

woken him this way – with an apple peeled, cored and quartered lying opened up on a white saucer.

He felt his mother shifting off the bed and watched for the flare of yellow light as she struck the match for the oil lamp. The cellar walls flickered and then settled in the new light, and the boy saw his mother was dressed to go out. She had her coat on and her hat with the brown feather at the back. It was only then that he remembered. His stomach turned over inside him and tears choked at his throat. The morning he had thought would never come, had come. Every night since he'd first heard about it, he prayed it might not happen to him; and the night before, he had prayed he would die in his sleep rather than wake up and have to go.

'You were restless again last night, dear. Did you sleep?' He nodded, not trusting himself to speak. 'Come on now. Eat your apple and get dressed. Quick as you can, dear. It's six o'clock by the station, they said. It's a quarter-to now. I left you as long as I could.'

Fifteen minutes left. Fifteen minutes and he'd be gone. Thirty minutes and she would be back in this house without him. She was bending over him, shaking his shoulder. 'Please, dear. We must hurry.

Eat it down, quickly now. Miss Roberts said you'd be having a roll and jam on the train, but you must have something before you go.'

'Don't want it, Mum.' He handed the saucer back to her. Only moments before he had been savouring that first bite of his apple. They were always crisp, always juicy, like nothing else. But now he felt sick at the sight of it.

'You must, David. You always have your apple. You know you do.'

He had upset her and ate it to make her happy, swallowing it like medicine, trying not to taste it. Each bite reminded him that this was the last apple.

Once out of bed he dressed to keep the cold out. His mother was packing his suitcase and he watched everything going in and wondered where he'd be when he took it all out again.

'They said only one case, so there's only room for one change of clothes. All the things you wanted, they're at the bottom. I'll send on the rest as soon as I know where you'll be.' She smoothed down his coat collar and brushed through his hair with her fingers. 'You'll do,' she said, smiling softly.

'Do I have to, Mum? Do I have to go?' Even as he asked he knew it was useless. Everyone was going