Darling Fan - For Prunella Ransome

By : Carl Halling

A tribute to the beautiful English actress, Prunella Ransome.

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Prunella Ransome was a fey and hauntingly vulnerable redheaded beauty who only made a handful of major films, and never achieved the major stardom she so richly deserved. However, she was absolutely unforgettable as the pathetic Fanny Robin, abandoned by her lover Sergeant Troy - played by '60s icon Terence Stamp - for having mistakenly jilted him on their wedding day in John Schlesinger's masterful 1967 adaptation of Thomas Hardy's "Far from the Madding Crowd".

Her father, Jimmy Ransome, was the headmaster of West Hill Park, a private school for boys aged 7 to 13 located in Titchfield in Hampshire, from 1952 to 1959; and she was born on the 18th of January 1943 in Croydon in Surrey, a massive suburban area to the south of London which, in demographic terms, could not be more mixed, including as it does many tough multicultural districts, such as West Croydon and Thornton Heath, the largest council estate in Europe in the shape of New Addington, and wealthy middle class enclaves such as Sanderstead.

Her career began in 1967 with a television series, "Kenilworth", based on the historical novel by Sir Walter Scott in which she had the vital role of Amy Robsart, first wife of Lord Robert Dudley, who met her death by falling down a flight of stairs.

On the back of this major role, she made her incredible debut as Fanny Robin, for which she was deservedly nominated for the 1967 Golden Globe for best supporting actress, only to lose out to Carol Channing for the role of Muzzy Van Hossmere in "Thoroughly Modern Millie". While "Crowd" was not a major box office success, despite some critical acclaim, it has come to be viewed by many as an unsung masterpiece. Despite this extraordinary early burst of success, she wasn't to appear onscreen for a full two years, when she featured opposite another idol of the swinging sixties, David Hemmings, in "Alfred the Great", directed by Clive Donner, as Alfred's love interest, Aelhswith.

A good deal of British television work followed, until she landed her third and final major film role, as Grace Bass, wife of Zachary Bass - played by Richard Harris - a character loosely based on American frontiersman, Hugh Glass, in the action western, "Man in the Wilderness", directed by Richard C. Sarafian.

After this, most of her work was for television, although she was to appear in two further films, one of which,

"¿Quién puede matar a un niño?", directed by Narciso Ibáñez Serrador in 1976 has a cult following among horror fans. The other, "Marianne Bouquet" is a little known erotic movie helmed in 1972 by French actor-director, Michel Lemoine.

From '76 to '84, she worked pretty solidly for TV, and among the programmes in which she had major roles during this period were "Crime and Punishment" (1979), directed by Michael Darlow, and featuring John Hurt as Raskolnikov and "Sorrell and Son" (1984), based on the novel by Warwick Deeping, and directed by Derek Bennett. After this, though, she vanished from British television screens for a full eight years, and was only to appear in a further three more productions, the last one being in 1996. According to the Internet Movie Database, she died in 2002, although other web sites give the date of her death as 2003, and there is no information as to the circumstances of her death, other than it occurred in Suffolk.

For my part, I'll treasure those few moments she graced the screen in "Far From the Madding Crowd", and especially the fathomless heartbreak in her face as she watches her beloved Sergeant Troy walk out of her life forever, but for a final reunion so heartbreaking it destroyed both their lives, Fanny's within a few hours, Troy's after a period wandering the earth as a soul in torment.

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