but now he works as a lowly teletypist for *Correos y Telégrafos*. He bitter man, today's. I see Manolo every Tuesday night at the Chess Club. He would do it for us. I could let him beat me a few times, make happy. Ha-Ha.'

'That sounds like a good plan but first I do want to telephone my old boss to explain where I am, what has happened and ask for her help to choose and order stock. If she was our International Agent, we could send her money through the bank and she could get the clothes we need sent by post.'

'Yes, I know send to money at bank and you can sign. Before only Don Fernando.'

'Right then, we can start right away. Would you try to set up a telephone call to her, please? She is Mrs Bernadette Corrigan my former employer at *Catherine's of Partick*, back in Glasgow. This is her business card with her telephone number. You book the call and I'll make the coffee. I might even try it without milk.'

'You become Galician.'

'Yes, I can feel it happening.'

'This good for you. Good for us. I happy today most to much. I cry. Sorry.'

Miriam leaned forward and hugged the tiny woman who hugged her back, trembling with emotion. Apart from Doña Maria, Miriam was the only person Anita Alvarez in her adult life she had ever touched, except by accident.

Walk me through the rain

This new bond was the start of a powerful friendship which would shape Miriam's life over many, many years to come.

Walk me through the rain

Death of Franco

Historical sidebar:

Franco died on 20th November 1975, aged almost 83. His health had been in terminal decline for months and during his last few weeks he had been on life support until the authorities agreed to switch it off. The following day King Juan Carlos was installed as the Head of State. Since the Spanish Civil War, Franco and his Bureaucrats had been in power for 36 years. His death marked a renewed resurgence among activists and workers' unions who were determined to secure democracy in Spain. It would be a bitter struggle.

Following the deaths of Doña Maria and Don Fernando Garcia in 1969, Miriam and Anita decided to change the trading name of 'Modas Maria' to 'Modas Galicia', hoping to attract a younger clientele, women known locally as 'Citroen wives', a widely used term for ladies of leisure whose husbands worked in the upper echelons of car production, the fishing industry, fish canning and shipbuilding, enterprises which continued to grow rapidly during the 1970's.

When Franco died, the economy of Galicia was booming, despite the 1973 oil crisis and the invidious corruption of Franco's Bureaucrats.

Walk me through the rain

Devastation

It was mid-afternoon on Sunday 4th March 1979, four days after the tumultuous General Election which had brought opposing noisy groups onto the streets of Galicia, banner waving crowds who had frequently clashed violently at competing rallies.

Miriam and Anita were in the office at *Modas Galicia*, studying reviews of fashion magazines from Milan, Paris and London, finalising their additional order for Summer and their first tranche for their Autumn collection, comparing these reviews with the letter from Bernadette Corrigan, now edging towards retirement from *Catherine's of Partick*.

'Well, Miriam, are you sure we should include so many *Laura Ashley* offerings?'

'Bernadette thinks it's a good idea. She went to browse their Edinburgh shop and liked what she saw. You can see from these samples she sent that the quality is high and matches their bold designs. There's talk of *Laura Ashley* opening in Glasgow. Did you see from the review that Bianca Jagger is a big fan?'

'Yes, I think the mood here in Vigo is for a younger, less formal look. But are you sure we should include denim. Is it not a bit downmarket for us?'

'I know. Teenagers are already wearing hippy denims but we would go for the luxury end with *Calvin Klein* and *Gloria Vanderbilt* pants with high-waisted flares paired with silk blouses. Look at these images, they're stunning, aren't they?'

'Yes, I see what you mean. Yes, these denim fashion trousers are very different from the jeans the kids are wearing.'

'We should get a few life-sized posters like these for the shop. I'll ask Luisa if she can help. I'll pose for her, maybe wear a few wigs and try out different make-up style, try a few zany long brimmed skip hats in bright colours. I still enjoy dressing up and my new baby is not showing yet.'

Anita closed her eyes and bit her tongue. The whole business of the new baby had been a debate she had lost. Now this baby was a reality, she must let this comment pass.

'But Miriam, would denim not be too big a risk? And do we have the space for a whole new line of stock?'

'Yes, we should really look for bigger premises. If we cut down on coats we could fit everything in. After all, every risk we've taken so far has worked out, hasn't it?'

Walk me through the rain

'Yes, Doña Maria and Don Fernando would be astonished at how well we have done since we relaunched.'

The telephone rang. Anita snatched it up and listened, blood draining from her face. She covered the mouthpiece and (speaking in Galician), whispered:

'It's Josepha. The police are at Villa Marina.'

Miriam stretched out her hand, took the handset.

'Josepha, calm down. Start again from the beginning, please.'

Anita watched, gathering up documents, returning them to the safe before locking it, shrugging into her jacket, collecting her handbag and lifting the car keys.

'Josepha, may I speak to the officer, please?'

'What? He's gone?'

It was Miriam's turn to cover the mouthpiece and relay the information to Anita in English.

'Some new disturbance at the harbour. Protesters blocking the roads.'

'Josepha, stay near the telephone and when I get to the bottom of this I'll call and let you know. Bye-Bye.'

'We're going to La Guarda, yes?'

'Yes. There must be a mix up. Juan would never go out windsurfing at this time of year.'

'Miriam. Let me drive the Mercedes, yes?'

'Good idea. Thank the Good Lord the boys are safe at the smallholding with Annamaria.'

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Monday 5th March, midmorning.

Tomaso and Arriana Watson were at *Villa Marina*, gathered in the Dining Room with Carme, Luisa and Anita to discuss the funeral arrangements for Don Juan Garcia, drowned, age thirty-seven.

Miriam was in bed upstairs, sedated, with Josepha sitting nearby in the dim light from the partially open curtains, working on her embroidery panel, creating another version of her bizarre wild flower depictions she sold at Annamaria's market stall.

Doña Annamaria was at the smallholding with the twin teenage girls Isobella and Teresa Watson and Miriam's boys, Juan (aged 8) and Donald (aged 6).

Walk me through the rain

Don Ramon Varela Lopez was also present at this meeting in his role as their family Abogado (Solicitor). Over the last decade, Ramon had also become a family friend, Godfather to both Juan and Donald.

At Tomaso's suggestion, Don Ramon addressed the meeting in his slow, deliberate Galician voice.

'Today is a sad and tragic reminder of ten years ago when Doña Maria and Don Fernando died. Thankfully, if that is the right word, we have Juan's body and a death certificate from the hospital. It was not easy and there was the usual easement cost but thankfully the autopsy was completed immediately confirming death by drowning with no suspicious indicators. His body has been relocated to the funeraria (funeral home).

'The cremation will be later this afternoon with a short memorial service at Iglesia Pi y Margall. As we have no male heir to speak for Don Juan, his homily will be led by Tomaso to be followed by a short informal gathering here to follow immediately afterwards.

'Doña Annamaria has elected to stay with the children at the smallholding and has refused to attend either event.

'Given Miriam's condition, I shall say a few words on behalf of the family.

'In my capacity as the Garcia family's abogado, I have been given a copy of the Police report, delivered to my home just before midnight.

'The police have confirmed his death has been adjudged to be a tragic accident. This simplifies the legal ramifications which I shall deal with when Miriam is sufficiently recovered.

'From this report, I learned there was an informal gathering of around thirty windsurfers directly offshore from the harbour at La Guarda. Onshore there was around a hundred onlookers gathered to watch the windsurfers.

'When the wind increased and the waves grew bigger, Juan was furthest out, the only person left on the water, the last one to head for shore. It seems Juan was a regular participant at these Sunday gatherings and generally regarded as 'most proficient'. At first no one was worried about him.

'Around fifty metres from the shore he was sideswiped by a rogue gust which snapped his mast. Juan disappeared from view, apparently trapped under the surf board.

Walk me through the rain

'His body was recovered by a bystander who, it transpires, is a qualified lifesaver. This man swam out to the board with a rope tied around his chest. He found that Juan was unresponsive, attached to the windsurf board by an ankle cord which helped this man locate him.

'Once he had Juan ashore, this stranger tried to resuscitate Juan but sadly our dear friend was already dead. There was a huge gash on his neck from the keel blade of the surfboard and the autopsy revealed that Juan had lost a great deal of blood.

'The Police have recorded a finding of 'death by misadventure' with 'no foul play suspected'. Their investigation has been concluded. A copy of the finding document was attached to the report they sent to me.'

Anita asked:

Do we have any details of this brave man?'

Don Ramon replied:

'I made enquiries by telephoning the Harbourmaster at La Guarda. It seems this stranger is a regular visitor there but is also well-known in Vigo and other Galician ports in his capacity as a British Government Marine Surveyor, inspecting and certifying visiting fishing boats registered at British ports. Unfortunately, after his efforts to revive Juan this man also collapsed, suffering from severe exposure and hypothermia. The ambulance which attended the scene transferred him with Juan's corpse to the Hospital Xeral de Vigo (Vigo General Hospital). I called them by telephone an hour ago and the stranger is still unconscious.'

Tomaso said:

'We shall mention him in our prayers.'

Anita added:

'I will visit him and take fruit and flowers. We must tell his family. Does he have a name, Don Ramon?'

'No, the Police do not have a name yet but the Harbourmaster in La Guarda said he is from Glasgow.'

'I'll ask Pepe Perez, he might know.'

The telephone extension rang loudly.

Walk me through the rain

Anita snatched up the handset before Josepha could reach the extension in the Kitchen, turning on the loudspeaker device attached:

'This is Villa Marina. Dona Anita Alvarez speaks. We are in mourning. Who is calling us at this sad time?'

'I am Inspector Ricardo Lamas. I wish to speak to the owner of Modas Galicia about a most urgent matter.'

'The owner of Modas Galicia is Doña Miriam Garcia. Are you not aware that her husband Don Juan Garcia was drowned yesterday while windsurfing at La Guarda? Unfortunately Doña Garcia is most unwell. She had a miscarriage yesterday and her baby is dead. She is currently sedated.'

'No, my territory is Central Vigo. I am very sorry to hear of her misfortunes. I am afraid I have more bad news to impart to her.'

'Inspector, I am the Manager of Modas Galicia and I am a very close friend of Doña Garcia. You can tell me this news and I will pass it on when she is recovered.'

'No, Doña Alvarez. I mean no offence, but is there someone more senior I should speak to, please? It is a highly delicate matter.'

'Yes, give me a moment and I will pass you to Don Ramon Varela Lopez.'

'Yes, this is good. I know Ramon well, we were at law school together.'

'Hold, please.'

'Inspector, he will take your call in private from downstairs, continue to hold until he picks up, please.'

Reluctantly, Anita replaced the handset and turned off the speaker.

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The others sat in silence in the Dining Room until Maria Manoli entered with coffee and Bica. Tomaso blessed their refreshment.

There was a chanting sound from far away. Anita rose and looked out of the window. There was a large crowd shouting and waving red flags. Workers from the Citroen car plant, radicals, probably communists, she surmised.

She tutted and returned to drink a further two coffees in quick succession.

Don Ramon opened the door and held up his hand, palm towards them, shaking his head.

Walk me through the rain

'It is about 'Modas Galicia'. The shop has been attacked, set on fire. One of several. I must leave and help make it secure, what is left of it. It may take an hour. If it takes longer, I will join you at the crematorium. Ricardo is sending a car for me, with an armed escort. As you can probably hear, there is a violent demonstration in progress. Please be patient, I will return or telephone when I have the full picture.'

Then he was gone.

Anita rose and moved quickly, hoping to catch him before he left but the front door slammed closed. She returned to the others to say:

'I'll go to check on Miriam. Send Maria for me if Ramon telephones.'

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Entering the bedroom, Anita moved to the curtains and closed them fully. The room was dim, warmed by the low Spring sunshine from the south.

'Josepha, you may go and help Maria. I will sit with Doña Miriam for a while. Return in an hour.'

Alone, she lifted the heavy chair closer and held Miriam's hand, stroking it gently, humming very quietly.

Time passed.

Miriam twitched, her eyes fluttered open and she sat upright, staring into the gloom, scanning, peering into dark corners.

She is looking for Juan, Anita thought.

Anita spoke in English:

'Dearest Miriam, can you hear me?'

'Anita, please tell me it was a horrible dream.'

'My dear, dear Miriam, sadly it is true. Juan is dead and the baby too. He was a boy.'

'No! No! No! Why are you saying these lies?'

'Here, my dear Miriam, sit up and take another pill. You need to rest. Sleep will help. You have two healthy and beautiful boys who need you. We all need you. We will help you to recover. It may take many weeks but in due time, you will heal and move on to a new life. As we all know, "Amidst Life there is Death but Life prevails". It has always been this

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way. We who are left behind must go forward and do our best to honour the memory of those who have gone ahead. You will have a good life in the years to come. Trust me.'

Miriam threw her head back and released a bloodcurdling wail:

'No, No, NO! I want to go now to join Juan and my lost babies.'

'There, there, there, my dear girl, sit up and take your medicine.'

Miriam sipped then settled and drifted off to sleep again.

Josepha returned and Anita went to her own rooms to wash and change for the trip to the crematorium.

The telephone rang in the Kitchen. She flew along the passageway and snatched the handset from the wall and pressed it to her ear before Josepha could reach the extension in the small upstairs office.

'Villa Marina. Who speaks?'

It was Don Ramon.

'Anita, are you alone? I have terrible news.'

Already switched, she said:

'Yes, but shall we speak in English? In this house the walls have ears, if you understand my meaning?'

'Perfectly. Anita, the Communists have attacked all the fashion shops in the centre, setting them alight. Only *Modas Galicia* has not been torched, not so far anyway. The Police are struggling to cope. Our shop was singled out for what Ricardo has called *trato brutal* (brutal treatment). They used red paint, disgusting language, calling Miriam a putana (whore, prostitute) and other despicable names, shredding every garments and dowsing the remnants with a mixture of urine and excrement. They managed to open the safe. The contents were set alight in a bucket then urinated on.'

'That's not really important. Apart from a few thousand Pesetas in petty cash there was nothing of value. Just accounts and draft orders, office paperwork.'

'Anita, more worrying is the Communists brought three figurines, a Queen and two boy dolls, all dressed in Red, White and Blue. They chopped the heads off and smeared everything with blood and guts from a cat they had disembowelled.'

'Don Ramon, clearly they are deranged, power mad. I've seen it before, years ago, during a riot after a football match when *La Coruña* lost to *Nantes*. It was supposed to be a friendly, a pre-season warm up. The rioters set cars on fire, all Citroens. Dozens of

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French supporters were taken to hospital. There were no arrests. The Police were caught napping. Everything was hushed up. But I saw it. Blood and red paint everywhere.'

'Ricardo sees this doll thing as a warning to Miriam. He says their actions were pre-meditated. He says we must try to persuade her to leave, to return to Britain. He says their wives are behind this, that they have hated Miriam since she arrived. I have heard similar rumours in recent months. Ricardo says I must make plans to keep Miriam and her boys safe but we must do it for ourselves. He says he cannot spare manpower to protect her.'

'Don Ramon, these rioters are worse than animals. May God punish them, and soon!'

'Anita, promise me, whatever happens, Miriam must never hear about what they have done to *Modas Galicia*. She put so much effort into it, you both did.'

'Don Ramon, ask Pepe to organise his crew to remove everything from the shop premises and re-paint it entirely, inside and out. We will go on, no matter what they do.'

'No, Anita, I will not send Pepe and his men into danger. Ricardo says there are rumours the Communists have taken photographs to make posters, to ask people to join them, to drive Miriam out. He fears violence.'

'But everyone knows she is living here at *Villa Marina*.'

'Anita, I think this may be the end of *Modas Galicia*. I think she must leave Vigo.'

'No! *Modas Galicia* is her creation, Miriam will never give it up.'

'How is she? Is she awake?'

'She was awake but only briefly. Then she began to screech and scream again so I gave her another pill. She is in denial but that will pass. Josepha is upstairs with her while she sleeps.'

'Anita, we must face the possibility that Miriam might never recover fully, in her mind. Juan's drowning and then this attack on *Modas Galicia*: it could tip her over the edge. I've seen it before. People can only endure so much suffering and loss.'

'No, Don Ramon, I can assure you Miriam is much stronger than she seems. Let us pray the perpetrators are found and punished. Someone must know who they are.'

'Listen Anita, do not repeat this to anyone. Ricardo knows who the ringleaders are but they are cunning and they will have alibis. Plus the workers unions are on their side, at least for now. He says the Police do not have the resources to root them out. Ricardo says the police force has lost about half of its strength. He says the Courts are afraid to prosecute, now that Franco's placemen are fleeing back to Madrid, back to their

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'vipers' nests'. Most of the local Bureaucrats have already immigrated, some to Argentina and others to Australia and Canada. '

'Don Ramon, are you telling me that Miriam and her boys are in mortal danger and that we cannot rely on the Police to protect her?'

'Yes Anita, that is what Ricardo has told me. The Communists have a list of people they want to drive out or punish. He says the man from Glasgow is on their list because he tried to rescue Juan from drowning. At my request he is sending his best sergeant and a constable - both armed - to guard *Villa Marina* until noon tomorrow. He is bending the rules for me but after that we are on our own.'

'Don Ramon, is her money safe?'

'So, you know about that? Yes, she has about \$50,000 US in her name under her British passport in a bank in Zurich, Switzerland. Juan did this just before Franco died. I have her codes memorised and I can teach her. The rest of her assets are in investments and loans in Juan's name. Miriam is the only beneficiary. In her absence - let's say it's for medical reasons - I hold Power of Attorney for her. And I am her joint guardian for her boys. Over time, I will liquidate these assets and send the money to her bank in Switzerland.'

'Where should she go?'

'I say back to Britain. She has a British Passport. I know people who would help her, for an easement.'

'Oh no! NO! I don't want to lose her. Miriam is like the daughter I never had.'

'Then go with her. I can help you with that too, I think.'

From the front of the house there was aloud clamour, raised voices.

'Don Ramon, I think the Police have arrived. I'll stay here with Miriam. Tomaso and Arriana have left for the crematorium, with Luisa. I will try to come when I am sure Miriam is safe.'

'Yes, I'll see you there. Anita, stay off the main streets and avoid the crowds, if you can.'

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Callum

Two days later, in the half-light before the sun was fully above the horizon, Doña Anita Alvarez made her way to Vigo General Hospital armed with an unsigned letter in English. The letter contained a single piece of typed plain paper, a confection dreamt up by Don Ramon who was an avid reader of spy thrillers. Tucked behind this letter were seven crisp 10,000 Peseta notes, withdrawn directly from the bank the previous day, an amount approximately equivalent to a month's salary of the intended recipient.

At Reception, Anita presented a business card from Don Ramon Varela Lopez and asked that it be passed immediately to the hospital's Chief Administrative Officer, explaining she had an urgent personal letter for the man.

A few minutes later she was ushered into the office of Señor Emilio Vazquez Rial, a man in his early sixties, serving out his last few years before planning to move back to Madrid where his estranged wife and family were based.

Anita spoke in slow and careful Spanish, mimicking the tone used by BBC World programme radio newsreaders.

'Señor Rial, I have a letter for you. I have been instructed to give it to you in exchange for the business card I gave to your Receptionist a few minutes ago.'

A decade earlier Emilio Rial had been a Second-Deputy Ambassador at the Spanish Embassy in London and could read and speak English fluently.

Emilio studied the tiny wizened waif of a woman dressed in widow's weeds, her fierce, glittering eyes peering directly into his own.

The thought sprang to mind:

Quite harmless, perhaps deranged?

As was in his nature, he decided to roll the dice, smiled, nodded and slid the card across his desk to her.

Anita responded by sliding an envelope across to him, adding:

'I do not know what this letter says. I have been told to sit quietly and close my eyes while you read it.'

As rehearsed, Anita folded her hands and bowed her head, as if in prayer.

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Intrigued, Emilio reached for his letter knife and slit open the envelope. His eyes lit up at the sight of the banknotes. The single unsigned sheet of notepaper was neatly typed in English.

Señor Rial,

the lady before you is a trained nurse.

She may look Spanish but she is good at disguise. She is a British Secret Agent. Be aware that she is also an assassin.

In January and February 1943, she was working with British Special Forces as a sniper, near Stalingrad, helping the Russians repel the Nazis. She has an encyclopaedic knowledge of hypothermia.

She is here to relieve you of your responsibility for the young man from Glasgow who was transferred to you from La Guarda on Sunday 4th March. Please arrange for her to escort this young man to the rear of the hospital where, beside the entrance to the mortuary, a van is waiting to take both the woman and the young man away to be treated elsewhere.

If you find you are unable to comply with this request, return this letter with the money to the woman and she will leave, without protest.

However, should you choose this pathway, there will be consequences.

Addiction to gambling is an illness which is expensive to fund when you are unable to sell morphine and other drugs obtained by subterfuge to clear your debts. Be assured we have a full record of your misdemeanours, a document which easily could find its way to the authorities in Madrid.

Emilio Rial looked up and across to the fierce bright eyes which dared him to refuse her request. Tucking the sheet of paper back into the envelope beside the banknotes he placed it in his inside jacket pocket. Rising, he pressed the remote bell push under his desk. Crossing the room he opened the door as his secretary approached. He whispered his instructions then turned and beckoned to Anita, inviting her to come forward:

'Your package will be delivered to the requested location. Make your own way.'

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From the hospital, Luisa drove her Citroen van directly to the rear entrance of Don Ramon's villa on the outskirts of Vigo where Dr Hernan Bello Pazos, an expert in respiratory diseases, assisted by his wife Matron Carmen Seoane Vidal, were waiting. They had frequently worked for Don Ramon as expert witnesses but had also treated people Lopez had rescued after they had been punished or tortured by the Bureaucrats.

The medical duo had been fully briefed and were ready to act. Their patient was delirious. As a foreigner the man from Glasgow had been denied the drugs he needed which were in short supply, administered only to the recent influx of injured police officers

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(designated as a first priority) and to injured protesters who had friends or family working in the hospital.

Their emergency patient was triaged, given the lifesaving drugs he needed, stripped, inspected, washed and made comfortable then connected to a saline drip to help combat his severe dehydration caused by three days of fever sweats.

The huge Scotsman had survived because he had a strong constitution. By the following evening he was sitting up, lucid and able to make it to the toilet unaided.

Anita had returned with a selection of fruits and bakeries from the smallholding. Luisa waited outside in the Citroen van.

Adopting a gentle form of interrogation, Anita learned his name was Callum Sinclair, originally from Skye but now based in Glasgow, where he still rented a room from a former student colleague called Euan, also a Marine Surveyor who dealt mainly with vessels based on the West Coast of Scotland.

Callum was already qualified as a Marine Surveyor when he met Janice, a shorthand typist who worked in a bank. They were married within a few months. During their honeymoon in Paris, she caught an infection which was misdiagnosed as influenza, a virus which she was told would run its course. Three days later she died in her sleep. When her body was repatriated to Glasgow, the post mortem revealed she had died of Legionnaires Disease.

Since then Callum had lived a bachelor life, travelling to remote places to inspect fishing vessels, initially making several trips to the Canary Islands although the Galician coastal ports were his most frequent recent postings. He had learned Lifesaving as an essential skill, a requirement before being allowed to graduate from his college course in Glasgow.

In return, Alice related the tragic story of Juan and Miriam Garcia who had also met in Glasgow.

'Callum, Juan Garcia's wife's name was Miriam Macleod and she was from Skye too, from Portree. Do you know her?'

'Not personally but I know she was friendly with my older brother Hector for a while. Hector married her sister. When Sarah lost her job, they emigrated on special £10 one-way tickets to Western Australia where Sarah is a schoolteacher and Hector drives long distance lorries.'

'Poor Miriam is bereft. The shock of Juan's death caused a miscarriage. She was three months pregnant. She has two boys, Juan who is 8 and Donald who is 6.'

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'The wee one is called Donald? Yes, that makes sense, her father was Donald. He was our postie - our postman - for years. Sadly he died about a year ago, stomach cancer my mother said. His wife Margaret is in a care home, lost her memory, poor soul.'

'Callum, please don't tell Miriam about her parents, not yet anyway. We need to get her back on her feet physically and mentally, built up her strength before she can absorb any more shocks. I know she knows about Sarah her sister being in Australia but there is no contact. Some sort of rift between them so let's leave the Australians out of the picture too, please, unless she asks you, of course. Agreed?'

'Yes, of course. I understand.'

'Callum, I have something I want to share with you and I need you to promise me you will keep it to yourself. Will you give me your word, please?'

'Yes, assuming it's not illegal. Or is it?'

'Not as such. What you need to grasp first is that Don Juan Garcia was an important man in Vigo and the surrounding area. He will be a great miss to all of us. Also, Miriam is my friend, she is like a daughter to me. Until a few days ago I lived with them in their grand house, helped Miriam run her ladies' fashion shop. But after the Election last week, the Communists attacked her premises and daubed it with despicable slogans and did other things I don't want to talk about. They are crazy, filled with a blood lust. They say it's a class war against all employers, the privileged capitalists and foreigners who have exploited the working people, paying them low wages. There is a strong rumour that they intend to burn down *Villa Marina*. The upshot is they have threatened Miriam and her boys. With help from Don Ramon, we are planning to help her escape. We think you are also in danger.'

'No Anita, I will be safe enough in La Guarda. The people there hate the Communists. Besides I have a good circle of friends there and a really great landlady. And I have work to do. This is my busiest time of the year and I have a tight schedule of inspections I have to complete before the end of March. If you can help me to get to La Guarda, I'm sure I'll be safe.'

'No Callum, you are quite wrong about La Guarda. Don Ramon has his own network of informers. There are Communists all along this coast and although they increased their share of the vote at the Election, they remain ambitious, pushing for more. Their behaviour is total madness. Don Ramon believes you are a target because you tried to rescue Juan Garcia and because you are an incomer, a foreigner, that you were a spy for Don Juan Garcia.'

'That's stupid. I didn't even know the man. I just reacted to his predicament.'

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'According to the rumours circulating among the Communists, they are looking for you as well as Miriam and her boys. But Callum, rumours work both ways. Don Ramon has paid certain people to spread the rumour that Miriam and her boys are already in France, heading for Britain. If the Communists accept that as true, Don Ramon thinks that leaves you even more exposed. Because he is known to be close to the Garcia family, with you here in his home, it places him at high risk too. We want you to agree to go at once to the Garcia's family smallholding where you will be safe while we work out how best to resolve this situation. As we speak, Don Ramon is meeting with some influential bank people. He moves in the shadows and he knows all the right people. He told me earlier he thinks he has a deal ready which might make everything work.'

'No Anita, tell Don Ramon I don't want to cause you any further trouble. I'll go to the harbour and try to escape that way, on a fishing boat. I know dozens of fishermen and I know for certain that not a single one is a Communist.'

'No Callum, Don Ramon says there are Communists down at the harbour day and night, patrolling, checking everything. They're even worse than the Bureaucrats. No, we have an alternative proposal. Miriam and her boys are at the smallholding. It is about ten kilometres from here, well out of Vigo, in a sheltered valley with a very narrow entrance. We have a fishing crew guarding that entrance.'

'Which vessel?'

'It is a boat Don Juan owned, called *La Estrella de Galicia*.'

'Yes, I know it. Pepe and his men are good people. They would take me to La Guarda.'

Anita persisted. Their debate continued for a further round until Callum Sinclair finally agreed to move to the Garcia smallholding but only until the turmoil died down.

Anita helped Callum change into his freshly laundered clothes then led him down through the house to the Kitchen entrance where they eased him directly into the rear of Luisa's van and drove him to join the Garcia family who had already moved to the smallholding for safety. It was still dark when they arrived.

The following evening, *Villa Marina* was burgled then set alight.

The police and firefighters did not attend, fearing it was a further ploy designed to set them up for another guerrilla attack by the extremists.

Fanned by high winds, the grand old house burned fiercely, leaving a gutted, empty shell.

Don Ramon had heard the attack was planned and had sent a messenger to Josepha and Maria Manoli who were safely in their own home from mid-afternoon.

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After the arson attack on *Villa Marina*, Anita delivered a letter of surety to be taken to the local bank which guaranteed their wages for a period of ten years, to be drawn down in weekly payments from a capital sum Don Ramon had lodged in their joint names.

Knowing the Manoli 'sisters' could not be trusted to keep a secret, Anita had told them this money had been sent from *Glasgow* where Miriam and her two boys were now based.

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Choosing

Over the next few weeks, the situation at the smallholding remained quiet. Its location tucked away in the canyon helped. Pepe organised a rota for guards at the narrow entrance while others from the crew carried out maintenance on *La Estrella de Galicia* and repainted her hull. To maintain the appearance of normality, Luisa and Annamaria went each day to the market selling only vegetables and early tomatoes, the smaller varieties. With *La Estrella di Galicia* hauled up out of the water, they had no fish to sell.

The Communists calmed down. Their rampage in the centre of Vigo had gained them more enemies than friends. Their newly elected Members of Parliament, now a full day away by road or rail, were already setting up residences in Madrid, enjoying their new status, exploring new restaurants and bars, embedding themselves, becoming part of the political system.

This process had removed most of the more vocal and aggressive agitators from Vigo and other Galician townships. Week on week daily life settled down, resuming its usual rhythm as the weather improved and the days grew longer.

There had been an initial backlash against the wanton destruction of the shops in Vigo and revulsion at the threats against Juan Garcia's wife and family who were regarded as victims, not oppressors. Don Ramon's rumour that the bereaved 'English' widow and her sons had fled to Britain persisted and after a few weeks without any sightings it was generally accepted that Doña Miriam Garcia and her sons had gone for good.

Pepe and his crew went back to fishing.

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Miriam was growing stronger physically with each passing day but remained distracted, confused and forgetful. Don Ramon visited regularly to discuss her business affairs. Anita attended to assist with book-keeping and banking issues and reminding Miriam of details she seemed to have forgotten.

Callum Sinclair remained a hunted man. Don Ramon and Pepe both reported that a small group of radical communists who had been sacked from the Citroen car plant were still prowling daily in the harbour area. Between them they had two pistols which they occasionally displayed as a reminder of their power, boasting they intended to shoot the tall, blonde Scottish boat surveyor on sight and dump his weighted body in the harbour as food for the crabs.

Don Ramon strongly advised Callum to remain in hiding at the smallholding.

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Callum was biding his time, working alongside Luisa, Carme and Annamaria in the fields, harvesting and planting under Luisa's direction and encouraging the boys Juan and Donald to work alongside him.

Both boys were bilingual, full of questions, especially Donald who was the more curious of the two, wanting to know everything about Glasgow and Skye and what it was like to travel on the ferry back and forth to England. The boys had been told a version of how their father had died and knew that Callum had tried to rescue him. Both boys could swim but they were never allowed to do so when the sea was rough. They also knew how cold it could be.

Observing their behaviour, Callum was surprised that they did not seem to miss their father, a subject he raised privately with Anita.

'Callum, I have decided to share some private information with you about Juan and Miriam, information which is suppressed, not discussed within the Garcia family. Although their marriage had started well, Juan's success and wealth affected him, set him off on a wrong path. He had a variety of lady friends, mostly in nearby towns, not in Vigo. At first Miriam was oblivious. When I hinted about it, she refused to believe me, even though it was common knowledge among our customers at *Modas Galicia*. Sadly, this behaviour is not uncommon among rich men everywhere in Galicia. I asked Don Ramon to try to speak to Juan and remind him of his Christian duty to remain faithful but he said there was nothing he could do, that it was a 'domestic matter', saying couples often went through rough patches. In fact, I believe Don Ramon was partly responsible for Juan's behaviour. Let me explain. Business was booming with good fish landings and Juan's fish canning business was doing well, expanding each year. Juan and Don Ramon were often away on so-called business trips, exploring opportunities to put their profits to work for them.'

'Yes, Anita, I already know this. Galicia is a fishing hotspot for Scottish and English boats, that's why I'm here.'

'Anyway, I was often 'a fly on the wall' at these meetings with Juan, Don Ramon and Miriam. Early on they decided to pursue investments in the Canary Islands. Under Franco The Canaries were being developed for year round tourism with new airports planned for the bigger islands. I went twice with them, mainly to watch over the boys. But even though I was in the background, Miriam told me a lot about what they were planning, who they were doing deals with.'

'Yes, Anita, I know several of these islands quite well, particularly Tenerife and La Gomera. A few years ago I was based out there from October to April. Great weather, hardly any rain and lots of sun. Beautiful beaches and good sea swimming most days.'

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'We went in February once and in November the second time and the weather on both visits was better than July here in Vigo. But anyway, what I want to tell you is that under the Franco regime, the Canary Islands were designated as 'holiday islands' with Tenerife being seen as the 'jewel in the crown'. The presence of fish processing at Los Cristianos was seen as *una monstruosidad maloliente* (a smelly eyesore). This was Juan's first opportunity. Through his ownership of a major canning plant in Vigo he made a case with the local tourism developers and bought out the ownership of the largest canning plant in Los Cristianos and moved it to the smaller island of La Gomera 50 kilometres away, diverting the centre of fish landings and canning from Tenerife, removing the eyesore.

'The big idea was to clear the port area to develop hotels and beach resorts for tourists to benefit from the good weather that area enjoys year round. The existing airport in the south of Tenerife was scheduled for conversion to a new, larger commercial airport.'

'Yes, Anita, as I said, I know this area. There are newer and more powerful vessels like *La Estrella de Galicia* fishing these waters nowadays, landing mainly skipjack tuna which is abundant around The Canaries, especially out to the West. In fact there are dozens of Soviet factory ships fishing all along the African coast while using The Canaries as their base under an agreement with the Spanish Government.'

'But Callum, forget about fishing for the moment and think about Juan and Don Ramon and their ambitions to expand into tourism. Let me try to explain. Moving the canning plant away from Los Cristianos made Juan Garcia an important man with the property developers in Tenerife. Over the years which followed Juan and Don Ramon were flying to Tenerife, sometimes staying for weeks at a time. Over these years, Juan formed a bond with a major developer and financier called Rafael Puig Llovina and his son Santiago Puig. They are the main drivers behind the hotels and shopping malls in the *Playa de Las Americas* development.'

'Yes, Anita, I've actually visited *Las Americas*. It's a busy, busy area. Dozens of huge hotels and apartment blocks being built with shops and restaurants galore. I found it oppressive, unreal, almost like a fantasy film.'

'Callum, according to what Don Ramon told me in private, Juan Garcia was allowed to buy into a small part of the Puig development consortium. Juan kept saying he was 'late to the party' but the Puigs told him not to worry, his chances would come as the entire coastal strip from Los Cristianos to La Caleta was also designated as a tourist development area. I've thought about this a lot and I'm almost certain from that very minute, Juan wanted to move to live in Tenerife, become part of the Puig cabal and build his own version of *Las Americas*.'

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'Yes, Anita, I heard that further projects were planned. Actually, they say Tenerife is a tourist paradise. Especially in the winter months when the other Spanish resorts on the mainland coast are often cold and wet while in The Canaries it's dry and sunny all year round. I suppose it makes a lot of sense if you are a businessman with available capital. High finance like that is all way beyond me, I'm afraid.'

'But Callum, I think that in his mind, Juan had already moved on from Vigo, from Galicia. Which is why, sadly, over recent years his beautiful wife Miriam and his two wonderful sons slipped out of his mind. Given his record in Galicia, I suspect he was enjoying many other female companions during his trips to Tenerife. Look, Callum, I can read Miriam like she is my daughter and I could see she was putting on a show of fake happiness, hoping for a chance to win him back. Getting herself pregnant again just before he was drowned was part of her plan to try to rescue her marriage. But it was a crazy plan because she has a history of miscarriages. Alicia, Juan's sister who lives in Edinburgh, has also lost three babies to miscarriages. I've often wondered if the problem is in the Garcia family. After all, Fernando and Annamaria did not have any family.'

'So, Anita, this is why Juan and Donald are not missing their Dad?'

'Yes, that's exactly what I have been trying to explain. The boys hardly know their father. I would say Miriam knew her marriage had failed but that she was trapped. However, there is another aspect I need to explain. What is not so well known is that the Puigs are also behind what the locals in Tenerife call 'the coastal clearances', moving local people away from their traditional villages along beside the sea to *apartamentos en los pueblos de Montagna* (homes for service workers), developments tacked onto existing hill towns. Of course the hotels and apartments need these service workers and the local government has provided a cheap public bus service to get them back to the coast and home again afterwards. This was already happening before Juan and Miriam became involved. Miriam was against it but Juan said it was essential to keep the coast for tourists.'

'In Skye, we have a different version of this. Young people escape to the mainland, to Glasgow and Edinburgh for education and better paid jobs. Year on year the population is in decline. My brother and his wife are in Australia and although I am nominally based in Glasgow, I'm seldom there. Actually, I haven't been back up to Skye for about six years. Most of my friends are here, in Galicia, mainly in La Guarda.'

'Callum, between you and me, when Miriam has recovered fully, I think Don Ramon is planning to move us all, everyone, including Pepe and his crew and their families to The Canaries. I know Miriam prefers La Gomera over Tenerife. It's not so busy and she has a nice villa there with a swimming pool. As I said, I've been there with them, to mind the boys while the three of them were in Tenerife at business meetings and socialising.'

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'Yes, Anita, I also prefer La Gomera to Tenerife. I like its climate, with a steady breeze most days. Ideal for sailing. I've often thought it would be a good place for a sailing school, you know, for families of tourists, dinghies and windsurfing. And it reminds me of Skye, especially up in the hills where it's misty. And like Skye, La Gomera is more community oriented. Tenerife is changing fast and tourism is spoiling it, I think.'

'Callum, I want to share something private and important with you. Are you aware that Miriam is attracted to you? When she is out on the veranda in her rocking chair, behind her sunglasses her eyes are following your every move.'

'Really? I've hardly spoken to her.'

'I'm sure I can understand what's going on in her mind. She has been so lonely over these last years while pretending she was happy. She is still a beautiful woman and still young, with needs, if you understand me.'

'Yes, Miriam is very beautiful. Perhaps the most beautiful girl I've ever seen.'

'Callum, are you sure you did you know Miriam back on Skye?'

'No, not really. I heard she went out with my older brother Hector for a few months and I did see her in Portree with him a few times. He is five years older than me. Then I heard she moved to Glasgow and met Juan and went to Spain with him where they got married. It was in our local church newsletter. Soon after that Hector married her sister Sarah and they moved to Australia.'

'Perhaps you remind her of Hector, could that be it?'

'Maybe. I don't know.'

'Callum, did you never marry?'

'Yes, but Janice died. It happened when we were on our honeymoon. Look, Anita, I'd rather not talk about it. It's too painful.'

'Yes. Let's just leave it there for now. But Callum, let me just say that I think you and Miriam would make a good couple. You are a very nice young man, straightforward. Pepe and all the people I've been able to ask say you are a good man, dependable.'

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Callum's conscience was pressing down on him. Don Ramon had insisted the Communists were still looking for him, that his name was still circulating. He had been unable to carry out his inspection duties for over three weeks and knew he must write to his employer to explain his absence.

Walk me through the rain

Working from Callum's neat handwritten initial version, Miriam had typed a letter explaining his predicament, to be sent to his office at the Fishing Vessels Inspectorate at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in London (MAFF) with a copy to his regional office in Edinburgh. By agreement these letters were sent by Don Ramon using first class registered mail.

Within a few days a reply was received. This unfriendly response was dismissive. It did not accept his plea for leniency, ordering him to immediately resume his inspections, work extra unpaid hours to catch up on his schedule. It stated that his backlog had generated complaints from vessel owners who had threaten to sue MAFF for loss of earnings when they had confined their boats to harbour awaiting his visits.

Two days later, a further letter was received, stating that a letter of dismissal had been sent to his home address in Glasgow. Callum Sinclair had lost the job he had worked hard for over many years. His income would cease at the end of March.

He shared his predicament with Anita and she smiled and nodded.

'Yes, Don Ramon told me. He is hoping you might come with us. I'm sure Pepe would welcome you as a member of his crew. Or maybe you could start your own business? Pepe says you are a proficient dinghy sailor. You're idea of a sailing school for tourists seems like a viable proposition. I mentioned it to Don Ramon who agrees. He said he arrange financial backing and help with the paperwork.'

'Well, Anita, I was thinking maybe the sailing school would be too big a risk, too expensive. I hate the idea of being in debt. There may be another option. When I was in The Canaries before, I was working for the Plymouth Office of MAAF and the man in charge there trusts me. If I leave it a few months then get in touch, he might take me on as a self-employed agent. They always have trouble finding reliable surveyors for The Canaries. Too many temptations to skive, mess about.'

'That sounds like a good idea. Maybe Don Ramon could help with that. You should discuss it with him. He knows all the key people.'

'Yes, Anita, I will. And thanks for sharing with me about Miriam. I'll definitely keep what you told me strictly to myself.'

'Actually, Callum, before I told you about Juan and Miriam's failed marriage the other day, I had already cleared everything with both Miriam and Don Ramon. After our chat I told them what you said and it's clear they both see you as a potential partner for Miriam and as a father figure for her boys as well. Everyone here at the smallholding can see the boys are already bonded to you in a way that they never were with Juan. Everyone approves of you.'

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'Look, Anita, I do fancy Miriam but I'm no good at speaking to girls, I never have been. It was Janice who did all the talking.'

'Callum, then I suggest you adopt the same tactic with Miriam. She likes to be in charge. In fact, here she comes now. Just relax, okay? Let her take the initiative.'

Walk me through the rain

Sharing

Imagining herself on a catwalk, Miriam sashayed across the grass towards Anita and Callum wearing a flimsy, low cut Laura Ashley summer party frock, a subdued floral pattern in pastel shades, chosen from the batch of samples from Bernadette Corrigan. Her make-up was perfect, minimalist, and her pale golden hair was shining, worn just short of her shoulders and sprayed lightly with Channel No 5 with its hints of vanilla and sandalwood wafting ahead of her on the soft breeze. She was wearing her finest silk underwear, enjoying the sensuous feeling of freedom it provided.

Miriam had been planning this encounter for weeks and now, reassured by the information from Anita's recent conversations with Callum, she was ready to act, hoping to impress him as she had done with those who had watched her as she announced herself on the busy streets of Vigo on her stroll from the station to Annamaria's market stall on the day she had first arrived on the train from Bilbao.

Over the previous weeks, from her position on the veranda, she had assessed him from afar but close too she decided he was even more striking than the younger Hector she had known in Skye. His face was less fierce, more gentle and she had heard him laugh, a deep bass rumble, making jokes with her boys.

Acting out her part, she smiled coyly at Callum who grinned back inanely, stunned by her beauty. With her face in shade from her large brimmed sunhat and her eyes hidden by dark sunglasses, she inspected his groin area, feeling her nipples respond to his evident arousal.

'Anita, please will you take the boys to the cottage and revise their homework. Our Juan is being difficult. He says he has earache.'

'Juan always has earache when he does long division.'

Miriam sat in the seat Anita had vacated, leaned forward so that Callum had a good view of her breasts and peered at Callum over her sunglasses.

'Well, Callum, how are things panning out for you?'

'Not so good, actually. You know I've been sacked by MAAF?'

'Yes. Sounds like your bureaucrats in London are not much different from ours in Madrid.'

'Most of my immediate superiors are reasonable but the ones at MAFF headquarters are vicious.'

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'Has Anita brought you up to date with Don Ramon's plan to move us all to The Canaries?'

'Well, she has hinted at it.'

'Look, Callum, the way things have to work in Spain is that apart from ladies fashion shops and a few other enterprises, its men who have to take the lead. Although we have only known you for a few weeks, we know quite a lot about you. Don Ramon has contacts here and in London and he delved into your past. You have a sound record. All the fishermen along the Galician coast trust you.'

'Miriam, are you sure about this. I mean, we have hardly spoken to each other. You would probably find me boring.'

'No, I've heard you chatting with the boys, You are so full of fun. So, Callum, please, please do give it careful consideration. I know Anita thinks we would make a good couple. Don Ramon agrees. I think we could make it work, given time to get to know each other better. And we do have Skye in common, and Glasgow.'

'Miriam, may I ask about Juan? Was there an issue between you?'

'Anita said she had told you about him?'

'Only that he was away a lot, on business trips, that he seemed to have no real connection with the boys.'

'Come on, I know Anita was very open with you, she told you much more than that.'

'Please, Miriam, I need to hear it directly from you, not second hand from Anita.'

'Okay, I get it. Well, here goes. It turns out that the Juan Garcia I married ten years ago was not the man I lost to a drowning accident. I know Anita told you about his many lady friends. For years I kept hoping he would return to me but, to be perfectly frank with you, in the end I grew to despise him. Can I be more direct than that?'

'Miriam, I'm very sorry to hear that. You've been through a horrible time.'

'Callum, just so we are clear here, Anita and I have the same view. Easy success by inheriting Don Fernando's wealth and to some extent his position in Vigo, went to Juan's head. I know Luisa showed you our wedding photographs so you know he was a good looking man. After Uncle Don Fernando was drowned and Juan discovered how very rich he had become, the very first thing he did was to go to Madrid and buy the very best clothes made to measure. He was away for two weeks and did not telephone me once. Anita told me later that Don Fernando would never have done that, that he did not flaunt his wealth. He used to help others. But looking back, I can see now Juan want the wealth and the

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power and the adoration that wealth gave him. He want it for himself, not to share. The truth is all along Juan was shallow, self-centred.'

'He shut you out?'

'Yes, but to be fair, he encouraged me to do likewise and I went to Paris and Milan with Anita and bought myself lots of expensive clothes. And while we were away on my spending spree Juan bought a new Mercedes and went off roving. Anita heard the rumours first and told me but I missed it at first, his affairs with other women. It took me ages to accept he was cheating on me.'

'Oh Miriam, how horrible to be duped like that.'

'Anita and I think it might have started in earnest when I was expecting Juan junior. In the early months I was probably unreceptive. No, Callum, to be blunt, I was unreceptive. Every part of me was aching, sensitised. I did not want him near me. But when we eventually resumed marital relations after the birth, I caught a woman's sexual infection from him. It was horrible, diabolical. I went to Madrid, to a clinic to get treatment. I should have challenged him but, well, I was too afraid I might lose him. I kept hoping he would get over it and return to me. But Juan was sneaky with it. After a business trip to Bilbao, Anita found sexy silk panties mixed in with his dirty clothes. She brought them to me but I was too timid to chastise him. Anita can be very fierce. She marched into his office and challenged Juan face to face. For a while it seemed he was reformed and we behaved like husband and wife but when he started travelling to The Canaries, it started again. He was like Jekyll and Hyde. I could just tell by the way he touched me, rough, forceful, domineering. By then I was pregnant with Donald. And again I did not want to be touched and again rejected him.

'After Donald was born I started again on contraceptive pills sent by post from Glasgow, from a friend with condoms which I insisted he wore. He exploded saying it was unmanly and I gave in but I avoided him whenever I could. We did have sex but only a few times a year. I could sense he was drifting. I was so ashamed of myself because I knew it must be my fault. To everyone around us we seemed like the perfect couple. I couldn't even bring myself to talk about it with Anita. You are the first person I've told about the worst parts.

'Oh Miriam. How absolutely horrible for you, trapped in a 'perfect marriage' that was a sham.'

'Then recently, I decided to try again to win him back, to make him love me again. My last chance saloon, I said to myself. I stopped taking my pills and I encouraged him, even though I was worried about catching another dose. Anita sensed what I was doing and told me not to do it but I allowed myself to become pregnant, hoping another baby would

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solve our problem. And then, out of the blue, there was his accident and he drowned and I lost the baby, another boy they told me. Sadly, he was not my first miscarriage.'

'Yes, I know how it feels to lose someone you love. I'm not sure I'm really over it. And finding someone new was beyond me. I've never been good at talking to girls. I just seem to get tongue tied.'

'Callum, I want to tell you something else I've kept to myself. Not even Anita knows this. When I started to recover from my collapse after losing Juan, I felt released. For years I had been trying to get him back and now I did not need or want him. His death freed me. And then there you were, right before me, playing with my boys and I could tell they adore you. You are a fine young man and although I am five years older than you, I hope I don't seem too old for you, do I?'

'Oh no Miriam. As I told Anita, you are beautiful, probably the most beautiful girl I've ever met, actually.'

'Callum, tell me about Janice, tell me everything. I would love to understand.'

'I was twenty-two when I started with MAFF, straight from college. I needed to open a bank account. I went to the Bank of Scotland on Byres Road, near to my rented flat. Janice, who was twenty-five, was already the assistant manager and she took me to her room where she helped me fill out the forms. It was late in the afternoon, a Friday. It was raining. She suggested we go for a coffee. Janice lived in Mount Florida, near Hampden, in a flat owned by her father. She normally travelled by the Subway to Bridge Street where she caught a bus. The rain kept teeming down. There was a long queue outside the Subway, some sort of breakdown, we heard later. Eventually, she more or less invited herself back to my flat in Vinicombe Street. She had a packet of Durex. It was my first time. I was hopeless but Janice knew what to do.'

'Vinicombe Street! Opposite the Western Baths!'

'Yes, I was a student member. They had an arrangement with the college. It's where I learned to swim, where I did my lifesaving certificate, a course requirement.'

'And you were taught by Mr McCann! He taught me too. Anyway, back to Janice, please. I promise not to interrupt you again.'

Miriam removed her sunglasses, leaned closer and took Callum's hands in hers, lifted them to her lips, holding them gently, stroking and squeezing them, listening in silence as tears rolled down his cheeks.

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When he was talked out, they walked hand-in-hand out past the cottage and stood in a secluded stand of trees, kissing, pressing against each other, exploring with their hands, whispering the words of the opening chapter of a new life stretching out ahead of them.

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Later that evening, Miriam repeated a simplified synopsis of what Callum had revealed during his long, repetitive explanation of his short time with Janice Mackinnon.

It was a whirlwind courtship.

Fast forward three months from their first night in his flat in Vinicombe Street and they were married.

Her parents had moved around during their lives - her father was a Bank Manager with the Clydesdale Bank and was currently based in Ayr, planning to retire and move back to Glasgow.

Janice was their only child, a late baby.

Mr Mackinnon paid for their honeymoon to Paris, booking them for a week at the Hotel Regina near the Louvre, a very posh establishment where the Mackinnons had stayed the previous summer.

On the third day of their honeymoon, Janice caught a chest infection and was confined to bed with headaches and a high fever. The hotel called a doctor who prescribed aspirin and hot water with lemon juice. There had been a spate of similar infections.

Janice died in her sleep the next morning.

Callum was bereft, disoriented, numbed.

Her father took charge by telephone and the body was returned to Glasgow where an autopsy showed she had died of Legionella Pneumophila (Legionnaires Disease). She was newly pregnant.

Unable to concentrate, his career as a Marine Surveyor stalled for several months. He found his solution by turning to walking, running and swimming. He also received counselling arranged by his GP.

Callum rented his flat through an agency, who also provided a re-mailing service for anything delivered to Vinicombe Street.

He moved to Portsmouth and made a fresh start with MAFF.

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The Portsmouth office posted him to The Canaries, firstly to La Gomera and Tenerife and then to Galicia where he had based himself in La Guarda.

At thirty-three, Callum Sinclair had been a singleton for almost ten years.

Janice Mackinnon had been his one and only girl, the father of his unborn child.

After the funeral, Roger Mackinnon berated Callum, chastising him for not taking Janice to a hospital where she might have received life-saving treatment.

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La Gomera

The Garcia party's move to La Gomera in early May 1979 was organised like a military operation by Don Ramon. It happened early in the morning, in the half-light with Annamaria, Carme and Luisa in floods of tears giving hugs and cuddles and wishing the travellers *un viaje seguro y sin incidentes* (a safe and uneventful journey).

Accompanied by Don Ramon and Anita, Miriam, Juan and Donald were driven by a shuttle bus sent from Madrid Airport to collect them. From the airport they flew with *Iberian* airlines (the Spanish state carrier) to Tenerife and onwards by ferry to La Gomera.

Approximately twenty-four hours earlier, Callum had been driven two hours north through the misty gloom by Pepe to A Coruña to catch an early train to Madrid followed by a local bus to the airport where, using his British passport and posing as a tourist, he bought a return ticket from *Spantax* airlines, crowding onto the busy tourist flight with other Spanish and international visitors heading to Tenerife. The return half of his ticket would never be used.

From the airport he travelled by local bus to Los Cristianos then onward by ferry to La Gomera, arriving the day before Miriam's group when he made the call to Don Ramon to confirm his safe arrival.

Contented they were safe at the smallholding, Annamaria, Carme and Luisa refused to go with them. In due course the ruin of Villa Marina was sold and the money deposited in a bank account in Luisa's name, providing them with sufficient funds to secure their future. A year or so later, a settlement was reached with the building insurance company and the local authority, this sum added to Luisa's account.

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On arrival, Miriam's first action was to rename her home as *Villa de Cielos Azules* (a play on 'Blue Skyes') a change which she registered in her maiden name with the local council.

Following a long chat with Juan and Donald it was agreed they would change their names to John and Donald Macleod, taking on their mother's surname. John seemed to enjoy his new first name and thought it made him sound Scottish, like Callum and Donald.

In due course this change would be registered with the authorities.

(Two years later, when all the legal transactions for the sale of Juan Garcia's assets had been finalised, Miriam changed her name back to Miriam Macleod, thereby erasing her link with Juan Garcia.)

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At the end of their first week, the final plan was agreed and Don Ramon and Anita flew back to Vigo to begin the process of dismantling Don Juan Garcia's mini empire and creating a series of investments in the name of Miriam Macleod, funds which were transferred to the legitimate tax-free haven of the Isle of Guernsey under her original British passport.

Miriam and Callum settled to wait, making plans for home schooling for John and Donald, swimming in the pool and cycling with the boys to explore their new island home.

Meanwhile, back in Vigo, the sale of Juan Garcia's assets proceeded quietly. This included his cannery operations in Vigo and La Gomera, his investments in the Citroen Car plant in Vigo, the other lesser investments along the Galician coast and his share of the *Las Americas* development in Tenerife, freeing Miriam from the odious tentacles of the Puigs' cabal.

In parallel, during a long series of fax exchanges with Mrs Alicia di Marco nee Alice Graham (Alicia Garcia), an equitable settlement was eventually reached, local taxes and fees deducted and the balance due transferred to Alice Graham's personal Bank of Scotland account in Edinburgh, making her an even richer woman.

When Anita eventually returned to The Canaries a few months later, she carried a portfolio of documents and deeds which she and Miriam lodged in the safe of the *Banco de Espana* in a personal account in the name of 'Mrs Miriam Macleod' resident owner of *Villa de Cielos Azules, Playa de La Caleta, La Gomera*.

A few months later, Don Ramon sold his villa in Vigo, wound up his legal practice, consolidated his substantial wealth and made his Will in favour of Callum Sinclair who he appointed as his Power of Attorney. Now retired, he moved from Vigo to live on Tenerife, basing himself in the village of *Los Gigantes*, in a small hilltop villa supported by a married couple. From his garden terrace, using a powerful telescope, he had a good view of *Villa de Cielos Azules* at *Playa de La Caleta*.

His days were spent reading spy thrillers and sketching out plots which he posted to Miriam who typed them up and sent them off on his behalf as suggestions to his favoured authors.

He also spent long clear evenings studying the starry skies, developing a retirement interest in astronomy and joining a local group of like-minded celestial observers who met on his terrace to enjoy meals delivered from a local restaurant and sample wines from his excellent cellar.

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Don Ramon had never been a good sailor and his visits to La Gomera became less and less frequent as he grew older.

(Eleven years after his move to Los Gigantes, he slept away, aged 83.)

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Established as a relaxed, cheerful and loving couple, Callum Sinclair and Miriam Macleod lived together as man and wife but did not marry.

Three years after the move to La Gomera, their daughter was born, a long, slim child with golden hair and pale sky-blue eyes. After a long wrangle, they called her Celeste Anita Annamaria Sinclair Macleod, shortened to Celeste Sinclair Macleod in daily use).

Mindful of her age and history of miscarriages, Miriam encouraged Callum to have the 'snip'.

For Anita Alvarez, her new life on La Gomera centred around John and Donald, keeping them focussed, insisting on perfection, praising them constantly and scolding them occasionally, when required. She used the materials which Miriam and Callum had ordered from distance learning institutions in Spain and Britain and elsewhere. She found the resource packs used for home-taught children in the Australia outback particularly useful, adapting and reformatting them to her own vision. In addition, she also marshalled Miriam and Callum, assigning them teaching duties and suggesting outdoor projects to collect specimens, set up insect and mammal traps in the garden and beyond with visits to the sea pools to observe and photograph wildlife.

In effect she was the *Director de la escuela primaria* (Head Teacher of their home school).

In parallel with her teaching duties, Anita was their housekeeper, in charge of visiting daily maids, organising routine maintenance and pool cleaning, supervising a schedule of internal decorating and external painting, sourcing and supervising experts to carry out necessary building repairs. Always the bookkeeper, Anita recorded all cash outgoings and invoice payments in her daily ledger, presenting it to Miriam on the last Friday of each month, mirroring her routine from *Modas Galicia*.

Callum Sinclair's vague plan to open a dinghy and windsurfing school did not progress. Instead he became an accredited consultant for the Plymouth office of MAFF, inspecting UK fishing boats throughout The Canaries.

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(This arrangement lasted for just over a decade when personnel in London and Plymouth changed and Callum was 'remaindered', deemed no longer 'cost effective', swept away by an unpredictable flick of a bureaucrats' brush.)

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Over the course of the years to come, Miriam's three children progressed with their distance learning approach by enrolling at the Open University (OU) as international students, using their first degrees to gain entry to Glasgow University.

With a 'highly commended' BA in European Political History from the OU, John Garcia Macleod studied at Glasgow University, gaining a PhD in Spanish History, before moving to St Andrews University to become a lecturer in Contemporary Spanish History. At St Andrews, he met and married Ann Geddes from nearby Perth, the daughter of a beef farming dynasty based in Ayrshire. Ann was older by a few years, already a Reader in the Maths Department.

Both are avid cyclists and live on the outskirts of the small town of Ceres (about an hour from St Andrews by bicycle using quieter roads). By choice, they do not possess a car. They have a large organic garden and the family are mainly vegetarian.

John and Ann have two sons called Fraser and Callum who footballers and faithful Dundee United supporters, win or lose.

Donald Garcia Macleod earned a BSc (Hons) Engineering Sciences from the OU and went to Glasgow University where he studied Civil Engineering, graduating with a Master of Engineering in Motorway Construction.

His first employment was in the Glasgow office of an international contractor but after a year he moved to their Madrid office before gaining a promotion to his firm's office in A Coruña on the Galician coast, (a two hour drive from Vigo). Here he met and married Lucia Fernandez, a graphic artist working for an global advertising agency.

Donald and Lucia have two daughters called Miriam and Anita who are keen tennis and netball players, always first picks for their teams.

Celeste Sinclair Macleod gained a BA in Human Anatomy from the OU then studied at Glasgow University where she graduated as a Dentist. Armed with a first class degree, she moved to Glasgow Dental Hospital, earning a post-graduate Diploma in Prosthodontics (tooth replacement like crowns and implants). She then moved to Tenerife with her Glasgow born husband Kevin Ferguson, an Orthodontist specialising in correcting crooked,

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crowded and misaligned teeth and bite issues. Together they have established a successful specialist dental practice in Los Cristianos.

Celeste and Kevin have three boys, James, Brodie and Ross, all budding football players and keen RC Celta Vigo supporters.

Approaching retirement, Pepe and his crew sold *La Estrella di Galicia* to a local man based on La Gomera and returned to their roots in Vigo. A few of his crew and their families remain in The Canaries, some in Tenerife, some in Gran Canaria and Fuerteventura where work opportunities and marriage with local families have taken them. The previous extended Garcia family ethos has faded, now just a memory.

Sadly, contact with Alicia and Raphaele di Marco was lost when Raphaele died of Motor Neuron Disease and Alice Graham moved to Brussels with her new partner.

Anita is long gone ahead to join Annamaria and Carme in their version of heaven.

Luisa visits occasionally for a month in early January although she suffers badly from arthritis and needs a wheelchair and employs a young Nigerian woman who cares for her full-time at the smallholding.

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As each their offspring graduated, Miriam and Callum revisited versions of Glasgow and other parts of Scotland they struggle to recognise, often shocked and disappointed with what they saw and heard in the streets of Glasgow and Edinburgh, saddened by the litter, graffiti and general neglect they witnessed, concluding that Glasgow was no longer the vibrant, hopeful city they remembered from the late 1970s and early 1980's.

In their sixties, Miriam and Callum live quiet lives, contented with their own company, their days set in a routine of gardening and local walking with occasional longer coastal rambles to favourite coffee shops and hidden family/community restaurants off the tourist trail where the food is tasty, wholesome and unfussy.

They are dedicated organic gardeners, growing fruit and vegetables which they share with neighbours.

Another favourite hobby is 'rain walking' which starts with a steep car journey into the hills to pick their way along faint leafy tracks through the semi-tropical forest which they helped establish as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

These rain walks remind them of their formative years on the Isle of Skye and they often talk of making a return pilgrimage yet have not done so.

Perhaps this is wise - to do so might spoil their rose tinted memories.