

## **Explosion**

Never mind the Promethazine taken the night before March 6th 1970. Sinister collisions of consequence and reality kept her restless and she woke before anyone moved through the townhouse. As the sunlight pierced through tightly shut eyes, Diana Oughton stared at the ceiling as nervous thoughts juggled her gut. For a second, she pictured being a little girl again, in ruby-red-slippers clicking her heels wishing to be anywhere but here. She'd welcome a glimpse through opened eyes of happier times like her vaulted ceiling in the bedroom back in Dwight, or her attic apartment with Billy on Felch Street back when he cared, or a mud-hut in Guatemala with leak eroded ceilings.

“What will I do?”, she thought. “Warn a soldier at the gate? Warn someone at the club? Will we get caught before I warn a soul? Or maybe... maybe I'll set the time-bomb for an hour, go to the ladies room and warn someone there? Or should I just crumple to the ground and scream bloody hell for their lives and mine. I've given my life to these people, who don't care I'm wasting away from a parasite that's in my belly. I could wrap my arms around myself and scream and projectile vomit and piss, and maybe Terry'll run like a coward from the crowd I know will gather. An ambulance can take me away and I can shut my eyes to it all. They'll take me to a hospital, someplace safe where I'll tell them everything they're planning here....”.

Lethargic.

Foggy.

Pillow on her face.

A headache.

Opening doors slamming doors.

Lazy feet shuffling noisily across hardwood floors drew her back from every place she imagined, each noise a slap of the paddle alarm clock near her bed ticking it's way towards the morrow

She ignored both.

“I have a day to figure it out – I'll come up with something,” she thought. She could put nothing aside, not a thought, not her senses, not the condition that savagely reminded her when she didn't take a pill and the oblivion of her senses when she did.

She remembered a different place and time, when hatred hadn't turned her heart black against privilege. She felt guilt. "Can I change anything?" she thought, "can I go home again?" Could she turn on these 'friends', and if she did, could she survive? Were they friends? Who would shelter her if she did turn on them? Carol? They'd come for her in Dwight. They knew the directions. Terry'd bomb her home as they did Murtagh's. They've advanced. Terry's advanced, he's gone evil. Whom would they kill? Her dad? Her mom?

She bit the back of her hand she'd placed as if stifling a breathless scream. It hurt.

Seven AM. Some way out.

Tornado in the sheets, twisting, too dehydrated to sweat, skin clammy like a fever, a hand on her forehead. Like an alligator taking her down below a scum covered pond, dim light through a break in the surface before the gator spins her to the death rattle. She felt no way out. Shortly after eight, she rolled off the bed and made her way down the hall. She passed Cathlyn Wilkerson on the third floor ironing and ignored the noises from the subbasement. She made her way to the kitchen and drank two glasses of water. On the way back, she saw the Army uniform and a long-sleeved white sequined dress piled near the door over three brown paper grocery bags full of something. "Pretty", she thought.

Diana bent over and picked up the dress by the tag. She stood there squinting to read it. She wished she had her glasses. She'd left them upstairs on the floor. The dress was a size 4. It wasn't hers. "Boudin looks like a man...wouldn't fit in at a gala, plus she wears a size 12. It has to be Cathy's".

"He didn't choose me...he didn't choose me...He didn't choose....."

No way out. Back to bed. Toss and turn. Nauseated again, stomach turning, get up fall into the bathroom, heave some, pulled self onto the commode and shat—it smelled diseased. Squirted last night's rice eaten communal seated around in a circle Vietnamese style. Their fingers shoveling into a wooden bowl of rice kissed with muoc mam that smelled like rotten fish. But she ate it anyway because she had the drug working on her. And now it was worse, all broken down and flying out of her like baby shit, greenish, slimy, stuff-like fetid Jell-O pasting the white walls of the toilet. What little nutrients she'd been taking in, the parasite took. It was God's trick on the body making choices for her, and she kept the extra hatred at a figurative

arms' length. Her knees on her elbows, head hung low between her legs. A single bead of sweat dropped from her forehead onto the floor.

Too raw, she didn't wipe. She barely managed to stand, hunched over the bowl and marveled at the color and consistency before surrendering to the smell of sick kicking off the heaving she knew would follow.

Spasms, heaving, nothing. Nada. Spasms- bits of rice and bile. Back in bed.

Toss and turn. No ideas. "Who loves me? Who loves me more? Who really loves me? Them? My dad? Carol?" She popped two Promethazine at ten-forty AM.

She curled into a fetal position and remembered something. Torn away from its mother, she saw an infant monkey once on a dirty street in Guatemala, terrified and for sale. It had a thin chain around its neck. "Food or a pet?" she remembered thinking. Dark grayish-brown, the size of a kitten, the monkey curled its arms around its legs and stared in the distance at nothing. Diana pulled the extra pillow into her breast, the linen cool against her naked chest and clutched it for security staring at the new style alarm clock flipping its paddled numerals over with a dull thunk on every passing minute.

Ten fifty-five AM. Way out? No way out.

She hyperventilated. "Gotta move, drugs'll knock me out soon." Her stomach settled some around a minute till eleven. She straightened her legs, stretched and rolled out of bed, avoided stepping on her glasses. She picked them off the floor and put them on. She found her shirt in the bathroom, put it on, and sighed. She stood at the bathroom door and stretched again, her eyes looking out at the grayish-blue sky.

Headed downstairs, she didn't hear any talking. Passed Cathyln who still ironed. Ted hunched over the carrel on the main floor. She went to the front door. The uniform, bags and dress still there.

She looked over them. She moved to pick up the dress again by the tag and blinked her eyes hard against the number "4". Confirmed, she let it slip the tag from her fingers. The dress fell and draped over the paper bags, sequins scraping against the paper bags with sounds like rubbing sandpaper.

No way out---

She stood there dejected, back hunched, shoulders curling into her chest looking at the dress, its sequins catching a little light. She wanted to cry, no time for tears, no fluids. Her green eyes traced the basement sound of things sliding across a rough-hewn table down from the hallway. She froze like an alabaster statue. The pressure behind her wide eyes felt like someone trying to pop them out with a spoon.

She slunk down through the hall like a zombie, her palm thrown against the wall for balance as she raced from the fog the drugs were blowing at her mind again. The tumbling in her stomach at ease and her heart slowed some—but she still felt on the cusp of hyperventilating—a futile reaction against the scrim blanket of finality that hung before her.

A scant floor below in the brownstone, No. 18 West 11th, Terry Robbins stood over his clocks working on dynamite wiring them into a device illuminated by a dim light bulb dangling over his head by a single wire. The kind with the rotary click switch encased in a black Bakelite socket. On the table to his right lay diagrammatical sketches for bombs he'd assembled. They lined the wall shelves. Anti-Personal bombs, sticks of dynamite covered in playdough and studded with roofing nails, thumb-tacks, ball-bearings or marbles and then bound in brown paper and twine. Clocks with their domes removed peeked from the holes punched in the brown wrapping paper like white faces of the moon. The battery exposed in the center on some, and at the opposite end on others. Terry Robbins made several variations of bombs, some with six sticks, some with more, and some less.

Terry had forced a salient timidity on this tribe through humiliation.--and when the dynamite kid, who incidentally, once home-built electric motors for model boats, suggested an electrical safety, Terry Robbins berated him to the glee of Weather women deeply enamored by his false knowledge. How dare a youngling question his ethos.

But the kid had a point. No one in the group except the kid understood the concepts of AC, DC, series and parallel circuits. Terry's plan for success relied on Zen, his perceived superiority through self-determination, and a drawing seemingly lifted from a cartoon by Friz Freleng. Ted gold submitted no leadership, offered nothing in the way of opinion on the technical, though where rhetoric or revolutionary prose mattered, he led the pack, but had only made erratic progress on his work since Ayers dropped the clocks, the last night being the worst since each had been wound and tested.

He wrote of their first big plan, the preparations, the ‘explosive climax’ as he scribed it. Head bobbing over the notes with a hand on an ear sometimes to dull the sound while his fingers piloted a pencil furiously through a speckled Meade composition notebook.

Upstairs Cathyln Wilkerson continued to iron in a morning light made gray by moisture wicking clouds lolling about outside.

Diana reached the sub-basement entry and gathered her courage.

Terry heated an Xacto knife to slice the plastic face off the clock in his hands, a pile of metal screws in front of him waist level on the table.

“Can I help?” she asked in a weak voice possibly as quiet as a mouse.

“Yeah.” He didn’t look up. Didn’t look at her. Didn’t look in her face. Didn’t notice her thin rimmed glasses crooked on her head, nor did he notice her eyes barely open. He didn’t notice her skin even paler than the night before, her gauntness. He didn’t ask her how she felt. He didn’t ask if she rested well. He didn’t notice how she moved slowly like a ghost to his side. Most importantly, he didn’t tell her he’d chosen Cathyln.

Facing the back of his head, she stood there watching his hands working furiously like eight legs of a spider spinning its prey into a cocoon, his head bobbing. Diana’s stomach tumbled and groaned against the pill, but this wasn’t nausea. It was either the baby or the nerves. She knew she wouldn’t need another pill.

Diana took a spot near him at the table.

Terry Robbins and Diana Oughton were stationed along the long wooden workbench painted green topped with piles and spools of colored wires – red, black, and green ones all in a disarray against accepted electrical standards. Eight alarm clocks lay in front of him, plastic faces out, 1/16th holes drilled at the forty-five minute mark. Some had metal screws already set in the holes with wires stripped and attached, the wire filament tangled in the screw’s threading.

He demonstrated an assembly.

“Strip a wire and twirl the filaments around the screw.” he said. “Take the screwdriver then drive it in the hole. Leave enough wire to make a connection to the battery.” “Do the wire colors matter?” she asked.

“No.” he looked insulted. “They don’t.”

“How’s it explode?”

Terry glared at her. “The wire on the screw goes to a battery terminal. The other wire on the clock’s minute hand runs to one off of the blasting cap terminals.”

He pulled a complete device to his belly and explained as he ran his finger along the colored wires as a man would trace the jawline of a beautiful woman. It looked sexual, a display he’d sometimes shown her as she watched a grin curl up the side of his mouth. Diana was nobody to Terry Robbins in his moment. “The extra terminal wire off the blasting cap goes to the battery.” he said.

“So when the minute hand with the wire around it touches the screw it makes an electrical connection and explodes?” She asked.

“Boom. Dead pigs. Dead soldiers. Too easy.” Terry said smiling, his thumb and index fingers tag with the wire-wrapped minute hand, back and forth, back and forth, “I’d better disconnect the battery. Don’t want an accident. Get the picture? Ready to build one?” In her delirium, she still saw his fingers playing with the minute hand – his words Dead pigs and soldiers replayed in her head.

Terry had prefabricated parts for six bombs in front of him, all of it in piles including the parts for the bomb intended for Fort Dix. Six completed devices lined the wall shelves. He had ideas for all of them, maybe one for May’s department store, one of their old planned targets. He pulled more clocks from the bag on the floor and began taking off the faces, winding them as he went without keeping an eye on Diana’s progress.

Diana began building her bomb with six sticks per his instruction, began stripping the wires then screwed the screw in the drilled hole, scotch-taped the thinner blasting cap lead wire from the stick onto the clock face along with 3 o’clock axis to the minute hand. At the tip, where the wire was intended to strike the screw, she wrapped the filaments carefully around it eight or nine times until it was like an old knot on a Judas tree, just without the purple flowers.

It took her about an hour.

“Six sticks for the pigs at Dix?” Terry singsongs.

“Six.” She repeated.

Smiling, he went back to work taping a few sets of dynamite into bundles of four with black electrical tape, its bitter end hanging from his lips, a knife in hand for cutting.

This’ll be for the pig officers.” He said.

Leaning against the edge of the table, she didn't hear Terry shuffling clumsily around the parts, nor did she hear Ted Gold moving upstairs. She didn't hear the K-or-C-Cathies wherever they were. She hunched more, barely aware she studied the bomb in her hands through the slits of her eyelids. It looked like a dream, an apparition. She shook her head.

Movement in the entry caught Terry's eyes but not hers. She didn't look up and instead inserted the blasting cap into the primary stick and taped the lead wire to the minute hand. She didn't look at the entry. Terry did. It was Teddy, his hair in disarray, heavy glasses balanced clumsily on the tip of his nose.

"I got a mechanical headache man. The clocks. I can't think – disharmonious man, I can't dig with that shit and write. I'm going to the drugstore to get cotton for my ears. Anybody want anything?"

Terry said nothing but looked over shaking his head no.

"Diana?"

She thought she looked towards the voice.

Some of the aches in her heart she took as hints at the reemerging covet of beauty, Oh, to wear silk or sequins and lace undies with a matching bra, a woman again maybe, and she yearned for that chance that the truth in dress-tag-size-four told her was a fat one. Some meat on her bones, she thought, showing her breasts in a party dress, perfume and hair just long enough to catch a clean shaven man's attention. A good man not bent on death and destruction but with a gentle touch backed by emotion, not a dictum. His fingertips tracing her spine, or a glancing touch of her naked hip in a bed atop clean white sheets in air not too cool or not too hot.

"Diana?" Ted drew back at the gape-mouthed empty eyed stare of a dead woman standing before him, her head turning towards the sound of his voice, hands moving in slow motion caressing the deadly thing she held in them.

"Do you want anything." He asked again.

She couldn't figure out if he spoke because his mouth moved and all she heard was a drone like a Peanuts character.

He smiled.

She took a breath ensured she'd said "no" and as Ted turned away, she saw his departing image and everything in between him, the doorway, and the bomb in her hands meld

into kaleidoscopic swirl of compounding colors that quickly blurred into shades of gray and black. It was a live device. She'd connected the battery, and her fingers slow motion rocked the minute hand of the ticking clock towards the screw.

It took thirty seconds for Ted Gold to step through the brownstone's front door, five more seconds to take three steps outside and decide he needed help deciding on cotton balls or cotton batts for his ears. Ted Gold, on board with exterminating 25 million Americans with the inconsequence of letting a fart slip out of his ass, couldn't make a decision on options of cotton and turned back to the door.

It took him four seconds to reach it, and one more to stand there in the doorway, a second to spread a dumb look across his mousy face, and a split second to look at the carol where his notes lay-micro-seconds for an instant thought in the back of his mind that he needed to hurry back and get to work.

She once thought these people loved her and thought she loved them. The Weathermen had become what she hated most - violent, cruel. An organization that used the power of positional authority to bind members to its will. Yet she stayed. She stayed not as a matter of ideology, but initially out of loyalty to the ones she thought were her friends. But now, because of the nature of the sickness she didn't confess, because she hadn't been spreading herself for the sexual buffet, she'd been cast aside with the indifference of Terry and Billy's seed cast into her. The two Kathy's taking her place as Terry's receptacle as Bill's contribution grew inside her sapping what spare strength she had over the anti-nausea meds and the malnutrition of commune life and none of them were the wiser to her condition, too embroiled in sinister focus of destroying the country. A baby changed nothing.

A baby changed nothing at all.

They'd kill her like Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme killed Sharon Tate. They'd kill mummy and daddy too.

She wondered if the thing in her hands would really work and turned her back to the table, her arms and hands behind her with fingers on the minute hand as she watched the 5'4" Terry stretched on his tip-toes placing a finished bomb on the shelf with the rest of them while looking over his shoulder at her and smiling-the grin wasn't affection for her, it was devilish. For a moment she saw her world through the translucent eyelids of a bird, everything grey a



moment before an instant of erupting color in verdant hues returned her to the family estate in Dwight where she loved being at the foot of a private lake below a bell-tower standing watch over her.

As a child, she'd daydreamed herself a princess in it as swans at her feet pleaded her to cast bits of bread in her hand that always drew her from the bell tower dreams into reality back in a time when she didn't hate her family for the rich ground she stood on.

She wanted to be the princess. She longed to be in the tower. Indeed, she did need rescuing from the fatal point, and the decision that stole her from the moment when the peaceful hues of her youth blended into what was only an explosive, searing white.

And then in that fraction of time, Terry saw a goddess encased in light, rather than the angel of death. As the second hand completed the Loony Tunes circuit he designed, the two of them and a baby known only to God ceased to exist in a flash.

Terry went straight to hell.

The bomb exploded in the guts of the brownstone.

Encased in concrete supporting an upper structure of heavy beams and wooden floors, the blast directed upwards and began the collapse of the building in upon itself as the first bomb set off the others on the shelf and it all began to implode.

In that second, three feet from survival, Ted Gold froze, deer-in-the-headlights look behind thick glasses as destruction let loose his death hanging over his head. If he took a step back, he might have been lucky if he'd ever been in combat, he might have reacted.

Instead, Ted Gold the revolutionary intellectual looked up at the means of his end falling to pummeling to greet him. A dislodged stone lintel.

It fell, crushing his skull and spilling his brains to cook in the fire and debris around the now dead advocate for American genocide.

Upstairs, floors rumbled and buckled under Cathyln Wilkerson opening a hole straight down. The orange carpeting below her unshod feet encapsulated her like a pupa she tried to escape, but support beams gave way casting her and the ironing board she stood near a moment before disappearing into a glowing abyss that rose to meet her. Hot dust burned her eyes,

exploding particles and burning embers pierced her lips and burned the back of her throat as she struggled for breath.

Cathlyn tumbled into the demise the Weathermen built. They worshiped the god that devoured them as Goya's Saturn3 devoured his children, muffled noises in a cannibalism of explosion that shook her bones and swallowed her in light and fire. She didn't have time to weep for the friends she figured were dead as she fell into the pile of heated rubble, dust and desiccated remains of Diana Oughton and Terry Robbins below her.

Lucky Cathlyn, surviving the secondaries and the thermobaric effects sucking air from her lungs as the fire thirsted for more oxygen.

She climbed the hole on the precipice of her friend's grave to street level and heard the weak cry of Kathy Boudin lying naked in the pit. She'd been showering and protected by the iron tub, she rode it into the abyss like Noah's ark surfing on the winds of Hades.

They stepped over Teddy's mangled corpse in the doorway without two thoughts about him and ran from Hell, Wikerson's clothing tom, and Boudin's nudity clothed in a grey-cake-batter of ash and water.

Someone on the street yelled, "Is there anyone else left in there?" As they passed in shock, neither answered.

A kind hand belonging to Dustin Hoffman pushed them across the street, the unknown face mouthing, "Was it a gas explosion?" "Yes-yes it was," they lied.

They fled to the new safe house across the street that Dohrn told them about during a quick phone call before dawn on the 4th. But there no Harriet Tubman materialized to spirit them away on a radical Underground Railroad. Susan Wager's house, Jane Fonda's stepmother, hadn't gotten the memo.

Mrs. Wager offered them clothes, which they took and for the moment, both survivors relaxed their opinions of racism and the proletariat deciding not to chide their rescuer for employing a middle age black woman as a servant. Knowing cops and questions would arrive soon, they split the scene on bus tokens stolen from the black woman's overcoat hung in Mrs. Wager's doorway.

Terry's pop culture fetish refined himself as Newman's Butch Cassidy, adopting his belief of an existential triumph of will over reality, a mistake translated into an untimely end where in the explosion, Terry's death imitated the art he lived to emulate.

Diana had no choice.

In Guatemala she tried helping people in tangible ways. Leading into 1970, she prepared to dedicate herself to terrorism.

She wondered, secretly, if she could stomach the extremes or envision a reconciliation once the bleeding began, and her appetite for neither bothered her as much as the foreboding commitment to friends that chained her to terrorism.

She could either stick with her history, or question her ideology and abandon them. The middle ground held death as its bookends. In Dwight, she loathed being white and rich.

In Guatemala, she learned to hate capitalist America and under the Weatherman, she learned to hate herself.

The Weathermen planted a fork on her *transmutation road*, a sequined dress in size four forcing her towards her dead ends.