# ADVENTURES IN TIME TRAVEL

Historical fiction by the winners of
the Young Walter Scott Prize 2019

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# About the Young Walter Scott Prize

When the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch first had the idea of establishing a competition for young writers, there was some uncertainty about whether there was any appetite out there for writing historical fiction. But right from the start the response – which grows every year – indicated that this was an opportunity for which many young writers had been longing.

First they select an historical period that inspires compelling story ideas. The best stories reflect thorough research, and the best of the best use that research subtly and convincingly. Then our writers populate their chosen period with authentic, compelling characters with whom readers can identify. Some of those characters may have lived, or been inspired by real people – others are created in order to drive the narrative. The challenge is to make the story true to its time, true to the facts of that period of history, and also appealing to a contemporary reader. Dialogue is often a key to success. Anachronistic speech can let a story down. In recreating their chosen period, writers must consider clothing, transport, culture, housing, belief systems, politics, communications – and so much more. Writing good historical fiction is a veritable tapestry of inspiration, facts, conjecture, probability, commitment, possibility and attention to detail.

All the stories in this anthology reflect the skill of these young writers. The judges – the Duchess of Buccleuch, novelist Elizabeth Laird, the Director of the Young Walter Scott Prize Alan Caig Wilson, arts journalist David Robinson and Literary Agent Kathryn Ross – marvelled at the variety of the entries, at the skill and at the ambition. Theirs was not an easy job, but they loved it, and we hope that in this anthology you will consider that they've chosen well.

And if your story didn't make it to this year's anthology, there's always the next one. It's never too soon to start planning your entry.

Alongside the creative writing competition, a programme of Imagining History workshops is run all over the UK by Prize Director Alan Caig Wilson, offering groups of young people a unique opportunity to explore

sites and buildings of historical interest. The workshops took place in Boughton House in Northamptonshire, Blickling House in Norfolk, Sutton Hoo in Suffolk and Trinity House of Leith in Edinburgh. Participants often go behind the scenes to places to which the public is not usually given access – and the tutors encourage active historical research, offering guidance on how to start writing inspired by the experience.

As this anthology goes to press, the Imagining History programme has had to be suspended due to the current need for social isolation. You will find information about when it restarts, and further information about the competition – including the entry form which must accompany each entry - on the Young Walter Scott Prize website.

Both the Walter Scott Prize and the Young Walter Scott Prize are supported by the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch and the Buccleuch Living Heritage Trust.

**Young Walter Scott Prize-winners**

2015 Joe Bradley and Rosi Byard-Jones

2016 Demelza Mason and Alice Sargent

2017 Leonard Belderson and Miranda Barrett

2018 Jenny O'Gorman and Joseph Burton

**Walter Scott Prize-winners**

2010 *Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel

2011 *The Long Song* by Andrea Levy

2012 *On Canaan's Side* by Sebastian Barry

2013 *The Garden of Evening Mists* by Tan Twan Eng

2014 *An Officer and a Spy* by Robert Harris

2015 *The Ten Thousand Things* by John Spurling

2016 *Tightrope* by Simon Mawer

2017 *Days Without End* by Sebastian Barry

2018 *The Gallows Pole* by Benjamin Myers

2019 *The Long Take* by Robin Robertson

## THE WHALE'S WAY

Ide Crawford
Macclesfield, Cheshire

Winner of the Young Walter Scott Prize
11-15 age-group

*This story was inspired by folk songs from the north-east of England – about the sea, Arctic whaling, and the press-gang. These set me reading nineteenth-century collections of songs, stories and poems in the dialect of Whitby and the North Riding. I was captivated by suggestive and onomatopoeic but now forgotten words and turns of phrase. The words had mostly Norse roots, and I realized that the dialect, like the weather and livelihoods of the people of this coast, had drifted to Whitby by sea from the far north.*

*I drew on several nineteenth and early twentieth-century studies of the dialect of the area in my attempt to capture my main character's voice. It is obviously not a perfect transcription of how she might really have talked. Even if I had complete knowledge of the dialect and how to transcribe it, writing like that would make it very inaccessible. Authors like Emily Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell who wrote in what they thought of as authentic dialect met with complaints from baffled readers. I compromised in favour of readability. I include a glossary of the old Whitby words used, many of which I have only found in nineteenth-century studies.*

*The whalers set sail for Greenland in early spring and returned in October. I was fascinated by the inversion of the usual pattern of feeling and association that this suggested; spring would have been a time of parting and sadness, autumn of hope and revival as the sailors returned with well-laden ships.*

## GLOSSARY

**Ackers** ripples

**Armogan** fine weather for starting a journey – naval slang, from French

**Blake** of light, warm, golden

**Brandered** roasted

**Bruckle** frail, brittle

**Clockflower** dandelion

**Close season** season so cold whaling ships find it hard to reach their grounds

**Crowdling** slow, sickly

**Crush** crowd

**Deary** small

**Didder** to shiver

**Dowly** miserable

**Down ligging time** bedtime

**Dree** dismal

**Elfbolt** belemnite fossil

**Femmer** soft and fragile

**Flayt** afraid

**Flittermouse** bat

**Ghaut** narrow Whitby alley

**Glancy** glittering

**Glestrin'** gleaming

**Glisk** transient view, or a gleam of sunlight through cloud

**Gowl** threaten or cry sulkily, sound fitfully and hollow like the wind

**Heartsome** inspiring courage and cheer

**Hirple** stick up the spine with cold

**Howle** empty, hollow

**Keeking** peeping

**Labbering** splashing, paddling

**Lall** shout or song

**Lantern-time** evening

**Ling** heather

**Lift** sky

**Lilting** bold and lively

**Lugs** ears

**Mafted** confused, as in a crowd or snowstorm

**Mell-supper** harvest-home feast

**Mirk** darkness

**Mokey** misty, like the mesh of a fishing net

**Neb** nose

**Pearching** very cold

**Pubble** soft, plump or round

**Rack** clouds driven by wind

**Rahve** tear

**Rine** hoar frost

**Rought** bellow or roar, as the sea

**Router** uproar, racing feet in a crowd

**Rykke** rip

**Scud** light drifting clouds

**Shadow-goer** fantastical shape-shifting beast, neither living nor dead

**Shill** biting

**Skimmer** shine

**Skrike** shout

**Snakestone** ammonite

**Snarly** as of wind, fierce and blustering

**Syke** ooze slowly

**Tharfly** slowly

**Trod** foot-path

**Turf-greaving time** autumn, time to slice or 'greave' the turfs for winter fuel

**Weel smon thee!** well on thee

**Wirdle** move slowly and laboriously

**October 1793**

I'm dreamin' – a soundless dream o' fallin' ice.

A breath o' wind comes – a sweet waft that mun ha' come rustlin' through meadowsweet an' butter-cresses. Summat soft an' warm reaches through t'snow an' melts t'cold.

A deary little hand, like a pubble shell, scrabblin' for my face – littler clingin' fingers. I always know when she's awake – t' way Jamie says he knows in his sleep if his ship has shifted course.

She's curled up, warm and sweet as a brandered chestnut in my cold bed.

"Let's go, my honey bairn!"

Down t' ghaut into t' lighter dark. My tread allays so loud on t'cobbles. The stark pillars o' t' empty marketplace, an' past Henrietta Street. This wakin' world is chiller nor dreams o' t'north, and t' shill wind that gowls through t'streets is little like my bairn's sweet summer breath, still warmin' my neck while the rest o' me is set a-didder.

Steps up into t' black.

"One, two, three, four, five…there, honey bairn…" Town gone now.

Her little heart beatin' again' mine. Answerin'.

As my legs tire, them snarly gusts gain strength – t' edge o' winter in 'em.

"There thee be, church, hirplin' under t' wind as be thy way!" Them graves is sharp against t' sky – it's growin' paler.

"An' one hundred an' ninety nine – top!"

Me feet find trod. I can hear the roughtin' o' t'sea in t' mirk below.

"Here's our nest i' the hussocks, my bonnie! Mind yon morn when we found a mammy roe and her fawn, warmin' it for us? That were a lucky sight! An' how they twinkled away through t' mokey dawn…"

I lap us snug and set to watch.

The lift brightens like t' apples on t'wall at home, scud touched wi' t' same whisper pink that kisses babby's bonny neb and lugs.

"There goes t'last flittermouse! Down liggin' time for 'im. There be t'sun, keekin' frae his black den. Risin' aloft. Sitha how t'sea shivers and skimmers, silver like a glestrin herrin'!"

Now t'rosy glow catches o' the rahvin' manes o' t' billows – and on t' sails o' a ship comin' home.

That's my heart, swellin' like a wave and crashin' into my mouth. I know t' build o' the Stranger.

My bairn will meet her father today.

He's pacin' yon bruckle deck, lookin' to t' land, tryin' to see his bairn's face in his mind.

Or he's lyin' beneath t' dim weight o' t' seas, or on some driftin' sheet o' clouded ice, t' snow-blossoms siftin' softly o'er him.

The *Stranger* takes t' same course home as that she set. A clear mornin' – armogan, Jamie said. T' cold were givin', the rine brushed from t' fields like sleep-sand, an' only t' bones o' snow left on t' tops. I were so big wi' babby I could hardly climb t' stairs.

They all said I knew tears I were buyin' when I wed him.

When t' sun and t' shoots is climbin', when the rack runs afore t'wind like a swellin' sail and t' bare twigs stretch out to grab t'spinnin' snatches o' blue between – then t' men mun go. When all hearts should be singin' wi' the blackbird, there's nobbut dree looks and dowly faces.

Most whalers scarce ken how a primrose looks, let alone a rose. But my Jamie do. 'Twere summer when we was courtin', yon close season. Lanes white wi' drifts o' may, an' him crackin' on. O' skeleton wrecks, o' icebergs shaped like shadow-goers in a dream, o' fathomless seas, marbled wi' ice floes like t'cover o' t' Bible in St Mary's – o' ships cracked to shivers like nutshells under a wagon-wheel. He told how he were saved for me, by God's will, when the Hope were crushed in t' Davis Strait, another summer day when t' ling blew purple above Whitby town.

Me standin' under t' fallin' blossom wi' dusk comin' on, thinkin' mesel' on a frosted deck listenin' to t' hush while t' ice snuck nearer. I weren't flayt then – to fear t'north seemed foolish as fearin' dreams. Besides, Jamie smiled at me so broad when'd done his tale that it drove t' cold away.

Not a lass this side o' Middlesborough but were won by his lightsome smile, his heartsome tongue an' his liltin' free ways.

Dog roses nodded their compliments o'er t' churchyard wall when we was wed.

Sweet and short were t' winter, and t' first snowdrop ended all. I said it worn't right for him to go, crossin' grey seas to lie in t' stiff arms o' distant lands o' ice – not wi' new life inside me, and stirrin' in t'earth – his bairn and spring set to be born together. I said 'twas pride, this wish to tame t' waves and bend t' winds on sails, daring death. He said 'twas wantin' pay enow' to keep babby and me.

So I watched t' *Stranger* sail, strainin' my een to catch a glisk o' t'gallants long after she'd dipped behind t' sea. When again hedges grew heavy wi' dog-roses, and after, when Mell-supper came round, and we came home from long wanin' days on t' moors wi' hands black wi' blaeberries, I told my bairn about her father and waited for backend. She bonnier by t' hour – and he missin' bright times niver to come again. Missin' yon first laugh on t'sands while t' wind chased sunny ackers o'er t' Esk.

I longed for t' flowers to be a-dyin'. How my heart did quiver and hop wi' t' first yellow leaf on t' birk! Turf-greavin' time at last – t'swallows makin' ready for journeyin', gatherin' on t' shrouds o' t' few ships left in harbour, flyin' dark against t' sunset to their song o' lost summers – that tune as allus makes me think mesel' a bairn again, seekin' elfbolts and snakestones on t'shore, labberin' in t' foam.

While t' skies grow wan and t' woods weary, the hedges sear as t' sinkin' sun saps out t' green – then all Whitby stirs wi' hope.

But these last weeks were wor nor ever. Watchin' and seein' naught but yon dree sea, t' tide wirdlin' in and wirdlin' out. So many langsome tide-turns o' empty water rollin' on between my bairn and her father.

And yet she ever blithe and bonnie as t' summer, growin' and thrivin' wi' t' other saplings o' t' year like all were reet enow.

"There's naught ails *thee*, is there pet? Weel smon thee!" She's grippin' one o' my fingers – her pubble little fist pearchin'. I croodle it in my breast.

Them sails, skimmerin' under t'dawn, mun be a dream. I know I shouldn't hope, but I can't help it. Jamie were always more venturesome nor any wife could wish; but mindin' t' bairn, he mun have taken care o' hissel?

He lives – I know it – I can feel it. Under them glancy sails his heart beats in time wi' mine and babby's.

I'm so sure I'll even spare a thought for t' other men – Nancy's sweetheart, and little Davy – and t' first mate as were so kind when we was courtin'.

The *Stranger* drags t' moments behind her, tharfly as t' white line o' wake. How desperate slow ships do move. How has a crowdlin' creepin' shell like yon braved waves that lick high as t' masts, and ice that closes round timber like t'fingers o' death?

"Soon thou'lt see thy daddy. We'll be there to meet 'im."

She's coming up-river now, but there's this shadow fright on me that if I stop watchin', when I turn back there'll be naught but grey water. We'll stay up here till t' last, and then run – down an' down…!

Time sykes by. I'll think how his face will look when I put my bonnie into his arms, and that will pass it well enow.

"Now, my Connie – ar't ready? Let's fly!"

The church-garth a blur, fast as t'blake sau't wind – red stalks o' briar snatch, but I rykke free – down, down, town spun out anunder, t' roof-tiles hot to my een as stirred embers, glowin' leaves.

The streets is full – eager faces in t' gentle sunlight. I don't know yon lass, but I smile anyhow… there's Annie, and Esther whose youngest went off to sea for t' first time in t' *Stranger.* They all stand out o' t'way for me. Times like this, Whitby is courteous as gentlefolks' watering-places.

Down to t' sands where t' boats is pullin' ashore.

And there he be. Smilin', dark een bright as ever. A few flyin' footsteps distant. Naught but clear mornin' air betwixt us.

It's no dream.

I put out one arm to steady t' world. Too many folk around us, a router on t' spinnin' sands. Somehow I'm being pushed back, mafted wi' t'crush. I hold babby out to him – high o'er t' heads – and she's dancin' in his arms.

There's a right go-to behind – t' lasses look frightened. It doesn't matter.

Naught matters now.

He lifts her high into t' sun, and she looks back at him wi' a funny, muddled little face, een wide.

Strange hands snatch her from him.

The throng closes and I can't see her – but I can hear her cryin'. My own voice skrikin' –

"No! No!"

I see her arm, her head, her foot through t' crush – and I have her! – deary, warm, femmer love. I gasp in her meadow breath like I were half drowned.

Only now I make t' words out from t' roar. All too sharp now, bruisin' t' air.

"The press gang!"

These bodies is a wall o' ice and I'm clawin', fingernails tearin' through t' cold.

Now I can see Jamie – een black holes, mouth set in a line, arms twisted behind him. 'I'll come back – forgive me! Don't let t' little one grow too fast!'

His face burns itsel' onto my brain and his een swallow me. Black. Deep as seas, sucking me down into t'chill.

None but childer in t' streets this lantern-time. I'm worn wi' greetin', a pool at low tide left howle by t' sea.

From one o' t' darker ghauts, I hear sobs – "The war will be long – I know it – they a' say so! And he may be killed afore tis o'er."

I don't heed t' mother's words o' comfort.

I don't care what length it takes to reach t' cliff top now.

Jamie will niver know my bonnie eight-month pet. Next year she'll be another bairn – and he won't be back next year, nor next. There'll be no peace. Back in t' winter, t' French killed their King. I didn't mind it then, for Jamie were home and my belly swellin'.

Her eyes is deep blue, gleamin' like wet pebbles under t' wave.

She's smilin' – t' way that only bairns can smile, fair like a lall o' joy. I mun smile back, whether or no. She gurgles and squirms on t' grass between t' graves, crawls to where one o' t'last clockflowers is shinin' and picks it, crushin' it in her little fist. She's not learned to pick flowers without spoilin' – but clockflowers grow strong.

"There's nowhere thy daddy won't see now, honey bairn. India, an t' Cape, and t' coast o' Barbary... Africa where there's no backend nor winter, only one long summer all year round. We'll wait here – we'll work, and we'll live – on this cliff – in t' churchgarth, in town, in fields, on t' moor… an' one day t'winds'll blow him back to us. Happen he'll cast up here wi' an epaulet on his shoulder gold as them clockflowers, an' enow prize money so he niver has to flit again. He'll bring thee a parrot that talks from t' isles in t' west, and the sharpest spices from out o' t' east. Don't grow too fast."

## THE BEST THING...

Charlotte Lee
Wistaston, Cheshire

Winner of the Young Walter Scott Prize
16 to 19 age-group

Today was the day he had been waiting for… The day of dreams. Stood in the building of the Chillicothe Baking Company, his invention carefully shrouded in cloth, he took in his surroundings with the familiar eye of one who had been here before, and allowed his hungry imagination to taste the delicacies that lay on trays all around the room. Pushed to the very edges of the space were wooden tables that were still lightly covered with flour, and he could picture his friend's workers striving tirelessly to meet the demand of the small Missouri town. Occasionally, the scent of cinnamon or coffee would waft through the air, as though it were a part of the street-corner bakery's fragrance somehow; a part of its charm.

"Otto!" smiled a man who entered the room. He was an average-sized man with neatly combed dark hair which matched formality and style with his suit and tie. "Promptly on time, as always," he continued. "Sorry that I had to divert you before, the journalists were fighting for this room, and we couldn't have that now, could we? Not yet, anyway," he said, with large eyes that gleamed with the marketeer within him.

"Journalists?" Otto replied, shocked and worried by the implications of his friend's words.

"Of course!" the man said, with characteristic confidence and assurance.

Otto ran a hand through his hair, before nervously pushing his round glasses back up to the bridge of his nose. "But what if the machine doesn't work?" he asked, jerking a hand towards his covered invention. "You are taking a gamble, Frank."

Frank smiled reassuringly, his earlier formality forgotten. He knew that the businessman that he could easily become was not who his friend needed now. He put a hand on Otto's shoulder. "It is not a gamble to me. I have total faith in you." Otto's expression betrayed self-doubt; Frank knew that he would need to double his efforts to motivate his friend. "You are the man who almost lost everything in a fire," he began, as though

with sudden inspiration. "What was it, ten, fifteen years ago? I can't even remember the exact year now. But that doesn't matter," Frank asserted, staring defiantly into the face of his friend. "What matters, is that you are the man who lost the prototype and blueprints for this machine in that fire, but picked yourself up, dusted yourself off, and continued with your dreams. I have faith in your invention. And I know that you do too. Otherwise, why would you go to so much length to get the machine to this stage? Why not show a little bit of that faith now?"

Otto was moved by his friend's belief in his design, and his rallying speech succeeded in rousing the strength that he needed. "Thank you, Frank," he replied.

"You are welcome, my dear friend." Frank grinned. "Besides, you know that this machine will work. It has had teething problems, but it will work now, I'm sure. This is more of a publicity stunt for the both of us, than anything else," he said, reverting back to business mode. "Now, we had better let those journalists in, or they are going to be breaking the door down. They don't often get a fresh story on a new invention. But hey, it's 1928, anything can happen." He held out his hand, waiting for Otto to shake it.

Butterflies fluttered in Otto's stomach at the thought of press attention, but nonetheless his nervously sweaty palm met his friend's, before he nodded and determinedly exclaimed, "Let's make dreams happen."

Frank's grin grew wider. "That's the spirit!" he laughed, walking toward the door, and formally greeting the reporters that were grouped around the room like flies around a light.

As the reporters eagerly entered, Otto eyed them with the same wariness as a rabbit might an eagle, or a wolf, aware that the rabbit is prey to something more powerful than itself. His friend, Frank, stood at the back, and it was only after a nod from him that Otto felt the confidence to reveal his invention. He cleared his throat, and in the expectant hush, began.

"Welcome everybody," he said as loudly as he felt he could; a gesture from Frank indicated that it needed to be louder. "My name is Otto Rohwedder, and the invention that I would like to demonstrate today…" He paused, dramatically pulling away the fabric that covered his machine.

"… is a bread slicing machine." He couldn't help but smile slightly at the small gasp that escaped the reporters. "The owner of this bakery, Frank Bench, who is stood there at the back," Otto smiled, "has kindly allowed me to test, and if successful, sell, a ready sliced, freshly baked loaf." He looked behind him and found the loaf on a nearby table. He picked it up and held it for the reporters to see. "With my machine, a system of alternating knives on a rotor system, the bread should enter at this end whole, and emerge sliced at the other end." He was getting in the flow of it now, but nonetheless his hands shook, and his heart pounded rapidly against his ribs. In the Missouri July heat too, sweat bathed his forehead, and caused his face to glisten. Barely breathing, he placed the loaf in the appropriate place, and switched the machine into the correct function.

Otto was keenly aware of the success that Frank needed. Although Frank had suggested that he did not fear the gamble, he was undeniably taking a risk. If Otto's invention did not succeed and gained undesirable press attention, then Frank's bakery would be in peril. He needed it to work; it had to. In an attempt to present complete calm and a lack of doubt, he proceeded to carefully and methodically explain the technique to the reporters, details of which appeared lost on them. Somehow though, hearing the words of his blueprint in his own voice reassured him. And thus, as though in some strange way in slow motion, the loaf appeared at the other end of his machine, sliced, and ready for use.

A cheer of delight erupted from the crowd and a giddy laugh of relief escaped Otto. Frank, at the back, clapped and shook hands with the reporters nearest to him.

Before Otto could gather his reeling thoughts, a reporter babbled excitedly, "Extraordinary! The slices are so perfect."

Otto tried desperately to gain control. "Yes," he answered, grinning. "Each slice is slightly less than half an inch thick." He just had time to see the reporter jotting that down, before another bombarded him with something else.

"How fresh will the bread remain?" he shouted.

Otto had sincerely hoped this question wouldn't come up. "We are making progress on a new wrapping system," he answered. "But it still needs time to be refined."

Suddenly a whole torrent of random and unfiltered questions raged through the reporters and Otto struggled to answer them all.

Frank stepped in. "Please, calm down. I'm sure that Mr Rohwedder has much to be getting on with today, so he will accept only one more question."

Otto looked to his friend gratefully, the excitement of the success of his invention suddenly exhausting him. A reporter stepped forward, an older man, clearly a veteran in his industry. "What advice might you give to other young people who have similar aspirations?"

Otto was taken aback by such a question. Something to do with his invention he could easily answer. But something emotional? That, he was even more protective of. "Well," he started awkwardly, "I would say, dream big. Dream small. It doesn't matter. People might laugh at you. Tell you that you aren't good enough. That the dream is inconsequential. You might even doubt yourself. But don't listen to any of those voices. You can achieve anything that you set your heart on. It's true; it is not just a romantic ideology. Your destiny is in your hands," he concluded, to an awed audience. Again, a sea of voices and wave of questions struck him, but before he knew what had happened, Frank, true to his word in that being the last question, bustled the reporters out of the room, and left him again in silence. They would now be rushing back to their newspapers; maybe they would even make the front page… That would definitely get the small Missouri town talking over white picket fences.

Staring in wonder at the sliced bread in front of him, he only subconsciously noted Frank come to his side. A touch on his shoulder alerted him to his presence. Frank looked fondly and appreciatively into the eyes of his friend, before pulling him into a tight hug. "Thank you," he whispered, emotional for his friend's success and for what positive publicity this could bring to his business. Otto chuckled quietly, hugging his friend back. "I think it is you I owe the thanks to more." The friends pulled apart, subtly wiping away the tears that had appeared in the corner of their eyes. Frank suddenly burst into a fit of laughter. "Who knew?" he exclaimed. "Sliced bread. Do you think there will ever be anything better?" he asked sarcastically.

Otto elbowed him in the side. They were like brothers, the two of them. Helping and encouraging each other, but also teasing each other when necessary, to remind themselves why life is worth

living. Eventually, as though in an afterthought, Otto asked, "Do you think that I will become famous? Be remembered like Edison?"

Frank's face flickered with sadness. "The world is a hard place. While some are quickly and unexpectedly thrust into the limelight, others are forgotten, despite how positive their contribution might be." He looked at his friend and noted his disappointment, almost defeat. "But let's be honest." He smiled. "We never do anything to be famous. Sure, it would be nice to enter the history books. But if you only do one thing for me, remember today. Remember the joy you felt when you saw the machine work, when you gave that advice for other young entrepreneurs. These are things that will matter more to you."

Otto sighed. "I would love to be remembered in history. Another of the great inventors..." He had that far-away expression in his eyes that indicated that he dreamt of greater things. He sighed again but smiled knowingly. "But you are right. I've always wanted to accomplish something for my own reasons. If I can help or inspire other people, you or other young inventors, then I will have achieved more than I set out to do."

Without a word, Frank quietly went off to the bakery kitchens and returned with two glasses of ginger ale, handing one to Otto. At his friend's speculative expression, Frank simply said, as though in answer to any question he might have, "Prohibition forbids champagne."

They did not drink immediately. In their minds they were re-enacting their own individual hardships that had been a part of the journey to the success of today; their own fortitude and determination. With these thoughts, it was as they stood side by side, gazing at the successful invention, that Otto reached over and clinked his glass with his friend's. "Here's to the dreamers."

## VITA'S TRUTH

Ellana Cowan
Barnet, Hertfordshire

Runner-up in the Young Walter Scott Prize
16 to 19 age-group

I knew I was in trouble when I heard the priest scream. Brimming with frustration, it rang out like a bell across Rome. It was the Pontifice's seventh attempt at the sacrifice and his fifth bull, yet, even with Apollo withdrawing his light, the Pontifice stubbornly ordered for the procedure to start again. I watched from my hiding place as the attendees sighed; the sacrifice might not have been over, but my attempts at sabotage were. I could only hope the animal was spooked enough to evade their last attempt.

Winding my way back past the Temple of Saturn, I tidied my stola and shrunk into my pallas. The evening air never bothered me, but the stares from the stragglers I passed did. By this time, the hectic cloud of people who crowded the streets had long dispersed, the melody of merchants' haggles replaced by the sombre sound of my hurried steps, echoing off the stonework. Only when I saw my sister waiting for me at the Temple of Vesta did I let myself relax.

"Someone's late," she said with a smirk, as I took the stairs two at a time.

"Look at you, Vestal for a year and already chiding me."

"Eleven years actually."

"But you were in a nursery for ten of them."

We took our seats by the flame, its familiar warmth sinking into my skin. As a Vestal Virgin, I had sat watch over the flame for many hours. It took Cassia a moment longer to settle herself, the ritual still new to her. Whereas I had been upholding rites for five years, she had only completed her training a year ago. It was unusual for two priestesses of Vesta to come from one family - unusual, but not impossible.

"So where were you?" she asked, her dark eyes, a perfect replica of my own, glowing with fire light.

"A military campaign is coming up and they were going to sacrifice Gaius."

"Do you really have to name all the sacrificial animals?" she moaned, and I let out a laugh. Watches were always more fun with Cassia.

"But…" Her voice changed, walking the line between bold and cautious. "I won't tell the Vestalium Maxima where you were if you don't tell her I wasn't on guard duty."

"But you -" The realisation hit me like a pungent odour. "Cassia, what are you planning?" I could hear the concern veining my voice, the sort of tone that would only fuel a little sister's rebellion.

"Nothing I'm not supposed to."

"Then why not do it in the day and not when we're guarding the flame?" My concern was turning to anger.

"The others still watch over me, this is my only time alone."

"I'm here."

"Vita, please."

As priestesses we made vows, we swore to an unseen goddess, promised away our lives with sacred words. As sisters we made no vows, rather our oaths ran through our blood, our lives bound to each other through more than words. When I weighed the two up, the choice was clear.

"You know the punishment?"

"Yes."

"You understand what will happen if you're caught off duty?"

"Of course."

"And whatever you have to do is important enough for you to risk facing such consequences?"

"It is."

I sighed, there was no way out. "Then go."

The night had well and truly descended on Rome, with Diana in full

command of the sky. Countless night watches had allowed me to establish a friendlier relationship with the dark. My young mind, heavy with tales of beastly creatures, was now overridden by my sharper, older eye, one that began to appreciate the alternative view before me. At night, Rome was no longer the rigid, unflinching city that stood like a soldier. Instead, the hazy light distorted and smoothed the razor edges of the marble; it silenced the streets, allowing the stones to heal before the storm of footsteps that would follow at dawn. Even Palatine Hill, peering down at the city and its inhabitants, appeared to relax, allowed itself to slouch without fear of being caught. At night Rome was different, almost human. And the Flame of Vesta was its heart.

The ever burning fire, brought by Aeneas from Troy, sacred to my goddess. Its preservation was entrusted to the Vestals; we were solely responsible for ensuring it never went out - and solely responsible if it did. The last time the flame died, a Vestal was accused of breaking her vow of chastity, a crime with the cruellest of punishments. Yet not unjustly, for the flame was essential to Rome's survival, a symbol of our goddess' power and protection. Or so I had been taught. Each watch I sat, my eyes fixed intently on the vanishing wood, my skin painted by the flame's holy glow, breath straining to capture and taste the sacred smoke – but I never felt that power. I had been desperate to, insisted I had, pretended to believe it. The trouble with being stubborn, however, is that not even your own mind can convince you of what you do not believe. Yet there was no choice in the matter, not until I was released from service. Before then, I helped animals escape from a brutal end at the altar, I kept up with my duties, and I prayed, with whatever ounce of faith I could drag up within me, that Cassia felt differently.

My prayers were not answered, as that night my sister came running to me for help.

With a boy.

"What happened?" My voice was frantic, more panic flowing through it than I wished to show.

"We were caught, legionaries -" she sputtered out between gasps.

"Get inside," I ordered. "Fetch more wood. If the Vestalium Maxima asks, say I bullied you into letting me leave. Say I threatened to snuff out the flame if you didn't."

Cassia feebly opened her mouth to protest, but I shook my head and pushed her up the stairs, watching the last strand of her raven hair float inside the temple. I turned to the boy.

"Go." I kept my voice monotone, not angry, but cold.

"But -"

A distant yell sounded.

"This will be difficult enough without you here as evidence. Go." It was almost a growl, a hint of rage, enough to send him scampering off. There was no need for an Augur, the increasing volume of the shouts was enough to tell me what would happen. I took a breath and readied myself.

I met the legionaries with a smile.

"Rather late for training." My voice was steady, confident even. I was a Vestal, and a Vestal had the right to address all those in Rome as she wished. "I hope our temple is in no danger?"

They were not interested in civilities.

"It's her," one of them grunted.

So Cassia had been seen.

"Where is the boy?"

Despite the disrespectful tone, they dared no further insults, remaining a good distance away. I suppressed a small smile. Even with my chastity questioned, they still treated me as a Vestal. "The only men here are you soldiers. Did you think you saw an intruder?"

"No, not an intruder." The Second Legionary fared better with his false propriety. Nevertheless, his meaning was still as clear as the River Tiber. Before I could speak in defence, the Vestalium Maxima burst from the Temple. Cassia trailed her, kindling spilling out from her arms.

"What is happening?" her voice boomed.

"Nothing, Vestalium Maxima," I replied, trying to stop my voice from wavering. "Only these legionaries seem convinced they saw a sight which cannot be so."

"And what is it they believe they saw?"

"Her." The First Legionary nodded at me. "She was with a boy."

The head Vestal held in her shock, any flash of surprise that may have played across her features carefully hidden away. "Where?"

"Outside of the Curia Hostilia. We were patrolling when we heard something and, well…"

I cursed Cassia's stupidity. The Senate building, of all places.

"And you say it was one of my Vestals you saw?"

"Her." Once more, he nodded at me.

"How many of you saw Vita?"

"Both of us."

Again, I cursed my sister. The Vestalium Maxima turned to me, her movements grave and solemn. She knew, as I did, there was little hope.

"What do you - ?"

"What is the allegation at hand?"

Any hope I may have had was extinguished when the new voice spoke. At this point, I had begun to think Mars was punishing me for Gaius' escape from the altar. The Pontifex Maximus rounded the corner into full view. This was the man who had made me a Vestal, and this was the man who could strip me of such an honour, casting me into my grave.

"These soldiers claim they saw one of my Vestals - with a boy."

"Have the soldiers examined the Vestal?"

A surge of revulsion shot through me as the Pontifex spoke as though I was a piece of entrails to be read.

"I do not want them to touch her."

Still, the Vestalium Maxima did not deny the request. The Vestals were powerful, but the Pontifex Maximus outranked even our leader.

I stood like a cow at a market as the two soldiers drew near me, their eyes scanning every one of my features. All our lives Cassia and I had been mistaken for one another, and it was this fact that I relied on in that moment. The First Legionary appeared content with the similarities, giving a satisfied nod. The second, however, the one who had cloaked his

disgust in civility, caught a glance of Cassia, as she stood whimpering by a column. His change of attention alarmed me. The punishment for a Vestal breaking their vow of chastity was not simply death: we would be buried alive. We would be lowered into a hungry void in the ground, banished to a subterranean jail, drained of life as each and every crumb of our meagre food supply slowly, painfully disappeared. In the dark, we would await the mercy of death.

Following the legionary's stare once more, I gazed at my sister. We looked alike, but we were so very different. Cassia was silly and flighty; I was stubborn and grounded. She was young and full of hope, me, barely years older, already swaying from the faith that should have fed me. Sweet, naive Cassia, unable to cope with the punishment which would lie ahead: so I had to.

"It was me. I was the one with the boy outside the Curia. I broke my vow of chastity." The blasphemy rolled off my tongue surprisingly easily.

Chaos broke out before me. I heard gasps and wails, orders given. Rough hands seized me, flinging my arms behind my back. Awoken by the commotion, the other Vestals trickled into the temple one by one, watching the terrible scene unfold. My eyes navigated the tangle of people, searching for Cassia. Yet I could not catch her eyes, for they were much too engaged with a more horrifying sight.

"The flame!" I gasped.

Amongst the mayhem no one had seen the flame go out. In front of us stood not a roaring fire fuelled by the power of Vesta, but a pathetic pile of wood. A hush spread across the square, each of us struck dumb by the sight. The Flame of Vesta had gone out, and if the legend was true, Rome would fall.

That was when I felt the soldier's grip on my arm loosen, when I took my chance, and ran. I had little hope of outrunning my pursuers, but there was one advantage I had. Sneaking from altar to altar, attempting to save as many animals as I could, I had composed a rather unique map of Rome, one compiled of winding back streets, narrow passages and secret pathways.

With my map firmly in my mind, I ran on.

## A GHOSTLY INSPIRATION TO A YOUNG SUFFRAGETTE

Ella Cox
Halstead, Essex

Highly commended in the Young Walter Scott Prize
11 to 15 age-group

My corset's tight

It takes my rights

I wear it and I have no voice

A thing to breed

A mouth to feed

We have never had a choice

Every day our bodies sold

To men and boys with hearts so cold

They take us as unhappy wives

Shackled to them all our lives

The words sheared through Emily's head like knives, painful in their truth as her own suffocating corset squeezed her ribs. As the sound echoed around the nursery her head snapped round to hunt down the author of her stolen thoughts, but there was no one there save for her brothers.

The whispers still wouldn't leave her as she slipped into her bedroom to try and escape the clatter and clash of her siblings. Back pressed against the door, she tried to calm her mind. Were the words only imagined? she questioned. Her answer came as a shock - a translucent figure, akin to those in the Tudor history book she had earlier been trying to read to her wayward brothers, was standing before her. Yet instead of a ruff, black bruises encircled the woman's neck and rivulets of phantom blood trickled

down her cheek. Emily gripped the door handle ready to flee when she noticed the immeasurable sorrow in the ghost's eyes. That and the fact the apparition had made no move to kill, maim or otherwise harm her person gave her the courage to ask, "What do you want?"

A voice like wind whistling through ancient cobwebs answered:

I am cursed
to speak in verse
from now until the end of time
my love to rhyme
it was my crime
to men who gave me bruises black
and gave me bones composed of cracks
I wish to talk
to one who walks
among the living not the dead
from what I've seen
your time's not keen
to change the lies you girls are fed

When sixteen
my father deemed
twas time for me to be a bride
the man he found
hated the sound
of my opinions and my pride
"Be quiet," he said

and cracked my head

against the floor

I spoke no more

But my silence could not stay

I wrote and wrote the years away

for if I could not speak my mind

my thoughts on paper I must bind

to hide from he who married me

and to evade his cruelty

The woman then moved towards the fireplace and placed a finger on one of the many panels. Emily warily approached and joined her hand with that of the phantom's. She pressed into the wood and with a click, it sprang open to reveal a tiny cavity containing a dusty leather-bound notebook. The inside cover was inscribed *Mary Barkwell, In the Year of Our Lord 1542*. Emily looked up at the woman. "Is this yours?"

The woman gently nodded.

Emily reverently turned the aged yellow pages which were covered in looping graceful script. There were hundreds of tear-stained poems speaking of a private grief, fierce anger, frustration, and a questioning of female servitude. Except on the final page. This was partly torn and stained with ominous dark blotches.

Emily's heart cracked. "What happened?"

Mary smiled bitterly.

I had daughters and had sons
I tried to help them not become
the Ignorant their father was
but save them I could not because
my girls were married at fifteen
their husband's hands with money gleamed
that's all their father cared about

I could not restrain my shouts
of raging grief and hurt and pain
I would now no more remain
the silent and obedient wife
a role I'd played all of my life

my husband needed no excuse
this was the end of my abuse
my blood fell red
he wished me dead
and caged my throat within his grip
my life's the thing that he did rip
away from me
and now you see
I'll have no rest
Not whilst words are in my chest

I could not save myself it's true

I failed to save my daughters too

but someone must know how I lived

someone must know what I did

my words are what I give to you

whatever little good they'll do

Cold fury seized Emily. Everyone thought they now lived in a progressive age with steam trains, factories, the dawn of a new Empire, but in essence the world hadn't changed. Not really. Wasn't her own father making plans to marry her off? Women were still ignored if they spoke, their voices whispers against men's loud bellows and if they screamed to be heard they were deemed unbalanced and hysterical, locked up in cells padded with patronisation and expectations of empty-headedness. Something had to be done.

Six months later an anonymous publication came out entitled *The Memoirs of Mary Barkwell – a woman of poetic strength.* It took the Victorian world by storm, publicly shamed as being untrue, unfeminine and a disgraceful challenge to Christian values. But in private, women kept it under their pillows, hid it beneath their needlework and read it avidly, Mary's eloquent suffering sparking rebellion in their hearts. They started to question "Why?" and make declarations of "No more!"

One evening as Emily sat in her room quietly re-reading the memoirs she turned and saw Mary gazing down at her. The dead woman smiled.

My work is done

goodbye dear one

And as she slowly disappeared she whispered, "Thank you."

## UNDERCOVER NAZI

Ranuli Jayawardhana
Sunbury-on-Thames, Surrey

Highly commended in the Young Walter Scott Prize
11 to 15 age-group

Nadia watched as the couples swirled around the dance floor, laughing and joking as the lively music carried them away, ethereally for some and as clumsily as a pig trying to do the Charleston for many. Her eyes rested on the bulging lump of cruelty that was Hermann Göring. Not that she would even dream of saying it out loud… No, honesty was not a language in Hitler's circle. They were all rivals united by an urge to impress their leader, battling each other for standing. Why, her own father was one of the most prominent! Yet it all looked so merry, Nadia thought to herself, that it was impossible to guess that there was a war going on. But it was something she knew the reality of far too well. She shuddered as she thought of what every individual in that room would give to know what she was….

"Hello there, dear child, fancy seeing you here." Magda Goebbels was positioned elegantly on the chair, as befitted the First Lady of the Reich.

Nadia was mildly insulted by her comment. It sounded more like an accusation than a courtesy and the words *dear child* did not go down well with Baroness Nadia Herying. She was twenty-five after all. "How are you, Magda?"

"Very well, thank you. How is your father?"

"Oh, he's doing fine but he had a slight headache today which is why he is not here," replied Nadia. Her father was never absent at parties which made today extraordinary. Nadia was the extreme opposite of her father: there was nothing more she hated than an evening surrounded by his Nazi pals. But strangely, to be in a room full of Nazis and their wives was a valuable chance to be taken advantage of.

"Oh, I'm very sorry to hear that." Magda paused and lent closer, like a snake ogling at its prey. "I overheard my husband talking to Count Herying and he informed your father that Hitler has many ideas for the invasion of Britain. I don't suppose you know anything, do you?" She

stared eagerly at Nadia, searching her face for clues.

"I'm afraid I don't, Magda. Father is very careful with any information of impending events. You know, in case..." She quickly lowered her voice.

"Oh yes of course I understand. Have you seen Emmy Göring recently? Apparently, she says her husband is confident that Britain is going to surrender next week."

Nadia laughed lightly, as she was supposed to. Everyone knew that Emmy Göring was never told anything about the Luftwaffe since she was very likely to bleat it all out to a greengrocer. Even so, Nadia herself knew that the British were now performing a very dirty game of warfare. It was knowledge that would make the eyes of Nazis stand out on stalks.

"I suppose they will soon have no choice," said Magda. "The RAF is tiny compared to the might of our forces."

"Yes…. Indeed."

Magda Goebbels shot her a sharp glance. She drew herself up like a cobra about to swallow and strangle its prey. "Well Nadia, it's been lovely talking to you but I'm afraid I really must be going. By the way, I was just admiring your dress. Do tell me where you got it from."

"Oh… I believe it's from a shop in Paris. Just something I got as a present a few years ago and this is actually its first outing." Her words camouflaged the shivers of suspense that had taken hold of her and the sigh of relief she now felt. Nadia always felt uncomfortable around the wives of the Third Reich. They could, despite their level of intelligence, almost read another woman's mind in a way that even the most philosophical of professors could not.

"Well how nice. It suits you very well. I must be off. Goodbye Nadia."

"And you, Frau Doktor."

Nadia watched as Magda Goebbels elegantly strutted off. She checked the time. 11:45. It was time she was off as well. Nadia had business of her own to take care of. She swirled out of the elaborately decorated ballroom. No one even so much as glanced at her.

A figure wearing velvet evening gloves and expensive furs made her way down the streets and sidewalks of Berlin, averting her gaze from the men standing on the street corners. True, she was exempt from interrogation by the Gestapo but it was better not to risk it. The secret police were infamous for their ruthlessness. Her father's reputation was at stake. After a year at her job, her experience told her that even an action like tying shoelaces was laced with an altogether different message.

She halted outside a seemingly unremarkable dingy shop window. To the outsider, it looked like many of the dozens of shops in Berlin that had closed for good. Little did anyone know that it was possibly the most important disused shop in the war. She rapped sharply two times on the door and muttered "Eton".

It opened.

Inside it looked like an ordinary well-stocked pub. The tables, the drinks, they were all there. She sauntered up to the counter where a barman was polishing an already grimy bar glass with a ragged, soiled cloth. He raised his eyebrows and shot her the same penetrating glance as Magda Goebbels had. Her picture appeared so often in German newspapers calling her the beauty of the Reich and praising her devout loyalty to Hitler that even after almost two years of comradeship he continued to eye her with a mistrustful glance.

"If I was you, Ernst, I would not polish a glass with a dirty rag. It is a basic skill: never do anything that could show you are not innocent of any incriminating actions."

Ernst rolled his eyes at Nadia. "There is a war going on for the ordinary people as well. I'm not sure if you noticed, since you are busy lounging in your mansions, but life is very hard for ordinary citizens, Baroness." He strolled out from behind the counter and opened a door disguised as a wooden wall. "In you go," he said.

Inside, dozens of men and women were sitting at the tables. Some looked none the worse for going through hell; others were considerably shaken. She sat down at a table where a man sat deep in thought.

"Hello there. It's been a while since our last meeting."

The man jolted violently and smiled. "Baroness. I was waiting for you."

"Now listen. Rommel is preparing for an invasion of Egypt, as I'm sure you are aware. Can you make sure this gets to the Headquarters?" Nadia drew out a series of folded documents.

He gave a nod and smiled. "I should report you, you know. To think that an aristocrat like yourself would like to lead a rough and hard life! Are you sure you're doing the right thing?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

Nadia smiled to herself. Her disappearance to Bohemia last summer was actually a cover. She had travelled instead to Cairo. Unknown to her family and friends, Nadia gained intelligence of the troop movements of Rommel's tanks. And she was preparing to see his plans for invasion go up in the air with a bang.

## YOU ARE ANNAHOK

Calypso Lewis
London

Runner-up in the Young Walter Scott Prize
11 to 15 age-group

You are picking up clumps of dirt and sand,

And marvelling at how easily they crumble,

When your sister jogs towards you.

"Annahok,"

she gasps,

"We have visitors."

Hand in hand

You head for the village centre.

Where you see them.

Their skin pale as the clouds,

Their hair short and sandy.

Why do they wear so many clothes?

Your people wear little to nothing.

These men wear strange, tight tubes of what looks like animal skin on their arms.

Except the skin has no fur.

These are connected to another piece of the stuff,

That is hugging their body.

Strange.

They say something

And you,

Don't

Understand.
It doesn't sound like Lokono.
Their tongue is jumpy,
Not like the soft flow of your own.
Your father,
Your chief,
He isn't here.
He usually greets visitors.
All the bewildered faces of your people are looking now,
At you.
This is your job.
You are daughter of the chief,
You are Annahok.

You open your mouth to greet them,
But all that tumbles out is a dry croak,
For now you realise the sheer size of them.
They are at least twice your height and width,
But not fat,
Like Old Sparrow,
Who sits in her hut all day,
Telling the village children stories.
You used to love those stories.

They were not fat,
But thick,

Like the old tree that sits in the woods,
Holding the memories of your ancestors.
You doubt these men hold such memories.
Finally,
You manage a
'Welcome to our village'
And sigh with relief.
Now they will come,
Stay the night,
And be gone by morning.
But they do not thank you.
They laugh.
A cruel, wide-mouthed, ugly laugh.

Anger explodes inside you,
You raise your hand to slap the leader across the face,
And just when you're going to bring it down
Your father arrives
And grabs your hand.
'That is not how we treat visitors, Annahok.'
His voice has an edge,
You've never heard him like this before.
'Go now, I will deal with this.'
So you leave.
The visitors are still laughing.

You squat in your hut,
Surrounded by your father's friends and family.
You're no longer in the mood to play with dirt clumps,
Does your father not realise?
These men are cruel,
They do not respect your people.
And yet he has invited them to dinner.
Even worse,
It's the Harvest Feast.

That night,
You skulk into the festivities,
Unnoticed.
You're not supposed to be here,
Your father definitely made that clear.
But you know you need to be there,
In case those pale men try anything.
Then you see him,
Laughing with them.
And the same burning anger returns.
They can't even speak your language!
How can they share a joke with your father?!
But you see everyone laughing,
And dancing.
And suddenly you feel
Like a heavy chunk of misery

Drowning
In a pool of happiness.

Days later,
When you feel the visitors have been here too long
You can't sleep.
You decide to get some air,
And creep from the hut,
Nearly kicking Hula on the way out.
The night hits you,
And you see them.
It's the men,
Creeping back into their hut.
What are they doing out so late?
You sneak towards the hut.
Every step a little louder than you want it to be.
An invisible tree branch scrapes your face.
It hurts.
You bite your tongue to stop from crying out.
That hurts more.

You peek into the hut's doorway.
The men are gazing at something.
It looks like Tala's golden earring.
You step further into the hut,
But trip on something,

It's large and shiny with a wooden end,

It smells like burning.

The men turn,

And before you can even think about running,

They have you.

Their large hands around your feeble wrists.

The object that tripped you

Is now pointed at your face,

And you are staring into a deep, black tunnel.

It still smells of burning.

The biggest man,

Shouts at you,

In a strange, jumbled voice.

He waves the earring,

And then gestures all around.

He waves the earring again, shouting.

What does he want?

Tears appear in your eyes.

Here you are,

Alone,

With a stranger yelling at you in a language that is not Lokono.

Perhaps they want to know where the gold is from.

So you tell them,

You do not know.

They stare, confused.

And start to talk in hushed voices.

You twist to look at them,

And a sharp pain hits your head,

Your vision slowly trickles away

To darkness.

15th October 1492

We have stayed with these people many days now, and are no closer to finding the source of the gold. That rude little girl from the first day was following us earlier. We asked her where the gold was but all that tumbled from her mouth was a strange string of sounds. Still, we've decided that she would make a good servant as she is young and healthy.

These people are too easy. I could conquer the whole of them with 50 men and govern them as I pleased.

- Christopher Columbus

You wake up in a strange, wooden room.

There are no windows and the room seems to sway every few seconds.

In the dark you make out a few others,

They all seem to be from your village.

Some you recognise.

In the corner you see Hula, your cousin, lying half awake.

You crawl over some people.

Some unconscious,

Some very conscious,

Some wailing.

'Where are we?'

you ask Hula.

'I do not know, Annahok,'

he says,

'But it sways like the canoes from the village.'

You are on water.

And you are definitely not in the village.

But you are Annahok,

And you will find your way home.

And you will bring all of these people with you.

You will.

*Note: The last sentence in Christopher Columbus' journal was taken from his actual journal, the rest is fiction.*

## REVOLUTIONARY

Turner Ruggi
London

Runner-up in the Young Walter Scott Prize
16 to 19 age-group

'Radomir! Have you got the gunpowder?' Stivan demanded in a whisper. I looked up.

'Yes, yes. The shipment moved in just as promised.' He nodded at me, but his eyes shimmered with disdain. All of us in the basement knew his name wasn't really Stivan. The empire had strengthened their spying since Tsar Alexander's death in '81, and nobody took any chances. Using a real name was reckless. Still, Stivan suited the name. He oozed authority with grey eyes like steel blades. Hating the Tsar more than anyone on this side of the Volga, Stivan had grown hard keeping all his tsar-loathing men in check.

'Dimitri, you're on crowd control. Radomir, you crack the safe door. Vilen and I will grab the bonds. Remember, it's the bonds we want, not the cash. That's the real prize.' Dimitri was the oldest of us. They say that as a child, he had fought in the Decembrist revolt against Tsar Nicholas I. He had a spartan white moustache and his cheeks and eyelids were wrinkled, but the fire of determination still shone in his brown eyes. Vilen was the youngest: a Ukrainian with faded blonde hair, his chin and upper lip badly shaved. Poor kid had shaky hands and a nervous stare and was still no older than 15. But Vilen was far from unusual. I knew dozens of frightened boys with no parents, myself included. When Father was packed off for Siberia accused of 'political dissidence', I was ten and didn't understand. I do now. I'll show them political dissidence.

The target: the Tsalka bank. Tsalka was a small town just north of the Caucasus with a surprisingly sizeable bank. The money will go to recruiting the peasants and former serfs in the provinces. We need men more than money.

I leaned back in my chair. The basement air choked my lungs and the taste of metal lingered on my tongue. The green wallpaper peeled at the top, as if the room was folding in on us. Shouts echoed from the floor above. The Tsalka tavern. Stivan shot an uneasy glance upwards then

cautiously reminded us to meet at the east end of Lefortovo Road and not be late. We left one by one, closing the black door behind us, unnoticeably joining the 1:00 am carousing of the drunken locals upstairs.

8:45 am, outside the bank. A Black Sea mist drifted through the streets. We could hear the thud of boots on the cobbled pavement before we could see anyone coming. Dimitri, Stivan and I rested against the brick wall. Across the road stood the bank, just opened up and blissfully unaware. Behind us, on the other side of the wall, was a factory billowing fumes, one of the few factories in Southern Russia. Just six months ago it had been a prison. The place had hardly changed.

'Damned Georgian weather,' muttered Stivan softly, followed by a slow warm breath into his cupped hand. The fog dampened our woollen jackets and moth-eaten gloves.

'Where's Vilen? We're running out of time.' Dimitri tapped his feet on the cobbles and glanced about impatiently. Thirty minutes passed. Had Vilen been caught? Had he run out on us? Panic clouded my thoughts like the fog filling the streets. Stivan shoved his hands into his grey jacket and, after a resounding exhale of cold air, turned and whispered:

'We go now. I'll grab the bonds. The kid was deadweight anyway.' Dimitri's white moustache twitched. The old man was afraid, and I was too. We made eye contact but knew that Stivan was in control here and we had to follow.

The fog seemed to thicken as we crossed the road. I still could hardly see the bank. Another black figure loomed further ahead. We edged closer.

'What took you so long? I was about to bail.' Vilen was standing in front of us.

'Vilen, you idiot. We were waiting across the street,' Stivan whispered furiously, pointing back to the fog. Vilen looked down. I thought I saw a tear shimmer in his eyes. We took a closer look at the bank. One cashier, no customers.

'We're already late, let's get in. Radomir and Dimitri, cover your faces and go sharpen up the cashier.' I nodded in response, pulled my scarf over my nose and turned to slip inside the building. Vilen refused to look up as Dimitri and I passed him. We entered. The bank had a large white atrium

and a high roof. Behind us, foggy windows and oaken doors. On the far end, a single well-trimmed man in a blue uniform and cap. A typical collegiate registrar, the lowest government rank. Sitting behind the rows of metal bars, the man stared down at his Russkiye Vedomosti newspaper.

'Probably believes everything the Okhrana prints,' I muttered under my breath. The clerk looked up and dried his nose with his hand.

Dimitri walked to the desk and coughed. 'This is a robbery. Don't move.' At his waist he held a short revolver pointed at the clerk's blue cap.

The door burst open. Stivan in a black mask ran in, flustered.

'Vilen ran! Something's wrong.' He pulled out a pistol from his overcoat and pointed it at the registrar. 'We leave now. I'll deal with the clerk.'

Bang. A shot went off from outside.

The gun slipped from Dimitri's hands as he fell to the ground clutching his chest. A pale Stivan turned to the window. There stood a Cossack, rifle in hand, with a full brown beard and a patchwork of scars. I scrambled towards the door to break for it. The butt of a rifle shattered a window. One Cossack charged the door and knocked me to the floor. We wrestled on the ground, but he pinned my cheek against the tiles like a helpless butterfly on a taxidermist's wall. Dimitri's body lay in front of me.

Bang.

All I heard was the stomp of boots, the cries of Stivan and the cracking of bones. Then a wooden rifle butt planted heavily on my temple and the world went dark.

Dimitri and Stivan were killed.

Vilen betrayed us.

I was arrested to be executed.

So this was how it would all end. A camera flashed at me as I lined up against the wall. Would father be proud or horrified? Am I martyr or a criminal? They asked question after question while pummeling, crushing, beating me into my grave. Mother died when I was too young to remember. At least she can't see this.

Death by hanging. I was exhausted from endless questioning as my execution day approached. I had heard they never let you sleep until you confessed, so I did. I had no will to resist. I just wanted sleep.

The transport to St Petersburg was packed like a slaughter-pen and the carriage jolted around on cobbled streets. The two-headed Romanov eagle lined the edges of the carriage alongside the Orthodox cross. I refused the opium of the masses: God wasn't any help and I knew death was the end. This proved little comfort.

Cheering crowds roared outside. The metal doors were opened and two soldiers clad in white hauled us out one by one. I tried to climb out on my own, but they grabbed my wrists and dragged me hard. I got a good look at one: a toughened, bald middle-aged man. His still eyes revealed his boredom at leading fellow countrymen to death.

'To your health, brother,' I said. He spat into the mud without hearing my words. Another soldier pushed me up the steps. Ahead of me were the gallows, and a crier stood on the scaffold. I glimpsed an empty palace balcony distantly behind them.

'In the name of Tsar Alexander III, we sentence Radomir Ivanovich Apukhtin to death by hanging.' The crowd exploded with approval. The crier began reciting a prayer of last rites. The noose chafed against my face. I looked to the palace; a figure now stood on the balcony. I could make out a thick beard and a large robe. The crowd jeered, then went silent.

'May God be merciful on your soul,' I heard someone say. I closed my eyes for the darkness.

I waited. The crowd began to murmur.

The crier broke out: 'The divine Tsar has decreed…' he began, as I opened my eyes, 'to pardon Radomir Ivanovich Apukhtin!'

Had I died? Was this the afterlife? Two soldiers released me from the noose. I looked at the palace. The figure remained unmoved. The crier, soldiers and crowd all stared: so many eyes, piercing me with questions. Adrenaline surged through my veins. I felt as if I was losing balance, the world was spinning uncontrollably. I hadn't died, I was alive. I turned to the magnificent palace.

'God save the Tsar!' I found myself proclaiming. A cheer boomed from the crowd. I collapsed in shock, love and regret and began reciting The Symbol of Faith.

'I believe in one God, the Father Almighty…'

Was I a believer now? Was I wrong to embrace God so fast? Whom did I owe more to, the revolutionaries who'd died by my side, or the Tsar who'd saved me? Or maybe a God who, until moments ago, had never existed?

I was released from prison almost immediately. Stepping into the Petersburg street I recognised the sun's pale coating on my hands, the branches of trees reaching high and reclining in shades of emerald. I would never have seen this morning or any other without that paradigm of virtue, the Tsar; The Little Father and his merciful words. I knew what I needed to do next.

Night descended over the Caucasus. The Tsalka tavern was alive with the clink of bottles, the blare of music and drunken dancing. I went inside and approached the bar. I entered unnoticed, but the four soldiers who'd followed me did not. The music stopped. The only sound left was that of peasants swallowing their own spit. I pointed to a black door marked 'PRIVATE' behind the bar. The soldiers marched towards it, pushing the tavern-keeper onto the floor when he tried to block their way.

'God save the Tsar,' I whispered. The soldiers forced down the black door and descended the steps. All I heard were the stomp of boots, gunshots and the cracking of revolutionary bones.

## ERINNERUNG

Daisy Stewart Henderson
Glasgow

Highly commended in the Young Walter Scott Prize
11 to 15 age-group

The morning fog cleared, crawling back into the woods, its cold grip on the world broken. Sun shone through the half-opened window, and the hands of the clock on the wall pointed upward. Running fingers through her matted hair, Elke's half-hearted attempts at teasing out the knots proved futile. Scratching furiously at her irritated scalp, she rested her hand on the table and examined the louse caught under the tip of her nail. Its bloated body was crimson, fat from its gluttony, fatigued from moving its swollen self. With eyesight sharp with youth, Elke examined the tiny creature as it wriggled pathetically before her. The first time she had seen lice, crawling through the hair of a girl at her school, Elke had been repulsed. Now, the vulgarity failed to reach her. With the back of her thumb, the girl crushed it into the wooden table. Its feeble outer shell broke, spilling minuscule innards, a red mark on one of the white squares on the chequered tablecloth. For an instant, Elke felt something almost akin to sadness. After all, the parasite, she thought, along with the others that infested her, might be the only living thing which still shared her blood.

From the kitchen came the woman who had opened the door to Elke some hours earlier. Short and stout, her appearance was almost spherical. Her cloth dress hung loosely by her ankles. Elke decided that she was older than Mama, fifty at least, with her hair having long since turned grey. Her eyes were a rich brown, holding the earth within her irises. Mama's had been the most spectacular blue, lighter than the ocean and summer sky, ice within her. Elke had always wished for her own eyes to be so beautiful, but they remained a greyish shade, reminiscent of nothing but storm clouds.

Viltė looked down at the child with pity and despair. She must have been about eleven, in a torn cloth dress stained by dirt. Her limbs were twig thin, lined with bruises and lesions, giving her a frail appearance. With her sullen expression and a look of hopelessness on her face, to Viltė the child looked defeated.

Clearing her throat, she asked softly, "Who are you, my girl?"

Elke stared at her blankly, frustration growing at her failure to understand. At home she had been known as intelligent, impressively articulate for her age and obedient in school. Now, words failed her, as the strange woman spoke in a twisted language she failed to comprehend.

"Ich verstehe nicht," Elke whispered.

Viltė didn't consider trying to translate what she had said. Whatever Elke had said, she spoke in the voice of the enemy. An East Prussian child, the daughter of a Reich of hatred. The war was over, and yet, a child spoke German at a Lithuanian table, in a Communist home, it felt as though it had only just begun.

Viltė retreated to the kitchen, and to frying potato pancakes over the stove. Elke held the necklace which hung around her neck in her dirt-caked fingers. Viltė hadn't noticed it. She knew to keep it hidden, as Mama had told her that it was real gold, and very valuable. Over her chest lay the locket attached to the chain, which she opened gently. The photograph was folded into quarters, leaving deep creases down the faces it captured. Interwoven shades of brown and grey built them, blurred figures. Elke knew there was no more clarity for her in the world. Pictures were expensive, taken only rarely, and that was the only one where they were together: Brigitte, her sister, Mama, and even her father, sitting in an armchair, smiling at the camera. It was strange to see him in civilian clothes. Elke now knew him as a man who marched through her fading memories, the proud badges on his uniform tarnished by defeat. With every day that passed since he was stolen by a steam train full of men in uniform, some grinning with excitement, others trying to conceal their tears, she wondered whether he was Papa at all anymore. On the mantelpiece, she noticed a picture of a boy, twenty at most, with Viltė's soft features translated through youth and masculinity. He too wore a uniform, the uniform of the men who had killed her mother. She turned over the family photograph, laying it flat in her palm. In Mama's swirling handwriting, it read:

Erinnere wer du bist.

In the weeks before it happened, on the walks home from school Brigitte would speak to Elke about summer. Fidgeting awkwardly with the top button of her blouse, she suggested, shyly, that this would be the month

they saw their father again. Her long, golden braids were tied in a knot above her neck, a stray lock of hair curling in front of her forehead. With anxious eyes she painted a mask of normality. Brigitte was fifteen, four years older than Elke, yet never managing to fill the role of caregiver and future housewife that Mama deemed to be her path in life.

Some days Brigitte tried to cooperate, pricking her fingers again and again with the sewing needle, looking at her mother hopefully as she fumbled with a piece of fabric. Blood trickled down her hand in a thin stream, she wiped it on the white cloth, and stormed to her bedroom, looking in the mirror and despising the girl she saw. Pretty yet powerless, Elke knew her sister longed to escape. She didn't understand the things Brigitte worried about at night, sat upright in bed, biting on the collar of her nightdress, longing for sleep. She did know, however, that in the world in which she lived, by growing older, a part of a person died. The innocence of childhood lost, swept away by the river, into enemy lands where the people, the people who were called monsters, looked across the water with the same fear mirrored in their eyes.

Elke was in her final class of the day when she heard the first gunshot. Then another. Silence. A third. The bell rang, its sharp trill diminished by the violence screaming outside. Brigitte found her sister immediately, digging her nails into her arm as she grabbed her, pulling her homeward. The streets were rife with chaos. A woman approached them, frantic, with a crying baby in her arms.

"You must go, children. Leave everything, try and cross the border."

Tears welled in Brigitte's eyes. Elke stared at her, open mouthed, and protested her harsh, truthful words.

"No, we have to get to my Mama, she's only two streets away."

Elke attempted to walk past the woman, but she stopped her with an outstretched arm.

"Liebchen," she said softly, "they've ransacked everything past here. They took the people, stole them all. Our world is on fire, my child. Your Mama's gone. I'm so sorry."

Elke stared at the woman, at the tear rolling down her cheek and the children who had gathered around her. She heard as Brigitte wailed behind her, buckling to her knees, crying into the cobblestone street. Ash

landed in her hair, blown by a cold northerly wind. She could hear the fire raging from behind, the gunshots formed a rhythm, the screaming grew louder. A symphony of suffering rose into being, crescendoing with her heartbeat, shrieking in her ears. There was only forward.

In pretty black shoes she ran, like a deranged creature, away from the chaos. The wild called to her, there was safety within the arms of the trees. Brigitte could do nothing but follow, assuming her sister was headed to safety, to the Lithuanian border. She had never been strong-willed, and any doubt was quickly drowned out by the burning need to survive.

At the edge of the forest they slept in a bed of leaves, losing consciousness almost immediately from the toll of the day. The howling of wolves in the distance formed a melody, lulling the children into their troubled dreams just as Mama's lullabies once had.

Elke was awoken by a light breeze and… voices. Brigitte lay still, her face red and raw, her body still shaking slightly. They walked, following a path of instinct, until the speech grew louder, the blur of sound morphing into distinguishable words. Words in their language. Through a wall of trees, they entered a clearing thick with smoke.

A group of boys, the eldest about sixteen, the youngest no older than Elke. An interrogation followed, leading to the inevitable alliance. There were six boys in the group, each one of them wild. They were fuelled by each other's crazed laughter, a form of fun sometimes frightening to Elke in the wake of all she'd endured.

For days they walked many miles on old tracks, hunting squirrels and birds with the tools that nature supplied. Food was always in short supply, and Elke struggled to get more than scraps from a kill. As Brigitte grew closer to the boys, she spoke of her father, and how he was with the army, although she didn't know where.

"Maybe Germany, but he could also be in enemy territory."

The boys listened with growing intrigue, the fragments of a plan forming in their minds. Bruno, the oldest, and the ringleader, suggested one day that they go find her Papa. "We can walk anywhere with our two feet!" he told them. "France, England, or maybe even America! The war is over, we can go anywhere we want! Once we get to a city, we'll surely be able to find your Papa. I say we head to Berlin right now!"

The group was instantly taken with the idea. Elke couldn't swallow her reservations, insisting that she was going to Lithuania, as they were almost there anyway.

Brigitte looked at her wide eyed, and said, "OK, but I'm not coming."

Elke froze. Her sister stood amongst the boys, pointed in a direction that led to nowhere, a path destined to end in their demise. Normally she would argue with her, but something in the tone of Brigitte's voice told her she was no longer the timid girl who cried quietly at night. In her mind, she was rebuilding her family. Brigitte saw a future, Elke read delusion. She was almost sure her father was dead. Hope had left her a long time ago. Had it been Mama leading her, despite her scepticism, Elke would have followed. However, her sister had already shown great weakness in every way Mama had been strong. Elke could not follow her. Pulling Brigitte into an embrace, she wiped her tears on her sister's dirt-caked blouse.

"I love you."

Brigitte slipped a golden chain from her neck. She pressed the locket into her sister's hand, and looked solemnly into her distrustful eyes. "I'll see you again, I promise. We can all be together."

The nights alone in the woods almost broke her. The warm grace of the sun gave her strength, and she made it, starving and desperate, to a village. The people spoke words that twisted in her mind, and the strange language assured her she was in the right place. The villagers sent her to Viltė's house after a rush of words that were mere meaningless sounds to her, and they ate a lunch of potato pancakes in silence.

As night crept over the world, Viltė sent Elke to bathe. She had spent hours combing the lice out of her hair, and cut it to the nape of her neck.

Shivering after her bath, Elke stood in the doorway to the living room, watching Viltė light a fire in the hearth. In Viltė's hand was a piece of paper, a photograph. Elke's stomach churned. With the locket in one hand, she looked at their faces one by one, and allowed the picture, the last link in a broken chain, to be swallowed by the flames.

Wolves howled in the distance, and Elke screamed words no one understood.

## THE COLLABORATOR

Lucy Thynne
London

Runner-up in the Young Walter Scott Prize
16 to 19 age-group

*'The shaving of women's heads…one could almost say that it was the equivalent of rape by the victor.'* – Antony Beevor, historian, Paris, 1944

Later, Elise de Marchant would only remember the rain.

It was the week after Liberation and it was supposed to be a hot, Parisian summer's day, but instead there was a soft wetness in the air and the smell of opened ground. Elise was glad – she had always hated Paris in the heat. She watched as the droplets made their beaded trail across her arm. They were pretty there, and she liked the way the light streamed through them when she angled her wrist – a water bracelet, she thought, threaded to her skin. Her mother would tell her that she was foolish – a dreamer, even – to be thinking of these details, and Elise caught her eyes briefly in the crowd now, her mother returning the gaze. She looked smaller there, somehow, like she could be anybody's mother; caught in the throng of people who had gathered to see Elise. Her glare was intense, and for a moment Elise tried to read what her mother was thinking.

*How could you humiliate me like this?*

*My own daughter.*

*You were always so reckless.*

With a flick of her elbow, Elise shook off the rain on her arm and turned away, breaking her mother's stare.

It was her mother's dress she was wearing that day. The men had come to the house in the morning and taken down the door, moving through the house with such force that Elise had briefly thought that the Nazis were back, returning to occupy the city again. The thought was so delirious that she had almost wanted to laugh out loud, right then in her bedroom like a madwoman, but instead she swallowed it away. Their voices were loud and throbbed through the kitchen, like oil seeping through paper. They were looking for Elise, they said. Take us to her. She had been sitting in her bed upstairs, watching the ceiling move in time with the men's

movements and listening to everything that the men were saying.

She knew she could try to escape, if she wanted to – climb out of the window and run, or hoist herself into the apple tree next door – but the likelihood of her getting away was near impossible. Someone would find her, eventually. When the men seized her from her bed, she did not struggle, but let them pull her by the arms down the stairs, obeying when they demanded her to strip down to this – a small satin nightdress that would cling to her in the rain and feel heavy on her shoulders, pasted to her back.

Her mother had stood there at the door, impassive. When Elise had begged her to stop the men, telling her that they had no papers, no legal warrant, nothing, she still stood there, her face hardened and blank. Who these men were did not seem to matter to her. Sometime far from this, Elise would return to this moment, remembering the ease with which her mother had given her up, the nod to the men as she left, as if she were not her daughter but a guttural thing, dragged down from the attic.

*Take her away.*

*Do it.*

And then she was in the street, and her mother was no longer her own.

Elise hardly dared to ask the men why she was being taken down through Le Marais, or how they had found out what she was. When she was younger she could have walked through the streets wearing this dress and not felt anything. Nobody had taught her then how to feel shame. Now she found herself noticing how her body was still like a girl's, angular and awkward, and hated that everybody could see it out here, in the open.

She tried to focus on where they were taking her, the shape of the trees along her road and the feel of the cobblestones beneath her feet, but nothing looked as it should. The city seemed different to her, as if it were uncertain of its new-found freedom, sat limply beneath the French flags and left-over streamers from the Liberation celebrations the week before. That day, everything had become a gaudy haze of red, white and blue. When they reached the local square, and Elise was pushed into the last in a line of chairs, she still found herself thinking about that day the Resistance had stormed the city. How strange it looked now, in its ill-fitting beauty.

There were jeers from the crowd, fingers pointing at her, and someone's saliva in her eye, but somehow it all seemed so far away to Elise. She felt as if this was all happening to someone else and she was merely an observer, ignoring her own life happening in front of her, watching as this girl with her face was shouted at, jostled into a string of other women. They were mostly young, like her, but some older and carrying children.

The woman who had been yelling *Collaboratrice!* from the crowd approached her now, accepting the barber's shears from the man who had brought her here. Roughly pulling her head back, the woman smeared her fingers with tar to paint a rough swastika onto Elise's forehead. Elise thought about how this was like her first communion – a similar kind of anointing, the people gathered to see. Cleansing her sin; God watching. Now, the shaving would begin.

With every shorn lock of hair that fell on her lap, Elise felt more and more tired. Why were they doing this? Wasn't it all over? She closed her eyes. Her feet ached from the walk and she knew she would have to tend to the blisters later at home. She hadn't felt this tired in so long, and part of her wanted to cry right there like a child.

When she had first met Peter, it was as if the tiredness in her body had wrapped itself away, knotted itself as small as it could go. He had been stationed in their quarter, and like the other German officers was assigned a local house to stay in – the de Marchant home, where he would sleep in the bed they had always used for guests. They would feed him; wash his clothes. She knew that if she tried to picture Peter now she would be able to reconstruct him in perfect clarity, remembering the bridge of his nose and the broadness of his face, the kind where you could see exactly how he would have looked as a boy. More than anything, she found herself missing this face, and wondered if she would be able to remember it in a month, in a year. When you examine something every day for four years it becomes so familiar, Elise thought, that you cannot cut it away as cleanly as hair. You begin to think it will belong to you forever.

She felt herself being swivelled to the other side by the woman with the shears, beginning on the other side of her scalp.

She remembered what her mother had first told her about loving a man. That it was like swallowing a fistful of aniseed liqueur, a love that could burn down your throat and wallpaper the heart and fog-up in the mind, thick like the morning mist on the Seine. Elise had imagined bottles of

love then, swinging from their mantlepiece with all that liquid delirium. She had wanted to choke it down when she was younger; to understand what her mother had meant – that when it had finally happened to her, she had wanted to tell her mother how right she was. Her mother had a knack for this – describing to Elise what she had never been able to explain to herself, fitting the words together so perfectly that Elise had wanted to say, 'Yes. That's it, exactly. How do you always know what I'm thinking?'

She'd wanted to tell her mother everything then, to explain all about Peter to her – that even though he was a German, he was kind to her. That he didn't believe in everything that the Germans were doing; that he was caught up in this as much as they were. She longed for that past version of herself, where she could tell her mother all of this – climb in to her bed in the morning and lie there for hours, talking, her head pressed to her mother's chest. Before the war she had been a different person, and now that person was far below in Elise. Suppressed, as if she had been held down under a water's surface for a long time, and her head was too heavy to lift itself up. Elise didn't think that person would ever climb up through her again, and that somehow her mother had realised this too.

Finally, the woman finished the job and the crowd was full of applause and shouts. Elise opened her eyes, taking in the shaven heads of the other women beside her. They were like female Samsons, she thought, made lighter with shears. Her barber pulled her to her feet by her chin and told her that she looked better now. She was cleaner, she said, uglier so that she would not be desired again. Elise realised that her cheeks had grown hot and tears which she hadn't noticed were there until they wet the back of her hand had begun to slide out from the corners of her eyes. Her hair lay mangled in the street in front of her, and she watched as it gradually turned darker with water, the rain falling increasingly thickly.

There was less of her now.

Later, Elise would only remember the rain.

For further information about any aspect of the work of the Young Walter Scott Prize, please contact The Administrator, Young Walter Scott Prize, Bowhill, Selkirk, TD7 5ET or info@youngwalterscottprize.co.uk

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