

It was raining hard and the sun was low in the sky as I rode through the streets of Glenrowan. I listened to the sound of the horseshoes hitting the cobblestones, muffled by my splashes in the deep puddles of rainwater. *"What can I ask?"* was the only question running through my mind. I pushed my horse to ride faster. It was raining harder. It seemed like the skies opened up just as I came to a stop in front of the prison. I dismounted and tied up my horse. I climbed up the cracked redbrick steps and pulled open the huge metal door keeping the inmates in. There was Ned Kelly, real as life, sitting there tied to a chair. The dim candlelight casted dark shadows on his face. His beard and hair were wild and untamed. I cleared my throat.

*"Ned Kelly?"* I asked, trying not to reveal my trembling voice.

*"Aye"* he replied. And so it started.

I pulled out my inkwell and quill from my pouch and shot off my first question about his early life. There must have been some reason for his actions.

*"What was your family life like? You know... parents, siblings... you had brothers didn't you? Cousins? Did they show any reckless behavior at any time?"* His face changed, becoming slightly defensive. I knew I had hit a soft spot.

Kelly: *"My mother and father both spent time in jail, as did my cousins, brother, and every friend I ever made. My parents were from Tipperary, deported from Ireland and sent to Australia for criminal activity. They arrived here some years ago on a prison ship. And...yeah. Did I mention my step-father was a horse thief? Seemed like my whole life, someone I knew was at war with the law."*

*"Oh"* I replied after a second. *"I do suppose that explains a lot about your actions Ned. When did it all start; crime, jail time, your run-ins with the law? Can you give me a specific event?"*

Kelly: *"At age 16, I was falsely accused of striking this McCormack fellow. For my "crime" I spent six months in jail."*

*"Seems strange though Ned. I mean, six months behind bars for a crime that you didn't commit. Something else must have been connected."*

Kelly: *"I grabbed him and threw him to the ground. I put my boot down on his throat and then pulled his own gun on him...Or so he says."*

*"No fear huh? You were just a kid and this was a bold action."*

Kelly: *"Yeah, it was bold, but no. I wasn't afraid of anything a day in my life."*

*"You have been called the Jesse James of Australia well as someone with Robin Hood credentials. Care to comment? Someone like you, robber, thief, doesn't seem to do anything nice for anybody. Jesse James maybe... but Robin Hood?"*

Kelly: *"I had a sense of justice. I stole from the rich to give to the needy. You know... Robin Hood stuff. I defended my mother when police came to take my brother to jail. They claimed that she wasn't cooperating so they grabbed her too, and sentenced her to three years behind bars. I set out to free her, and by doing that, gained popularity by and by. I started a gang and we protected the poor that supported us. We were heroes... at least in their eyes."*

*"Interesting Ned, but I don't think that that is enough to classify someone as a "hero". Do you have anything else?"*

Kelly: *"Well, rich and power-grubbin' squatters would go out and mess with the poor folk, takin' their horses, and impounding them. Then, they made them pay to get them back. When my father had his horse impounded, we went and stole all of the horses back and sold them to some poor folk, an innocent party."*

Time was ticking and I was getting "the look" from the officers. My time was up. "Any regrets?" I asked. When he looked at me, the fear I expected to see was not there.

*"No" he said with unbelievable confidence. "I gave the oppressed comfort. I stood as a symbol for Irish-Catholic and working-class resistance. I used my stolen money to push for the creation of a "Republic of the Northeast of Victoria. I was a political revolutionary. I fought for the oppressed, fought against the law. I murdered for others, murdered for my friends. I killed, but I wouldn't change anything. I left a lasting impression."*

My hand was terribly cramped from writing so much so fast, but I didn't want to miss a word that left Kelly's mouth. When they carried him away as I began to pack up, he handed me a book. He didn't say a word, but just looked at me with those big, dark eyes he had.

I opened it when I got home. 8000 words of wisdom from Ned Kelly. A biography. He was brilliant, although obviously uneducated. Errors of spelling and grammar controlled the piece, but there was also the ever-present poetry of metaphors and truth. I felt connected to a criminal in a strange way. I decided to keep the biography a secret, because the world was not ready for it yet. When he was hanged the next day, I stayed home. Irish Culture had lost a legend.

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