

ADVENTURES IN TIME TRAVEL

Historical fiction by the winners of
the Young Walter Scott Prize 2020





AND WHEN DID YOU LAST SEE YOUR FATHER?

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Highly commended in the Young Walter Scott Prize
11-16 category

Author's introduction

The Young Walter Scott Prize combines my love of writing with one of my favourite subjects, History. My story was inspired by a painting titled, 'And When Did You Last See Your Father?' by William Fredrick Yeames. It depicts a Royalist family being interrogated by Roundheads during the English Civil War.

I stumbled upon the painting whilst doing research for a History Essay. I was instantly intrigued. The brave innocence of the boy, the silent sorrow of the mother, the stern soldiers and the question, 'And When Did You Last See Your Father?' I'd seldom come across a painting that had snared me into deep speculation. It was a mystery I wanted to put words to.

AND WHEN DID YOU LAST SEE YOUR FATHER?

Inspired by the painting: "AND WHEN DID YOU LAST SEE YOUR FATHER?" by William Yeames

Scott House had once known joy, though it was hard to believe it this morning. In the southern study the interlopers had the family ready to be questioned. The men wore yellow sashes around their waists, their dreary outfits, so out of place in the extravagant decor of the room, though definitely fitting the mood.

At the table sat four men. A weary scribe scratched out notes with his quill. A gangly soldier sat expressionless, his eyes as hollow as a pistol barrel. They would have brought him along for mere menace. In the middle sat a serious looking inquisitor who was whispering swiftly to the ginger man on his left, though the words couldn't be heard over the sobs of the little girl, common sense would tell you they were discussing nothing good. The inquisitor stopped and began to question the only man of the household, a little boy.

The mother cast a concerned look towards her son who was standing so innocently proud upon a stool, his brilliant blue outfit shone like a star in the dark atmosphere that day, in total contrast to the grim men in front of him. Her husband had told her about these men, he called them Roundheads, "a bunch of dull parliamentarians".

Did these "Roundheads" have no decency? First, they interrogate her and now her seven-year-old son.

While other sons and fathers would spend no worth of time in each other's presence, this boy and his father would move heaven and earth for each other.

They were a prosperous family. A happy family. With pleasant experiences there was always a price. The man of the house had been called away to war. A war to protect his king from parliamentary forces. This miserable fact of a war against men of same country still haunted the family's thoughts to this day. A King against Parliament, Cavaliers against Roundheads, family against family. Was the country in chaos?

The creeping fear of the inevitable danger lurked close in the family's train of thought. They all buried this despair deep within themselves and silently prayed for their loved one to return.

It had been a day since the Roundheads' arrival. They'd been woken from their bed chambers and directed to their father's study where the Inquisitor sat waiting.

He still stood there peering at the little boy like he was observing something peculiar or unexpected inside a cage. His face wasn't unkind or repulsive like the men behind him, he smiled gently and spoke...

"Good Morning, your Uncle here..." he nodded towards the ginger man to his left, "has been telling me all about what a fine young man you are. My name is Thomas Monck, what's your name?"

The boy nervously yet politely replied, "My name is Rupert, sir."

"Rupert's a strong name." He grinned. "How old are you?"

The gangly soldier glowered at the boy, without pity.

"I'm seven, sir."

A burly man who was sitting in the armchair in the corner, gave a low grumble.

The inquisitor smiled, "Are you a good boy, Rupert?"

"I hope, so." For some reason, Rupert couldn't stop looking at his Uncle. How could he be a part of this group that held him hostage?

The inquisitor gave a chuckle and leaned forward so he directly looked into the boy's eyes, "Do you love God?"

It was simple question for the boy to answer, "Yes, sir."

"Do you love the King?"

There was silence...

The mother burst out in tears. The soldier who had an arm around the boy's sobbing sister said in a gruff voice, "Come now, any opinion the boy has would have come from his parents."

The inquisitor gave a disregarding stare at the soldier, "Sergeant Crawford, is that how you speak to a senior officer? We are the New Model Army not some fools the King's strung together."

The Sergeant stood to attention, the inquisitor turned and smiled to the boy, "Yes, your parents, would you mind telling me their names?"

“Yes, sir. My mother is Georgina Debois.”

“And your father?”

“I don’t know, sir...”

The inquisitor smiled a smile that would have been worn by a fox when seeing a rabbit, then said, “Do you study the bible?”

“Yes.” The boy stared at the guard holding theirs.

“Good, then you’ll know God’s Ten Laws. Could you tell me Law Nine, Rupert?”

“Thou shalt not bear false witness.”

“Thank-you. Can you tell me what God will do to those who break those sacred rules?”

The boy’s mother interrupted the interrogation and blurted, speaking to her son, “I believe the most important law is Honour thy Father and thy Mother.” She glared at the inquisitor without his notice.

“Yes. Can you tell me, does your father play games with you?”

At that moment his mother burst into tears, the inquisitor shot her a sharp look then resumed his playful smile.

“He does, sir.”

“And so, it should be, I remember playing with my father when I was your age, when did you and your father last share that experience?” The Inquisitor smiled.

The boy’s lips were sealed.

The boy twitched uncomfortably. The memory, so fresh in his mind, by the unexpected visit of his father and his men, those last words that he’d said to him, before he fled. “Don’t forget me...”

Only a mere two days ago...

“And when did you last see your father?” the inquisitor repeated.

A ghostly chill filled the study.

“I’ll ask again, when did you last see your father?” His smile broke, his barely hidden anger revealed.

No noise escaped the boy. His mother took a deep breath. The once honest eyes of the inquisitor were swapped with the cruel eyes of a desperate man.

“For the final time...” He gritted his teeth. “When did you last see your father?”

The boy’s uncle stared at the inquisitor; he disliked his nephew being threatened by a man six times his age.

A sharp knife of anxiety cut into the previous atmosphere; a cold sweat boiled on the little boy’s forehead. He had a life or death decision.

In one metaphorical hand was Truth. A truth that endangered his father, a man who had raised him, the father he loved.

Then there was a Lie. A lie which would save his father yet would damn his immortal soul.

The decision was his.

The little boy cleared his throat and spoke...