

A Visit to Yorkshire

by Marion Umney

Emily knew they should have brought the Volvo. Not only was it more comfortable, but it had clout. Why was it, she wondered, that some men thought they could intimidate women on the roads as well as everywhere else tailgating you in their big flashy cars. Her mother laughed.

“T’was ever thus I’m afraid. I put it down to penis bragging myself. They’re giving a message – I’ve got a big one and I’m gonna stick it up you. What they don’t realise is that we can see right through them and we don’t give a shit!”

Emily stared at her mother then burst out laughing. She was beginning to realise that very few of us are what we seem and since covid, or perhaps her father’s death, she wasn’t sure which, she was seeing a very different side of Laura.

The scenery was changing as they left the outskirts of London and headed north. Rows of suburban semis gave way to fields and hedgerows. Clean, modern, homogenous housing ribboning out from small towns gave way to heavier, dark grimy brick homes huddled together in homely clusters, where half derelict factories and warehouses were the only indicators of past prosperity. The landscape became more rugged as they headed further north and moorland replaced farmland as the motorway became more deserted as if mirroring the bleak loneliness of the place.

It was getting late as they entered the town and found their hotel, a grey stone building with a certain faded elegance, hidden from the road by a bank of trees. The reception area was cool and inviting however, and the receptionist ready to chat, eager to know their plans.

“We’re just doing a bit of research actually.”

Emily had learned a long time ago not to mention she was a journalist. The response was usually either a stone wall of suspicion, or an overeager interest in who she might have interviewed and what they might have said – a presumption of celebrity which she could never identify with. Laura however, was less circumspect.

“We’re looking at a bit of family history actually, and we want to find out a bit more about the Carltons.”

“You’re related to the Carltons. I thought the family had died out.” She called across to a colleague sitting in the office behind her.

“Hey John. Wasn’t it a Miss Carlton who managed one of the mines before the coal board took it over? did she ever marry do you know?”

The man looked up and seeing the two women at the desk came out from the office. He was about Laura’s age, possibly slightly older, with a mop of grey hair and soft grey eyes.

“Mr Arkwright has lived here all his life.”

The receptionist introduced him. If you want to know anything about local history he’s your man aren’t you John?” she smiled across at him as he scrutinised the two women closely.

A frown crossed Laura’s face. She was sure she had come across that name before, but for the life of her she couldn’t remember where. Probably not. In this part of the world you couldn’t get a name more common than John Arkwright and yet.... She held her hand out “Laura Blackmoor, and this is my daughter Emily. Pleased to meet you Mr. Arkwright.”

And you, MRS Blackmoor?” The question at the end was palpable and Emily found herself bristling, although she couldn’t quite work out why. Laura, to her surprise, just laughed. “Please just call me Laura.” As Emily wondered how any more surprises she was going to get over these next few days.

The man gave a small smile “So Laura, you’re looking for the Carltons. Well that’s easy, Carlton house, the former home of the Carlton family has been turned into a museum. It features the history of mining in the area as well as housing documents and photos relating to the family itself. Not the most illustrious family round here I have to say, but it’s a nice little museum. Was there anyone you were particularly interested in?”

“Not really” Emily interjected, before Laura could open her mouth, “One of our ancestors came from here and we think she might have had connections to the Carltons, that’s all. We needed a holiday and have never been to this part of the world, so it just seemed a good idea to kill two birds with one stone.”

“Right,” John Arkwright smiled at Emily and then at Laura, “Well if I can be of any help just let me know.” And with that he turned and withdrew to his cubbyhole behind the reception desk, leaving the two women to register and collect their keys.

As they moved towards the stairs Emily glanced over her shoulder at the desk and couldn’t help but notice My Awkrigh was still staring at her mother.