

The Rings of Time

In the fifteenth century there was a village, abandoned because of the plague, nearby Burghley house.

“Did you know that you can tell how old a tree is by counting its rings?” says Andy, reading from the ‘1001 facts you’ve always wanted to know!’ book. More like, 1001 facts I really do NOT want to know.

“No, I didn’t, Andy,” I sigh, and then grimace through my ever-increasing headache as I stare at the question: what do you want to be when you’re older? In class I had no idea, now I still have no idea.

It also doesn’t help that in the background my dad and Andy seem to be having a ‘who can laugh the loudest’ competition at ‘You’ve Been Framed’. I sigh, going up to my room, away from the annoyance of the television.

The next day, we go to Burghley house. Panting, we collapse onto the grass. I lean back on a large, old tree stump. The day is as fresh as the delicate, white snow drops surrounding the stump and the grand, imposing house before me casts a shadow over the fine dew, dispersed by the cool morning. There is a mass of weathered chimneys topping the sandy-coloured house and the gleaming windows look over the gently rippling, sparkling lake where an elegant swan floats gracefully past. I breathe in the scent of freshly mown grass and lie back, closing my eyes.

Suddenly, as I open them again, everything has disappeared, replaced by darkness. Neon rings swirl around me as I look about in surprise. I’m scared and petrified, what’s happening to me? My heavy breathing quickens and my heartbeat crashes against my chest like waves hitting a cliff. Then, silence.

When I look up, I am sitting on a small stool, next to a bed. A vile, putrid odour hangs around the small room, making my eyes water. As I peer over the bed, a dark shape moans and I back away. There is a young girl of about eight years old with perspiration pouring down her body which was covered in black spots. I know I need to find a doctor quickly. Outside is a huge crowd of people in simple pinafores and aprons. As I stumble about, a man stops, asking me if I am alright.

“Yes, no actually, there’s a young girl in this house who looks dreadfully unwell. She needs a doctor immediately,” I stutter.

“Ah, just another struck down.”

“Struck down with what? I don’t understand.”

“The plague? The reason why we’re all abandoning the village? Besides, there aren’t any doctors.”

Competition entry 01

The man starts to walk away as I look before me in confusion. Suddenly, everything starts to make sense. The people, the village, the girl and the fact that there are no doctors clarify my thoughts. I have gone back in time.

Inside, the girl groans in pain, still sweating. There is no cure to the plague. At least not here, not now. Pressing a damp cloth against her forehead, I ask her name.

“Lily”, she says weakly, as I give her a drink of water.

Lily clutches her stomach as she starts to cry again. Although I can't cure Lily, I can at least distract her.

I wake up suddenly in my own bed. I have no idea how I got here. I lie drenched in cold sweat, my head pulsing with a headache. The last thing I remember was telling Lily a long story of time travelling and the future. At the end, Lily had smiled and taken a final, ragged breath. Outside, in the silence, I had sat down on a tree stump, when there was that same sensation of neon rings.

Something which Andy says floats back to me; ‘Did you know that you can tell how old a tree is by counting its rings?’ A tree brought me here. A tree took me back. ‘The Rings of Time’, I think, smiling to myself.

That brings me right up to now. I sigh. I guess I’ll never know if I made Lily’s last moments better. But I do know one thing; the answer.

Later, I stare at the question again: What do you want to be when you're older? But this time it’s not quite so difficult, because, something I have learnt is obvious. That I want to be someone who helps and saves people. Below, in large letters, I write one word: Doctor.

The End

[740 words]