The Dandelion Insurrection
- love and revolution -
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(an excerpt for you to enjoy!)

Under a gathering storm of tyranny, Zadie Byrd Gray whirs into the life of Charlie Rider and asks him to become the voice of the Dandelion Insurrection. As the demise of American democracy looms, the young firebrand writer hurls his incendiary articles across the nation and foments a surge of resistance to the destructive greed of the corporate-controlled government. With the rallying cry of life, liberty, and love, Zadie and Charlie fly across America leaving a wake of revolution in their path. Passion erupts. Danger abounds. The lives of millions hang by a thin thread of courage, but in the midst of the madness, the golden soul of humanity blossoms . . . and miracles start to unfold!
In a time that looms around the corner of today, in a place on the edge of our nation, it is a crime to dissent, a crime to assemble, a crime to stand up for one's life. Despite all this - or perhaps because of it - the Dandelion Insurrection began . . .
CHAPTER ONE

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Little Bird

The seasons wrestled in the sky. Battalions of black clouds collided. Cold and warm gusts of air slammed against each other. Sleet rained like gunshot.

A little bird flew north.

She was the lone hatchling in a nest of deformed eggs, the last survivor of the fledglings that perished in a shocking bite of cold; the sole remainder of a once mighty flock . . . but she would not think of those stiffened feathered bodies now.

She winged hard and fast in the great battering of winds. All across the continent, the earth railed against the destruction wrought by humans. The eastern skies whipped furiously. Western clouds refused to rain. Soil cracked. Wind swept up walls of dust. Along the coasts, the rivers spilled their banks and the oceans attacked the shores.

Humanity marched onward despite these warnings. The earth was ravaged without distinction. Mountains crumbled. Lakes vanished. Forests fell. Prairies burned. Black plumes filled the sky.

The bodies of the birds lined the highways of migration.


She winged northward too soon in the turning of the seasons, but spring called to her with hints of hope. The ground rebelled against
the grasp of winter. A spark of life emerged that could catalyze the courage of the world.

*Don't wait! Don't wait!* the little bird sang. Death litters the animal highways. *You are next. You are next. In the war that humans wage upon the earth, the young ones will be next.* The bird flew north against the wind, warbling *don't wait!* Death creeps ever closer; not one of us can wait.
CHAPTER TWO

The Man From the North

At the edge of the nation, a fist cracked down on a weathered table.

"That's it! They've gone too far!" leathery old Valier Beaulier declared.

A riot of voices shot out loud enough to disturb the guards on both sides of the Canadian-American border. The women immediately hissed at them to shut up. Police patrolled the small town's streets in droves. The squabble of questions puttered out nervously. The curtains were drawn tight across the windows. Pierrette's Cafe bulged at the seams, grossly defying the new laws that restricted gatherings to fewer than twenty people. Every rickety chair held an equally creaky collection of arthritic bones. Younger men were relegated to leaning postures against the walls, perched on the narrow sills of the storefront windows, or shoved up against the cream and sugar shelf. Charlie Rider squeezed into the corner as his grandfather called for the family's attention.

"Rick Dumais, tell them what you told me!" the old man insisted. He nudged his agitated companion, who burst out talking so fast that his French and English tripped over each other in stumbling consternation.

"C'est vrai, I swear, it's true. I went to the bridge, there-la, to go across to Canada - my ma tante, she wanted me to take her to church today - but le agents des douanes - the guards - they said I couldn't cross. The bridge is closed!"

"For what?" Jean Pierre demanded to know. "Repairs?"

"Non," Rick answered. "It's the border . . . they've closed the whole border!"
"Ah voyons, there-la," Bette burst out, skeptical of the news. "They'll let me across. I got that new identification."

"I tried that. They say it makes no difference," Rick told her.

"Mais, je suis un citizen du Canada et des États-Unis!" Jean Pierre declared in French, pulling dual citizenship papers from his wallet.

"They don't care. Only official business, they say."

"Is my daughter's wedding official enough?" Pierrette snapped from behind the cafe counter. "Are they going to reopen the border before she gets married next week?"

A collective gasp sucked the air from the room. Jean Pierre's white eyebrows shot up. Round eyes swung to Pierrette's daughter. The girl's face turned ashen. She protested quietly that certainly something would be worked out, after all, she was almost married to her fiancé, the wedding was next week, the papers were all in order, they had a house together in Canada; couldn't the border guards make an exception?

Valier's deep voice cut sharply through the rumble of the others, demanding to know the reason for the closure.

"Pourquoi les douanes sont fermées?"

"Terrorism, they say," Rick answered the old man respectfully.

Terrorism. The family groaned in collective exasperation. Everything was because of terrorism these days; the unending wars overseas, the soldiers on the streets at home, the restrictions on gatherings, the censoring of newspapers, the police checkpoints, the ballooning military budget, searches without warrants, and now, the closure of a peaceful border after hundreds of years of open travel.

"But we aren't terrorists!" Jean Pierre exploded. "Nous sommes les Acadiens!"

We are Acadians! They had lived in this valley for four hundred years, marrying back and forth over the international border that crowned the northern tip of Maine. The sharper tones of the sisters and aunts blended into the gravel pit of men's voices. The rumble of
the old backhoe, Jean Pierre, kept pushing and shoving everyone else around. The reverberating engine of Valier leapt from idling mutters into roars. The sighs of his ancient oldest brother, Mathieu, slipped between the voices like wind through the trees. This was a family that knew the pinch of hunger, the births and deaths of babies, the callousing of hands, chapped lips and rugged cheeks, the etching of dirt in skin, the crash of timber falling, the roar of tractors, the scent of opened earth, the cool roundness of potatoes, the drip of sweat from the brow . . . and the feel of French upon their tongue.

Nous sommes les Acadians. We are Acadians.

Valier Beaulier sat in the center. Valier, they had named him, from the old Valere, dweller of the valley. The family that ringed him had endured in La Vallée Saint-Jean through the turning of four centuries. Southward, the land stretched out in rolling farms. Due north, the blue-gray corrugated steel of the paper mill sat in the middle of the town like an intractable giant, smoking a pipe that reeked of damp pulp. Beyond that, the country stopped. Politics drew a line at the river, claiming a division that the families of the valley all ignored . . . until now. Carefully keeping their voices low, they demanded to know what idiot had ordered the closure.

"The guard said that it’s closed on the orders of the President, himself!" Rick Dumais told them.


The thin voice of Mathieu rose through the rest.

"It’s so easy with those computers! One click and all the votes are gone! Mon Dieu! In my day, we had paper ballots."

"In your day, grand-père," young Matt teased, "they stole the elections on horseback!"

Laughter shot out in bellows and shortles, hefty snorts and quiet
chuckles. Old Mathieu swiped a lazy hand at the youth, his lips curling in an indulgent smile. In the center of the cafe, Valier rapped the wooden floorboards with his cane.

"Shhhh! Keep your voices down and listen to me. Écouter! We will get through this! Mathieu, Jean Pierre, and I have voted in every election since Truman beat Dewey, and I say, politics come and go. People endure. The Acadians have been citizens of France, England, and the United States. We have survived Federalists, Populists, Whigs, Tories, Know-Nothings, Democrats, and Republicans, alike. The English rounded us up and drove us away, but we returned. They tried to suppress our religion, but by the grace of God, it remains. The Americans whipped us for speaking the French, but - "

He paused, looking around proudly.

"On parle français ici!"

French is spoken here. It was their motto, their creed. Wrinkled hands leapt into applause. Lined palms slapped the tables' edges. Old shoes pounded the floor. Fists curled approvingly on knees. English, on the tongues of both the British and Americans, had dominated the region for hundreds of years, yet French was still spoken here . . . and the Acadians had endured. On parle français ici!

"Mais oui, c'est vrai," Jean Pierre conceded, "but remember when the border was easy to cross? Back then no one needed papers. You knew the guards on duty! That was before they transferred our men to New York and brought those cold-hearted bastards up here!"

"In my day," old Mathieu began with a weary shake of his head.

"In your day," young Matt interrupted cheekily, "you were sneaking whiskey across the border in your grandmother's coffin during the Prohibition!"

Again, that beautiful symphony of laughter rang out. The sound flared in the heart like a lamp during a bitter-cold night, clearing the shuddering fear, keeping the darkness at bay if only for a moment. Eyes jumped nervously to the door. The wick of humor fluttered and
died out. Old Mathieu waved a feeble hand and insisted that he hadn't been born then; it was his father, and, anyway, those days were gone. The border was closed and how was their sister, on her deathbed and all, how was she going to be brought across to be buried in the family plot now?

"Ah, voyons," he sighed, "what is the world coming to?"

Shoved up in the corner, Charlie gritted his teeth. How could they ever know what the world was coming to? He was a journalist for the local paper, but if it weren't for his relatives, even he would know nothing about global news. The only uncensored information that passed back and forth across the Canadian-American border came via his cousins, aunts, and the little old mémères. For this, Charlie Rider often escorted his grand-père to bingo night, accompanied his uncles to the bowling alley, volunteered with his aunts at church socials, and wedged himself into the corner of this cafe, shoulder-to-shoulder with the comingled musk of men and bitter coffee, eavesdropping on a vital flow of information which invariably began with my brother heard or my sister-in-law's cousin said.

Not the most reliable of news reports, but it was better than nothing; better than the syndicated fairytales the local paper expected him to write; better than the insulting stream of government propaganda he was expected to believe; better than the lies that had the gall to parade around as journalism. A pit of frustration fumed in Charlie; a frustration stoked by the restrictions of his editor, who threatened to fire him for his inflammatory articles and reminded him that his employment contract stated:

- No anti-American sentiments.
- Stay on predetermined subjects.
- Any potential aids to terrorists will be edited out.

Journalists vanished like flies swatted by government agents. Entire newspapers choked and died overnight. The slightest hint of dissent triggered raids by the long arm of the censors. Charlie's work
was riddled like Swiss cheese by the time the paper reached the public. His description of the proliferation of soldiers and tanks on the streets was removed because it aided terrorism by revealing military maneuvers. His report on the erosion of civil liberties was cut for criticizing the new security measures and was, therefore, anti-American. When drought destroyed forty percent of last year’s grain crop, his editor shredded Charlie’s report and, instead, told people that global warming was Nothing To Get Hot and Bothered About. Once again, indefinite detention without trial passed through Congress, but the newspaper merely said, Security is Important. Corporate taxes decreased while the already cash-strapped and debt-ridden average Americans paid more, but the local paper stuck to the official line of Business Fuels the Economy. Charlie asked to have his name removed from the articles.

"This country has gone to hell," Charlie muttered under his breath.

"Watch your language," Jean Pierre barked.

"Pourquoi? Why?" young Matt retorted, springing to Charlie's defense. "It's true. Democracy is dead. We live in a police state. Haven't you seen the soldiers crawling up and down the valley?"

"Mmph," the family assented. A week ago, the latest hybrid of militarized police had showed up in the valley carrying automatic assault rifles and carte blanche to stop and question citizens. Young Matt's impertinence had earned him a black eye and a harsh warning.

"Fear of terrorism has destroyed our country," young Matt complained. "The terrorist attacks started and the military took over everything!"

"Non, it didn't happen overnight," Jean Pierre argued. "It was like the weather in the spring, blowing hot, then cold. Congress passed laws. The courts struck them down. They passed them again. The old president vetoed a few."

"He passed others," Matt interjected. "Even that liberal president
was a nightmare for the Bill of Rights!"
"Bah," Jean Pierre said, waving his hand in disgust, "all politicians are nightmares. You're too young to remember anything."
"Maybe you're too old to - "
Stiff looks from the family silenced the brash young man. He backed down and leaned up against the wall next to Charlie. The cousins exchanged a long look and let their elders take a turn.
"Sure," Rick Dumais began, "terrorism changed things, but this goes back to when the corporations stopped paying taxes and became more powerful than God!"
"Mon Dieu! It is like false idols, eh?" Jean Pierre burst out. "We worship money and it corrupts the soul!"
"Well, we're so broke now that we ought to be saints," Pierrette snapped sharply.
"That's what I told my wife," Rick agreed. "Money is the only vote that matters . . . and we haven't got it!"
The grandfathers nodded at his sensible comment.
"Mais oui," Jean Pierre agreed, "if only millionaires can run for Congress, isn't that taxation without representation? Have we got King George running the show again?"
"Non, non, c'est les trois hommes dans le bain!" young Matt called out.
The three men in the tub! The old men wheezed and howled, slapped their knees and roared back with laughter. Heads shook at the flippant reference to the nation's powerful: the Butcher at the head of the military, the Banker who controlled the major banks, and the Candlestick Maker who ran the fossil fuel industry. Le président-illégitime was nothing more than a rubber ducky floating in their bubble bath. The women laughed into their fists. Shoulders bobbed in amusement.
And yet, it was nothing to joke about. Just last week, a high school student had been arrested for making anti-American jokes.
Humor lights the wick of dissent, it was said, and dissension ignites into terrorism. Censorship grasped the nation in a tight fist of control. The media stayed in line or disappeared overnight. Mail arrived opened at the postbox. Phone conversations were recorded and analyzed in a huge surveillance center out west. The Internet Censors pounced on anything criticizing the government or the corporations, and showed up at your door to arrest you. Nothing was secret. The common expression ran, just between you, me, and the government's spies... Even in this family gathering, it could be risky to voice opinions too loud. Rick Dumais surreptitiously parted the curtains covering the cafe door and squinted up and down the street. An uneasy lull fell over the family as they waited for his shrug.

"Nothing," Rick assured them.

"We're headed toward trouble," Jean Pierre blustered. "They've closed the border and there's no escaping now. Those three men in the tub own everything and control the rest. Half the country works for them and the other half is starving!"

"I read somewhere that it's called plutocracy or oligarchy or something like that," Rick interjected.

"It's corporatocracy, that's what it is," shot out young Matt, his Adam's apple bobbing.

"Non, you don't know what you're talking about, any of you," Old Valier said dismissively. He frowned until his wrinkles reached the bottom of his chin. "It's worse than that: une dictature."

A dictatorship? The older men drew in sharp breaths and began protesting. The younger generation argued against the notion. The women crossed their arms over their chests and pursed their lips. Old Valier shrugged. He preferred to call a horse a horse.

"Well, I am not the only fool who thinks this way. Listen to this," he sniffed dramatically. He pulled a folded paper from his breast pocket and slid his reading glasses up his nose. After peering around to be sure they were listening, he began to read.
"You can call it by a thousand names, but it's all the same. When an elite group of people function in sneaky, undeclared tyranny, they have become, in essence, a closet dictatorship."

Charlie swallowed. Where had his grand-père grabbed hold of that article?

"... due to rampant militarization, unchecked corporate influence on politics, restrictions on civil liberties, and a severe narrowing of the power elite, the United States is no longer a functional democracy..."

Charlie's eyes flicked nervously to the door.

"... unless the people rise up to restore it."

He slouched low in the corner. Every last one of them could be thrown in jail for anti-American activities. Charlie silently quoted along as Valier read the banned article. Every word was utterly familiar to Charlie. After all -

"L'homme du Nord wrote that!" Matt called out in sudden realization.

*The Man from the North.* The room flinched at the sound of the name. Eyes flicked northward. The blood stirred. One man crossed himself automatically. *L'homme du Nord.* Even the mention of the writer evoked a sweat of admiration, envy, and fear. Because of the Internet Censors, his articles were slipped hand-to-hand, smuggled across the border from Canada, taped in the back of pocket Bibles, Uncle Henry's Swap 'n Sells, and Old Farmer's Almanacs. All through the winter, their woodstoves had been kindled by the man's incendiary remarks. He tore apart the corporate-controlled government, decried the rising tide of militarism, and lambasted the grind of economic injustice that held millions in a death grip. *The Man From the North* also regaled his readers with real life stories of courage in the face of oppression. He touched their hearts with passionate tales of kindness in a time of darkness. People looked out their windows at night and thought: *we are not alone in wanting a better world than this.* Prayers had been uttered for the continued
protection of this man's life. They gave thanks for his fearlessness in speaking out when no one else dared. Up and down the valley, they had been stopped and questioned by the authorities about the possible identity of the Man From the North. The federal government hunted him on both sides of the border, trekking far up into Canada in search of the elusive man.

"Pardon?" Valier blinked at young Matt. "This could not possibly have been written by L'homme du Nord."

"Sure it was," the youth replied. "Mon oncle sent that article from Québec."

Valier's voice cracked across the room.

"Charlie!"

Charlie bolted upright. Valier's rheumy, wrinkled old eyes pinned him to the corner. His grandfather shook the article at him. The handwritten scrawl of the pen was clear to all.

"Tell me why - "


"- this is written in your handwriting!"

"Because," a soft voice replied from the doorway, "Charlie is the Man from the North . . . the voice of the Dandelion Insurrection."
Zadie Byrd Gray. She stood on the cafe's threshold like a breath of fresh air. A white scarf covered her black curls. Her boots climbed her calves. Red leggings scaled her thighs. Her jean jacket hugged her like a sailor on shore leave. And that short, tight skirt, Charlie laughed to himself, was nothing but honest. She released the door. The bell tinkled. The cafe was silent. Her lips curled in a slow smile.

The past and present collided in a sudden short-circuiting of time. No one spoke. The family breathed in unison. Eyes leaped back and forth from the young man to the woman. Years of memories were stacked inside them like a set of nesting Russian Zadie-dolls, from the twelve-year old hellion dragged north by her hippie parents to the precocious adolescent strutting the halls of middle-high school like the Queen of America, to the daredevil teenager boasting about her victories in the wild west of adolescent love while young Charlie died in the agonies of unsuspected adoration, to the gorgeous sixteen-year old who broke his heart by running away in a fit of spontaneity, stringing him on with long distance phone calls and whirlwind visits right up until today. She stood in the doorway with that sphinx’s smile while Charlie’s breath slipped out in a sigh. Zadie Byrd Gray. She'd rescued him and ruined him, run wild with him, revived him, released him and returned to him. He couldn't love her an iota more . . . and everyone but Zadie knew it.

Smirks grew. Valier folded his gnarled hands over his cane and fixed his eyes steadily on his grandson. Be patient, he had once told
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	he teenage boy, be patient with that girl. All these years later, Valier could see that Charlie's patience would not last another month. A lit fuse crackled in the young man; explosion was inevitable. Charlie ran a hand through his sandy hair and swallowed hard.

"Welcome back, Zadie," he managed.

"Thanks, Charlie."

She flashed her lightning strike of a grin. Charlie's heart burst into flames. A rumble of snorts and titters broke the silence. Valier rapped the floor with his cane.

"Come, belle, give an old man a proper French greeting," he demanded imperiously.

Zadie swept through the assembly to kiss the old man on each cheek. Charlie died a thousand deaths of envy, stuck in his corner, hemmed in by shoulders and chairs. His mother, Natalie, arched an eyebrow at Zadie's short skirt. Charlie sighed. There was no lost love between those two.

"Now," Valier demanded, holding Zadie's hand and shaking it a little, "tell me why my grandson is making trouble."

"I am not making trouble," Charlie retorted.

Valier rattled the article at him. This was making trouble. This would bring the authorities down on their heads. This was kicking a hornet's nest, smart-mouthing your elders, setting off fireworks in church . . . in short, Valier scowled, this was exactly Charlie's brand of trouble.

Zadie pointed to the article in Valier's hand.

"This is flying like a little bird across the country, delivering messages of courage and waking people up. Charlie's writing is the rallying cry of the Dandelion Insurrection."

Mouths dropped open. Half legend, half real, the stories of the Dandelion Insurrection's spirited resistance rode the rumor-winds that swept across the country. The tales were murmured in
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barbershops and whispered in kitchens, passed between the church pews, and told in hushed tones late at night when husbands and wives climbed into bed. From all directions and corners of the country, the stories came, sharing a common message of hope: the golden soul of humanity was rising up.

When? the hushed voices asked.

In the spring, the rumors replied, when the dandelions bloom.

The wind swept down the prairies with the question.

Where?

The echoing answer leapt from mountaintop to rolling hill to valley floor.

Everywhere.

The Dandelion Insurrection was as small as baking bread in the oven and as large as bringing down dictators. It was practical and metaphorical, symbolic and literal. It was real. It was legend. It spread hope. It grew kindness. It sowed the seeds of resistance in the ground of adversity. Everywhere the concrete of control paved over the goodness of the heart, the Dandelion Insurrection sprang up through the cracks.

In the cafe, an explosion of questions erupted. A barrage of sound roared out as they shouted above each other, thundering, rasping, thumping the floor with their boots, pounding the tables with their fists until Zadie threw her hands over her ears.

"QUIET!" Charlie bellowed.

A score of mouths snapped shut.

"The Dandelion Insurrection," Charlie told them, "is the last hope that people have as our democracy is strangled in the grip of this hidden dictatorship. It is the refusal to be squeezed to death by the hand of fear and greed, but instead, to spring into action to live!"

For a moment, the family stared at him in disbelief. Then every throat broke out once more in a tangle of French and English. A few
voices hastily shushed and silenced the others, muting the noise into a dense thicket of whispers. Curiosity strained against the stranglehold of safety. The questions broke free, rising and falling in a tumbling cacophony of sound. Charlie and Zadie stood quietly as the storm raged around them.

Hello, he mouthed silently. She smiled. Charlie's pulse hammered until he couldn't breathe. Forget my earlier words, he thought. The Dandelion Insurrection is what happens when the heart breaks open with love! The breaking open itself is the insurrection. It is what happens when our love for life and for each other rises up so powerfully within us that we can no longer keep silent, but must leap into passionate action!

This sudden understanding beat ferociously through his veins as the family argued about the hidden dictatorship and democracy's demise. Charlie waited them out. They could bicker until they were blue in the face, but the facts were clear; the police were armed like soldiers, the army swarmed like mosquitoes, the military marched up and down the streets, and what could you do? Nothing. You could not sign petitions. You could not speak out against the government. You could not rally together in the square. Grunts and growls shot around the room. Heads shook. Beards waggled. Sighs and appeals to God slipped out. Elbows leaned on tables. Mouths spat out complaints.

"Charlie?" young Matt asked, nudging his elbow. "Is it true? The Man from the North . . . is that you?"

The cafe silenced abruptly. Natalie's eyes bored sharply into her son. The members of her family were salt of the earth farmers and foresters, not radicals, certainly not revolutionaries! The family stared at the young man as if he had suddenly sprouted horns. Charlie shifted awkwardly.

"Well, yes," he replied.
"Holy boys!" Matt burst out in awe. "I never figured!"

"Well," Charlie answered, "I didn't figure anyone around here was taking those articles seriously."

"I do," Bette confessed.

"Ét moi," Jean Pierre admitted.

"Ah, well," Rick put in shyly, "my wife has them all hidden in her underwear drawer." He blushed beet red as the others burst into laughter. Charlie's mother pushed furiously off the cafe counter and threaded through the chairs. When she reached her father's side, she snatched the handwritten article from the old man's hand. Her eyes scanned it in disbelief.

"Charles-Valier Rider," she snapped, calling her son by his full name, "have you lost your mind?" Natalie's face was pinched with distress. There were soldiers on the street, hunting the Man From the North! "Who put you up to this?" she demanded.

Charlie froze as Natalie glared at Zadie and memory cut him as keenly as a sharpened blade.

"We need a voice, Charlie," Zadie had told him. "The stories of the Dandelion Insurrection must be told. People are rising up against this oppression, but they are few in number and we need more. We need you to plant the seeds of love, creativity, and courage. We need your poetry."

"But I'm a reporter, not a poet," he protested.

"Wrong," Zadie had contradicted, "you're a poet, not a reporter. Your writing has a revolution of metaphor and beauty beating against the jail of your practicality."

Charlie stared at her.

"How did you know that?" he asked.

Zadie smiled.

"It keeps escaping. Besides," she went on, "it's not enough to report the facts of the Dandelion Insurrection. You'll need poetry to
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capture its essence. The Dandelion Insurrection slips out of its own parameters. It's as big as restoring democracy and as small as saying hello to your neighbors. Sometimes, it looks so ordinary that you don't even know it's there."

A blaze of writing had hurtled from him like a firebrand of resistance. *Be like the dandelions, he had written, spring up in intolerable soils, dare to stand up against violence and hatred, blossom into love.* Charlie translated the articles into French so the authorities would suspect he was Canadian. The underground presses across the border switched them back to English before sending them anywhere the seeds of resistance would take them. All winter, he had used the stories Zadie told him to ignite the dormant courage of the nation. The words couldn't fly fast enough from his fingertips. He raked the coals of frustration, stirred up the smoldering piles of despair, and tore off the smothering effects of fear. *Be like the dandelions, he wrote, courageous, bold defenders of the golden soul of humanity, fearless in the face of adversity.*

Zadie sent word back to him: people were listening. Charlie watched in awe as rumors of his infamy circulated. In America, they began to call him the *Man From the North*. Following the French clues, the authorities searched in Quebec, Montreal, even as far as France. The dark fist of oppression tightened. Charlie wrote despite its shadow. The fingers of the government crawled across the land. Charlie kept churning out his articles. The hot stench of infuriated tyranny fumed. Charlie held his breath . . . and kept on writing.

Two weeks ago, Zadie had left a cryptic message on his landline. "Get ready to go."

She didn't say where. She didn't hint when. She left Charlie, as always, hanging in breathless uncertainty. He eyed the border nervously. He waited for her call. He crossed his fingers, prayed in church, packed his bags, and hoped-against-hope that Zadie would
reach him before the federal agents. For days, he had tiptoed nervously around his Ma, hating to lie to her, knowing that he would vanish and she would not know the reason why.

Now she knows, Charlie sighed, but that doesn’t make it any easier.

Natalie drew all five feet and two inches of herself up in a storm of outrage. The entire cafe hunkered down. Valier murmured in a conciliatory tone. She sliced him with the steel in her eyes.

"Charlie, you must stop writing these at once!"

Charlie clenched his jaw.

"Ma, I’m not a little boy anymore."

"Non. By now, you should have better sense," Natalie snapped.

"How many times have you said that God took away all my common sense and gave me curiosity instead?" Charlie shot back.

Old Valier sighed. That boy got his fire from his father, Scott Rider, may the man rest in peace. Even now, he could see that rebellious, motorcycle-riding atheist in the determined lines of Charlie’s face. Stubborn. Headstrong. Insistent. Valier’s eyes flicked up to his daughter. Ah voyons! Who was he fooling? Look at the woman, hands on her hips, one toe tapping; still wearing tight blue jeans just like the day she had ridden off on the back of Scott Rider’s motorcycle; still poking her stubborn chin up as defiantly as when she had returned to the valley pregnant with Charlie, not yet married to Scott, unashamed and unrepentant. Valier sighed. The boy got his stubbornness from both ends.

"Charlie," he said gently, "you are in danger, maybe we can hide you. We can make sure the police don’t know you are the Man From the North."

The family nodded solemnly, but Charlie shook his head.

"No, grand-père. The time of winter and hiding is over. Haven’t you heard the river? The ice is on the move, cracking and booming, yearning to break free. It is spring. The dandelions are erupting from
the soil. It's not time for hiding... it's time for action."

He had their attention now. No one stirred.

"How long will you sit around, talking, talking, talking, but doing nothing? Already, the border is closed. Already, we risk arrest just for speaking in this way. What will it take for you to say, enough? We tuck our heads between our legs, trying to spare our loved ones suffering... but the road of complacency never leads to the end of suffering. It leads to death!"

The younger men along the walls were throwing glances at each other, agreeing with Charlie's words. The ring of older men who had lived through hardship and bitterness wore their weary cynicism on their scowling faces. To them, Charlie made another appeal.

"What is life without freedom?" Charlie asked. "Real freedom, not just from terrorists, but from oppressive control? Nous sommes les Acadians. We are Acadians. We have pride in ourselves, our families, our land, and hard work... but one day, we will hide our heads in shame, looking back at these times and knowing that we did nothing."

"Bah," Jean Pierre dismissed him, "you are a boy. You have never fought for anything. I have spilled blood for this country. I have lost brothers for this country. I will not take up arms against my country!"

Charlie regarded him steadily for a moment.

"Nor I," he agreed softly. "I will not take up arms against any man. But I will stand up for the principles this nation was founded upon; the freedom of speech and assembly, the right to a fair and speedy trial, and the equality of all human beings."

"Huh," Natalie snorted, folding her arms across her chest, "and you plan to do all this with your bare hands, eh?"

"Yes, if I must," Charlie answered. "But my bare hands wield the tools of nonviolent struggle; the tools of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesus, Gandhi, and countless more through history. Matt knows about them. He has read my articles."
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Matt looked up red-faced.
"Yuh, and I can tell anybody what they want to know." The young clown of the family was not laughing now. He appealed to them in earnest. "We've got to take a stand. The Man From the North - Charlie, that is - he made good points in those articles." Matt looked from one face to another, expecting to be rebuked by the elders, but they were grave and silent, weighing his words. "I joked about the three men in the tub, but, by god, when just three men control us all, it is not funny! The Banker has been foreclosing on families all over the country. How long will it be before it starts to happen here?"

Old Mathieu spoke up.
"They're not going to get my land. We've worked that land for four hundred years."

"If they can't get you off by economics, they'll do it by military force," Charlie warned them. "Remember le Grand Dérangement?"

The faces grew stony around him. He had tapped the root of centuries old bitterness from when the British had expelled the French families from the valley.

"It didn't work," Jean Pierre said stiffly. "We returned."

"It can happen again," Charlie replied. "It is happening now. In other regions of the country, where the land rests above minerals or gas, they are pushing out the families by economics, by laws, and by force."

Zadie spoke up softly.
"If we don't do something now, our kids won't even remember the freedoms or rights that our forefathers fought for. We must resist this slide into authoritarian control! My parents will help you. You joke about them being hippies, but they have a wealth of knowledge to lend. They have trained in nonviolent struggle and they are connected to Dandelion Insurrectionists all across the country."
"And," Matt added proudly, "we've got Charlie; the Man from the North!"

Zadie shook her head.

"The authorities are raking their talons through this valley looking for the Man from the North," Zadie told them solemnly. "That's why they closed the border. I came to take Charlie out of the country, but I got here too late."

"It doesn't matter, anyway," Charlie said. "We can't run away from what's happening in this country. We've got to meet it, head on."

Natalie stiffened as if the air had just left the room. Her heart clutched her chest. Her boy was gone, swept like a ghost from the stark reality of the present. Her son was a stranger, a man with burning determination in his eyes, sandy hair left uncut, a leanness to his angular cheeks, the heat of his youth tempered by a fierce winter of thought, now standing there, a man, yearning to give himself, his words, his breath, and his life to this troubled world.

"Charlie."

He flinched. The way she shhched the 'Ch' and bit down on the 'r' and raised the pitch of her voice right at the end . . . that was her warning tone of trouble, often followed by a tirade. Natalie was the youngest of Valier's children, spoiled and cossetted by her seven older siblings, but she had grown into a woman made of iron sinew; short, petite, and tough. She pinned her son with a fierce look.

"I will never forgive you for being an idiot," she said shortly.

Charlie groaned.

"Ma - "

"But," she cut him off, "I have read the articles of L'homme du Nord, in English and en français! And I agree, we must do something." He blinked at her unexpected and sudden support. She straightened up and looked at the family.
"They closed the border a week before my niece's wedding. Are we going to do nothing about it?" she demanded.

They shifted uncomfortably.

"Eh, but what can we do?" Rick Dumais answered.

"Resist," Charlie urged them. "Push back. March across the border dressed in your wedding finery, if you must."

Zadie supported him.

"All across the country, people like you are in this position," she said. "They can't hold a baseball game without a permit. They can't recite the Declaration of Independence without being hauled down to the police station for an interrogation. People are rising up because they must."

"Mais oui," Natalie agreed, "and so must we! If the whole valley goes across the border together, they will have a hard time stopping everyone, won't they?"

The young fiancée blanched.

"I don't know, Aunt Natalie . . . that is . . . what if we are all arrested?"

"Lynnette," Natalie shot back, "do you want to get married next week?"

"Mais oui!"

"Then we're going to have to stand up for your right to do so!"

Charlie smiled. Grand-père always said that Natalie had inherited her mother's spirit. She stamped her heel on the floor and glared at the rest of the family.

"It's time we made a fuss about these restrictions on assemblies over twenty," she declared. "I can't even have you all over for Sunday dinner without a permit. C'est absurde! We need to make a stink about how the government is destroying l'héritage culturel Acadians with their senseless laws. We aren't terrorists - "

"Nous sommes les Acadians!" Valier roared out, completing her
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sentence with a bark of laughter. Hands clapped in approval. The family broke into conversation, gnawing on strategy and worry, bursting out in small explosions of epithets for the stupidity of the boy, of the government, and of them all! In the ruckus, Natalie reached over and grabbed her son.

"When are you leaving?" she demanded.

"Now, I think," he answered, glancing at Zadie for confirmation.

"It would be best," Zadie told Natalie softly.

"Oh!" She pulled her son into an awkward hug, telling herself it would not be the last time. "Well," she said, lost for words. "Charlie, I - " Natalie bit her lip. Tears pushed to come out, but she was determined not to make a scene. Behind them, they heard Valier bark out a command. Charlie swore under his breath and bolted for the door. How many times had the old man played this trick on him, ordering his cousins to -

"Catch him!" the old man's command burst through the room. Matt and Rick pushed off the walls and leapt for Charlie, shaking the cafe with their commotion. Chairs crashed to the floor as Valier yelled to them.

"My own grandson is the Man from the North? Catch that wicked boy! I will smack him for his stupidity . . . and bless him for his courage!"

Smiles broke out in the melee of tumbling bodies. Rick Dumais seized his torso. He shot a quick nod to Matt and they swept Charlie off his feet, hoisting him up onto his back in the air.

"L'homme du Nord! L'homme du Nord!" they chanted.

"Put me down!" Charlie cried.

Zadie started laughing.

"You're not helping!" he told Zadie.

Natalie began to chuckle, too. Bette's wheeze broke loose from her chest. Jean Pierre's snorting guffaws shot out. Matt and Guy's
hands shook. Charlie bobbed midair.
"You're all crazy!" he hollered at them.
The bell above the door jingled.
Heads swung toward it.
A policeman entered.
Everyone froze.
"Bonjour, Officer," Valier said politely as the uniformed man scanned the scene with a fierce scowl. Startled eyes and shocked faces instantly alerted the policeman's suspicion.
"What is going on here?" he growled.
The officer's teeth clicked as he began to count the occupants of the room.
"Assemblies of more than twenty must have a permit."
"This is a restaurant," Pierrette called out, trying to keep her voice from shaking.
"You are not eating. This is a meeting of more than . . . " He tried to tally their numbers, but Jean Pierre blocked his view.
"Eh? There cannot be twenty of us here!" Jean Pierre protested. A sudden flurry of relatives ducked behind the counter and into the kitchen. The rest stayed frozen in place, hearts thumping in their throats.
"What are you doing with that man?" the officer asked, pointing at Charlie.
"Huh? Oh. Uh . . . we are just - " Jean Pierre stammered as they searched rapidly for an explanation. They certainly could not say that they had, at this very moment, taken hold of the Man from the North. Rick Dumais coughed. Old Mathieu creaked in his chair. Natalie scuffed the floorboards with her shoe. Valier shoved Charlie's article out of sight. The officer waited for an answer.
"Eloping!" Zadie exclaimed breathlessly. "We are eloping. Me
and him." She pointed at Charlie.

"Oui, monsieur," Valier agreed quickly. "It is an old French tradition to carry the groom out on his back . . . eh . . . as if he is on his way to his funeral!"

There was an old tradition of bullshit, too, Charlie thought, but now was not the time to point that out. The relatives quickly supported Valier, explaining in convoluted French-English sentences l’héritage culturel Acadiens in a contradictory tumble of invented traditions. The policeman’s frown bent in confusion, but before the officer could piece together the glaring inconsistencies, Valier leaned on his cane and stood.

"I am the boy’s oldest blood relative," he announced, frowning severely as if preparing to give or withhold his benediction upon his grandson’s proposed marriage. Valier pondered Zadie solemnly, shaking his head. Matt and Rick muttered something about hurrying it up . . . the boy weighed more than a barrel of potatoes.

"Yes," Valier continued, "the boy has pleaded his case. He is headstrong. He wants to go forward with this. It is foolish. It is crazy."

Charlie held his breath, realizing that Valier was talking not about the imagined elopement, but about the Dandelion Insurrection. Valier cleared his throat and took Zadie by the hand.

"What this girl is asking our boy to do, is to . . . eh," he paused, looking askance at the policeman. "Well, she wants him to stand up for the rights of all men to determine their own lives."

The old man switched to French, declaring that the essence of freedom granted everyone the right to live and love. It was a holy trust from God, and must be protected by all.

"Life? Liberty? Love? Who are we to stand against such things?!" he asked them. He stood up straight and rapped the floor with his cane. It was the moment of truth, were they for or against Charlie?
"La vie. La liberté. L'amour. Who will stand up for it?" Valier demanded.
"Moi!" cried out Matt.
"Moi aussi!" seconded Rick.
"Pour la vie!" hollered out Mathieu.
"Pour la liberté!" yelled Jean Pierre.
"Pour l'amour!" roared petite Natalie.

Zadie let out a whoop of delight. Valier thumped his cane, gesturing, *carry him out!* He hobbled quickly through the door as the policeman held it open. Matt and Rick paraded Charlie out. He lay stiff as a board, his heart pounding, turning his head away as the officer looked curiously at him.

"Wish us luck, Officer," Zadie requested, pulling on the man's arm to distract him. Charlie choked. Leave it to Zadie to have the gall to ask the police to wish good luck upon an insurrection. The officer glanced up at Charlie, unimpressed.

"Seems like you might need it," he said.
Charlie rolled his eyes. *Officer, he longed to say, you have no idea.*

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