

THE ROAD TO NAB END – Chapter Seventeen – Part 2

One night, father came home, tired out, to learn that we were moving.

‘Will,’ mother announced, her face alight,

‘I’ve taken a house on Livingstone Road close to Eric. It’s where the toffs live. We’re going to leave the grime behind. We’ve lived too long in a house in which you can’t swing a cat. The rent collector can keep it.’

Father was dumbfounded. He stood there and blew out his cheeks as if recovering from a blow. He had difficulty breathing. Mother didn’t give him a chance to recover.

‘It’s a champion house. There’s room for everybody, four bedrooms!’ Ignoring father’s ‘but’ and ‘in heaven’s name’ and ‘have you taken leave of your senses, woman?’ she raced on.

‘There’s an indoor petty, one that flushes, and a bathroom, now think of that, Will. There’s a proper kitchen, a proper dining room and a proper sitting room. And it’s all lit by electricity. That makes us as good as Eric. Can you imagine it?’

She went faster still.

I suspected she was adding rooms that were not there. She’d got it all worked out: my sister Jenny, who was about to marry Gordon Weall, would rent the front rooms overlooking the hills. Gordon, a painter, would paint and repaper the rooms.

‘Well?’

We all held our breath. Surely, he couldn’t say no to all that. But he did.

‘Tha’s off thi ‘ead, woman,’ he shouted. ‘How can we afford to live with toffs? We’re ‘and to mouth as it is.’

‘That’s where ye’re wrong,’ she sobbed,

‘Don’t you understand? We’ve got to do summat or we’re goin’ te die in this dirt.’

Then Jenny joined in.

‘We can do it dad, we can do it. Mother wants to move up and you’ve got to help her. You’ve got to listen to what she’s saying. She’s worn her feet off looking for a better place and all the thanks she gets from you is to say it’s madness.’

By now the three women were crying; the kitchen echoed to their sobs.

I’d never heard the three of them at it together. Father stared at them with glazed eyes, slowly wiping the sweat off his brow.

My sisters needn’t have cried so hard. Mother had no intention of being done out of the house. She knew that father didn’t want to change houses. He didn’t want to change anything. There was no ambition in him. But the new house was mother’s rainbow and she wasn’t going to let anybody take it away. Producing all kinds of papers from her blouse, she delivered the final blow.

‘Look at these,’ she said.

Father looked at the papers.

‘Oh Maggie, tha’s really done it this time, lass.’

Of course, he could have repudiated the estate agent’s contract. Mother couldn’t read and had signed with a cross.

But he didn’t.

It took father some minutes to recover from shock. ‘Hmm ...hmm...’ he kept saying to himself while staring at the floor.

‘Well, hast tha made up thi mind?’ mother prodded him.

‘Aw reet,’ he answered with a nod.

‘Aw reet’ took us to Livingstone Road.