ADVENTURES IN TIME TRAVEL

The winning entries for
The Young Walter Scott Prize 2022

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About the Young Walter Scott Prize

Honouring the achievements of the founding father of historical fiction, The Walter Scott Prize is among the most prestigious literary awards in the world and boasts a stellar list of winners. The Young Walter Scott Prize was established eight years ago for young writers aged between 11 and 19 years and last year we were delighted to welcome the YWSP 2021 winners, Leo Wilson and Oliver Dhir to the Borders Book Festival where they were presented with their Prizes, alongside the winner of the Walter Scott Prize 2021, James Robertson.

The novelist Elizabeth Laird, one of this year's judges, said, *"Every time I settle down to read the Young Walter Scott Prize entries, I'm fascinated to see what subjects the young writers choose. They're always a surprise. Inspiration strikes from places all around the world and from every century, sparked by places the children have visited, by an inspiring teacher or by the personal histories of their families, or perhaps by a poem, a memory, a painting or a sudden wild act of the imagination.*

Reading these stories, I feel sure that the future of fiction is secure. Some of these young writers will go on to do great things, but for now we can pause to celebrate what they have already achieved."

Our warm thanks go to Elizabeth and the rest of the judging panel, YWSP founder and Chair, the Duchess of Buccleuch, journalist and literary reviewer David Robinson, literary agent Kathryn Ross and YWSP Director Alan Caig Wilson.

We look forward to receiving entries for YWSP 2023. Details will be posted on the website in due course.

The Imagining History Programme UK is run by YWSP Director Alan Caig Wilson and we're delighted that so many young writers are taking up the opportunities it offers. More information about that Programme and how to become involved can be found on its website – www.imagininghistory.org

Both the Walter Scott Prize and the Young Walter Scott Prize are generously 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

2019 Ide Crawford and Charlotte Lee

2020 Atlas Weyland Eden and Madeleine Friedlein

2021 Leo Wilson and Oliver Dhir

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

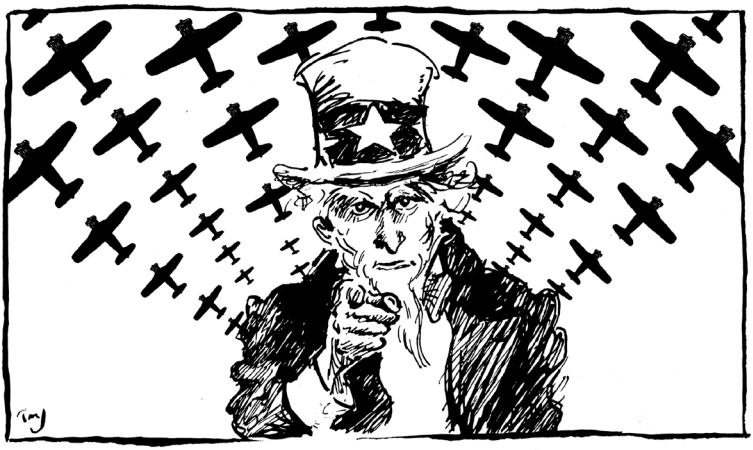
2018 *The Gallows Pole* by Benjamin Myers

2019 *The Long Take* by Robin Robertson

2020 *The Narrow Land* by Christine Dwyer Hickey

2021 *The Mirror and the Light* by Hilary Mantel

2022 *News of the Dead* by James Robertson



MRS FUJITA'S LIVING ROOM

Ellie Karlin
Bristol

Winner of The Young Walter Scott Prize 2022
11 to 15 category

Author's introduction

At the time I was planning my story, we were studying the Second World War in History. I started thinking about all the parts of the World War we had not gone into detail about and, reading further, became fascinated by how the conflict continued in Japan even after Germany had surrendered. This led me to think about the terrible decisions leaders must make during wartime, sacrificing lives for the supposed 'greater good'. I wanted to focus my story away from the much-debated ethics of this decision and go deeper into the lives of two ordinary women in Japan at this time.

Mrs Fujita's Living Room

The taste of fear lingers in the air like perfume, thick and cloying. The thrum of the observation planes that seem never to sleep has become background music to the visits Mrs Hayashi pays to Mrs Fujita, in those afternoons where neither can pretend to be busy anymore. Sometimes, Mrs Fujita tells her friend, she dreams of embracing her son, but when she opens her mouth to tell him she loves him she hears the planes as if out of nowhere. They are louder than in real life, she says, louder than the loudest voice in the world.

Mrs Hayashi says she doesn't dream of her husband or her sons anymore. She says there are no faces in her dreams, only strangers' voices. But when Mrs Fujita asks what the voices are saying, Mrs Hayashi only presses her sleeping baby to her breast and shakes her head, as if she doesn't remember.

That baby is the centre of both women's worlds now; she is the miracle child born from Mr Hayashi's last leave, that time Mrs Hayashi saw them all home and her boys' smiles were older and sadder than a hundred years. Mrs Hayashi wishes she could dream of those smiles, if only to be sure she would never forget them. It was only a few weeks after that last visit that the letters stopped coming.

The little one has her father's eyes, so dark brown they look black. She is not yet six months but she seems already to understand the world as it is. She came smoothly into being without cry or struggle and even the creaking collection of the nurses who remained said how good and quiet she was. Mrs Hayashi can remember how tired and joyful she felt when her sons came screaming and squalling to life, how she would laugh and say they were her father and her father's brothers come again. It is different with her daughter. With her, there are only sweet half smiles and little hands grasping into heaven.

Mrs Fujita dotes on the girl as if she were her own. She had a daughter once, she told Mrs Hayashi one day. Mrs Hayashi opened her mouth in surprise, but when she caught sight of Mrs Fujita's sagging face she only pressed her lips together in sympathy and placed the girl in her friend's arms. She does this now without prompting.

‘She has no father, she must have two mothers,’ says Mrs Hayashi.

Even though Mrs Fujita at once protests that the girl’s father is still alive, Mrs Hayashi does not want to talk about it. She is very pale and skinny, and she confesses that she does not always have enough money to buy food for the both of them, that she would rather the baby was fed than she was. Mrs Fujita insists that they must eat together from now on, that Mrs Hayashi and the baby must sleep in her son’s room until he comes home. Mrs Fujita promises she will take care of them.

Every day Mrs Fujita leaves very early to work in the factory. Before the war, it would have been unthinkable for a married woman to do such hard work as this, yet Mrs Fujita carries the soot and dust with fierce pride. She praises the men for fighting, but she often says women are just as capable of bleeding for their country. She is not young anymore and her hands are red and sore with blisters when she comes home, yet she feels happy knowing she is helping put weapons in the soldiers’ hands. She has long since forgotten why the war started or why it continues in Japan when everywhere else has surrendered. She only wishes to do her part so that it may soon be over.

Mrs Hayashi wishes she could work too, but Mrs Fujita forbids it. The baby is too important to be left with strangers, she says, and Mrs Hayashi is far too thin. So all day Mrs Hayashi sits and sings to her daughter, thinking about how much Mr Hayashi wanted a girl, how he talked of her as a part of their future the night before he left for a war that lasted longer than anyone expected. As Mrs Hayashi thinks and sings sweet songs, her knitting needles clack in her fingers. Every time she places the thick, carefully sealed parcel on the post office counter, she wonders who will open it, who will read the words filled with so much of herself.

In the afternoon, Mrs Fujita cleans her gritty hands and face in tepid water and Mrs Hayashi serves tea and rocks her miracle baby back and forth. In Mrs Fujita’s living room, the talk becomes the same, day after day. It is the talk that permeates the city in fear and anticipation.

Scarcely a week goes by without news of a bombing in one of the neighbouring cities, of the death of somebody’s mother, somebody’s father, somebody’s brother or sister. Sometimes they can hear the noise of the impact, see the houses wreathed in flames, yet their city stands almost intact. A few minor bombs of course, yet so far only the roundabouts have been destroyed. They are the only ones standing.

Why us? Every voice cries. Why have the Americans, who have so little kindness, spared this place of all places?

The citizens play out scenario after scenario, each more fantastic than the last. But it is the questions that they never speak aloud that hang over them like death's own shadow.

What is planned for Hiroshima? What will come upon us to end this war?

FOREVER ENGLAND

Rosie Brooker
Solihull

Winner of the Young Walter Scott Prize 2022
16 to 19 category

Author's introduction

My story is about Westcote, a man from a rich family who has returned to his ancestral home after serving in the First World War. An old friend, Spats, comes to stay, and in their seemingly inconsequential conversation, Westcote revisits the horrors of the war, his disconnect with his present situation in life, and the lost hope and love of the past – whilst Spats remains pleasantly (or callously) oblivious to it all. A catalyst for their conversation is Rupert Brooke, who was a real poet famous for his hopeful and poignant verse about the war. At the heart of the story is the idea of Westcote's voicelessness and his need to suppress his fears and emotions, and I chose to set my story in this period – the time of transition from the battlefield and war poems, back to 'normal' everyday life and the witty prose of Wodehouse – in order to explore those constrained, conflicting traumas which so many people like Westcote were forced to live with ever after: there was no recognisable 'normal' which they could go back to.

The poem from which the quotation is taken is *Tiare Tahiti* by Rupert Brooke.

Forever England

Lord Westcote, son of the late Viscount Westcote of Grouseton Abbey, who in turn was the grandson of the famed Earl Roderick of Whitby, who was a direct descendant of a Norman baron originally from the region of Pays de la Loire where they produce the finest Sauvignon blanc – Lord Westcote was reading a book when there was a knock on the door.

'Come in,' Westcote murmured. His words were muffled by the thick smoke from his cigarette.

'I say, old boy, I do hope you got my letter, otherwise I fear that I'm uninvited.'

Westcote would have known that voice anywhere. It belonged to Spats, an old friend from Oxford named after the garments which were habitually to be seen peeking out from underneath his meticulously pressed hems. Westcote remembered him as the timeless English gentleman: suavely mannered, enviably tailored and perfectly pedigreed.

'I did receive your letter,' Westcote said. He did not elaborate on whether Spats could stay at Grouseton Abbey or not, which had been the purpose of his letter. Instead, Westcote remained motionless, watching Spats through the smoke of his cigarette. The only sound in the room was of Earl Roderick's marble-faced clock, ticking away relentlessly.

'Well, I'm glad.' Spats eased himself into a winged armchair opposite the fire and rested his feet in the grate. 'I haven't been here since before the war. It's a wonderful house, what?'

Westcote did not think so: it was a house of garish opulence, tastelessly baroque, brimming with priceless heirlooms and antiques which glared ludicrously at him from a forgotten, gilded past.

'Yes, wonderful, wonderful,' Spats murmured, surveying the room with a practised eye. 'Mother used to have a cabinet just like that… I suppose you inherited this place from your father?'

'Yes.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Why?'

'Well, because he… he's…' Spats trailed off; the word 'dead' did not quite leave his lips.

Westcote grunted and turned back to his book. He had been viscount since 1915, when his father died whilst he was in the Dardanelles. Spats must have been thinking the same thing because he started to look uncomfortable and nervously drank Westcote's whisky and soda, thinking it his own. Earl Roderick's clock struck a doleful eleven o'clock.

'Anyway,' said Spats briskly, 'I've been sent here on a mission from Margaret. You remember Margaret, don't you?'

'Your sister?'

'Yes. She used to sing and play duets with you.'

Flurry of chords – lilting voice – stream of semiquavers: Westcote remembered all too well. The echo of Margaret's voice haunted every note he played, although he had not touched his piano for years.

'Well,' Spats continued, 'She's of a poetical disposition and wants to write an article about a poet, whom you apparently knew. I haven't a clue why the newspapers accept work from ignorant little girls these days, but there it is.'

'Who is this man?'

'Rupert Brooke.'

Silence.

It took all of Westcote's self-control to ask eventually, 'Why does she want to write about him?'

'Well, he's a sort of national hero, isn't he? Young, patriotic, all the hope from the beginning of the war. Margaret called him a martyred hero – he died in Greece like Byron, after all – and it's all very romantic and classical, dying on the way to the Dardanelles like someone from the Iliad… Don't you think?'

Westcote snuffed out his cigarette and stood up, avoiding Spats' eyes.

'And then I suppose Margaret found him interesting because she's a girl and Brooke was – what did Yeats call him? – the handsomest ma–'

'… man in England,' Westcote finished bitterly. 'Yes. I knew him.'

Westcote could see Brooke in Spats' eyes – worse, in Margaret's – as a golden, Classical hero, a poet, a martyr: an idol of lost youth and hope. Agitated, Westcote picked up an antique snuffbox off the mantelpiece and fingered it absently, his fingers stumbling over its grooves and curves under a carpet of dust.

'Well?' Spats prompted.

'Well what? Brooke was a family friend. I met him again on the ship bound for Gallipoli.' Westcote faltered slightly. 'But of course he died before we got there.'

'Yes, yes, I know. But Margaret wants something more personal – an anecdote, perhaps?'

'An anecdote…' Westcote mused. He paused, distracted by the miniature painting of cherubs and gods in the lid of the snuffbox. From its shadowed surface, a face peered back at Westcote from the depths of his mind: young and deathly handsome. Was it Brooke's face as he slipped from woman to woman, from artist to Hollywood actress? Was it Brooke's face as he basked in Tahitian sunlight, hidden from the world? Or was it Brooke's face as he sat in Antwerp in the officer's uniform he had wheedled for himself, penning his war poems hundreds of miles from any fighting?

'Well?' Spats prompted again.

'I didn't know him well enough for an anecdote,' Westcote lied. 'Anyway, I didn't see him in 1914 because I was… elsewhere.'

Westcote's mind blurred with other memories – thick mud sloshing with slurry, rats fattened with human rot, a horizon of shapeless corpses – and he dropped the snuffbox onto the mantlepiece with a crash. He abruptly started to pace up and down the room. The light from the fire was dim and red, casting the room in oily shadows which slid greasily over a polished handle here, a golden trinket there.

Westcote remembered Brooke coming to stay here once on a whim, a little like Spats was doing. Brooke had been famous even then, and he wore his fame effortlessly, as if he had been born to be adored. His intense magnetism filled the house with energy and brightness. Westcote remembered most vividly the evening when Brooke, light, laughing, louche, had let himself be persuaded to read his poems aloud and they had all been seduced by his rich voice and glittering eyes.

'Westcote!'

'Hm?' Snapped out of his reverie, Westcote fumbled with his thoughts. 'Where was I?'

'I think you were getting to the bit where you met him again on the ship. On the way to Gallipoli.'

'Yes, well, he was heading to Gallipoli after having seen no action in Antwerp. We spoke a little on the ship. Then he died a few days after. They thought it was sunstroke at first, but it was probably blood poisoning.'

Westcote bit his lip so that he would not continue: *Two days before we got to Gallipoli. Two days before we were slaughtered. He died two days before – he, the hero, the poet, the national treasure – having never seen action at all.*

But he could not restrain himself from adding, 'So, in the end, that corner of a foreign field which is forever England happens to be an olive farm in Greece.'

Westcote expected the bathos to affect Spats, but it did not; Spats was still lounging in the armchair as comfortably as if all of Grouseton belonged to him. The ancestral splendour cosseted him, and Westcote recalled how Spats had maintained his complacent ignorance: his affluent father had orchestrated Spats into an indispensable role at a company which produced officer's uniforms during the war, thereby exempting Spats from military service. It was Spats' habit to boast that he had once commissioned a pair of breeches for General Haig himself.

'But Margaret shouldn't write any of what I've just said in her article,' Westcote said suddenly. 'She should write about Brooke's pastoral poetry, his early, hopeful verse, and bring in the Trojans defending the Dardanelles before the Ottomans did, to keep it heroic. Write what people want to hear.'

Even if it's a lie.

Westcote stopped, suddenly aware of how his words had slid from advisory to bitter. Something had crept into his tone – some terrible, lurking, haunting fear – which he tried to chase away by saying somewhat inanely, 'But of course Margaret can write it for herself. She doesn't need my suggestions.'

Before he could think better of it, Westcote asked, 'Margaret became a

nurse in the war, didn't she?'

'Oh, yes. She worked in a hospital.'

Westcote knew that he shouldn't have asked, because his next thought was: *Well then, she did more to help the war effort than either Brooke or her brother.* He started to pace up and down again, unable to look Spats in the eye.

Westcote looked over at the crystal tumbler and saw a dead man staring back at him, his face shredded with shrapnel, his hair still writhing with the lice that had outlived him. Wescote, startled, turned away, but his mind was seized with the steady drone of machine guns, the bite of barbed wire, the mindless, pitiless, toil. Westcote stared into the marble face of Earl Roderick's clock and saw a reflection in it of himself, that summer, that fateful summer, when he was fresh from his first term at the Conservatoire in Paris, young, patrician, ready to do his duty, fluent in French – *It'll be like a holiday in France, boys, won't it?* – his mind busy with strains of Mozart and phrases of Vivaldi – although Debussy was always his favourite – and he was hopeful – naïve, only twenty-one – and dreamt of heroes – still had enough schoolboy Greek to tackle the *Iliad* – and was filled with his own sort of poetry –

Silence.

The piano in the corner of the room was covered in a thick cloth, hazy with dust. His French was dominated by words of war: *fusils, ordres, morts*… The Viscounts and Earls and Norman barons of the past stared down at him reproachfully from the walls, mocking him.

He, the Fifth Viscount of Grouseton Abbey, the Honourable Lord Richard Westcote, lived in a silent abhorrence of the world.

'Margaret told me to ask after you, too. She's missed seeing you.'

Tell her that I've missed her, Westcote thought. *Tell her that I missed the angels in her voice, the music in her youth, the poetry in her being. Tell her that always I'll miss her.*

Brooke's poisoned words drifted dream-like into Westcote's mind, as euphonious and hollow as they had been when Brooke had read them:

Hear the calling of the moon,

And the whispering scents that stray

Hasten, hand in human hand,

Down the dark, the flowered way.

Snare in flowers, and kiss, and call,

With lips that fade, and human laughter

Westcote had not seen Margaret since before the war. He was not sure whether he would want to, because he knew that he could not be a hero to her: heroes are either dead or liars.

Earl Roderick's clock struck midnight.

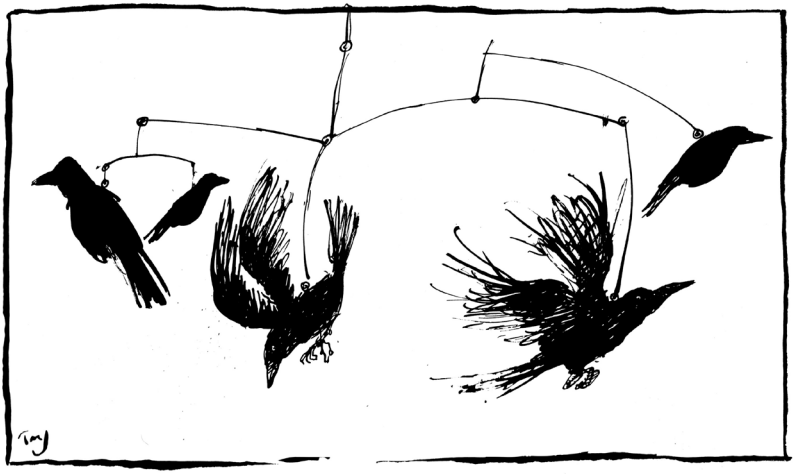
'Well, then, my dear fellow,' said Spats, standing up, 'I'd better turn in. Your maid has put my things in the Green Room, I think?'

Snare in flowers, and kiss, and call,

With lips that fade, and human laughter…

Westcote, haunted by Brooke's silver-tongued duplicity, dreaming of Margaret's mellifluous voice, broken by his burden – Westcote opened his mouth to reply, to speak, to say something, to feel his voice in his throat, to stop choking on other people's words…

Silence.



THE DAY HOPE DIED

Melissa Muthama
Sherborne School for Girls, Sherborne

Runner up in the Young Walter Scott Prize 2022
11 to 15 category

Author's introduction

I decided to set my historical fiction story, The Day Hope Died*, in 1994 Rwanda because I felt it was an opportunity to shed some light on the past experiences and history of African people. I believe that the world has become desensitized to a lot of the experiences within Africa and the struggles still left today due to a pattern of hate and discrimination. My hope is that* The Day Hope Died *will be able to register and speak to people of different backgrounds, in hopes that they may be able to sympathise with the characters and may perhaps spark an interest in the history and legacy of Africa.*

The Day Hope Died

That was when I saw them, that was when they saw me. Without thinking, once again I ran…

The morning of April 7th 1994 was cold. I remember sitting at our circular wooden table, taking brown porridge with Ntwari beside me. I remember parts of our wooden table had split, I remember the parts of the table that had split. That morning Ntwari stood beside my chair, tugging at the wrist of my grey school sweater. "Neza, come and play with me," he pleaded, his dark brown eyes full of yearning. Instantly, the sound of Mama's voice thundered across the table. "Ntwari, kurya!" *Ntwari, eat!*

5-year-old Ntwari, without the slightest tinge of resistance, returned to his bowl of porridge; not saying another word for the rest of that morning. Ntwari was silent the morning of April 7th 1994.

Ntwari and I began to go on our way to school, past the fig trees that lined the neighbouring compounds, across the dusty roads of Neomata and through the hazy mist of the morning until we arrived at the small one-room building, where young children spent their days preparing for careers that Rwanda could not provide for them. I glanced up at the words Christian Star Primary School written on the gable in white paint against the dark blue wall that covered only the front of the brick building.

I felt Ntwari's grip tighten on my hand as we approached the building. On April 7th 1994 Ntwari took a moment longer to let go. Today, I wish I would have held his hand a moment longer.

"Genda, Ntwari, Genda," I said turning back.

Go, Hero, Go…

I arrived at school just as everyone was sitting down, the chalk from the blackboards plastered on each of the walls entered my nose making me sneeze. I took my seat two rows from the back next to a new girl from Uganda by the name of Keza. It wasn't long before I got to know her and discovered our fathers made work driving trucks together to and from Kenya. She became my friend. The meaning of Keza's name matched

her. Keza means beauty.

One would think that beauty is something that stays with someone forever or at least until the end of their youth. Keza's beauty, however, faded on April 7th 1994.

On that day all the beauty faded; hers, ours - everything became ugly.

"Silence class!" Madam Utiwonze exclaimed. We were all silent.

"Everybody here who calls themselves a Tutsi, stand up," she continued.

Again there was silence. Silence until the boy sat on the right of Keza steadily rose from his seat. One quivering brow raised, his eyes fixated on Madam Utiwonze's face. Her expression shifted from one of false curiosity to one of pique as their eyes met. He began trembling, whilst his hands played a tireless game of catch. The feeling that whatever he had stood up for was not something to be proud of, spread through the classroom like a bad rash. A look of disgust began to settle on the faces of each of my peers. I turned to Keza, who was already staring at me, a small puddle had formed on the cemented floor beneath her seat, the look of absolute horror overlayed on her face as she slowly mouthed, *'Don't stand up.'*

I did not know what Madam Utiwonze meant. I didn't move.

"Come with me Emmanuel, leave your books…" Madam Utiwonze's voice was low. Her head turning to face us, "Class, study page 31 in your books, I will be back." They left the classroom together. The sunlight briefly entering the classroom as the green door swung open, then shut, revealing the words *Class 5* that were written on the front of the door. Nothing but the murmurs of the classroom left to fill the silence.

The afternoon of Thursday April 7th 1994, Keza and I stood in the courtyard for a few minutes after school. Just as I was about to say goodbye to my closest friend, she turned to me and in a hushed tone somewhat confessed, "Neza, this is my last time standing with you."

"Kuki, Keza?" Tears began to form in the backs of my eyes even before I could understand why.

"Because we are all going to die."

Every Thursday Mama collected Ntwari from school after her trip to the market and every time, just as they were about to enter the house, I would always hear their singing from the dining table whilst sitting doing my schoolwork. I would slightly pull back the curtain just beside the dining table to watch them as they walked in. Mama would be casually balancing the crops on her head, supporting them with one arm whilst the other held Ntwari's hand. Her grinning face looking down at Ntwari as he ate a mango or guava from the pile. The specks of fruit stuck in his teeth revealed whenever he would smile or sing the letter 'y'. They were always singing. On April 7th 1994 there was no singing. There was no noise.

That evening as I awaited my family's return home, the sun had begun to set. I sat on the worn-out red armchair in our living room, watching the television. Next to me, the equally frayed green sofa that separated the living room from the kitchen. I wrapped myself in the rough knitted blanket from the top of Mama and Baba's bed when the living room bulb began to grow dim, occasionally flicking off but then always coming back on. The images on the screen kept only my eyes occupied. My mind was far, thinking about Emmanuel; of where he had gone, of why Mama and Ntwari were late to come home. I thought about the next day when Baba would return. A soft smile spreading across my face.

I thought about the words that Keza had said to me just a few hours ago.

The words that scared the living soul inside me. My face went blank.

My feet grew cold as they met the red clay tiles on the floor; I began to smell burning. I frantically turned my head in every odd direction trying to learn where the smell of smoke was coming from until my eyes landed on the open window on top of the kitchen sink. Orange. Through the window, a bright orange lit one of the inside rooms of Mama Shema's house. Automatically, my legs carried me outside. A small crowd of people had gathered outside the burning building, a few stood still whilst most rushed with buckets of water to and from the well trying their best to extinguish the fire. I quickly ran to join them. I noticed on my way back from the well, a child that appeared the age similar to Ntwari, sat just beside the crowd, crying. Mucus dripping from his nose and a fly kept landing on his nose, then his head, then his knee. Shema's little brother. Moments later Shema emerged from behind the stone wall that separated the small house from the road and collected the child and cradled him in his arms. Dust covered Shema head to toe, from the top of his short

afro to the bottom of his heels. Shema dropped to the side of the crowd cradling the small child in his arms. I stood there motionless, watching him, watching the expression on his face turn to complete disbelief as he stared at the house then to ground; eyes wide open. He began wheezing. Hard, heavy breaths. The small boy hugged Shema's neck, his screams getting louder. The babble of the crowd came to a sudden stop when a man stumbled out of the house, coughing out the acrid smoke he spoke the words, "She's dead."

The crowd broke into a harsh wail before the chatter began again. This was the last day that the community would unite.

From behind me I heard a harsh voice, "Neza, Neza!" I turned around and there stood Baba.

Baba was home! I thought. Briefly glancing back to the crowd before running to him. "Come quickly Neza," he muttered into my ear. His shirt had been torn at the hem, his eyes filled with angst. I followed him back into the house. We walked in to see Mama, sat on the same red chair that I had sat but moments ago with Ntwari perched on her lap. I faced Baba once again.

"Neza…" He began in the same hushed tone. "When the time comes for hiding you all must not hide together; or they will kill you all." Baba planted a kiss to my head, his cold hands resting against the temples of my head. My stomach began to turn. Suddenly, the radio scratched, all our eyes shot towards it. A small crack sounded before a deep voice began to speak.

"Arise all Hutus, the time for cleansing is now, kill them all, for even the child of a snake is still a snake…"

"Now listen," Baba started, drowning out the scratchy voice coming from the radio. Mama's back straightened all the way up, her eyes widened like that of a puppy being told what to do, her hands supporting Ntwari's neck as he lies asleep with his head on her shoulder. "I have said it but I will say it again, you are all not to hide together, Kwizera, tomorrow you are to go to the church with Ntwari, beneath the church there is a room where you may keep Ntwari along with the other children, take him food and stay with him during the long hours of the day."

Kwizera, I thought, Mama's name meant hope. On April 7th 1994, hope died.

A long pause, "Neza, you must be strong, make sure nobody sees you and you must take care of yourself for I will not be there to protect you, ndagukunda."

The lump in my throat was too heavy to lift but my eyes spoke.

I love you Baba.

Suddenly, a chant from outside,

Kubagana!

Kubagana!

Kubagana – *fight till death*

The chants grew louder and louder. A moment later Baba said, "Tomorrow has come today, go hide, I will handle this."

With Mama cradling Ntwari in one arm, we scurried into their bedroom when just as my foot passed the door frame, I felt Mama's hand haul me back. "Child do you not remember what your father said, we are not to hide together, *genda*." The sound of accusation in her voice but the look of desolation forming on her face.

Glancing to look at Ntwari a last time, I saw his eyes wide alert; the look of absolute horror. I held Mama's gaze for a moment longer before turning to run down the short corridor, past the two separate rooms of the kitchen and living room to outside. That was when I saw them, that was when they saw me. Without thinking, once again I ran.

Sprinting once again past the fig trees, across the dusty roads of Neomata and through the black of the night. Until there stood in front of Ntwari's school, two tall figures. Each with a dog, holding a rifle in the other hand. Before they could notice me, I hid behind a sparse hedge and slowly peered to the side to catch a glimpse of these tall silhouettes. A man appeared from inside the building holding a torch as well as a rifle. "Clear!" he spat to both of them, the glare of the moon barely allowing me to make out any of the movements, when just then the cry of a baby came from inside the classroom. The man who had just emerged out of the room quickly turned back. With a single boom. The cry suddenly stopped.

Again there was silence.

IT'S THE NOISE

Ted Whitaker
Gloucestershire

Runner up in the Young Walter Scott Prize 2022
11 to 15 category

Author's introduction

In WW1 and WW2, the Royal Navy attempted to counter the submarine threat of German U-Boats by disguising naval vessels as merchant ships in order to ambush them. They were known as Q-Ships.

This story is partially inspired by a Q-Ship called the HMS Willamette Valley, cover name RFA Edgehill which sank on the 29th of June 1940 after a confrontation with U-Boat U51, resulting in heavy casualties. The survivors would have been rescued by seaplane or nearby ships once the U-Boat threat was diminished. However, rescue, in many cases, was not immediate, with survivors having to brave the violent oceans for hours, or even days. This was the aspect I wanted to focus on.

During the aftermath of the fictional battle the protagonist of my story is stripped of everything other than the immediacy of his situation as he tries to cope with the hostile environment of the sea and the inhumanity of war. This story is written in the first person and many details are left ambiguous as the narrator is essentially drifting in and out of consciousness.

The ending is left to the reader's imagination.

It's the Noise

It's the noise. The sound of the waves. Overwhelming. Short gasps of sound as I fight to stay afloat. It's a battle I'm losing. Black ocean, orange fire, and a sheen of oil. I'm drowning. Choking. Every feeble cry replaced by a mouthful of saltwater and oil. I need to stay above water, but I have no choice in this. I belong to the sea now.

It's cold, so cold. Blood is freezing inside my veins. My limbs grow heavier and heavier.

The British guns are still firing as their warship slowly sinks. A wave cuts me down. Something has me, it's pulling me under. I kick my legs but it's no use.

This is it.

This is the end.

This is the day I die.

Under the water. Consumed. My heart is all I can hear, pounding in my ears. Fear. I don't want to die. Death becoming reality. No air, a panicked breath. I feel the water entering my lungs. Bubbles in my vision. Bubbles which are now changing direction.

I'm being pulled out of the icy water, my clothes weighing me down. Black oil clinging to my skin. I'm heaved onto the deck of a wooden life raft. Taking a quick, painful breath. Coughing, raising my head, I purge myself of seawater. Then I see them. Men fighting for their lives. Patches of sea on fire. The men try to escape the flames as a wave takes them in. The screams. I can do nothing to help them. Exhaustion takes over…

My eyes open. It's still night. The fires seem smaller. The screaming has stopped. I could have been one of those men.

As the nausea leaves me, I feel a sharp pain on the side of my head. It feels as if someone has shot me. I feel pain. That means I'm alive!

But so is the Tommy in front of me.

His clothes and his skin are stained with a tar-like layer of oil. If it weren't for his unintelligible shouting, he wouldn't have given himself away. My uniform, my insignia, yes, he knows I'm the enemy. The

expression on his face clearly indicates that he regrets who he saved.

The waves are shaking the raft violently, letting me know that moving too much or too fast could tip the whole thing over, then we'll both drown. He knows this as well; this must be the only reason the Tommy hasn't torn my throat out already. So, we just sit here for minutes, or is it hours, as hell unfolds around us.

I can see the British ship; it's being dragged into the depths of the ocean. A huge steel coffin, taking all life with it. Dim lights achieving nonexistence as its electricity cuts out. A dull groan emanating around us, as the air is forced out of the ship as the bulkheads collapse. Twisted metal fracturing. The warship vanishes. All that remains is a wave that comes towards us but dies in the process. I haven't seen a ship sink before; we'd always been gone by then, under the waves and out of sight as they taught us to.

Now, the only light is distant burning oil. Large pools of fire sitting on top of the sea where the warship had been. Flames dancing as if on a mirrored ballroom floor. It's hard to see where the sea ends and the night sky begins. Flying among the debris with the moon and the stars. But we're not flying, we're on a small wooden raft, in the middle of the Atlantic.

Soon I can't even see my shaking hands, the floating fires becoming too distant to give me any sight. The only light comes from the eyes of the Tommy, reflecting the flames like the devil himself looking at me.

He stares at me. Is he planning something? He's clutching his side. Is there a weapon concealed there? Is he waiting for the perfect moment to kill me?

The sea isn't still. Waves catch us, swaying the raft back and forth. I dig my nails into the planks, watching as the horizon disappears and reappears in front of us. The waves lapping at the sides, as if tasting to see whether it should eat us whole. The sea is furious, each wave feels like an argument against our existence. Scents of oil with every gust of wind. Just the furious monster beneath us.

The only light now is from the moon. The Tommy continues to watch me. He is unflinching. The waves are calming down. He mumbles something incoherent, nothing more than a whisper, and then continues his silence.

My head throbs. I must have hit it when I fell from the gunner's seat. Tentatively I lift my hand up to my right temple. Instant pain. I can just make out the crimson colour. Blood. I need to clean the wound.

In a moment of desperation, I dive my hands deep into the chilling waters. Cupping them, I pour the oily seawater onto my open head wound.

Agony. A sharp, hideous pain, like my own skull exploding. Was this the right thing to do? What was I thinking? The Tommy shouts in panic, I think he's telling me to stop.

Overwhelmed by the pain, I feel myself drifting in and out of consciousness. Death would be welcome right now, to join my comrades. Darkness takes over my vision. Then nothing.

For just one moment I'm sure I can taste coffee on my lips. Inhaling its welcome warmth. Except it's salty and it's filling my lungs!

Choking, I cough up saltwater. My throat is raw. The ocean surrounds me. It's morning. The Tommy is awake. I see his whole face for the first time. Dark hair, he's about my age. His skin is pale, too pale. His eyes red as if they've been open for years. He's still holding his side. Noticing my gaze, he whispers something in English and chuckles dryly, the threat is still there.

The cold is eating away at my skin. Frost has collected on the deck, I run my hands over it, watching in childish wonder as it breaks away. Looking around me, I spot piles of debris, bits of wood and wreckage in the water. There's a body of a sailor still wearing his coat. It's keeping the dead man warm. Here I am, jealous of a corpse.

The sea is both blue, black, and grey. Blending into each other, not meaning anything anymore. I can't tell whether these remains are from my U-Boat or from the warship. In the end it doesn't really matter. Both crews now sharing the same unmarked grave.

"We're going to get out of this," I mutter, half to the Tommy, half to myself. He nods, as if he understands. It could be the seawater, or it could be the blood dripping down my neck, but I feel that if I could succumb to sleep again all would be well.

I cast my mind back to the U-Boat, I was manning the deck gun, aiming at what we thought was a merchant vessel, before its shutters fell down revealing a fully armed British warship. Both vessels firing

instantaneously. It's the noise that gets you. The warship quickly found its target, hitting our exposed U-Boat. I was flung off. Saved from the fate of my crew, my comrades. It seemed to take an age for me to hit the water. I hear the Commander ordering the torpedoes to be fired. Both of our vessels sinking together.

It's the noise. A faint buzzing overhead. I look up. The sun is burning, and this sun is reflecting against a moving metal surface. It's a seaplane! A British seaplane. I don't care, it's a chance of rescue. I try to shout as loud as I can, my voice hoarse, waving my arms, daring to jump upwards. Its wings dip, first the left one, then the right. It's seen us!

"You won't take us today!" I yell at the ocean. Laughing I turn to the Tommy, "I'm your prisoner now." Beneath me the raft shifts and the Tommy slips backwards overboard.

Panic. I lunge over, falling to my knees. My hands flail to catch him, still slippery with oil. Panic. Instinctively I dive in, and in one motion I push him back onto the raft. Breath taken away, I splutter, the freezing water stinging my skin. Back on the raft, looking at him now, barely blinking, breathing shallow. His hand has moved from his side, revealing a metal splinter deep into his abdomen. He was never holding a weapon; he was holding a wound.

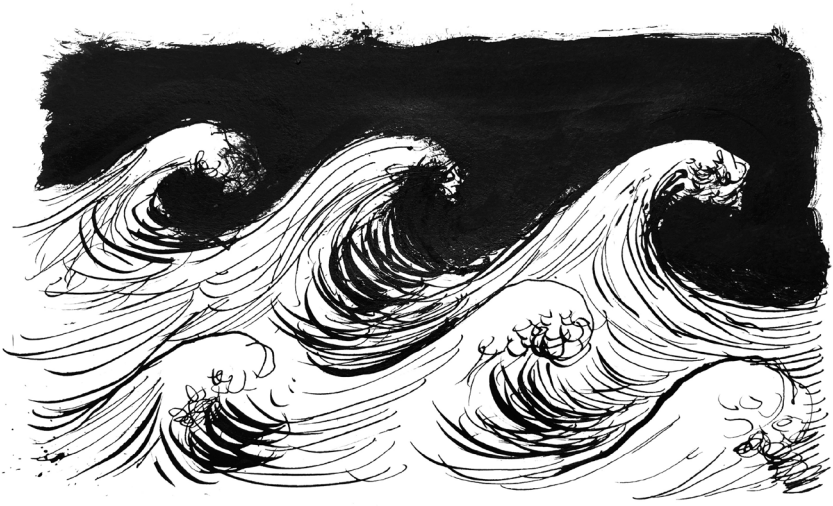
He's dying, eyes closing. No, not now, not when we're so close to rescue.

I gently tap his face, trying to keep him awake. The plane is going to land. "There, see, it's your comrades, here to rescue us…"

Us? Will they rescue me? Will they show me mercy like he did? Will they save me?

Taking a deep breath, I prepare myself for an uncertain fate. I can already see he's slipping away…

"Hey Tommy, they are here to rescue you! Can you hear the noise?"



SEA-CHANGE

Florence Bolton
Oxford

Runner up in the Young Walter Scott Prize 2022
16 to 19 category

Author's introduction

Sea-Change *is set in the Industrial Revolution, in a small village where, up till now, families have remained for centuries. It focuses on the differing viewpoints of a father and daughter, and how an industrial revolution can cause equal change to people's way of life. I started the story from Nicholas' perspective, as I had previously never branched out from main characters my own age in my writing, and really enjoyed the challenge. This story is set partly in a hamlet beside the Mersey river, and partly in the fast-growing city of Liverpool. Although the characters and plot are entirely fictional, Oglet was a real village up the Mersey from Liverpool, that shrunk in the Industrial Revolution to contain only a couple of farms today. Speke is also a real place, as was the Salt Refinery, which closed in the 1840s.*

Sea-Change

New Year's Eve, 1837

Nicholas

The old man paced the shingle, boots crunching into the gritty residue strewn beneath the banks. Clouds, seething in a thunder-thick whirlpool above, spat rain onto his bare head, gnawing at his face, and the gulls' spiteful screams tore his ears like knives. Unrelenting. Wave after savage wave hurled itself against the shoreline, clawing and grasping at the weeds clinging to the rock.

It was bitter today.

"Bitter? I'm not bitter!" Words he had shouted less than an hour ago still swirled in feral currents around his mind. "I can't believe you, that's all. Abandoning home like the prodigal son, that's what you're doing!"

Worse — she wasn't after a fortune to squander, and had told him with firm politeness of their plans. David, she mentioned blithely, had got a job at the new Lime Street Station in Liverpool. Paid better than the Salt Refinery, and right in the city centre as well. Close to the sea, Pa! Besides, it was near enough to Oglet that they could come and visit — only half a day if you rented a horse and cart.

"And I suppose you'll be able to afford that often?" Nicholas spat, but she had borne the squall with meek but determined obstinance. Like mother, like daughter. But Rebecca and he would never have left Oglet, not when the family had been there for as long as memory could sustain.

First it had been the Hughes, then the Taylors. Young families were being sucked away by the glassy promises of Liverpool, lured by siren-songs disguising themselves in the screeches of mechanisms and machines. Oglet was being brushed off the map, house by house, leaving only the

fields and the Mersey behind. It was a riptide revolution, a newfangled sea of metal-woven cotton and steam. And as with all riptides, Nicholas thought, nothing good would come of it.

"I thought I'd find you here, Nick." A deceptively youthful voice broke the surface of Nicholas's musings.

"Afternoon, Meg," he replied, scuffing his boots along the stone wall with forbearance. Meg Baker was not a day younger than seventy, but fresh-faced with the walk from over near Speke.

"I heard about Ruth..."

Nicholas' frown knits together the silence.

"News travels fast 'round a hamlet. But don't stay bitter at her, will you? She's doing what she thinks is best."

Nicholas swore. "That en't what's best for us nor Oglet."

"You mayn't like it, but it's Change. And Change rolls in with each tide, and it don't stop."

"Change sucks us away with each tide!" Anger surged inside him like brine from the waves. "It's a sea, dragging us into trouble."

Still Meg faced him on square. "New ideas en't trouble if you don't let 'em be. You're scared of it, of this 'sea' as you call it , you who's named after the patron saint of sailors, of all people! It en't the sailor's job to push the sea away, even if it's dangerous. He goes with it, and tries to guide the boat into new and clearer and calmer waters. Now you think over that, will you?"

"Drown you, Meg Baker! Ruth's the one in the wrong! Leaving me behind, throwing me away like... like jetsam!"

But Meg's words had sunk deep into the old man, and as he watched her disappear up the narrow path the words reverberated around his mind like church bells.

Change rolls in with each tide...

Ruth

A New Year's coming, and we're on the brink of a new world. The young woman stared out down the Mersey towards the sea. Lime Street Station was a year old and finished at last, and the Roberts Loom had long since woven its way into factories. A New Year, and a new life.

She breathed in the silence of the night, disturbed only by an owl's hoot, the soft snores from David in the bed behind her, and the pale, distant whispering of the water. This was her last night in Oglet. Her last evening of starling-chatter and stars, her last time running her hands over the splintering window-frame and gazing down-river. Her last night in the dark, before a many-tongued, gas-lit, utterly new but utterly beautiful world.

When Ruth and David had visited Lime Street Station in the bright spring, Ruth had been enthralled by the stonework and the glass and the metal. She was entranced by the circus of colours and people that found themselves there, the energy that Oglet never had, but most of all, the speed and smoke and screech of the trains. David had felt it too, and, hands grasped and eyes uplifted, their honeymoon had mingled with courtship of the bewitching pleasures of a New Era. Then David had got a job in the Station office. It had been a dream at first, a fantasy aspiration to live in the centre of this new-found life. A fire-light fancy to talk over, eyes reflecting the flames in greed and adoration. But now it was all going to come true, a happily-ever-after fairytale they'd write for themselves forever on.

Still, an illogical guilt drawstringed through her. Every time she looked at Nicholas, at his now-pale eyes or his wrinkling hands, some invisible force pulled the regret closer and closer to her heart. She had always been his joy, the long-awaited, long-prayed-for Isaac to ageing parents. His little girl to tickle under the chin and chase on the beach and point out where the distant sea danced. And now she was his only family as well.

Like Oglet, Nicholas never changed. Ruth was the one who had, who'd shifted with the seasons. Irate and confused at first, when Rebecca had died. Then numb and icy. When David had come, Ruth

had blossomed again, and now still she sprouted the joy of new ideas. Yes, Nicholas never changed his views. He was set firm on dissuading her from leaving, and he'd raged until he blew himself out of the house and down to the shore. But when he'd returned this evening, he didn't storm, or shout, or even bring up Ruth's leaving. When she mentioned it, he'd purely shrugged, "Well, Shrimp, if you have to."

Pa's changed somehow, Ruth thought, closing the windows, *but it en't a bad thing. New year, and a new life.*

Five Years Later: *May 1843*

Ruth

Ruth had been back to Oglet before, for brief holidays spent on misty morning walks to the Mersey. Sitting by the banks and gazing into the hopeful distance beyond the shimmering water, feet trailing in subaqueous swirls like the clouds overhead. Smiling. She had almost forgotten how beautiful it was. Nearly perfect; the only downside, Ruth had always thought, was that the rolling fabric of salt and freshwater never had quite the same lure of timeless innovation that the waves and wilderness of the sea had. Ruth had thought that when they'd moved she would be able to gaze down-river like always, only exploring new sights of far greater water, of the Irish sea. But the new tenement block they were renting in was named "Dockside" only interpretively, it seemed. The smog shrouded what the high brick buildings did not.

James and Edward, new arrivals in the five long years, spent hours in the Oglet water each time, waddling on chubby legs and laughing. They had never seen water so clear, not when the factories belched smoke and dyed the water grey with muck.

Each time they went to Oglet was pre-planned, marked out by David with black ink in the diary. Preceded by fastidious searching in his schedule, letters asking leave, meticulous searches for the cheapest horse and cart. And the days would trudge past until finally, the money-box was

emptied and off they'd all go.

But they hadn't visited for several months. Ruth's gradually swelling belly inevitably gave birth to ill health and sleepless nights and David worrying for the safety of a newborn in a horse and cart. So he'd made a note of a week in July, circled it out, labeled it free and scratched his pen on thin, white paper. Just like every other time.

Today was different. Ruth had been bouncing Becca and keeping an eye on the boys' rough-and-tumble in the yard, when the post had brought Meg's familiar country scrawl.

"Dear Ruth,

Please cum back as soon as you can. Mr Evans needs you.

Yours sinserely, Meg Baker".

"Oh well," David said when she showed him. "They're old, it's probably just an over-reaction on the part of two senile brains." And he smiled and put his arm around her shoulders. Ruth looked down.

"But darling," she muttered. "I *know* Meg. She wouldn't message unless something really had gone wrong. And Pa's old now. What if he can't look after himself anymore? I'm worried, David."

Squeezing her hand softly like he always used to, he opened the moneybox.

Nicholas

The old man shifted the bolt and slid the door open slowly, ignoring the biting pain that had remained persistently in his hip since he'd tripped last week. Two waist-height hugs presented themselves proudly, and, as he reached for the doorframe, a young woman reached out to support his arm.

"Hallo Ruth!" he smiled weakly, and prayed she wouldn't notice how his shirt was misbuttoned, not after all the time he'd spent forcing his shaking fingers to do the job.

Ruth! Ruth was here! When Meg had come with the bread and meat that his aching joints could no longer collect from the village, she'd mentioned the possibility of Ruth coming, though how she knew he couldn't guess. It had been too long since they'd visited; Christmas was a stale memory five whole months past now.

"G'morning!" Ruth spoke cheerfully, her chattering as incorrigible as a seagull's, but the split second of shock in her eyes drove a barbed hook deeper into his heart than fingers could remove. "I met Meg on the way here and she told me 'bout your fall and everything. Well, you just sit down and I'll make a nice cuppa tea and... oh Pa..." He watched her fingers rub tears away determinedly. "You know why I've come, don't you? I thought we could work around it at first, but I can't see no other way... You'll have to leave Oglet."

Nicholas reluctantly nodded the head that was wrinkled more than the sea was with waves. "Yes, Shrimp. I understand. Change rolls in with the tide. And it's time I stopped clinging to rocks that'll only crush me under them. It's the sailor's job to guide the ship, however battered and old, into new and clearer and calmer waters."

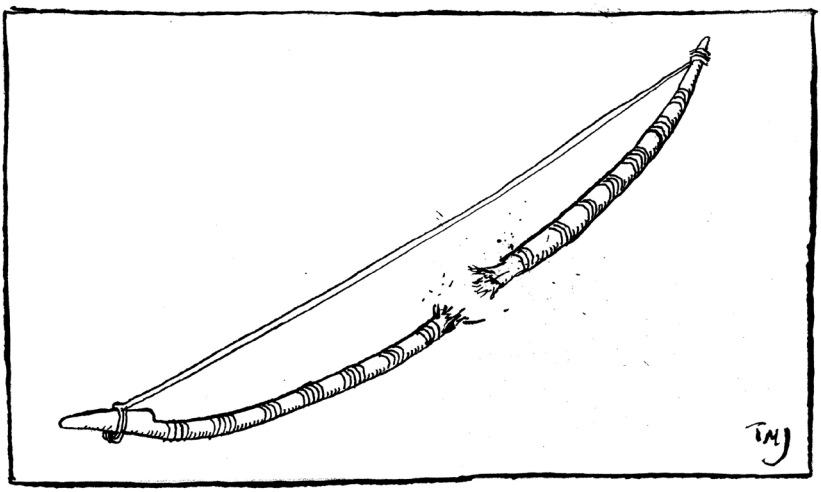
The old man sat on the shingle, hands feebly grasping the sides of the log to balance him. Boot by boot, Meg had guided his creaking steps over the field and down to the banks of the Mersey-side. The breeze clutched at his skin and his coat, but the gulls' cries had faded in his ears this year. Waves grasped the earth softly, and the weeds at long last relinquished themselves to the spinning, weaving threads of water.

Fate was bitter today.

Yes, fate was bitter but family was loving. David would come home tomorrow to a warm loaf and a steaming mug of tea that Ruth had magicked up, all with Becca on her hip, while the boys drowned their Pa in a thousand hugs. Then Ruth would sing their home into harmony, the mermaid she was, luring and wooing and daring all at once. And Nicholas? He'd sit and smile from the rocking chair, and picture the waters where memories mingled with a salt-water ocean of dreams.

But for today, here he was by the river. Here he was for the last time.

"Change rolls in with the tide, and I'll swim along with it," the old man thought, staring out into the blurry blue. *"But I'll never see the Mersey from Oglet shore again."*



WHITE FOX

Atlas Weyland Eden
Devon

Runner up in the Young Walter Scott Prize 2022
16 to 19 category

Author's introduction

Japan, 811 C.E.

In the northernmost isle of Hokkaido, there lived the native people known as the Ainu. For thousands of years, long before the arrival of the Japanese, their culture was one immersed in the landscape, revering the trees and snow, worshipping the mountains and bears. To them, spirits and gods were everywhere, and in everything.

To the south in the isle of Honshu, there lived the Emishi, a tribal warrior-people whose culture was lost to time. They were driven from their land by the expanding Yamato Empire, and the survivors faced two fates. Some were assimilated into the empire, their skill as horse-archers going on to create the samurai. Others fled north, to face the winters of Hokkaido. All that remains of the Emishi are tales that paint them as cannibals and shapeshifters. Yet their bloodline lives on, both in the modern Japanese and in the Ainu, who linger still in their snow-swept home.

White Fox

Imekanu pushed forwards another bowl of dried salmon. It was an honour to feed the bear who was also a god. Her father brushed away soot from the central fire, and the flames settled and sighed. Her mother wove patterns into an elm-bark robe. When the bear finished his fish, the three of them guided him to his bed by the east window, where he collapsed onto their softest embroideries. He was a cub, already forgetting his life among firs and frost. As they cleared the bowls, Imekanu glanced out the window and gasped. 'Spirits!'

Her father narrowed his eyes and shook his long beard. 'Not spirits. Southerners.'

Two shapes wound their way along the river. She looked closer. 'What are they wearing? Won't they freeze?'

'Southerners,' repeated her father. Imekanu padded over the reed-mat floor, slipped on her shoes and walked outside. Her mother called her name, her father shook his head, the bear murmured and dreamed. People peered through windows. The southerners drew near: a woman, holding the hand of a boy almost as tall as herself, dressed in too few furs. Ice spirits danced about them, touching and biting. The village stared.

'Welcome,' said Imekanu. 'Please, come inside.'

The boy blinked. His skin was white. His eyes were golden. Mother and son traded a glance. 'Thank you,' said the boy. Imekanu smiled. The owl-engraved door watched them pass within.

Her father eyed the foreigners. The foreigners eyed the bear. 'What is the meaning of this?'

'They speak our language,' said Imekanu.

'They are southerners. Strangers.'

'The bear was a stranger before we took him in.'

The bear grunted in agreement. Her father looked to his wife for help. 'They could be spirits in disguise,' she said, her voice as soft as snow. 'It would be wise to treat them well. Besides,' she looked to the roof and walls, 'the house does not mind.'

Her father sighed. There was no arguing with the house.

His eyes on the bear, the boy propped his bow by the door, the weapon restless against the wall. Imekanu and her mother sat on the left side of the fire, her father on the right. The southerners sat in between — facing the bear. Her father unwrapped two pieces of dried fish. Their guests looked ravenous, yet they ate politely.

'I am Imekanu,' she said.

The boy hesitated. 'I am Aterui.'

'We heard rumour of travellers from the southern isle,' said her mother. 'Are you the only ones?'

Aterui's mother wrung her hands. 'We had companions. After we crossed the water, a storm separated us. I fear we have wandered farther north than we wished.'

*

At dawn, her father strode through the village, his knife at his hip. He spoke with the elder whose snowy beard trailed along the earth, and when the sun shrugged off the horizon, he returned home. 'It is decided,' he said, laying his knife by the hearth. 'The southerners can stay. The gods have let them come this far. They have eaten under our roof, so they will remain our guests.' His face was grim, but then he only smiled on the salmon hunt. The guests bowed.

Imekanu and Aterui sat by the fire, listening to the flames. By the window, the bear yawned. Aterui flinched. Imekanu giggled.

'It is... a pet?'

Imekanu didn't recognise the word. 'The cub is our guest.'

'Cub? They get bigger?'

She nodded. 'When he's grown, we will hold a feast, entertain him with singing and dancing. Then we will cook his meat, and he will journey into the sky to tell Kim-un-Kamuy how he was honoured in life.'

Aterui blinked. 'Is that how you treat all your guests?'

'Only the most honoured. Don't worry, Kim-un-Kamuy loves bears best.'

'Kim-un-Kamuy...' He turned the name over in his mouth. 'A god?'

'The greatest god, the god of bears. Long ago, a woman lost her husband and Kim-un-Kamuy came down from the mountains in the shape of a man. Their son fathered everyone on the island. We are the children of the bear.'

The cub raised himself and ambled over. She scratched behind his ears. 'A relative of yours?' asked Aterui.

'On Father's side.' They both laughed, and the house laughed with them, wind beating on thatch. The fire fretted. With reverence, she added another log. 'This is Kamuy-Fuchi,' she said. 'Her hearth is the threshold between worlds. She speaks both with gods and men, and guides the souls of the dead.' A sombre look came upon Aterui's face. He gazed into the flames and said nothing.

*

Days faded and passed. Her father took Aterui aside, showed him how to make a buck-lure and prepare a trap.

Aterui raised his chin. 'I know how to hunt.'

Her father scowled. 'As proud as a wolf and as thoughtless as an otter,' he said. 'Winter will eat you.'

Yet winter was proving calm and dozy. One mild evening, Imekanu and Aterui walked together by the river. She spoke of spirits and animals. Of how the creator-god told Otter how to make the perfect human, but Otter played in the river and forgot, and so humans are imperfect. Of the flying squirrels who watch over children. Of all the gods that live in the home, the hearth and the beasts.

'And you?' she asked. 'What of your gods?'

Aterui gritted his teeth. 'Our gods have forgotten us.' He fingered his

quiver of arrows. 'We have fought the empire longer than I can remember. Longer than my mother can remember. You say we are southerners, but we come from the north of our isle. The empire, they are southerners. They marched up from their cities, called us barbarians who live underground and drink blood. We shrugged off their assaults like so many raindrops. We know the secrets of horse and bow.'

'Horse?'

'A horse is a boat that sails on the earth, a gale you can ride. But the empire bribed our clans. They stole our secrets, mustered their own horses and forged strange weapons. My father was a mighty warrior. He rode into battle — he did not ride back. We had no choice but to flee north. When I was young, I thought this island was a myth. The ends of the earth.' His gaze turned inwards. 'The empire says we are not human. They say we are witch animals, shapeshifters. Serpents, spiders. Foxes.' He scowled. 'Decades of war, only to be remembered as vermin.'

'Vermin?' said Imekanu. 'No animal is vermin. Some cause trouble, like Otter, but he cannot be blamed for his nature. Animals are gods. We kill and eat them, knowing we eat the meat of spirits.'

He shook his head. 'Foxes are thieves, not gods.'

'Foxes are mischievous, but in the way the wind is mischievous. She blows one way, when sometimes you wish she would blow another. She is swift, clever, playful. She howls, laughs and leaves at her leisure, as does the fox.' The river sang beside them, journeying to meet her sister sea. The newborn stars blinked dew from their eyes. 'We live on in the stories told of us,' said Imekanu. 'When the bones are gone, all that remains is our myth. Vermin, you say? You, the untameable fox-people who vanished into the north?'

Aterui fell quiet. He pondered the river. 'I suppose we are both myths,' he said.

*

Next day, her father said, 'We are running low on fish.' The house fell still. The bear furrowed his brow.

Aterui stood. 'I can hunt. I will go today.'

'Are you mad, boy? The storm god is awake.'

'Storm?' Aterui laughed. 'The sky smells like spring.'

'Father's right,' said Imekanu. 'Dark clouds circle the mountains.'

'They look far off. The rest of the day should be clear.'

'But what if you lose your way? You don't know these woods.'

Aterui looked to his mother. 'You are as skilled a hunter as your father,' she said. Aterui's eyes glinted. He turned to Imekanu's parents.

'Please, you have given us such kindness. Let me repay you.'

Her father sighed. He picked up his knife and consulted the blade. 'I must stay and chop wood before the wind rises,' he said, 'but if you wish to spite the storm god, it is your choice. The deer-trail is northeast through the birches.'

Aterui bowed. He pulled on borrowed furs and restrung his bow.

'Be careful,' said Imekanu.

'My family has lived through a lifetime of war. I can survive one hunt. Besides, if I am a shapeshifter, I can always grow more fur.' He smiled. She couldn't help but smile back.

The house was quiet after he left. The women sat together and wove. Her father paced in and out with armfuls of wood. The hours crept on.

Dusk settled in. Imekanu laid a blanket on the bear and cleaned the hearth so the goddess could sleep comfortably. As she lay in bed, cold clawed through the walls. Snow spirits beat drums on the roof. The wind wailed like a vixen caught in a trap.

*

At dawn, when the storm subsided, they went searching. The snow lay deep enough to bury a bear. Imekanu ran ahead along the deer-trail. 'Aterui!' she called. She ran until she lost sight of the others and firs eclipsed the sky. The woods were awake, restless and writhing. Birches blushed from the storm's embrace. The tiny people of the burdocks dashed along the leaves, the demons in the roots raised their heads and growled. An owl cried, an unseen god in the green. A serpent twisted down a trunk — or was it a vine?

She came to a halt. Tried to breathe.

A squirrel poked his head from a birch. She stared. Remembering etiquette, she bowed. He sniffed, all white-grey fur and night-black eyes, and leapt from one tree to another. She edged closer, and he flew to a fir, and then onto an ash, soaring through the woods. She ran after him, her breath coming in sharp clouds.

The squirrel stopped in an elm and gazed at the earth. She stumbled to a halt.

Lying on his back, Aterui did not blink. Did not breathe. A blanket of snow covered his body. A spider scurried across his rigid, half-open mouth. A ray of light parted the branches and caught his golden eyes. Imekanu knelt, shivering, though not from the cold. She did not cry, because the tears would freeze and make her unable to see him. So they stayed, hot behind her eyes, as she stared at the block of ice lying where there had once been a boy.

*

Her father prepared the body. The women waited outside, while the men cleaned and dressed him, Kamuy-Fuchi watching with folded arms. They carried him out on a mat suspended on poles. He wore a white robe. They snapped his bow in two and laid it upon his chest: the god in the bow would follow him to the next life. They bore him south, to one of the open graves dug in autumn in readiness of winter's woes. Aterui's mother wept, tears freezing to her face, while Imekanu and the village women sung their quiet songs.

They cleared the snow and lowered him into the grave. Soon there was nothing left to be seen but soil. The song's words fled her mind; she hugged herself and shut her eyes. The wind whispered in her ear. When she opened her eyes, it was snowing — a faint, gentle snow. And there, in the distance where the dark woods gathered, stood a fox.

His fur was white. His eyes were golden. She took in the smallest breath. He tilted his head and smiled, in the way foxes do. Imekanu watched him run into the trees, into the snow and the mountains, like a warrior going into battle, or a boy disappearing into myth.

SCARS NEVER HEAL

Gavriella Epstein-Lightman
London

Highly Commended in the Young Walter Scott Prize 2022
11 to 15 category

Author's introduction

My story is set in 1966 and follows the story of a young white nurse on probation being forced to consent to something unimaginable. I chose to set my story in the 1960s because this was a decade of social change – the civil rights movement, women's liberation and protest surrounding the Vietnam War. Despite the progress engendered by these movements, injustices were still deeply entrenched in society, especially in places in the Deep South such as Alabama.

I chose to set my story in Alabama because it was a place where there was a federal programme funding the sterilisation of women and girls who were poor and black.

I was inspired to write my story on this subject as I read about it in a history magazine and was shocked by the injustices perpetrated by the federal government. My central character, Nancy, emerged from my wondering what I would have done had I been a bystander to such distressing events. The character of Imani came to me as a symbol of an innocent person who is unjustly hurt.

Scars Never Heal

1966

Selma, Alabama

I smooth my starched dress and dab on a layer of pastel pink lipstick. Today I'm a nurse-in-training. I gulp down remnants of once-warm coffee. Distant hums of orange-breasted robins commingled with revs of spluttering car engines setting off enter my ears, achingly familiar as I set off.

My first assignment for the Selma Family Planning Clinic is to visit a young girl. I'm administering birth control shots, Depo-Provera. It's surprising - she's only eleven. So young. Poor and black, what a hard life.

The acrid stench of dirt hits me as I knock on the door of what is more like a shack than a building, rustic panels of wood making up the walls. The place is on the verge of collapse. A busy-looking woman opens the door. "Who are you?" she blurts out. Behind her a girl appears, clutching her mother's skirt.

"I'm Nancy Sullivan, the new nurse here to give your daughter her birth control shots."

The woman places protective hands over her daughter.

"Get in," she mutters abruptly. "I get all these government people so often I don't ask. Do what you've been paid to do."

"Well, I'm glad to meet you," I say, plastering on a professional smile as I enter. I take in the house – barely fit for habitation with cracked walls, broken ceiling tiles and mud flooring – and I silently, unknowingly let appearances speak for themselves.

"You must be Miss Johnson." The woman mutters 'yes' uneasily. "Are you Imani?" I ask. Retreating away from me, the girl nods.

"You've had the shots before, haven't you?" I try to sound as friendly as possible. Mrs Johnson leaves us to it.

"Two years," Imani whispers. A girl of nine was put on birth control?

We enter a tiny room where the walls have more holes than not. It's so cold air sweeps through me like I'm in a freezer.

"Now, I promise it's not going to hurt at all," I assure her. We sit down on the couch so moth eaten there's hardly any fabric to sit on; I take out the needle but Imani immediately shrinks away. "It won't hurt," I repeat. Imani is close to tears.

"Because you're being so brave, I brought a candy bar, how do you like that?" I give her a comforting squeeze. I've been given a job to do and I *will* complete it.

Imani slowly grins and I've finally gained her trust. Taking out the shiny Razzles bar, I place it between us and Imani thrusts her arm out towards it. I take out a prefilled syringe and am about to inject the shot, when I take a pause. I'm breathing lungfuls of air and my hand won't keep still. Every time I look at Imani I can't imagine injecting shots into her. A lump of vomit rises up my throat. I imagine the liquid making its way through the veins in her bloodstream. Water wells up in Imani's eyes and I don't want to cause her any pain.

I close my eyes as the needle penetrates her skin.

A month later

I'm entering the Clinic, face flushed from the coldness of late autumn and eyes raw red from lack of sleep, when Mrs Carmine, head of the clinic and my supervisor, stops me in the entrance hall.

"Nancy, I need a moment," she orders, narrowing her eyes at me. Carmine smiles and it's as frosty as ice on windowpanes in the dead of winter.

"Of course, Mrs Carmine. If it's about the mess-"

"It's not," she cuts in sharply, a dagger knifing through my words. "It's a matter regarding a patient – Imani Johnson." An image of Imani smiling at me for the first time flashes before me like a hologram. "She's on birth control shots, but I'm not convinced it's enough."

"But Mrs Carmine, she's only eleven. She's so young," I reply, vehemently.

Carmine arches her eyebrows. "She's coloured and lives in a poor neighbourhood. We need to keep her safe. That's what you want, right?"

"Y-yes, I always want her to be safe…" I mumble, trailing off.

"The tubal ligation operation is happening at noon at Jefferson Hospital. I'll meet you there."

Tubal ligation? I can't deny I was confused – confused, not worried. "But Ma'am, Imani's probably never even talked to boys, she's so young."

"We need to step in before it's too late," Carmine says, gravely. She doesn't take her eyes off me, like I'm a specimen being examined under a microscope. Carmine leans in towards me and her pungent fruity perfume hits me. "Nancy, you haven't been at the clinic for long. Your probation period has only just started. If you cooperate, your position could be made permanent. Very soon."

My probation. It's been weighing on me for too long. Carmine's eyes have followed me throughout my time at the clinic, quietly scrutinising me for any evidence showing I'm not up to scratch. My job constantly on the line. It's between me and the poverty line. I need it to eat three square meals a day, to pay for my younger sister's education.

I should trust Carmine – she's an experienced nurse and surely she wants the best for Imani?

There is a fluttering in my chest as I reply. "Mrs Carmine, I'll collect Imani now."

"Oh, and Nancy, if the mother asks why you're taking the girl, just say it's a routine check-up. Better not to worry her." Carmine smiles widely and I could challenge her.

But I don't.

My mouth closes as quickly as I opened it.

I walk towards my car, unaware of the severity of what I am complicit in… in… I can't even write it.

Sterilisation.

*

"You'll pick Imani up from Jefferson Hospital at six."

Mrs Johnson hugs Imani, caressing her daughter's hair lovingly. "Alright, you be good Imani," Mrs Johnson says fondly.

Fifteen minutes later, Imani and I race to the hospital doors. "I win, I win!" she cries out, laughing.

"You win!" I exclaim, hugging her. "Want to go to the park after this is over?"

"Yes!"

My smile dissipates into a frown once I notice Carmine standing in the reception, lips curling. Imani sees Carmine and rushes to hug her. I shudder when Carmine wipes her hands on her dress where Imani touched her. Noticing this, Imani's eyes droop and she lowers her head defeatedly.

"The doctor is waiting," Carmine announces. "I need to wash my hands," she whispers to me, detestable disgust dripping through her voice like sticky phlegm.

We walk to the operating room and are greeted by a doctor who hands Carmine a consent form. Carmine signs it without even glancing at it, immediately handing it to me. "Sign below," she instructs, her snow white teeth flashing in the light.

"Do I have to?" I ask, drumming my fingers incessantly.

"Don't keep the kind doctor waiting, Nancy," Carmine replies, shoving the pen into my hand. Imani sits on a hospital bed so huge it threatens to swallow her up.

Remember what's at stake, Nancy.

I scribble my signature onto the form.

I, Nancy Sullivan, consent to the sterilisation of Imani Johnson.

Imani puts on a too-white hospital gown so big it hangs off her and she bites her lip restlessly. The doctor is preparing for the operation, Carmine hovering over him like a hawk waiting for its prey. "Nancy, I don't like this," Imani whispers, her fragile body trembling.

The first time she's said my name.

Yet, at this crucial moment, I see what I've been conditioned to see: a young, helpless girl who from the moment she was born never stood a chance in this world. A coloured girl who doesn't deserve to have a child. I push her hand off my arm and fetch the kind doctor a cup of water. There are no tears because my heart has been ripped out of me and been replaced by a pumping machine.

*

An hour later

I watch as general anaesthetic is injected into Imani's arm and she wilts onto the bed, helpless. I watch as the doctor inserts a needle into Imani's stomach and takes out his pair of long, searing scissors as of he's about to butcher a steak. My lips are cracked dry. I don't utter one word the whole time this is happening.

Chop, snip, cut, chop.

Butcher, butcher, butcher.

Blood, blood, blood.

Dizzy, dizzy, dizzy.

I try to stand but I'm teetering dangerously on my heels. The doctor announces that he's finished after what seems like a lifetime and Carmine claps her hands together excitedly.

Imani wakes up from her stupor and immediately starts screaming. A ferocious scream, so impossibly loud in such a tiny girl. It's a scream of immense pain, a lion's roar.

"Shut up, child!" Carmine bellows, but Imani doesn't stop. She's in too much pain.

"Mrs Carmine, she's in pain!" I exclaim, rushing to Imani's bed. Imani is whimpering now, shivering and shaking.

That's when I see blood pouring out of her. "Mrs Carmine, I'm begging you, Imani's bleeding!"

Somehow this plea for help cuts through my hard exterior and forces me to realise the entirety of what I have done.

Carmine grimaces. I hold in my breath as she shakes Imani hard, not stopping until Imani's desperate cries subside into quiet raindrop tears.

Suddenly, I can't bear this anymore.

How stupid

I've been

how naïve

how complicit.

The guilt crashes down on me, boulders falling from a cliff, and I cannot bring my pathetic self to face it.

I run out the room.

*

The vomit hits the sink with a splash and I splash water over my face to be rid of it.

My palms are clammy, face drenched in tears.

I've been biting my lip so much it's bleeding. Bleeding like Imani is bleeding.

They cut her tubes. Took them right out of her.

I did it to be off probation.

I did it because it *seemed* like the *right* thing to do.

For me. To keep afloat.

For Imani.

For Imani – what did I ever do for her except hurt her? Heck, I gained her trust. I made her think I cared about her, and I know I did.

So why did I do it?

I wipe my face of its tears and shakily walk out of the toilet. I can't stay there forever. The taste of warm blood, sweat and saliva swirls through my mouth and makes me want to gag again, but I can't go back to that sink.

I've been there for three whole hours.

I have a headache so burning I'm afraid my head will split open.

*

I enter the hospital room where Imani is lying, quietly moaning. Carmine is speaking to the doctor in hushed tones. I gently hug Imani and look into her eyes and see a ghost of who she was before the operation. Eyes grey, full of insurmountable pain, skin pulled taut over her face. Wet with tears.

The door creaks on its hinges and Mrs Johnson appears in the doorframe. Her eyes widen in shock as she sees Imani on the hospital bed. "Get your hands off my daughter!" she bellows, and I stop cradling Imani. "What have you done?" Mrs Johnson asks.

She's staring directly at me.

What have you done?

"I-I-I…" I close my eyes because once again I'm dizzy.

My head hits the hospital bed.

We gave your daughter a tubal ligation to prevent any pregnancies in the future, Carmine responds.

How could you

It will help the girl no doubt she would otherwise not be able to control herself

Is she not worthy of having a child

I was completely justified

What did you do

Mummy's here be brave

Who consented to this

Nurse Nancy signed

no, don't expose my guilt

imani

mama it hurts so much

what have you done

this guilt cuts me to the core

scars

blood

scissors

cut, cut, cut

scars never heal

LET THERE BE LIGHT

Samantha Yeung
The King's School, Canterbury

Highly Commended in the Young Walter Scott Prize 2022
11-15 category

Author's introduction

Let There Be Light *is set during a 25-hour blackout in New York City in 1977. The plot revolves around Chester Young, who works his dream job in New York but struggles with the monotony of his life, and his chance meeting with friendly stranger Leo Maltempi. They become trapped in a powerless elevator together, and gradually, revelations about the mysterious stranger emerge, culminating in the realisation of Leo's unexpected dark past as an Italian Mafia hitman.*

To be perfectly frank, I set my story and these characters during this particular event because I was looking for historical fiction writing prompts on Google, and I really liked the idea of an extended blackout in a major city because of the breadth of narrative possibilities the situation allowed. On top of that, this was a topic that had absolutely no ties to me personally, which left much room for creative scope. Quite often, you see a lot of people writing stories that have great personal meaning for them, and there's something beautiful about putting a piece of yourself in a story. However, sometimes all you need is one initial idea to get the creative ball rolling, and for me, this was it. Ultimately, I decided on writing a more human story about Chester and Leo, taking inspiration from the real-life accounts of that fateful evening.

Let There Be Light

July 13th, 1977

I've made it, Ma.

This is it. I'm living my dream.

The solidity of the weightless silver card case in my pocket—and its existence—is very much palpable. In bold black letters pressed onto a subtle off-white, the little piece of card lies flat in the palm of my hand and reads: **"CHESTER YOUNG: STORY EDITOR"** and under it: **"175 Fifth Avenue New York, NY 10010".**

The words on the card seem to find their way into my mouth and sit there for a while, unspoken. These words leave a bittersweet aftertaste, peppered with flavourful hints of pride, accomplishment — and disappointment. Disappointment because I've worked so hard to be here, in *the* Flatiron Building, but when I leave my desk in all of its coffee-ring-stained glory, it means leaving the colourful world of fiction I've grown to love behind and going back to the shitty apartment I've grown to hate.

My fingers drum while I study the page of messy scrawls and doodles when a fleeting quote comes to mind - "When the lights went out, so did people's inhibitions". Perfect for the character I'm working with.

In here, I am Chester Young, Story Editor. But, in the rest of this wonderful city, I'm Chester Young, the man whose world is painted in shades of grey. Chester Young, Story Editor, is a publishing connoisseur. He's respected, useful, and damned good at his job. Yet, in this big, big world outside of crippling deadlines and calendars fit to bursting, I'm reduced to nothing. This building and the job that comes with it inject colour into the monochromatic life I live. This is why I burn the midnight oil—not because I can't stand my shitty apartment, but because I can't stand myself in it.

The sultry, humid night permeating my little office window coats my world in a slight sheen of perspiration that bleeds through the collar of my shirt. My forearm adheres to the uncomfortable faux leather armrests of my office chair and in the quick struggle to free it, I steal a glance at my wristwatch—it's well past nine. It's one of those unbearable summer

nights when cracking a window open does nothing but tighten the hellish grasp of suffocatingly sticky air.

The aimless wanderings of my fleeting thoughts provide no comfort to me as I step into the elevator. Chester Young, Story Editor, regresses into the lesser Chester Young—left alone to chase happiness in his lightless drabby world. These distracting thoughts send my mind spiralling sluggishly; briefly captivated, my unfocused vision centres on the shiny black surface of my shoes.

The grating sounds of ancient cables and pulleys creaking swiftly draw me away from my musings. Coming to a jerky halt, the car's ornate gold and silver doors open, revealing a pair of brown loafers. Intrigued, my line of sight continues upwards, discovering neatly pressed slacks with creases as sharp as cut glass. His weary eyes and time-ravaged visage contribute to the calcified air about him—clearly from a different era than today's discos and bell bottoms. Perched on the gentleman's nose is a pair of simple black shades which is distinctly odd as it is night-time, and we were indoors.

As we wait for the elevator to begin its descent, he offers a tentative smile with kind eyes that seem to say, 'I guess I'm not the only one here at this godforsaken hour'. I smile back.

He seems determined to break the silence and he speaks, gesturing at himself with a laugh.

"Leo, Leo Maltempi," he has an infectious grin. "You know, this kinda weather reminds me of home—Sicily. I left that island for a reason—the weather, one of them."

"Chester Young, a pleasure to meet you." He exudes friendliness and I am hesitant not to return it. "It can't be so bad – better than sliding on ice all day here in the city," I respond wryly, looking him over once again. His oddity continues – he seems far too meticulous to be a man who likely grew up running wild on the sands of the Italian coast. He laughs, the sound ricocheting off the walls of the elevator.

"True, true. There's not a day that goes by where I don't think of home." His wistfulness is endearing. "I bet there ain't a day go by where Sicily don't think of me."

As I lean in closer, drawn in by the hinted promise of an

interesting interlude to assuage the monotony of the night to come, the pungent scent of citrus permeates my nose. The sharp zesty notes of Leo's cologne are a welcome stranger in the dusty elevator, transporting me right into the lazy afternoons of his nostalgic reminiscing. Now, this—this delicious satiating of both the Chester Youngs' appetite for stories is a fáilte addition to what was going to be a monotonous night.

Leo opens his mouth to speak but the words die on his tongue as the fluorescent lights dim to a warm yellow. They flicker and blink, as though struggling to stay awake before suddenly slumbering, much like the rest of this city at this hour. Leo remains unphased. What does phase us both, is the violent halting of the elevator car, not too dissimilarly to the conversation we are having.

"The lights have gone out," I muse, squashing a bubble of momentary panic. My simple observation seems to amuse Leo who chuckles.

"Welcome to my world, boy." That explains the shades. I'm inclined to relate with Leo, being no stranger myself to lightless, confined spaces. The life I lead outside the office bears some similarities to the situation we are ourselves in—one likely caused by a power outage in the building.

"Ah," I flounder a bit, unsure how to respond to that – after all, what does one say to someone who's blind? I don't want to offend this intriguing stranger. Leo finds my lack of response amusing, his now-familiar chuckle reverberating in the dark, blanketing us both with the sound.

"Yeah, shit happens. Y'know I could —well, actually, I am— write a book about all the shit I've been through. Matter of fact, I was just finishing up signing a book deal at your offices. Apparently, they like my stories of hot, lazy afternoons spent among groves of citrus fruit, sipping almond milk and munching on Indian figs." The chuckle reverberates once again.

I huff a laugh. "It sounds like paradise."

"It was. I spent many an afternoon in the shadows, desperate to escape that unforgiving glare, lounging in ancient Greek ruins. I still see those weathered, dilapidated façades, like bleached skeletons against the backdrop of the pale blue sky."

I can hear his teeth grinding softly and imagine him carefully mincing the words he will say next.

"But I didn't spend so much time in the shadows just for fun, you know. Those old ruins are great for lurking and staying out of sight. Wish I could say I'm writing this book about perfect Italian summers, or picnics with my loved ones…" Again he sighs wistfully and my curiosity piques higher. "My story's about men's last wishes. Their words, their tears – and fears – just before they die…the way the light in their eyes just *poof* – extinguishes."

The silence following his revelation rings in my ears. Once again, this stranger has rendered me speechless. I can feel my brain scrambling for a logical explanation.

"Were you a doctor during the war effort? It must've been difficult seeing these tragedies so often."

"Oh no, nothing so honourable," he continues, "a trained professional with expert hands, yes, but no, not in the same way."

Hanging on to every word, I wonder—whatever could this gentleman be talking about? An amusing thought comes to mind, and I crack a joke. "What? Like a hitman for the mafia or something?"

Leo considers this for a moment and replies, "Well, I did have to leave Sicily for a reason…don't it feel good to just run away?" His tone shifts from flippant to serious.

I roll my eyes. "Ha. Very funny. You should greet tourists with a sign that says, 'Welcome to Fear City', especially with the Son of Sam on the loose."

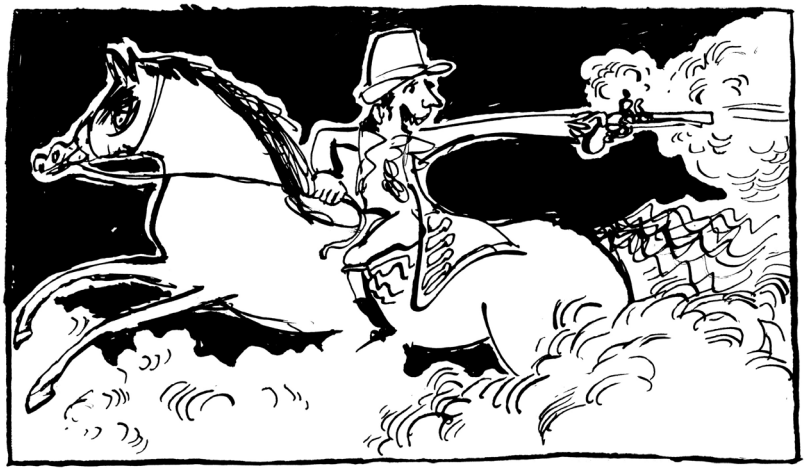
Before Leo can reply, the elevator's doors are pried open without notice, bathing us in swaths of bright, morning light—its exposure quickly becomes painful. I look at Leo again, this time in the sun, and realise this calcified air surrounding him isn't due to his age, or grounded wisdom. It is the crushing weight of the guilt that he carries with him—his guilt.

As I part ways with Leo, it is immediately apparent that I have met someone who is definitely…interesting, if not dangerous. Still, Leo briefly coloured my night, if not my life. But outside, outside of our chance encounter, the city has suffered an unforeseen apocalyptic event. Well

beyond my line of sight, hundreds, if not thousands of stores of all sizes have been looted. Stretching dozens of city blocks, debris litters the floors of our streets, from signage to rubble, to shards of cut glass from smashed windows. From where I am standing, acrid fumes envelop the city in billows of charcoal, waiting to be extinguished.

I learnt later that while Leo and I were stuck in the elevator that night, the city had lost all power for twenty-five hours. I'm not sure if I was fortunate—I was oblivious to what was happening —but I might have been a little too close to a killer for comfort.

Now, when life gives me lemons, I think of Leo.



SIXTEEN STRING JACK

Sophie Davey-Adam
London

Highly Commended in the Young Walter Scott Prize 2022
16 to 19 category

Author's introduction

Everyone loves an outlaw. When I decided to enter this competition, I sat down and made a mind-map of favourite time periods, places, people, jobs... and I kept coming up with characters, whisps of characters, that were not perfect, often not very good people. Of course, it's fair to say that a perfect character is not one written about often - what kind of story is that? But I knew I didn't want to tell the tale of some virtuous person who was wronged by the world, because I am not a virtuous person who has been wronged by the world. Yes, I'm not on the same level as Jack, and Jack is not on the same level as, say, Jack the Ripper. But I wanted to explore how things all go wrong, how one decision or action could be the step too far you take off the cliff.

Deciding to write about John Rann himself, out of any highwayman I could find, was practically a coincidence. As I mentioned, I created a mind map of potential ideas - and promptly forgot about it for the better part of around two months. I suppose it was good for me, in the end, to come back to it with fresh eyes - even if it meant drafting a few redundant characters and stories to get to the good bits. Dick Turpin is arguably the best-known highwayman, so it was my first thought to delve deeper into his tale - there is no shortage of sources available, I am sure - but instead, to be entirely honest, I opened the Wikipedia page of notable highwaymen in England and clicked on one randomly. I think that John Rann was a fascinating man, and rather underrated, for lack of better word. My research into the man himself was quite strained - there was an old play written about him, the only copy available to me was very difficult to read, and so I struggled through various sections, before deciding that perhaps more creative liberty could be taken for the plotline. I did spend a fair amount of time familiarising myself with the coach trade of England, grasping different types of coaches, and learning the word 'postillion'.

So, please enjoy the story of a boy who went too far, and let yourself be transported into 18th Century England, with our somewhat reliable narrator, John Rann.

Sixteen String Jack

28th November 1774

"Stand and deliver!" My voice cuts harsh though the soft evening air. Before me: my latest exploit, a man with creased skin and sharp, fearful eyes. He gazes up from his coach, and I watch his focus move from my muscular horse to my colourful breeches.

"There's nothing of value!" His tone wavers. I note a chest sitting on his left.

"Give me the box."

"Oh, no," The man raises trembling hands, "Nothing of value in there, kind sir, nothing at all. I promise you that. Only letters, from my wife. Nothing, nothing of value to you. My wife, they're letters -"

"Show me."

"But kind sir, I assure you, they're nothing -"

"Nothing of value, yes, I believe you mentioned that. Prove it, now."

His unsteady hands fumble opening the lock, but it eventually clicks. Impatiently, I snatch it, rummaging through the contents. Papers, a locket I quickly conclude not real silver, more papers, and… a striking ruby set into a ring. Small but well-kept. I toss the rest back at him, slipping the ring onto my finger. He watches, his jaw working as I admire the glinting gemstone.

"Move on," He takes up the reins with visible relief, forgetting his lost jewel. "Though, I suppose I could kill you." I feel a twist of satisfaction as I scrutinise the fear flooding his eyes, "But I believe time will soon perform that task for me. Good day."

Pleased, I turn my horse around, remembering to call one last laugh over my shoulder.

"I am no kind sir, kind sir. I am Sixteen-String Jack!"

~

This truly is what I was made for, I decide. My youthful days as a

postillion were boring, and when I picked my first pocket, this glorious life of crime and adventure made me feel something. That thrill never goes away. The first gala I managed to enter utterly changed my life, more than anything.

That gala… my, what an age ago.

~

20th June 1766

Heat seeped through the air, furious and sluggish. I was a lad of sixteen, earning my keep as a coachman. Drops of sweat rolled down my back, moistening my spine with damp warmth. The stench of manure clinging to the seams of my tattered clothing, I navigated the roads of Bath. They bustled even at this hour; horses' hooves kicking up yellow clouds of dust around me.

The sun was only just beginning to descend from its throne when I returned to the stable where I worked. Absent-mindedly, I prepared my horse and fed it, leaning against the stable door and dozing off to the rhythmic munching. My moment of calm was interrupted, however, by my young mistress.

"John! Have you got the carriage ready?"

Miss Erwin came tearing down the steps of her home, gathering gorgeous skirts in one hand and frantically fixing her hair with the other. We were bound for Eggington Manor, for a gala - the occasion about which I was none the wiser.

"All ready, Miss Erwin!" I delicately took her hand and helped her into the carriage. "Have you your purse?"

"Yes."

"Your best pearls?"

"Indeed."

"And the name of the Baron's new-born son?"

"George. After his grandfather."

"Then, we leave."

~

Warm lights radiated from the windows; sweet, fantastic smells floated through the air. I took in this deliciousness as I helped Miss Erwin down. This part of my job was one I couldn't tire of.

"I'll wait right here, Ma'am," I smiled, aware of the graceful flurry of people entering the house.

"Thank you, as always, John."

The night air was warm, but a breeze lifted my hair. I passed the time by periodically walking around, on one occasion relieving myself in a bush I'd convinced myself was well out of sight. Most of the other coachmen had headed to the local tavern, to enjoy ale and a round of cards, though I couldn't handle my alcohol very well.

This was by no means my first time outside a gala, and I admit that many times I was sorely tempted to sneak in, invisible to wine-softened eyes. Of course, it'd be idiotic of me to try: my clothing would give me away instantly. But that night, something felt different. Magical. Abruptly, a choking gag came from behind a nearby tree. Instinctively, I hurried towards the noise, bracing myself for revulsion. A boy, only about a year my elder, leaned with his arm against the tree, pale and sweating, over a large puddle of bile. I cleared my throat.

"Sir, I apologise -" He spotted me and relaxed. I was just another serving boy.

I gingerly made my way over, feeling distinctly green. Nevertheless, I comforted him with one hand and held my nose with the other.

"All right?"

Another retch. I glanced at his uniform: a butler for the Manor's party. An idea, wry and glowing, came burrowing into my head.

~

The smell was the first thing that hit me. Rich food, sweet wine, a thousand scents. For a moment I let myself stand, wearing that boy's miraculously clean uniform, my face giving no hints that I was, suddenly, uproariously alive.

I drifted, smiling serenely at an older woman patting her beehive-like wig. She was distracted, looking for someone. I noted an exquisite

hairpin lodged in her locks. Without thinking, I extended a gloved hand, slowly … there. It slipped into my palm, and I dipped it into my pocket without examining it further, though I wished to. Heart thudding like the wheels of a coach on a cobbled road, I turned away, fingers still trembling. Tonight, I was to have fun.

By the time I returned to reality outside, my pockets sagged with trinkets. Beside myself with childish glee, I ducked out the backdoor and made for the coach. Miss Erwin would be another half-hour at least, so I could exchange clothes, send the boy back inside - I stopped in my tracks. Miss Erwin was crouched beside the boy, lying unconscious. I swore.

"Miss Erwin!"

She looked up at me, tears filling angry eyes. Pretending I hadn't any knowledge of this boy was out of the question. I bit my tongue.

"What -" Her voice came out shakily, edged with quiet betrayal, "- in God's name did you do to this poor boy?"

"Nothing! I promise you, I promise you Miss Erwin, he was sick, he vomited, everywhere, so I said I'd take his place, so he wouldn't get in trouble, see, the Baron would've beaten him, and I couldn't let that happen, see how sick he is, Miss Erwin? But I didn't hurt him!" I despised myself for lying to her face, but the words kept pouring out. They were founded on truth, of course, but I hadn't any idea how I'd hide my newfound riches from her. She stared at me, long and hard, chewing her cheek. Eventually, she took a heavy breath.

"We'll bring him inside, we must, then leave. You'll return tomorrow morning to exchange uniforms and apologise sincerely to Baron Eggington. Am I understood?"

I'd never seen her so stern. I nodded dutifully.

"Now, lift his head, I shall lift his legs. On my call, one, two…"

"Ma'am, please don't exert yourself. I can carry him alone." I avoided her eyes. She'd already grasped his legs.

"None of that, John," She planted her feet. "Ready? One, two, three…"

She was right. An unconscious body was heavier than I'd thought. We shuffled back to the Manor. I carried the boy backwards up the stairs,

glancing carefully over my shoulder. We were so close to the top when that same older lady let out a shrill scream behind me. Something about a corpse. The excitement of the past hours, combined with the startling yell, frightened me more than I'd care to admit. I stumbled, trying to cushion the boy's fall with my stomach - that much, I was successful. But the vigour and angle of my fall lead to something I hadn't accounted for: my stolen items spilled over the stone steps, clattering accusingly. So many of them. I was dazed, pinned down. The commotion attracted guests, enticing them from the party to the sorry scene outside. Miss Erwin slowly lowered the boy's legs as the confused, frightened hubbub faded to shocked silence. Coming to my senses, I pushed his head off me, and scrambled to my feet. The older woman picked her hairpin from the floor. Raised a single, wizened finger. Pointed it right at me.

"Thief," she said, voice hoarse from screaming, "disgusting, little thief!"

The commotion started up again. Someone threw a pastry at me, landing stickily on my cheek. Not bothering to wipe it off, I turned to Miss Erwin, she'd forgive me…

"This boy is my postillion," she announced. "I'm not proud to say it, but he is. He's committed a crime, a petty one at that, tonight. I already know what I must do. I haven't any way to know whether this is the first time he has done this. But… I haven't the heart to punish him."

Thank goodness. I'll not go unpunished, but I'll return the items, and once I've earned her trust again, it shan't be spoken of.

"So, I leave it in the law's hands. John Rann, I dismiss you. You are no longer under my protection as my servant. I want no more part in this. Goodnight."

She made for the bottom of the stairs. I followed her, desperate to say one last… goodbye? Apology?

"Miss Erwin…"

"Jack," We locked eyes. "I hope…"

And then she walked away.

~

28th November 1774

Every time I'd reminisce about those first goods I stole, I'd always try to block out Miss Erwin. The pain she regarded me with was enough to destroy all the glory. It was easier to pretend that she never existed. Or, on longer nights, I'd imagine all sorts of other endings. Maybe I could have changed clothes in time. Maybe that old woman wouldn't have seen us and screamed. Maybe my nerves would have been tougher, and I wouldn't have jumped so. Maybe I could have somehow explained myself. Maybe Miss Erwin could have somehow forgiven me.

My attention is grabbed by a group of torch-bearing police. One of them points a finger at me. Right at me.

"John Rann?" A gravelly voice. "Halt, you are under arrest."

They surround me, five or six of them, all furrowed brows and importance.

"We've caught you at last, Rann," one says, swaggering forwards.

"Well, be careful not to credit yourselves too much, gentlemen," I smirk, "I've been caught before. But there was never quite enough evidence, was there?"

"We have evidence a plenty now, Rann," another one reveals, "Sixteen String Jack, is that right? For those ridiculous breeches, I assume."

"Quite right, sir," I smooth them down, "Thank you for noticing. They have a story behind them if you'd care to listen."

"We wouldn't," he says shortly, "You've made a pretty name for yourself, Rann. But you've also made a mistake."

"Oh?"

"You robbed a man this evening."

"My, was he your brother? You have matching wrinkles."

"The chamberlain of Princess Amelia."

"I suppose I ought to be honoured."

"You ought to be hanged."

I don't say anything to this. They all stare at me, a peculiar combination of disdain and wonder and I want to make some witty remark, but strangely no words form, and I let them take me to some Newgate Gaol, and for the first time in eight years I allow myself to picture Miss Erwin's face.

30th November 1774

Lost the trial. Smiled through it. I'll be hanged tonight.

~

Cold in here.

~

Managed to use a contact to get a pea-green suit for the… last moment.

~

Windy. I should say something. I talk loudly to the executioner. Laugh. Entertain the crowd with a jig. One last time.

~

The trapdoor swings out beneath me. Oh. I can't remember my last words.

TROUBLESOME

Amelie Roscoe
London

Highly Recommended in the Young Walter Scott Prize 2022
16 to 19 category

Author's introduction

Troublesome *details the early life of Rosemary Kennedy, sister of John F. Kennedy, who underwent a lobotomy at 23 years old. Having always been drawn to the overlooked tales of marginalised figures, I felt compelled to retell Rosemary's tragic narrative in order to give voice to a young woman who was forcibly silenced for 'troubling' the pristine image of her prominent family. Set between 1918 and 1942, I aimed to interrogate the culture of the early 20th century America that upheld such an extreme stigma around female mental health, and enabled the often fatal practice of female suppression through the use of lobotomy.*

Troublesome

Rosemary was contorted - she had been so for several hours. Legs splayed like some trussed-up pig, limbs woven in and amongst each other, knotted and twisted in an intricate embrace: she was a ravelled string of yarn. She rose and fell, like a lamb placing its own fragile neck on the butcher's block, in grim acceptance of her own fate. Her mother's cold fingers were pressed into her side, yet Rosemary remained obstinately unmalleable: the sweeping gesture of the royal curtsey, the arc of the back, the gentle lowering of the knee and the demure tilt of the head were all motions denied to her.

'Try again Rosie, you're *so* nearly there!'

Rose Kennedy Sr was always the first to recognise the descent of the red mist over her daughter. It began as it always did: a tremoring of the lower lip, the furious swiping away of hot, bitter tears, soft hands curling into fists. The girl's life had been peppered by such fits since she was a baby: during Rose Sr's labour, a virulent strain of Spanish influenza had passed through the hospital, and the doctors had ordered Rose to keep her legs firmly shut, despite being in the midst of giving birth. Consequently, poor Rosemary had been deprived of much oxygen for the first hour or so of her life, and the effects were disastrous. The child seemed permanently in the grip of fury, and anxious teachers remarked to her parents that she wasn't quite developing at the rate of all the other children, and might she be more comfortable at a school designed for a girl of 'her needs?' Her parents, royalty amongst the Boston Catholic set, quietly shuttled her away to a boarding school for the intellectually disabled in Pennsylvania, where the truth of their daughter's mental limitations could be more readily concealed.

At 15, Rosemary was sent to the Sacred Heart Convent in Elmhurst, Rhode Island: it was here that the loneliness, like a maggot burying itself in the fleshy chambers of her heart, took hold. Rosemary was educated not with the other girls, but in a classroom of her own: it was cold, for Miss Newton, her teacher, believed that the frosty November drafts were 'good for the countenance.' Rosemary's only company during the pale-blue hours of the long school day was the aforementioned Miss Newton, and two nuns who gripped their rosary beads more tightly when the

girl walked near them, for they asserted that Lucifer had come to dwell within her, finding no other explanation for Rosemary's destructive temper. The other girls were callous strangers: what desire had they to share their surreptitious conversations, their gleeful gossiping, with a girl whose intellect mirrored that of a seven-year-old? Rosemary's family was well-renowned, and the visits from her handsome brother Jack earned her enough respect to save her from any real concerted efforts at bullying.

But certainly, she was all alone.

She was so alone that she wanted to scream, and often she did; her wounded howling was often muffled behind the palms of Miss Newton, whose citrus-scented fingers attempted to silence the troublesome girl. Troublesome; it was a word often used to describe Rosemary, for those attempting to explain her violent condition were often in want of a better word, a more exacting word, a kinder word, even. Yet they always settled on 'troublesome'.

On her eighteenth birthday, Miss Newton and the nuns bade a relieved farewell to Rosemary, as she returned home to Brookline. Here Rosemary's days were filled with outings to the opera, tea dances, dress fittings and the like, where her mother ensured that not only was she clothed in puff-sleeved dresses of crepe-de-chine and silk, but also draped in a veil of silence. Handsome brother Jack had began to cut quite the impressive figure in politics, styling himself as John. F. Kennedy, whilst Rosemary's father, Joseph, had been named US ambassador to England. Whilst Rose Sr was delighted at her family's ascendency into social spheres she had but dared to dream about, she worried about how her daughter might navigate this cruel world. She concluded that taciturnity, save for rehearsed speech, was the best course of action.

Though Rose Sr might have hoped that the episodes of anger were of a juvenile nature, as adulthood ushered Rosemary into the world of high society, the rage intensified. It consumed her like a wave - it lashed against her sides in fiery tongues, it doused her in liquid ire, it drowned her in a gloom of fury - and when it washed away she wept, for sorrow lingered in its salty shores. Of course, the anger often lapsed: in these brief instances, she was a sweet creature, filled with gaiety and affection and the stuff of real kindness. Despite truly loving her daughter, and recognising her innate goodness, Rose Sr simply couldn't understand the girl. And so, when Joseph suggested that Rosemary be presented at court as a

debutante, Rose leapt at the chance, believing that she could find some common ground with her daughter on the basis of their shared femininity.

Thus preparations for Rosemary's debut started, for she was to be presented to King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, at Buckingham Palace, no less. Arrangements were made and rehearsals for the *royal curtsey,* an archaic ritual of the societal debut, began. Arc. Lower. Tilt. Rise. Arc. Lower. Tilt. Rise.

For five hours she practised the curtsey without respite, until her mother, with an almost imperceptible nod of her head, whispered,

'Yes.'

The evening was mottled with shafts of yellowing, pestilent light, as candles dressed the pale debutantes in a jaundiced hue. Rose Sr slapped her daughter's wrist as she began fidgeting with her taffeta hairpiece.

'Stop it,' she hissed, 'you are a *lady.* You will *not* embarrass us, not here.'

Rosemary's lower lip wobbled.

'I just - all I mean to say is - I just want your day to be perfect, my darling. Happiness - that's all I want for you, my sweet, purely happiness.'

Rose smoothed her daughter's hair back, tucking a wayward strand behind her ear.

Various Honourables and Viscountesses glided past the King and Queen, curtseying deeply in appropriate deference. Soon Rosemary '- the eldest daughter of his Excellency, Ambassador Kennedy -' was called forward to pay obeisance to the expectant monarchs. Blood roared in her ears as she approached the royal couple, and she wondered for a moment if her delicate heels had been exchanged for wooden clogs, for each step was leaden and slow. A Persian rug - o instrument of torture! - had been laid across the marble floor, awaiting the inevitable slip of the poor debutante. As Rosemary attempted the fiendish royal curtsey, she tripped: it was as though the stumble was spun into existence by some vindicative fate. No one could deny the conspicuousness of the stumble; not even Eve suffered so great a fall. Scrabbling for the last remnants of her dignity, Rosemary rose from the doomed curtsey and hurriedly rushed into the crowd. Never before had she been so aware of the weight of her own tongue, of the hard swell of the back of her throat: she looked to her mother through a

nebulous haze of tears for some word of reproach, but she remained silent.

Rose Sr never spoke of the incident again; when asked about her daughter's debut, she proclaimed, with vacant eyes, that it had been a great success.

When the Kennedys returned home to Massachusetts, Rosemary's condition worsened. Her instances of rage, once characterised as bouts, took on a prolonged nature, and her melancholy couldn't be dampened. She was violent, too - once she hit her own mother square in the jaw. Physicians concurred that she had certainly regressed, and Joseph in particular despaired at his maddening daughter. He struggled to locate that paternal urge that swelled so quickly with his other children - he couldn't recognise this unfathomable creature as his own. He was therefore overjoyed when an old friend, a neurologist, offered over lunch news of a new medical procedure for 'girls like Rosemary.'

'It's wonderful, not *nearly* as radical as it sounds. I know dozens of girls with dear Rosemary's predicament who have been completely transformed by it. You see, they drill two small holes into the skull, and… well, I won't bore you with the details, but it's this revolutionary surgery that's all the rage in Europe. I'll contact a friend in Boston who'll sort Rosemary out in no time.'

Joseph was usually predisposed to scepticism, yet it took little persuasion for him to agree to Rosemary's lobotomy. He didn't consult Rose Sr on the matter, which admittedly did cause him a degree of guilt, yet he reasoned that if the lobotomy was as effective as the doctors claimed, Rose would be too delighted to be angry. Two weeks later, he bundled his daughter into the car and drove her to a surgery in West Massachusetts, furiously suppressing his malignant guilt.

The operating table was cold, and the blade pressed against Rosemary's scalp even colder. Having been mildly sedated, the doctors began to insert the scalpel through the holes in her skull, making small incisions into her brain. The surgeon, Dr Freeman, swung the blade back and forth like the hands of a pendulum clock, severing ribbons of brain tissue. Every so often, he would ask Rosemary questions, to check whether she still maintained brain function.

'What's your full name, dear?'

‘Rosemary - Rosemary Kennedy. Where’s my mama?’

‘She’ll be here soon child. Focus now dear.’

With gentle nicks of the scalpel, Freeman forayed into the cavities of Rosemary’s frontal lobe.

‘How old are you, dear?’

’Twenty-three years old, sir. I-I want to see Mama.’

‘Soon, sweet child, soon.’

Freeman enjoyed a rapier flourish of the wielded instrument, slicing at another tentacle of tissue.

‘Recite the Lord’s Prayer for me, sweetheart.’

‘I… Ma-‘

‘Try again for me dear. Our father who art in heaven…’

‘Ar… I-I- Ma…’

Freeman put his scalpel down.

‘Once more now, Rosemary. The Lords Prayer… You recite it every Sunday, in church.’

Rosemary managed a strangled gargle.

‘Just… try your name dear. Tell me what your name is, child.’

Rosemary choked once again, releasing an incoherent garble of sounds.

Freeman held up three quivering fingers.

‘Count my fingers, Rosemary.’

Her eyes lolled back in her head saliva dribbled from her lips.

‘Rosemary? *Rosemary!*’

Freeman addressed Joseph with more than a little fear, his heart beating wildly in his chest.

‘Well?’

‘Unfortunately, sir, the procedure did not go to plan… such outcomes are always a risk, of course, but your daughter’s mental function has been, well, somewhat damaged by the procedure…’

‘Speak plainly to me, Freeman. What have you done to the girl?’

‘The procedure has rendered her unable to speak, and - well, her intellect has regressed to that of an infant. I am terribly sorry again Mr Kennedy. I can recommend several institutions, however - well, to be blunt, this surgically-induced ‘childhood’ might make life somewhat more manageable for your family, sir…’

Freeman trailed off in his speech.

Joseph cradled Rosemary, now sleeping in his arms. She looked strangely at peace, younger even, her complexion still, her iron-wrought expression smoothed… Joseph would never admit it aloud but he dared to breath an internal sigh of relief. Though she would be eternally subdued, like some petrified babe, perhaps Freeman was right: now she would be less difficult, more easily contained in some quiet institute. Perhaps now that she had been stripped of the little intellectual dignity she possessed, she would be calmer, more docile, yes -

Certainly less troublesome.

Rosemary Kennedy spent the rest of her life alone in institutions: her family did not visit her until 20 years after the operation. She died aged 86 of natural causes: the miserable, isolated and mute existence she endured following her botched lobotomy finally drew to a close in the year 2005. Rosemary Kennedy was one of approximately 50,000 victims of lobotomy in the United States.

Postscript, May 2023

Just as this anthology was going to print, we received the sad news that the Young Walter Scott Prize founder and Chair, the Duchess of Buccleuch, had died following a short illness. All of us involved in the Prizes will miss her terribly. She was so passionate about encouraging young writers to look to the past for inspiration, and she was delighted by the ambition, scope and skill of all the winning writers over the years.

Details of the Young Walter Scott Prize 2023
and the Walter Scott Prize will be posted on the website
and publicised through our social media channels.

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For further information about any aspect of the work of the Young Walter Scott Prize,
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