

## The Lemon Tree

By Christopher Wild

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Aunty Doris had a lemon tree.

She didn't live in Limone on Lake Garda, where the lemons grow in abundance in the rich fertile soil. Nor did she live in Sorento where the Ponderosa's grow to the size of a small bowling ball. None of those places where the sun shines in perfectly blue cloudless skies for most of the year and the old people are wrinkled from years of working outside under intense sunlight.

She lived in Shaw, a small densely populated mill town in the valley of the River Beal, at the foot of the Pennines. Famous for its forty eight dark satanic cotton mills -- large rectangular brick built buildings that once dominated the panorama, making the area the powerhouse of textile manufacture during the industrial revolution. A town where the cold damp air caresses you, welcomes you, makes you feel like you belong, before its dark angry clouds dump their rain on you before they rise over the Pennines. A place of poor sterile soils and rugged terrain. A place described by Samuel Lewis as having produced 'a race of hardy and laborious men'.

She lived in a Edwardian mid-terrace opposite the Ideal Bakery. A two-up-two-down house that stood proud flush on the pavement, branded with years of smoke that bellowed from imposing factory chimneys and rows and rows of chimney stacks servicing cosy but functional coal fires. The house had a back garden, nothing more than a small yard that separated it from the cobbled alleys the interwove between the surrounded houses. Large slabs of stone - not the perfectly formed concrete paving stones of modern, but rough, nobbled, and discoloured slabs that might have been pulled from the local quarries -- made a path between the neighbours yard wall and the small perfectly preened patch of grass, toward the back of the yard.

There at the back, nestled between a low wooden fence and the outside privy-cum-coal shed, standing slightly lower than the outbuilding, and surrounded by misplaced homing pigeons, stood the tree. It didn't grow those gnarly, fragrant, and fresh lemons that you find in the market stalls of Portobello Road, nor the perfectly dull and symmetrical more common to british supermarkets.

The tree wasn't covered in long dark green elliptical leaves, finely toothed. It didn't have small perfect red buds or white purplish flowers with yellow anthers. It wasn't a tall majestic well nursed tree with light yellow fruit shown beautifully against blue skies. It was nondescript, fitting of its place -- in the corner of yard in a small cold Lancashire town. It was old, woody, and ever so slightly out of control.

But on it, at the end of every branch, sat the most

elegant lemons; perfectly formed by years of love and care. Tended for in a way that only a little old lady could.

Every shrove Tuesday when I was still so small that I could barely reach the fruit on the low hanging branches, we would cross the yard, propelled by excitement and expectations, to harvest a precious lemon to squeeze on our pancakes.

I would lift my hand up and caress one of the many perfectly identical plastic fruits hanging from every branch by the thinnest of cotton. No matter which one I took it was always full of the most wonderful juice, the taste of which would always remind me of this special place, this special moment. We would take off the lid and check, just to make sure, before returning to the house to continue with our feast.

Aunty Doris's *Jif* Lemon Tree -- a work of wonder and beauty.

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