

Torrid times before the birth

In the last chapter we met Dorothy, a beautiful young woman, confined to the family doctor's home and surgery, unable to venture out until she gave birth to her first child, conceived out of wedlock. Six-months before that there had been a torrid meeting between the family of the mother-to-be and the man who had broken her virginity: an air force pilot, just home from war.

Tracking back through those early days in Yorkshire, to a day six months before George was born, we come upon a tumultuous scene taking place in the large, stone-built residence (bought a year or so earlier to house the large and extended family). Several people are seated around a rectangular, highly polished dining table, with *dad*, the fifty-year-old, family patriarch, positioned at one end. They are taking tea from flower-patterned porcelain cups, accompanied by a dark fruit cake and cheese – a traditional and delicious snack in this part of the world - served by two teenage girls, ostensibly the older *sisters* of the baby-to-be.

Dad was addressing a thirty-something gent to his left, whose pushed-back, *Brylcreamed* hair, lay dark and shiny on a larger-than-normal head, which in turn sported an equally prominent nose. To top of an effect which seemed to beg playing up, rather than playing down his seemingly errant behavior, the young man was wearing a rather bright, mustard-and-green, plaid jacket: fashionable in Scotland perhaps.

"Now listen here young man," the older one bellowed in a thick Yorkshire dialect, while glowering at his adversary, *"You come here with your crippled wife."* He gestured to a somewhat gaunt-looking lady in a wheelchair, sitting next to the younger man. *"And this boy of yours."* (a nine or ten-year-old boy could be seen at the far end of the room, playing on the floor). *"And then you have the cheek to tell me it was all an accident; that you were suffering the after-effects from flying over Germany, or some such rubbish. Well let me tell you young lad, I was also an airman, in the war, The First World War, and*

I never got any lady into trouble, as you have done with our young Dorothy here! You should be ashamed of yourself! I tell you frankly, downright ashamed!" His finale to this little tirade was accompanied by a loud thump on the table, causing the white porcelain cups to rattle in their saucers and the younger man to recoil sharply, looking decidedly fearful, as if thinking he would be the next item to be pummeled.

Dad's fuming red face extended upwards to his receding, grey hairline. His first-born daughter - his angel of mercy - had been sullied and misled by a de-mobbed Royal Air Force pilot. It was high time to seek some sort of revenge and today was the day he would do it. His stoic Yorkshire character told him that the young man sitting next to him needed to be taught a lesson; a sharp lesson that he would never forget.

Dorothy sat, looking rather sheepish, alongside her father and opposite the man whom she had made love to some three months earlier, now staring down at her slightly larger-than-usual belly. The man she had thought was a single, thus un-betrothed airman - disturbed by a bloody war and in need of some rest and recuperation - was now here in this room, fighting off assault waves from her own enraged father. And though this father-to-be of her own baby now seemed a little arrogant, even insolent, she well remembered that time, not long before, when she had fallen for his charismatic, outgoing nature and believing his story, had given up her carefully protected virginity.

Now, she sat and observed the man's disabled wife, who in turn sat grim-faced and silent, staring blankly at a framed painting of a seaside scene, on the opposite wall. Her face was a vision of despair: her life also turned upside down by the man she had trusted since their marriage, ten years before. In different ways they had both been betrayed by the same man, in his lust for a new conquest. The wife, glancing unseen at the husband sitting next to her, knew instinctively that Dorothy was not the first woman he had slept with, beyond their marriage vows ... and perhaps more importantly, would not be the last. Her thinking was consumed by what was to happen next.

“Let me tell you,” dad continued. “it’s high time for explanations young man. You can’t go around doing this sort of thing. It’s not done here in Yorkshire and I don’t think it’s very well accepted, North of the border, where you hail from, either. There are consequences, as we can now well-see my lad!” (he nodded pointedly towards His daughter’s growing tummy). *“You’re supposed to be a responsible citizen. Your air-force training should have damn-well told you that fact of life!”* Another thump on the table, accompanied by rattling teacups, once again caused the younger man to cringe and look away ... towards his disabled wife (though in truth, he knew deep down that due to his own actions, this was now a route which offered no support).

“I’m sorry sir. It wasn’t meant to be like this; I’d just arrived back from the occupation, when we happened, by chance, to meet.” This was all the besieged man could offer up, in a voice that seemed like a whimper against the older man’s bellowing.

This was like a red rag to a bull for the patriarch. *“Sorry! Sorry? Your dead right it wasn’t meant to be like this! Our Dorothy is a fine upstanding Yorkshire lass. Now look what you’ve done to her! You look like a talking parrot from the jungles of Brazil in that ridiculous jacket. God knows what Dorothy here ever saw in you.”* The wife on hearing that, thought much the same: she had made a grave mistake in marrying the man, and today’s upheaval was the ultimate consequence.

And so it went on: the young man berated and cowering under the strain, the lady in her wheelchair staring at the painting as she mused on the man she had once trusted and the young boy playing in blissful ignorance on the floor. Nothing really could be changed or amended; the deed was done, and everyone involved would live from that day on with the after effects, including the small foetus that was slowly developing inside the womb of Dorothy: the boy called George, to be.

At the finish the head of the family had his final say. *“Well, despite what you’ve done, we’ve decided that Dorothy will have the child and mam and I will look after it, as if it were our own.”* He gestured to *mam*, as she was known by everyone, who had been

silent, but listening attentively throughout, at the far end of the table. *“You can take yourself and your little family back to sunny Scotland, where you came from, and carry on with your merry little life, though I guess it may not be all that merry from now on, judging by the look on the face of the lady you call your wife!”* He was still red-raw angry, but managed to appear a little pleased with himself after this thinly disguised, rather vicious joke.

The thinly veiled forecast from the patriarch did in fact come to pass when the wheelchair-bound lady walked out on her husband, with the boy, a few years later, after which her husband decamped to marriage with a long-term employee, from the pub he and his former wife had managed on the East coast of Scotland. Forever after that, the young boy who had come with his parents to the seismic meeting at the grand old house in Yorkshire, remembered his mother’s continuous referral to his father’s new wife as: *“that fucking barmaid!”*

For the yet-to-be-born baby, that was the last his mother and her family saw or heard of the couple from Scotland, though the young boy playing at the end of the room on the floor, would come back to feature in the life of *baby* George, more than fifty years on from that historic day. In time to come, they would meet, and the young boy would recount the details of that day, tinged with a sense of humour, for George’s benefit.

Dorothy hid away in the family doctor’s premises, first as receptionist and then, when her belly was beginning to show, as mother-to-be and after-hours housemaid. On returning to the family fold with her newborn in a cardboard box, *mam* took over the reins: a tiny Scottish lady, exceptionally beautiful in her youth and now the matriarch; respected, almost revered by all, including her husband, *dad*, of almost thirty years.

“Such a beautiful wee bairn.” *mam* said with a loving tenderness as she lifted the baby from the box, giving him a pronounced peck on the nose. The young child, just a few days old, peeked out from his tightly wrapped, sky-blue blanket, smiling back at her as if he knew he was in safe hands. And indeed, he was ... for a few short years, at least.

“As we agreed Dorothy,” she said firmly, whilst continuing to gaze lovingly at the baby she was holding, “I shall be his mother from now on, and no one, not one soul outside this place, will be the wiser. Your brothers and sisters have all been sworn to secrecy.”

Mam then placed the young baby, George, lovingly into the cot, installed earlier that day, at the foot of her bed. She pulled the soft blanket up to cover the back of his head and ears, then bending down to kiss him on the cheek, continued:

“You will carry on next week with your teaching, as if nothing has happened. You have missed the first few weeks of term, but I told them you had gone down with a severe flu and they accepted that. You’re a talented young language teacher Doris, and they want you back. You will focus on your career and leave young George to me”

“When you come home and you are inside this house, George of course is yours. But outside and for the rest of the world to see, he is mine. It’s best like this, if you value your future and don’t want to be tormented by righteous gossip for the rest of your life.”

Dorothy looked on, with those vivid memories from the notorious meeting, well before George was born, in the back of her mind, while now listening to these robust and assertive declarations from her own mother, subsequent to the birth. She really had no choice in the matter. Her parents were so admired by all around them (family and friends), to go against their bidding would have been unthinkable ... even if it was the fate of her bastard child at stake!

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