

Bad blood

Natalia Magdalena O'Connell 1941-1991

Exactly one month after the fateful first of September, 1939, Natalia's grandparents, Roman Catholic Polish jewellers of Jewish extraction living in the Kazimierz quarter of Krakow and her eighteen-year-old mother to be, managed to escape to London via Sweden. The whole journey had cost them nearly half the jewellery they had managed to smuggle out, but they still had enough over to buy a spacious flat in Warrington. Grandad did his bit for the Polish army in exile whilst mother did hers in the former munitions factory at Risley. Natalia's mother fell in love with a young second lieutenant, got engaged and pregnant whilst the young Englishman got killed in action. It took Natalia's mother fourteen months to be persuaded – the war effort, the best interests of the child, a good home etc. – to parted from her child. The baby had high cheekbones and round hazel eyes as full of curiosity as they were of beauty. Natalia still remembered the desperate words of 'Moja córeczko, moja córeczko!', but not the hysterical sobs when her mother was severed from her baby to be adopted by a respectable family from Milnsbridge near Huddersfield.

Nevertheless, the little foreign flower blossomed and flourished despite being surrounded by Huddersfield's grimmest concentration of identical factories and mills. Dad was chief dyer the local dye-house, which meant he could afford to live in a spacious detached house surrounded by a large garden and small orchard. Dad together with multinational chemical works contributed to the wondrous Huddersfield sunsets with phosphorescent effects in vivid greens, luminous purples and pale orangey yellows.

When Natalia was eight years old, her parents divorced. Dad was banned and a vague longing melancholy dimmed the lustre in this once bright jewel. At school, Natalia was bullied on account of being beautiful and speaking correct English.

As a teenager she became emaciated and sank into herself. This was partly because she was surrounded by ogres – First World War casualties in the form of maiden aunts - who constantly berated Natalia's adopted mother on account of the divorce: "Ee, I don't know. You can't even keep a man." Despite Natalia's emaciation at the age of eighteen, her high cheekbones and luxuriant jet black hair attracted the local males and occasioned whispered cries of 'Bad blood! Bad blood!' from the envious aunts.

When she was twenty, Natalia had not realised that coarse-grained Simon Littlewood was a classical specimen of the species called 'cad' despite his superficial resemblance to Kirk

Douglas. In court, he denied his paternity to the beautiful daughter he had begotten – an almost perfect replica of Natalia herself. The ecstatic ogres intoned almost in unison: ‘Bad blood, bad blood – like mother, like daughter – bad, bad blood.’ It took Natalia almost the same length of time as it had taken her mother to be severed from her child. The arguments were slightly different – how are we all going to manage? You can ruin your own life if you want to, but are you really going to ruin your mother and daughter as well? They meant themselves, of course, as they were all partially dependent on Natalia’s wage as a typist at the local mill office and totally dependent on the large detached house.

When the severance lady came to perform the dire deed, Natalia did not hysterically cry out: ‘Moja córeczko, moja córeczko!!’, but ‘It’s my baby. It’s my baby. Mine! Mine! Mine!’ The ogres were so shocked by this hysterical outburst that they sent for an emergency doctor to the nearby hospital who at the word ‘adoption’ became grimly serious and coldly professional. After the inevitable jab, he still had the difficult operation of extricating the baby from tight grasp of Natalia’s delicate fingers. Thus the severance was successful. Well, Natalia had a spell of six weeks in Storthes Hall Hospital, the local asylum, later to become the campus of Huddersfield University. A kind of normality ensued.

Long autumn days where the sun’s pale light barely penetrated the surrounding mist so that the dull red orb appeared like an ominous UFO in an alien sky were followed by days of identical grey skies, cold wet wind and constant rain and drizzle. A few years passed until she met Kieron, the Celt – steely blue eyes and hair even blacker than her own. They made a beautiful couple whilst the aunts chanted in the background: ‘Bad blood. Nothing will come of it. Like mother, like daughter. Bad, bad blood!’

Something did come of it, however. They married, produced Coleman who had the same complexion and colouring as his father. After Kieron’s failure as a maths teacher at the new 11-16 comprehensive at Radcliffe Bridge, Natalia worked in the water board office as a typist to finance Kieron’s studies in accountancy. Natalia’s only regret was that she could see her beloved Coleman only in the evenings and at weekends. Kieron was a perfect house husband and Coleman had bonded very closely with his father. The highlight of the week was on the Sunday evenings when they enjoyed the luxury of listening to the weekly radio serial whilst dunking ginger biscuits in their cocoa. They had little money but much joy.

had given birth to him on February the 14th.

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