Guy Fawkes Day

I am thousands of kilometers from home, shivering in a jacket no match for a November night in Yorkshire. James and a slivered moon my only accomplices. We are planning the utter destruction of Britain's Parliament. The truth: *Parliament* is a rickety collection of discarded bird houses, perched above a tunnel we carved into the slope that prevents James' mother's rose garden from sloughing into his father's orchard. Six of James' unwanted, die-cast Napoleonic Dragoons are its only security. They lean drunkenly at their guard posts, their feet pushed haphazardly into the soft, forgiving clay. As the first match flares I see into their flat, unblinking eyes.

They know they've been betrayed.

Ours is a plot three weeks in the making. It's November 5th, 1966. Guy Fawkes Day. We're in soot-tarnished Cudworth, a village uncomfortably wedged between coal heaps in the Metropolitan Borough of Barnsley. Rotherham, the place where Little John is said to be buried, is only a half-hour drive south. My father insisted on taking us to the church to take rubbings on the sarcophagi there. (When we returned to Vancouver he got them framed and hung two in the hall, so that every visitor, from family to the Jehovah's Witness recruiters were greeted by the grinning skull from the Swift family crypt). It's his new craze, overtaking his HO railroad collection. *At least it's bloody cheaper.* I heard my mother sigh to no one but me at the kitchen table, her cigarette smoke a shroud above her head. She's talking and sounding like a native, and

we're only two months into our year-long posting so that my father can teach math and social studies to third graders whose system of weights and measures I will never understand.

I'm six-going-on-seven, and am sitting on the broken stone wall next to our tunnel and would record every detail of this act for my grandfather, if the light were better and my hand didn't shake so badly from the cold. He waits in Vancouver for my report. It is for him—more precisely it is for him *and* the future of the International Socialist Movement—that I risk so much.

* * *

When my father accepted the teaching exchange through the Vancouver School Board we realized too late that he'd consigned us to a year of rain, itchy school uniforms, and a sing-song Yorkshire accent that followed my sister and me like a lost puppy three years *after* we'd left England. He dismissed my mother's fears as typical Canadian parochialism, but barely two weeks into our stay it was *his* continental sensibilities that were offended by the damn rain, the screeching old women in the market, and the ubiquitous soot that lay on a village barely emerging from the business end of the Industrial Revolution. His complaints circled the air above our supper table, mingling with the steam rising off Mrs. Bone's mashed potatoes. Our landlady said nothing in defense of the weather or her village, but smiled, the veins that criss-crossed the backs of her pale hands throbbing as she served up seconds.

Mrs. Bone was widowed a year before we arrived. There's pictures of Mr. Bone in the *drawing room*, him with his woolen cap pulled low over his brow, unable to disguise his prominent nose and chin. I wonder if he sniffed out the collapse before it came down on him and six others as they packed in their shift? Mrs. Bone thinks so—she said he'd had a bad feeling the

day before the accident. It was to fill the house with voices that she applied to host Canadian families on exchange. Not sure she expected one of us to be a Viennese expat who was convinced the wrong side won the war. But with my sister and me she is always kind, quick to smile and offer a sympathetic ear.

Mrs. Bone's son lives in Sheffield; he has a new baby, but they don't visit often so she's thrilled to have us. She tells my sister and me this everyday as we pass through the kitchen. We're her first *international* tenants, and the first since she had the plumbing done. The old outhouse (*bog* my classmates call it) still squats in a corner of the backyard in the shadow of the high, brick wall that divides her property from her neighbour's, but the door's been nailed shut by the handyman down the row. To keep us from falling down the pit, was her reasoning. *Wouldn't that be a nasty shock for your parents, seeing only your feet there wrigglin' like the dickens when they looked down the hole? You wouldn't stay long after that now, would you?*

Last June we packed three steamer trunks and six suitcases and rented our house and took the train to Toronto, a bus to Buffalo and, eventually, a liner out of New York bound for Southampton. It was one of my father's dreams: crossing the Atlantic by luxury liner, so he booked us a cabin on the *S.S. France*, the longest passenger ship in the world, though not quite long enough for me.

It took five days to cross the ocean, but less than one day for my father to find fault. *Rich Americans*, they quickly became the bane of his ship-board existence. Or more specifically, the family from New York at the next table. It became his mantra of discontent, reciting their faults—and by extension—the suffering they unknowingly inflicted upon him. We could hear his liturgy every evening after we'd brushed our teeth and were supposed to be asleep: he was like a

newsreel describing their considerable faults. They were loud, uncouth, uncultured, obnoxious, spoiled. Completely unworthy of their wealth. In the almost-darkness the litmus of his injury was that they were *Jewish*. He whined to my mother's gradually slumping shoulders, as the weight of his vitriol pummeled her to silent surrender.

* * *

It was my mother's family who came to the train station to see us off on our adventure. For the record, my father has a brother in Toronto, and his mother lives in Vienna. That's all the family he's got. She lives in a dingy apartment in Grinzing, a leafy suburb of Vienna best known for sheltering the middle-aged, stone-deaf Beethoven while he composed his Ninth Symphony, and for its *Heurigers*: vineyards that serve their just-pressed wine in cobblestone courtyards hemmed by chestnut trees, peeling stucco and old, shuttered windows. They were the favoured haunts of Austrian Nazis who congregated in brown-then-black-shirted herds and drank wine out of heavy glass carafes and sang German folk songs with nostalgic bluster.

My father longed to be home.

My grandfather held my hand until the conductor shepherded us aboard. He crouched beside me and in my ear whispered of Yorkshire coal; how there were miners still working fourteen hour shifts underground, in bad air, inhaling coal dust. *Silicosis is their only future*, he said. He told me the way I could help them was to look and to learn and bring back my observations. He'd take it from there: he had connections. *When you grow up you'll fix that and more,* he said. *The working man needs new heroes.* He pressed a small object into my palm. *Don't let your father find this,* he whispered, kissing my cheek and closing my fist inside his own warm hand. Then, my mission objectives established, he kissed the top of my head and pushed

me into the confluence of my father's impatient, windmilling arms.

It was only after we were in our cabin, when my parents left us to get drinks in the dining car, did I examine the button. It was wooden, roughly painted, and oval shaped, but there were no holes to sew it onto a sweater or jacket. Over a white background the red initials *I. W. W.,* separated by stars, were surrounded by the banner *One Big Union- We Want the Earth.*

I was now an honorary member of the International Workers of the World.

* * *

Before I met James I was lonely in Cudworth, with only Barb, my twin sister, for company. We tried catching robins in Mrs. Bone's backyard by using the bottom of a wooden apple box, leaning it against a pencil around which I tied one end of a string. The pencil propped open the apple box, we sprinkled a few cookie crumbs on the ground- we couldn't find any bird seed. We hid behind Mrs. Bone's roses to wait. A robin came—once—and sat in the trap to eat the cookie bits. When Barb tugged the string, the pencil got stuck in the soft ground, the box fell sideways and the bird flew away. I yelled at Barb and she yelled back, saying she didn't want to play such a stupid game anyway.

Instead, I sat at Mrs. Bone's kitchen table and drew pictures for my grandfather. Pictures of the brick row houses and the slag heap and of the tall iron-and-stone fence around the mansion across the street. My mother took my drawings, she ran her fingers lightly over the waxy bumps where I'd pressed too hard, leaving too much black crayon behind, and folded them over the letters she's written to my grandparents. *He'll love them*, she said with her ever-present sad smile below her sad eyes. I told her that I was duty-bound to keep Grampa informed of the working man's struggles. She laughed, but covered her mouth with one hand when she saw I was serious.

* * *

Of the nine offspring of James Black and Margaret Griffiths only Albert—my Grampa—produced children. By the time I was six, the Blacks were a clan of grey-hairs with dark, shining eyes: past middle-age, their bellies showed the contented, well-deserved spread of retirement. The four eldest were born in the *Old Country*, when Victoria was still Queen. They made the ocean crossing with their mother to meet my great-grandfather, already ministering to his Baptist congregants in Olds, Alberta. The three younger children—including my grandfather, who survived infancy in rural Alberta and the family homestead in Trail during the Great War—knew Britain and the monarchy only by the stories their elder siblings told. The women were teachers, all of them. Liable to break into verse without warning. Minnie, Dorothy, Nellie, Jean could recite Robbie Burns' poems in Gaelic, or as easily reel off verses of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, and Tennyson. They knew every tartan from Aiton to Young, and each of them delighted in plucking slender threads of Black family lore from the tangled cloth of Scotland's past as much as they enjoyed tweaking the raisins from their scones at tea time.

The men of the clan were educators also. Wiry men whose bodies hinted at a strength far beyond their compact frames. Men who could recite from memory:

He me relieved from my strong foes
An such as did me hate;
Because he saw that they for me
Too strong were, and too great-

or recount the clan killing at Glencoe and Bonnie Prince Charlie's defeat at Culloden. Powerful were my grandfather's hands: able to cut and stack a cord of green alder faster than men half his age, then handle an old vellum page of the Family Bible like it was a delicate flower brought home to his wife. These men were not the sons of warriors: they were the sons of librarians and

ministers, but with a prairie toughness bred into their bones that both church and school polished, but could not eradicate.

* * *

My father teaches at the Primary School, a brick island in a sea of tired, black pavement. It's the school where the older children go. My mother stays home with the baby. We never call her by her given name (Joan), that's our mother's name. She was horrified when our father returned from the registry desk waving the birth certificate proud as anything. She'd wanted to call her youngest *Anne*, after her grandmother, but my father never bothered with the wants of others. We call her *Schnecke*, which means snail in German, 'cause she crawls so slowly. My father has animal pet names for us all. Barb is *Igel* (hedgehog) on account of her hair is always pointing in every direction. My father baptized me *Loewe,* the lion. It's a cruel joke. I'm scrawny and near-sighted, with dark hollows under my eyes and knobby, scraped knees from falling regularly at morning recess. My scabs give my father an excuse to rail at my clumsiness and my mother another reason to rub my back while he floods my scrapes with iodine. As I bawl like a baby I am certain he's smiling, if only on the inside. (I read somewhere not long ago that doctors did a test and found that iodine drizzled on an open wound actually *slows* the healing, compared with antibiotic cream or even just clean water and air. I think iodine as antiseptic was conjured up by men like my father, by Austrian Nazis drunk on green wine).

My father sometimes hunts us down at recess, gives us chocolate even as he finds something to lecture us on; his *disappointment du jour.* His eyes are Aqua Velva blue and too close together. When I see him without his eyeglasses I think of a mole with blue eyes the same colour of the ice the time we went to the Athabasca glaciers and I leaned over the rope rail and

stared down the throat of a crevasse. White becoming blue turning to bottomless black. My English playmates linger a safe distance away. They don't like how he tips his head back so he's looking at them down the flat of his cheekbones. Or that he always wears leather gloves, no matter the weather.

My father was eight when the Nazis annexed Austria. His favourite stories were of summers spent in the *Hitlerjungend*, stringing telegraph cables. To him it was summer camp; a chance to get out of the city and sleep outdoors. He got pleurisy in 1942 and nearly died. But his uncle, a surgeon as well as a Colonel in the *Luftwaffe,* came back from Italy where he was stationed and stuck a needle the size of a bicycle pump between my father's ribs and drained the fluid from around his lungs so he lived.

I know I should be grateful, retroactively.

James' father is the general manager of the mine at the edge of town. James lives, by some quirk in the town's development, across from our row of houses. The Bellis house faces the river and is set far back behind a high iron and brick fence, but the main gates open directly across from Mrs. Bone's house. A month or so after we arrived James saw me on the street, walking with Mrs. Bone to the corner grocer. She went everyday, but on Saturdays she took Barb and me and bought us each a *Crunchie*. I'd never tasted the brittle toffee and smooth chocolate together; how the toffee melted on my tongue and the milk chocolate coated my mouth. Heavenly. Anyway, he came to call. I was invited to the house and must have made a decent impression, for James was allowed to have me over whenever he liked.

My father is thrilled: we'd been noticed by Cudworth's elite. We are, somehow, special. But after a few weeks his tone changes. How had James' father come by his wealth and

standing? My father complains at the dinner table. He is an unspectacular man, not particularly well educated or bred. I see my father's insides twist with envy, and from envy it is a short, effortless hop to ridicule. I listen, and am confused: if my father hated the rich, ridiculed the wealthy 'captains of industry', why isn't he like my grandfather, a proud, dedicated union man? I had to ask Grampa, he'd know. But I am also torn about reporting on Mr. Bellis: What will my grandfather say about me fraternizing with the son of a Capitalist? I tell myself he would encourage the connection, for I am learning the workings of Free Enterprise. How else to discover its Achilles heel?

* * *

My grandfather ended up a socialist because he couldn't afford to lose his teaching job if it were discovered he was a Marxist. There was an element of practicality in his ideology, which I attribute to his common sense Scottish heritage. Awkward enough being a card-carrying member of the CCF, as well as the IWW. He marched in strikes—whether it was the longshoremen, machinists, postal workers, or nurses: the struggles of workers crossed vocations and genders. He attended union meetings and was elected president of the BC Teachers Federation for a stint in the 1950s. He worked to further equality and had a personal example to share: My grandmother lost her teaching job when they got engaged in 1930. Inequity and corruption angered him, whether it was the outrageous profits of big business, or the slap in the face of flagrant government patronage. He wanted fair wages and a decent standard of living for the working class whose sweat produced the goods everyone needed. Growing up poor on a farm in Trail—where winters meant shaking a skrim of ice off his blanket and thawing a pail of water on the cookstove—forged an iron-clad notion that nobody should have to go without. He forever

carried the shame of throwing rocks at the Italian boys who lived in *the Gulch* as proof that class distinctions were both artificial and evil, and that warmth, indoor plumbing, and a good education shouldn't be the preserve of the rich.

My grandmother told me much later that when they were young and newly married, before my mother was born, evenings were spent in the kitchen, the lights dimmed by cigarette smoke as they and their friends relived the critical debates that wracked, weakened and ultimately doomed the International Socialist Movement. They would chain smoke, drink too much cheap rye whiskey as they role-played their heroes: My grandfather was Friedrich Engels, my grandmother Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, while best friend Archie was Karl Marx. The most raucous debates centred on how best to resist Franco and Mussolini and Hitler.

My grandfather wanted so badly to fight. Into his eighties his face still shone with pride when he spoke of the courageous *Mac-Paps* in Spain or the guerilla tactics of the IWW during the 'Twenties. He showed me the secret signs that wandering, jobless men left at the ends of driveways and along the sides of country roads: three rocks in a triangle-shaped pile meant a good chance of finding a place to sleep, or an X inside a circle scratched on a post meant it was a good place to stop. I forget the rest, or which configuration was which, but through those warnings the uprooted and displaced became brothers. His only regret was being nearly forty when the war against Hitler began. Too old for the front. He quit teaching and joined the army, but had to settle for a quiet anti-aircraft station at Boundary Bay.

* * *

James and I became best friends. We explored the orchard and the formal garden and the woods that made up the Bellis estate. When I mentioned the horrible condition of Yorkshire

miners he just laughed, which made my ears go red. *It's the prime minister's fault*, James said. *They make the laws. My dad never breaks the law.* So we hit on our plan. We would blow up Parliament. Make new laws for everyone. Just like Guy Fawkes. We raced through the property, looking for the choicest spot on which to construct our doomed Parliament. We found it on the bank that separated the rose garden from the orchard, where a stacked stone wall had crumbled away over the years. Nobody had bothered to rebuild it.

We cleared out the loose rocks and began to excavate. We borrowed shovels, a mattock and a bucket from the garden shed to scrape the soil. Every weekend day and weekday evening, until dark, we laboured. The clay lying beneath a thin blanket of topsoil was mostly clay, heavy and wet. We both felt the urgency: Guy Fawkes Day was less than two weeks away. No matter the weather went sour. We dug, we chiseled, we sweat, widening the tunnel so that only a thin, earthen roof remained, upon which our Parliament would perch. My hands got blisters. Fortunately, James' parents showed no interest in our undertaking. Each evening at supper we returned to the main house to wash, but no explanation was demanded so none was given. My own mother was less liberal, as I had few clothes, but James loaned me gray shorts and another white shirt. Except for my shoes, which I had to polish every night before bed, my school uniform remained unharmed.

* * *

My father's one regret (besides getting married and having children before he earned a PhD and landed a principal's position at a Vancouver high school so he could join the Arbutus Club and drive a Chrysler New Yorker) was that he was too young to fight in World War II. With the *Wehrmacht*, defending the Reich from Stalinist hordes. He'd been sent to live on the estate of

a family friend near Budapest, but in 1944 was forced to flee the advancing Russian armies. Stories of his teen years were full of air raids and occupation: of stealing mouldering cabbages from the Russians after the fall of Vienna. The conquering army were young men from Siberia who had never seen flush toilets, let alone heard Mozart or Puccini. They were curious, even friendly with the Viennese. Then the occupation force came, many who called the Ukraine home: men who had seen and lived what the Germans had done to their towns and villages. They were not so gentle. Thousands of Viennese women were raped and contracted syphillus. For my father the winter of 1945 became an ordeal worse than nearly six years of war. He survived by smuggling half-decent food and kindling from the Americans to his mother trapped in the Russian zone.

As he got older his stories changed. They became bitter lectures on unfairness: How the undeserving grew rich without ever having read Goethe in German, or hearing Brahms or Beethoven in a plush seat in a Baroque concert hall. The fix was in. As he saw it, his children would never finish in the medals. My sisters and I listened in frightened silence, staring at our dinner plates, hoping that perfect posture would save us from a sudden, ferocious slap. As if *we* were part of the conspiracy. At bedtime my mother came to us to apologize, exhausted, her eyes puffy, her breath smelling of contraband cigarettes and rye. She kissed our foreheads, closed the bedroom door, and went alone to face his anger.

* * *

James used his considerable allowance to buy fireworks, passing over the candy bins on our twice-weekly trips to the store. I was confused. How did other working class revolutionaries fund their acts of disobedience, if not for benefactors among the Capitalist class? Marx had

access to Engel's wealth. I had more questions for Grampa. James also won access to his father's considerable supply of holiday fireworks. They were intended for his staff at the mine, to be divvied out the night before the celebrations. James siphoned what he could, at considerable personal peril. We stored them in a sack in the garden shed. James stuck a padlock on the rusting hasp and on breaks from digging and reinforcing our tunnel we would go to the shed, unlock the door, dump the sack and spread the explosives on the stone floor and examine them like archeologists drooling over a mother lode of fossils. When our muscles ached from digging we scrounged lumber from around the property to reinforce the tunnel roof. Our Parliament began to take shape out of birdhouses that had blown down in the last big wind and were waiting for a handyman's attentions. Our results looked more Frank Lloyd Wright Postmodern than Tudor-Baroque opulence, but to James and me our construction efforts were exactly what we wanted, deserving of every bit of Cherry Bomb Justice we could muster.

* * *

My mother chose to make her mark by marrying my father, an immigrant she'd met in the Ocean Falls of 1958. It was then a booming mill town of five thousand, clustered around the Crown Zellerbach plant. Today scarcely two hundred hardy souls live there, scraping by in the few homes not bulldozed in the 'Seventies by a shameful government who tried to erase the town from both the map and the province's memory. My father was a married immigrant when he arrived by seaplane in 1953. He divorced Helga and she moved to Vancouver Island where I hazard she never forgot him, no matter how hard she tried. Just like my mother never forgot him, until the cancer took her. Seventeen years of his unfiltered malice.

When my parents got engaged my grandfather refused to let my father into his house,

until he had done the right thing by his daughter. I wondered if it was because my father was the son of aristocrats, too bourgeois for Grampa's socialist leanings, but it wasn't that complicated. When my father arrived on the doorstep my grandfather saw an adulterer first, bourgeois second. When they got married my grandfather's house was theirs, and he swallowed his misgivings of my father's politics. He never stood between them, not even the first time my mother appeared on his doorstep with a savage redness on her face: that 'just-slapped' look we each got to wear when we made the mistake of talking back, speaking out, or laughing too loudly.

It was my father who held the grudge. He never forgave the Blacks, as a family. Maybe for *being* a family. In his mind they were immigrants too, recent ones by Canadian standards. He often wondered aloud how it could be that every descendant of Scottish blood knew it like gospel that Scotland was special, as different from England as the thistle is from the rose, but he was simultaneously blind about any similar relationship between Austria and Germany. I think it was all those newsreels of adoring Austrians lining the wide streets of Vienna in 1938 that caused his confusion.

* * *

It's the afternoon of the bonfires and James and I have much to do. We meet under threatening skies at our excavation, a yawning, toothless mouth. Six feet high, three feet wide, extending as deep into the slope so as to nearly swallow James and I both, lying head to toe. It was a miracle it never collapsed as we dug around the single, unsure post we'd found to hold up the roof. The temperature has dropped and it hasn't rained for a week. Cracks begin to show in the earth near the edges of the roof, where the boards end. There is no telling how long it will hold.

It takes three trips by wheelbarrow to get Parliament, Westminster, and Buckingham Palace to the high side of the wall. We push our structures into the centre of the undercut, using shovel handles so we don't add our weight to the thin crust of earth above the tunnel. James has donated a half-dozen French Dragoons from his tin soldier collection. They guard the central courtyard of our doomed government, though none too professionally. We are too afraid of collapse to risk righting them. James did up Parliament in leftover yellow house paint. The oily smell sticks to my hands as we lift Parliament off the wheelbarrow and set it at our feet. We can't stop grinning.

Throughout our mission we've argued only once: Which flag should fly from the spire above Parliament? I'd suggested the Union Jack, as we were in England. James, when it comes down to it, can't bring himself to demolish anything flying his country's flag. We get drawing paper and draw the American flag, but when I observe that there are no kings in America, we copy the Italian flag from one of James' father's history books. It bores us. I suggest we try and draw the old Nazi flag and James' eyes flash. With great care we draw the black, four-legged spider in its white and red web onto a pilfered pillow case. We stick the flag to a bean pole and secure it with bent nails to the side of Parliament. The pillow case hangs limp, nearly invisible on the bean pole, so we paint two more copies onto sides of the clock tower. We are satisfied we've established a villain worthy of civil disobedience.

When all is in place we rush for the fireworks. It is getting dark and I am overdue at home. James has to meet his father at the Bellis bonfire near the river, over at the furthest end of the estate. We work fast, sorting packets of fireworks. That afternoon James had bought four hefty Fat Boys that singly could blow off a limb, should they misfire. We'd spent the day before

braiding wicks together, wrapping different combinations in newspaper. Our plan is to demolish the roof support at the same time as the smaller bombs blow the birdhouses. Simultaneous explosion and collapse. There will be no survivors. In the chaos that follows a working class government will emerge to end suffering and injustice.

We set the tunnel explosives in a crate James had painted red to look like a box of dynamite, and together we load, then steer the wheelbarrow over the bumpy, damp ground to the orchard. I slide the smaller packets onto the roofs of Parliament, while James wriggles into the tunnel to set the dynamite box. Once the wicks are laid out in serpentine trails we cover the tunnel entrance with old boards and set stones from the damaged wall to anchor the board bottoms.

I badly want to blow it up at once. Fat, intermittent drops of rain fall. A downpour will snuff out our conspiracy. James disagrees, saying that we need night, and that the fireworks will be dry inside their paper packages. We have to wait until the grown ups are gathered at the bonfire, singing and drinking and watching Guy Fawkes burn, so we can linger over the devastation and savor our triumph over evil.

I hardly touch my supper: Expectation sits like a full balloon in my stomach. As my family prepares for the hike to the bonfire, I slip upstairs for my blotter and pencil. I need to write about the sputtering wick, the blast, the shower of debris and the tunnel's collapse. I will send the account to my grandfather, along with my artist's rendering of the cataclysm.

Mrs. Bone leads us through the open gates to the Bellis bonfire. She calls her flashlight a *torch*, and she shines it on the uneven ground in front of our feet. My father carries my baby sister. Our breath trails behind in tattered ribbons. Much of the neighbourhood is invited. Mrs.

Bellis hands Barb and me mugs of hot cocoa. James' father sticks glasses of rum-laced coffee in my mother's and father's gloved hands. James and I keep near the fringe until Guy Fawkes' makeshift gallows ignite. The crowd cheers. Roman candles shoot off; galaxies of blue sparks. James tugs on my sleeve.

* * *

I wriggle on the cold stones. My bum is freezing. James fumbles with the box of matches. We have no flashlight, no other light than the flare of the lit match and the faint glow of the bonfire on the other side of the house. James jabs the sputtering flame at the first wick, the one that climbs the bank to the buildings. The wick accepts the fire, begins its race toward Parliament. The second wick lights, vanishes between the old boards stopping up the tunnel. James hurries next to me on the wall. I stick my pencil between my teeth and plug my ears.

The first wick is faster. There is a flash, then another, and the beanpole holding our flag whizzes past. It is the first of many pieces of splintered wood to shower us. They are still falling when the boards burst from the tunnel ahead of a belch of orange flame. I feel a rush of air, cry out as something slams into my shoulder, knocking me off the wall. I am looking up at blackness. I hear the ocean inside my head. I'm sure it's James shouting that this is much bigger—and better—than we planned.

Mrs. Bone's flashlight is in my eyes. My father's hands pick me up roughly, stand me on wobbly legs. James is sitting on the ground, his mother is holding a handkerchief against his ear. Broken boards fan from the blast, as if punched outward by a gigantic fist. Parliament is gone. There is a crater where the government once stood. I start to grin—what a blow for the revolution—but my father slaps me to my knees. He chases me home with the toe of his polished

shoe.

* * *

Our last chore Saturday morning, after picking up every fragment of wood, is to fill in the crater and pile up the stones. James and I will spend all day at our penance, speaking hardly a word. James has had a small piece of flesh taken out of his left ear. I have a bandage on my arm, beneath my coat, but that hurts less than the three purpling stripes across the backs of my thighs and bum. My father's punishment was swift, carried out during the interrogation while my mother weeps behind her bedroom door. I draw the explosion with my crayons, and write a short story for my grandfather. My mother folds my drawing and letter and slips it inside an envelope, along with my I.W.W. button.

The revolution will have to wait.

END