

And When Did You Last See Your Father?

The war never meant much to me; a mere murmur in the dark, a worry line momentarily creasing an unguarded face. I was just a boy at the time and my young mind had only room for food, frivolity and fun. I was carefree and unburdened. I was innocent, but for how long?

They came to the door in the middle of the morning. It was a dark, grey day; rain cascaded down, fat droplets plopping onto the roof. Not the sort of weather for playing out, too slippery to climb the giant oak tree's broad bows. Sprawled on the extravagant rug, I was trying to occupy myself with a disheartening volume mother had produced for me.

It was a hard knock, quite unlike the tap of mother's dainty visitors. A loud volley of bangs echoed around the house, it was a 'LET ME IN OR ELSE' noise. Mother's face went pale. The maids hurriedly fled for the back door. But I didn't notice, I didn't notice much those days, I was blissfully ignorant. I had the faintest of notions that something was different when father hadn't appeared to wish me goodnight the previous evening. His large, polished, oak chair had been unoccupied all morning. But these things escaped my mind and so, when the knock came, I remained spread eagled upon the floor.

RAT-TAT-TAT-TAT! This time it was louder and longer. Mother started as if woken from a trance, she brushed a strand of fair hair out of her eyes and then, her fingers fumbling on the ornate, golden door handle, she pulled wide the door...

Cromwell's soldiers thronged in, crowding the room, their muddy boots soiling the clean swept floors, their long spiked pikes scratching the polished woodwork. The soldiers were not as I knew; they were not the laughing, long haired merry faced Cavaliers, who stayed talking to father late into the nights. Not father's leather shod comrades with their lacy ruffs and shining buckles. No, these men were different, they wore metal armour that glinted in the light, their mouths were sullen slashes, their eyes held a steely glint that caught your gaze and held it until you turned away.

Mother faltered in the doorway before succumbing to the Roundhead soldier who seized her from behind and forcefully propelled her away. Venetia was next, she wept silently, her head bowed, her hands clasped. Then they came for me, a tall, broad shouldered man taking me by the waist in a vice like grip. They dragged us into father's room, not caring for the beautiful tapestries or fine walnut furniture. Another man lounged in father's comfortable upholstered chair, his boots resting upon the lacquered desk. The soldier leaned forward, trapping me with his cold blue eyes. I didn't dare move for fear I should feel the sharp end of their weapons. He cleared his throat and, with a harsh, grating voice, asked

"And when did you last see your Father?"

LI: to be able to know the meanings of words and phrases

1. Second paragraph: Find a word which means the same as **stretched out**.
2. Fifth paragraph, which word is closest in meaning to **sullen**:
bad tempered
ugly
brutal
3. Look at the sentence: '*Mother faltered in the doorway before ...*' What does the word '**faltered**' tell you about what mother was feeling?
4. Look at the first paragraph; find and copy one word from the paragraph that is closest in meaning to **light heartedness**.

LI: to be able to make inferences

1. '*It was a hard knock, quite unlike the tap of mother's dainty visitors...*'
Why does the author describe the knock in this way?
2. '*It was a hard knock, quite unlike the tap of mother's dainty visitors...*' What does the word '*dainty*' tell us about the visitors?
3. Read paragraph beginning: 'Cromwell's soldiers thronged in, crowding the room, their'
Why does the author describe the men as '*different*'?
What does the author want the reader to understand?
4. Find evidence from the text that mother was frightened .
5. Find evidence from the text that the lead soldier was not a kind man

LI: to be able to retrieve and record information from a text

1. What time period is this story set in? How do you know this?
2. Is the boy rich or poor? How can you tell?
3. What phrase does the author use that tells you the boy didn't know what was happening?
5. What was mother feeling when someone knocked on the door? How can you tell?
6. Why are the soldiers there?
7. Look at the last paragraph. What phrases does the author use to tell the reader that mother is nervous?
8. Are the soldiers respectful? Give reasons for your opinion.

9. Where do you think father is?