

From “Look for Me in the Whirlwind”

Kuwasi Balagoon

1971

My father and mother were very law-abiding people, who paid taxes and got up early to go to work, ate miniature breakfasts and made sandwiches out of lunch meat or leftovers and made separate dashes five times a week to work, and kept a close eye on every paycheck and expenditure, slaving and saving. My oldest sister, Mary, joined them when she became of age, making three mad dashes five times a week. My father worked for the U.S. Printing Office, and my mom and Mary Day worked at Fort Meade, Maryland. Their love for my other sister Diane and for me, the only boy and the baby of the family—and the concept that you’ve got to work somewhere, and all-suffering determination—enabled them to rush to the job, and getting there, work and teach white folks how to do the type of work encountered, and then watch them climb the governmental ladder quickly, while they themselves rose slowly and painfully step by slow stop. They did that for twenty-five years, so we could have food and clothes and goodies.

My youngest sister and I were left during the day under the supreme guidance of “Mama,” our grandmother, Aka Mama Shine, Ann Shine, Mama Hattie, Mrs. Williams, and different combinations thereof. We lived very clannishly, and our family transcended blood lines. People I’ve called “cousin” all my life—I’ve yet to see the hook-up.

As I arrived, my father announced to all within range of his voice that I would be a doctor and a professional football player, boxer, or base ball player, but that is not the case, as you see. Nobody knows my first words, because it took me four years to be understood. Mama (my grandmother), the spiritual leader of the family, hipped us to some highlights of her past. Wasn’t none of that three-pigs bullshit around the house. We heard no Humpty Dumpty poetry; instead she said, “If a man is what he isn’t, if he isn’t what he am, then as sure as I’m atalking then he isn’t worth a damn.” Right on, Mama!

Before even learning how to talk kids look for their cues. Black kids like all kids are subject to having TV invade their consciousnesses, and indeed TV reflects all situations as bad and black people’s worst. Of course I remember Tarzan movies and Jungle Jim flicks, and I watched them closely and often. I suppose I related to it but of course after a while I nixed both of them off. My main TV hero was Superman. After the TV pictured him coming out of a phone booth and taking to the sky I began to picture myself faster than a speeding bullet and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. It went to my head. Until one day I tied a towel around my neck fashioned like a cape and after finding out I couldn’t take off the ground, climbed on top of a swing and jumped off. It’s a bird, it’s a plane, it’s that nutty Weems kid—crunch! I rolled around holding my

ankle with both hands and hollering for Mama. It was broken, I knew it was, because anything that hurt that bad had to be broken. Mama came to my aid, checked it out, and became the first person in history to heal a broken bone with rubbing alcohol. After that I started using more conventional means of transportation, like walking, bicycles, things like that.

I was a wild kid, but my folks took very good care of me. When I was a child I never went hungry, and everything I asked for within reason I had—if not immediately, then as surely as the coming of running water and indoor toilets. I ate until I was full and fed the rest to Nippy, my sneaky, vicious, obedient friend and family watchdog. Nippy didn't bark or vacillate before attack. The immediate family loved Nippy and Nippy loved the immediate family; everyone else was subject to being chewed for the slightest provocation or for free. He attacked Uncle John every time he had a chance—as if Uncle John didn't have enough problems with a little old lady across the tracks burning roots on him and Aunt Teresa.

Once a new insurance man plodded his route to our house. Nippy watched and waited for the alien to get up on the front porch, then dogged along behind him in a good-natured manner showing no intentions to do harm, playing it to a bust, even wagging his tail—then snap-rip, snap! The alien was petrified, begging for “help!” Luckily for him Mama was home. I watched as long as it lasted, and if it would have lasted longer, then longer I would have watched. To my dismay, and the alien's prayer, Mama appeared and called Nip off. Making one last threatening grab, he left the scene as he came, and went back to his bone. Barking dogs don't bite. Strange how a lot of big-mouthed, long-winded, so-called revolutionaries possess less initiative than an apolitical dog.

Mary Day met Jimmy, and everybody dug him. My mother's only complaint was that he wouldn't keep a job. He played guitar, talked cool, and was like a big brother to me. And a beer partner of sorts. My father would let my sister and me sip out of a bottle or can he was drinking, and once or twice, while company was over, I managed to steal a whole can to myself—but was caught, obviously drunk. Jimmy was cooler than that. He'd just pick up a couple of bottles at the package store and we would ride around, you know, shooting the shit, until I was cool too.

The Christmas I was thirteen was a super Christmas for a materialistic youth. Jimmy had a job at a department store warehouse, as a truck driver. Whenever he could he liberated. Good God he liberated, we couldn't get everything under the tree. I had at least one of everything that Mattel and all their competitors put out. Santa Claus drove a truck that year. The whole family had surprises.

The summer I was fourteen went on in the usual way—you know, baseball, the creek, shooting birds, standing on the corner. Then one day a friend told me that Jimmy was in jail. “Naw, man.” He said it was in the papers. That Jimmy had raped a white girl. “Naw man.” I shot home and my sister and Mom corrected me, “The cops got Jimmy, they say he raped a white girl.”

He was being held in Marboro County jail, which looked like one of those jails in the westerns. Mary Day started getting money together for bail but then there wasn't no bail. Jimmy knew of this Negro lawyer that was supposed to be all right and passed word out to obtain this guy. Soon conferences followed and sometimes on Sunday we would go out to that racist jail. His cell was at the corner of it and a small window, blocked by a large shade tree, was his only source of fresh air. Today I know I would climb a tree like that with a fistful of hacksaw blades.

Marboro County jail was and probably still is a chamber of horrors where a black man could get whipped half or all the way to death for breaking the cold, concrete silence, replying to a question or statement with any sign of resentment, or for having the wrong tone in his voice.

State storm troopers would drop by with super-large flashlights and sticks and check out the menu. Everybody I'd seen after a stay there came back with bad news, because Marboro was bad news, even worse news than Hyattsville, and it's no secret that the cops would put a telephone book on a "nigger's" head, take out their "niggersticks" and try to kill that book. I've heard brothers say that the cops were so mean that they even used to break up white boys. Cowing down did no good.

The trial began. The family stood by him; I wasn't permitted to go to court, but this was how it was related to me later. The courthouse had segregated toilets, not that my folks wanted to sit down and shit beside crackers but with them came the signs: "white ladies"—"colored," and "white gentlemen"—"colored males." They gave doubtless support to the doctrine of white supremacy. The pigs lightened up on the water fountains, with just "white" and "colored" signs over them. Jimmy was escorted by ten police. The jury was all racist cracker local yokels. The white girl's clothes weren't torn and she didn't have any kind of cuts or unusual red spots. Virgin Mary's untorn dress and contradictory testimony didn't mean a thing. The jury went out for about fifteen minutes and came back with a guilty verdict, and Jimmy was sentenced to life.

Jimmy had been living off tea and bread and spent the last four days at Marboro without anything to eat, and then was sent to Maryland State Pen in Baltimore. There's only one good that came out of the whole thing: in November of '68 he busted out that motherfucker and to this day, it's my understanding that he's still at large.

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I missed the march on Washington—by going to football practice—but later I read Malcolm's comments on it and heard him rap twice on TV and his logic and stance took root in my mind. I had also heard Dr. King, but wasn't particularly impressed. Pictures of Bull Connors, beating demonstrators, turned my stomach. And the events that took place at the rebellion in Cambridge, Maryland, showed a far better action for black people to take even then. A sure-enough riot jumped off at the then-new D.C. stadium on Thanksgiving Day. With a predominantly white high school football team playing Eastern, the brothers lost the game but didn't lose the fight. The reports of the multiplicity of ass-whippings administered by black folks to white folks, for a change, turned me on. That to me was a moment for rejoicing. Many nights while walking home on the side of Route 1 or through the White community, College Park, a carload of crackers would ride past and throw bottles out of the window and shout, "Nigger!"

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My grandma taught me how to write my name and count and I started the first grade at five, fell in love with Miss Sheppard, kissed her every day, but simply could not stand being cooped up in one room all day, and failed, and barely squeezed through by the jagged edges of my teeth on the retake.

The third year in grade school found me at least looking at the blackboard and books. Miss Carson was a good enough teacher, but waiting for lunch still consumed most of the morning. Mama believed in heavy breakfasts and lunches and it was absolute law that it all be eaten. "Don't you know that there are people in the world that wished they had what you're throwing away?" For some time, too, because of speech difficulties I attended speech classes. I never passed a spelling test; the reasoning was that I couldn't spell a damn because I couldn't talk a damn. But somehow I passed, maybe because Miss Carson'd had enough.

The third grade was a very memorable year. The teacher was one of the most beautiful women on the face of the planet. Memory brings her right into focus: she was thin down to her hips,

which flowered and tapered down to ample legs. And although at school I waded into my dreams, my attention came to her and daydreams included her. I remember her saying, “Donald, stop looking at my—feet.” I sang songs to her in my dreams. She, being concerned, kept me from going to recess and kept me after school, drilling the lessons to me—but I wasn’t very receptive, too stunned by her beauty to understand anything else. My mother, concerned as ever, pressured me to my studies after going to parent-teacher meetings but—zonk.

I remember one day she wore a red dress to school with no bra. I came out of a daydream just long enough to see one of her small but ample, succulent breasts fall from the dress. Good God Almighty—it sprang up and stared out into my eyes. Embarrassed, she was caught off guard. She whipped it right back behind the bright red barrier, then followed my straight line of vision until our eyes met, then nixed it and me off. One could tell that she didn’t feel like working that day, but in time it passed. Let it be understood, the value of the whole experience, especially at such a young age. I hope she is not embarrassed by this but flattered.

Miss Reed taught sixth grade, and when I entered that grade I entered petrified. Miss Reed didn’t dig horse playing, clowning, or daydreaming. My sister had been an excellent student, which was one problem for me; and Miss Reed was legend, a smoke-bringer. She wasn’t a big woman but obviously a healthy one. I must admit that she was a good teacher, and that means she held the interest of the students, and tried to make what she was teaching relevant. She rapped about the issues of the day, civil rights, the missile race, and so forth, and made a rule that we had to bring in current events. Failing that or any homework was trouble. My folks dug her. Any means she used to teach me was all right with them. To me, then, she was a monster, with my very own mother giving her the green light. Miss Reed dug that I needed help on reading, like a few other students, and started a special reading class on Saturdays, and continued the class into the summer. She never ran out of gas. Before that I only tugged and pulled at the few things that interested me, but after that I could really read. And I began wanting to be a veterinarian.

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The summer after ninth grade I began to work at Berwyn Fuel and Feed, loading trucks with bags of cement, kegs of nails, and wallboard. It was a time of growth mentally and physically. I ate breakfasts of six eggs and six slices of bacon and two lunches, plus with the extra money I could buy more wine. Working around older cats I turned into a wizard at cutting down people’s mothers.

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I came back from the army, and Lakeland was exactly the same as I left it. Entering by cab was like being in a time machine, the same dogs barking and every tree and rock in place. The family was surprised. After the initial shock they ran down all about who got married and who died and me and Daddy drank rum until late and then retired. The next day I went out to see if things were the same. They were. School chums had hatted up for D.C. or college, and after a couple of days I was beat. So I started going into D.C., running down old friends and partners.

Meanwhile, after some test, I started working as a clerk and messenger at the U.S. Department of the Interior—which was an immediate drag. I went to parties all over the area and to New York every once in a while—later, every other weekend—but the escape wasn’t enough, even with smoke and speed, so I quit the job and moved to New York. During this time also I read the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and thought about what was on my mind to do, and what I in fact was doing—walking around with eyeballs looking like they were cut with a razor, doing

nonsense at work, helping somebody else's world go round, and falling to sleep coming home on the bus from work.

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In the army, basic training, there was one sergeant who was the terror of the camp. After picking up cigarette butts in the rain—which I loathed, number one because I didn't smoke—we were called into a formation, whereupon this sergeant would call out names, to which we were to answer, "Here, Sergeant." Then when several dudes didn't answer loud enough—I saw it, I swear—he said, "Come here." They came and stood at attention. "Grab your balls." They grabbed their balls. Then he demanded, "Squeeze!" And, "Does it hurt?" "Yes, Sergeant." "Squeeze harder! Does it hurt?" "Yes, Sergeant!" "Squeeze!" From the ranks I could hardly control myself from laughing, but somehow covered it. Fools were turning red and crying, and squeezing.

I took so much bullshit that I got headaches from suppressing my anger, in order not to get a 208. [A "208" is discharge as an "undesirable".]

I was sent to Germany. As time went on I got an Article 15 for "impersonating a Pfc." When I argued about it, noting that wearing other people's field jackets was a common occurrence, the punk-ass company commander said that he had only seen *me* doing that, and the first sergeant said, "Article 34, conduct unbecoming a soldier, would hold up just as well." [Article 15 is a rule under which one is reprimanded but usually not subject to court martial. Article 34 is a rule under which one is subject to court martial.]

I hit it off all right later in the third platoon, being a field soldier in the field, and being in good understandings with the brothers. But there was a lot of shit that had been bugging me for a long time. Besides the ridiculous changes that all enlisted men went through, there was an added factor: rampant racism on all levels. A captain who was black was demoted to sergeant E-6 before our very eyes and shipped out. Brothers would spend 34 or 35 months of a 36-month enlistment and then get dishonorable discharges—white soldiers had to make successive super-duper fuck-ups before the same would happen to them (like throw a German citizen off a bridge into the river in the month of January). If a brother whipped a white boy, under just about any circumstances, then disciplinary action was on the way—but not vice versa. And motherfuckers were still rapping that A-Company–C-Company shit. I rapped anti-American.

We blacks who felt we were marked men, on whom designs had been made to take care of 208-style, looked at the injustices on the post, had a secret meeting, and formed an organization based on fucking up racists. We called ourselves De Legislators, because we were going to make and enforce new laws that were fair. We were De Judge, De Prosecutor, De Executioner, Hannibal, and De Prophet. We said we would go to jail for a reason and not the season. We would get 208, but would make the brass go gray and bawl and stay up a whole lot of nights giving it to us.

From then on, every time a racial situation appeared, we did. Every time white G.I.s ganged a black G.I., we moved to more than even the score. One at a time we would catch up with them and beat and stomp them so bad that helicopters would have to be used to take them to better hospitals than the ones in the area. We were not playing. We would plan things so that we could kick something off inside a club that would instantly turn into a riotous condition—once everything was in chaos it was impossible to pick us out. We then broke faces and bodies of whoever we planned to get, and made our escape. Afterward we would have critiques, just like in the end of war games; get our alibis together; and keep the whole thing under our hats.

The CID [Criminal Investigation Division of the armed services] began investigating us, and the Provost Marshal. We began to want 208s but were beating motherfuckers up so bad they

wouldn't name us. One of my partners, Huff, had a very high moral character, and broke me out of the habit of talking about people's mothers. He was an earnest social student and passed on worthy literature. He and Rhodes were the best of company. Rhodes was serious-minded about the struggle; and he oftentimes related that he grew up with the four sisters who were murdered by the racists in Birmingham in the explosion of the church.

We avenged an attack made on a brother and a Latin brother, by attacking and thoroughly whipping eight crazy geeks on another post, in their own company area. Our thing was stomping "chucks," as we called them: quickly knocking them off their feet, and kicking, stomping, and jumping with both feet in their faces. I began keeping a close count of one-punch knockouts: 8 in September, 10 in October, 14 in November. The CID kept on me and we kept on. One Legislator was soon courtmartialed—actually on a frame-up—and I was getting an Article 15 for fighting in a riot-torn club.

The company commander at that time was a complete dodo. I mean, lost in space. Once, in the field, while pointing out a route from one tactical position to another on a map, he placed his entire palm on the map and said, "We're here." I mean where—Germany? Then he slid it straight across the map and stopped and said, "We're going there." Nobody could believe what they heard and saw, then dug who was talking. What the fool was saying was that there was a road on the map going across rivers and straight through or up and down mountains. Of course, there was no such road. But that was the end of his map orientation: "We are here and we're going there." This fool was sent to Vietnam, this babbling idiot, with maybe a hundred and sixty men at his disposal, and he showed he could dispose of every one of them.

When Westmoreland needed more pawns, he got some from our company. And a lot of men went home—two Legislators, and friends—and we got a new company commander, a new first sergeant, a new platoon leader, and I made Pfc. (after being in the army 18 months—it usually takes 6).

During this time other cats began to fight when we fought. The Latins, the Hawaiians, the Indians, and the sure-enough outlaw whites fought with us. Which made a really painful confusion for our enemies in these "race riots." We even made scared motherfuckers useful—by knocking out a creep in the doorway of a building with only one exit, everybody trying to leave the scene had to step on him. And if the MPs came in, the more the merrier.

There were some hip dudes in De Legislators. Hannibal had earned his name by kicking ass. I had earned the name De Prophet by prophesying that so-and-so was going to get fucked up in a predetermined amount of time, and then going on and fucking the chump up. Brothers had asked how come I had never got busted. First, we were careful; and second, we were decisive, never saying, "One more ass to kick and then I'm going to stop"—always five more asses to kick. I wish that I'd kept in touch with the Legislators, and a few other brothers from that time, because sincere comrades are hard to come by.

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One spring, in the army in Europe, I took leave in Spain and came back AWOL, broke, jet-black, and bony, with balls like BBs. I not only went to Spain, but out of my mind. Got hip to good reefer, and stayed at a pension in a small seaside village, ate octopus, played the sets, came from out of the lime pits and into a little Spanish castle magic. Even the long trip back was hip: I ran into brothers from Africa and we rapped all across the French frontier.

Then on the very last lap of the trip, I found myself eighty pfennigs short, and couldn't pay for a ticket back to post. One hundred pfennigs equal one mark, and a German mark is about one

American quarter. Looking around the train station wondering what to do, I noticed a cracker Spec 5 standing around and approached the fellow American soldier. I explained my situation: since one Yankee dollar equals three marks and eighty pfennigs, I asked the dude to give me a dollar and I'd give him three marks, to which he replied, "Boy, that's like giving you a quarter." Now, this cracker really knew how to say "boy." There were too many people around to kill this motherfucker. He couldn't have known he was talking to De Prophet.

I got so angry I had to walk that shit off, and for a long time I walked, hardly seeing anything but straight in front of me. I thought about actually going to Vietnam to protect the shit this cracker represented to me. "God damn right I'd shoot him." I walked about two hours trying to get my stuff together, until I found a military post where a brother I did not know gladly gave me a dollar and said, "Ah, fuck it," when I attempted to hand three marks to him.

In Spain people had asked me if it was all right if they called me mister. I felt compelled to be respectful. It was as if I had actually become a part of the community, during that short time that I was there. I knew all the little kids, had nicknames for them, and people actually cried when I left.

Back at the post all the brothers were glad to see me and gleamed as I reported to them—but even as I told them I wondered why Spain had seemed so hip. Now Barcelona is fast. In fact I ran into a brother who seemed to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown because the hookers and con men had got over on him so tough, and I had to round on the dude immediately, because I figured that he might be running down a game himself. I mean that Playa del Toro was Spain's 42nd Street, and the neighborhood behind it was a Spanish ghetto, full of players. It came to me that the little resort town I'd stayed in was hip because most everybody there had bread, including myself, nobody seemed to be in need. The police were idle, they just stood on their favorite corner and smoked all day in this town, and people came there to spend money. I was unaware of the political climate, and until I got back to Germany I was unaware of the lesser degree of racism.

At Barcelona station, I sat with a Spanish lady until four o'clock in the morning and we rapped in broken English and Spanish and sign language. The station was empty except for us, there was time on our hands, and we were hip to each other. She was waiting for a train bringing her children in and I for a train going out. There was no Queen-Virgin-Mary-about-to-be—"better-death-than-this"—raped by a gorilla, who grew a long tail at midnight, who would rip her pussy open. It wasn't on the scene on either mind, nor any fucked-up vibrations. A very un-American experience, un-German experience, a pleasant experience, which should be everyday people action.

Another time, I had waited and saved and I took off for London. Which was home. I vowed to stop processing my hair after seeing the nappy brothers and sisters there. And also there I felt and became more committed to black liberation. While standing on a corner one morning, rapping to some West Indian, African, Asian, and South American brothers, it occurred to me, like through the flow and substance of the conversation and their mannerisms, that we were really brothers. Among them and the beautiful black sisters, I was home. A brother got over on me for some gunjee and the rest of the breads I had just run into gave him a choice to either give up the gunjee or the rest of the bread, and I ascended into the brotherhood. After hearing German music and that cowboy shit-kicking shit so often for so long, and then hearing nothing but Otis Redding and James Brown and sure-enough soul bands, and doing some honest-to-goodness jamming, my soul revived.

Relaxing, partying, learning and teaching and talking about what was happening with black people all over the world, was a natural tonic. Yeah baby, Revolutionary Cultural Exchange.

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In New York, staying at my sister's place, I got on down with the tenants in the rent strike, joined the community council on housing, and started helping to organize other buildings, while doing volunteer work at Project Rescue. I soon found myself with a real purpose, doing things unselfishly and seeing direct results of it. That summer I continued to work under Mrs. Sims, until I got more experience and could teach and explain to others by having them follow me through by routine. When anti-poverty funds came in I got an apartment to myself. Spare time caught me at the Aruba Temple, the bookstores, and out in the neighborhood, or trying to hook up something with other community organizations. And then I met Devil Food. Wow! And fell in love and everything seemed OK. A blessing, new life, new love. And what I was doing with nothing before, I was doing now with a salary, was growing and felt complete.

I involved myself after a while with mostly one aspect of housing in our community: rats. Spent a lot of time as an understudy to Mr. Rattray at the Rescue Office in Brownsville, and on joint projects with Tony Sanchez in El Barrio.

Rats falling out of the ceilings giving old people heart attacks and biting children is common indeed. It's amazing how many babies are bitten by rats each year in Harlem alone—and you can't imagine the long-range physical and mental effect these bites have, how many young black and Puerto Rican children and adults are victims, and how many people stand guard all night, fearful that a rat will attack their children—and buy chicken and beef to place by the rat holes so the rats will be satisfied with that instead of human flesh.

Knowledge of this burned inside my head. The community council on housing and Jesse Gray's youth program mobilized around rats. We made posters, handed out leaflets, presented a play on it, organized tenants, and made and bought traps to combat the situation. We also demonstrated at the city's so-called Department of Housing—Housing Department creeps sabotaged Project Rescue, whose function was to get emergency repairs to tenants in slumlord apartments. We also demonstrated at OEO, the federal government's jive Office for Economic Opportunity.

Lyndon Baines Johnson sent a bill into Congress that was designed to eliminate the rat problem. That's the only hip thing I remember him doing, and that was laughed off the floor. Even L.B.J. himself said that the action of the congressmen was shameful. We thought they were slimy motherfuckers; we were smoking mad. We took our signs, posters, and a rat, jumped on a bus and went down to Washington to demonstrate at the Capitol. They didn't know we were coming and we didn't feel like walking around in circles in the hot sun when we got there so we walked right into the gallery of the House of Representatives, unrolled our posters and banners, brought our rat cage out from under cover, and started shouting about what was on our minds. The pigs came in to quiet us down and we nixed them off, then they systematically ushered the scared tyrant congressmen and the Boy and Girl Scouts out, and then came back to us. They were openly shook up and stood around pulling their guns out on us and putting them back in their holsters. Then they picked Jesse Gray out as the spokesman and told him he was under arrest and began dragging him into the hallway—at which time we shouted, "If you arrest one of us, arrest us all," and moved on into the hallway. That was full of cops, and of us—mostly young adults and teenagers.

As they came at us we went to work with little ado, like the butcher, baker, and candlestick maker. I myself ramshacked six beering, baseball-watching fat farts, and most of us rumbled for a

half hour, sending fifteen pigs to the hospital. I had a pile of pigs laying out on the floor when one grabbed me; I wrestled him down and began pounding the pig when four or five others grabbed me by my hands and feet and dragged me into an adjacent hallway. As the battle raged on, we were overpowered. Since I couldn't defend myself at that time, I played possum, but one pig hit me about four or five extra times anyway, and then stopped.

While I was lying in the hallway pretending to be knocked out, my sister fought through the barricade. Two pigs brought Bob in, trying to hold him while a detective tried to hit him with a blackjack, but as the pig got ready to swing, Bob kicked a field goal—as the pig grabbed his balls, the pig that had beat me the most and was standing over me waiting for me to move so he could beat me some more, turned around to help the others get Bob, and when he did I came to, jumped up, and body-slammed him, just crunched him in a corner. And the shit was on again.

After they handcuffed us and took us to the wagon, we looked out to see the shit was still going on. The brothers and sisters were fighting the pigs down the steps and all over the lawn. One man-and-wife team were battling at least thirty of them. Pig Speaker of the House McCormack yelled, "Get those niggers out of here!" and turned and ran back into the building before anybody could get to his old ass.

We stayed in the station house for about a half hour, were charged as "disorderly persons," and were bailed out. Feeling cleansed and sharp I went home to Lakeland for a couple of days and shot back to New York and work.

Shortly after what the papers termed a mini-riot our programs' funds were cut off, but since we had already started a rent strike and couldn't leave people unprotected and out on the limb, we continued. Also at that time I joined the Central Harlem Committee for Self-Defense, joined in educating the people of Harlem about the monster on the hill, Columbia University. We demonstrated at Columbia and mobilized the community. My hands were full. Those were days for stopping city marshals from evicting tenants, notifying tenants of meetings, taking complaints, and trying for and sometimes getting emergency repairs. The community council on housing's pockets were empty. Jesse Gray promised that we would get some bread, but the promise never materialized, so we pulled away from his leadership and continued on. All that fall and winter Mrs. Jackson, Mr. Harold, Mrs. Sims, Zontini Robinson and I drove on. And like the beautiful thing was the way the people in the community accepted us into their homes and heart.

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It had long occurred to me that the American government had the resources to reconstruct all the slums within its confines, if it had the will, and that working as I did as paid opposition was only a sham, making black people believe that things were getting better. Proof of that was the community council on housing funds' being cut off when we were doing all we could. I had seen that the judges in Slumlords and Tenants Court [Landlords and Tenants Court, part of New York City's civil court] were on the side of the slumlords from the jump; and I found out early that a black man in criminal court was doomed. I saw firsthand that the Brooklyn House of Detention was full of nothing but brothers and Latin brothers. The Queens 17 frame-up made my stomach turn. So I knew that all court bullshit was out.

I also dug how the city government and the creep teachers' union tried to put a school in Brownsville, Brooklyn, out of action, taking control of the school away from the people in the area. I knew regardless of American propaganda that the Korean people had run across the 58th parallel, and that the Vietnamese people were putting something on the real Charlie's ass. A lot

of things totalled in my mind, mostly that this society puts property before people, some sick motherfuckers are at the controls, and the very fate of humanity is at stake.

Now just this knowledge and no knowledge of how to deal with this shit has driven a lot of people crazy.

Rap Brown influenced me more than anybody except for Malcolm. And by that time I'd read Robert Williams' book, *Negroes with Guns*, and *The Crusaders*, which I studied, along with Mao's Red Book.

I decided that I wasn't doing enough. And I decided what I would be doing for the rest of my life.

When I heard that Huey Newton had been involved in a shootout with two pigs and one had died, I thought I'd check this brother out, as he seemed to be a sure-enough leader. And when the Panthers came to New York, I checked them out, and found the ten-point program unquestionable, and the fact that it was community-based a good thing. Digging that the cadre believed that political power stems from the barrel of a gun made me feel instant kinship. So I joined, and extended my energies and skills to the black community and mankind through the Party.

Since then I've been captured by the pigs, but have studied and acted to become a better man and a better revolutionary. I long to be on the streets with my people, and elevate the struggle to a higher level, and do whatever is necessary to bring this disgraceful period to an end.

...

Brother Malcolm said once: "If you're black, you were born in jail." Jail—the buildings, the cells, the bars—means only a change in the *form* of our restrictions and confinement. It is only a matter of degree.

And the barless jails and the jails with bars will and certainly must be disrupted more and more. All who seek to put justice in the place of injustice, are moving in that direction, black people, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, Indians, poor whites. The pigs have nothing going for them but beastly repression and fancy murder machines. All power is truly in the hands of the people, and in the end the people will win.

A certain sector of our confinement, referred to as Branch Queens House of Detention, was out of order for a while. It was no longer serving its established function. We know that the conditions at these places are not the result of accident. Most of the prisons inside the United States are filled to the brim with poor people, and 90 per cent of the prisoners are non-white. The bail imposed on us is many times above our reach, and implicit in the bail system is the madness that "freedom" in this country is determined by the amount of material wealth one has. A poor person has started serving a sentence as soon as he feels the snap of handcuffs. He is then taken to a police station, and if not beaten, is at least degraded. He is interrogated by members of an occupying army, beings who live elsewhere, not his neighbors. He is then taken to the local warehouse of souls, which is often a warehouse of soul brothers, and there he is made to wait—most often for months; sometimes for years.

While he is waiting he has no law books to begin work on his case. He is also denied political literature. He finds himself fighting mental suffocation and stagnation, being unable to pursue most fields of knowledge to any extensive degree. He is denied adequate medical attention and adequate recreation and space for exercise and his woman. If he is allowed visits they are painfully short, and female visitors are often the target of slimy remarks by the incompetent administration and racist, vicious guards who are like the police who arrested him. And many times we feel free

to curse the guards, keeping in mind that if the prisoner returns the obscenities, the officer can wait until the inmate is locked in his cell, at which time a mob of pigs can charge in, outnumber and brutalize him. The inmate knows that and *lives* with it, either by taking the insults or standing his shaky ground.

The food in most jails averages around horrible. Unsanitary conditions, rats, mice, insects, and censorship, add up to genocide, and those responsible for it are the real criminals. Most jails are sweatboxes in the summer and iceboxes in the winter. Bail hearings are hard to come by, and constitutional rights such as a bail within reach, a jury of one's own peers—only hearsay. At trial the "arresting officer's" word is 99 times out of a 100 taken over the defendant's. It is amazing how many people are in jail solely by the say-so of a cop, or any one witness more to a judge's liking than the defendant. The police, judges, and prosecutors have a coalition. And the so-called legal aid given to defendants unable to meet the cost of hiring their own attorneys has long taken an attitude, "If you can't beat them, join them." A coalition of creeps. The prosecutor moves for a conviction, his job has nothing to do with justice. His goal is to get the convict in question a sentence and nothing else, and the more convictions he has, the better his record. When defendants are charged in political cases, there results an even more obvious disdain for the judicial system, and the power structure and judges and the prosecutor move even closer together.

In the jails, an increase of outbursts and burst-outs is inevitable. The fact that the prisoners of war in the Tombs, the Brooklyn House of Detention, Rikers Island, Kew Gardens, and Queens House of Detention vomited up all the injustices that had been crammed down their throats is a people's indictment of the corrupt city and state government. Number one in the people's indictment is the American government, from Nixon and Wall Street and generals at the top on down to sly, slimy, crawly, creepy Lindsay, to wild boar McGrath, to all the poppy-ass flunkies and overseers who help maintain their beastly order. The charge is first-degree genocide and conspiracy to commit genocide.

As might be anticipated by any rational human being with adequate knowledge of Branch Queens prison, it—like a large percentage of the prisoners entrapped in that torture chamber—exploded. Guards (some of whom get "guards" mixed up with "gods") were captured by the people, and put on the right side of the bars, for a change, along with a black civilian cook, and a pig captain. In total, seven were locked up. And every inmate's cell in the concentration camp was opened, with all keys in the hands of the prisoners of war. In fact, a few inmates could have escaped when the rebellion started because the pigs were caught completely off guard. The first day could rightly be called "turnabout day."

Before the new prisoners could get hip to the hunters getting captured by the game, they were secured. The doors to the building were barricaded tightly. In virtually one clean sweep, the entire part of the building in which the POWs were being held was taken, along with the church. There are some who say that at that time the warden's office could have been taken over also, along with the church. The mess hall was not considered worthwhile, so was closed off and barricaded. The prisoners of war began arming, and defensive sectors were occupied, in case of immediate moves from the pigs.

Someone, perhaps a provocateur, set a fire. The smoke was so thick that we could hardly see our breath in one section of the building. A rumor started that the whole building was on fire, but the rumor and fire were quickly extinguished. I saw that as a test—a test that was passed.

Maintenance on the barricades was established. Lookouts watched over the area for an expected onrush of pigs. All telephones were smashed. Everything that helped the jail to operate,

that we did not have any use for, was put out of order. In the excitement, mostly every window was smashed. Towels were dampened for the protection of each inmate against tear gas, and blankets were watered down and placed on the floor. The building was secured. What a beautiful feeling! Next to getting out of jail, turnabout day is where it's at.

It was a trip, a really hip experience. The only relief oppressed people can get is to strike out against the oppressor, and it is the only freedom we know of. The freedom of doing what you think is right and doing what you must do, of saying fuck the consequences. Embraced by a natural high, I looked into the faces and the eyes of my brothers; the vibrations were right on. I wish I could express the spiritual explorations that took place. It was a religious experience. 'Trane would have to play it, and Henderson and Villion would have to put it into colors. It was art and it was life.

The rest of that day was spent tightening up the defense, and the brotherhood. Everybody seemed to be flying. Messengers to carry out the word to and from every part of the building were appointed. All tiers had representatives, and guard posts and reliefs were set up. At least two security teams roamed the building at all times. The battle plan was mapped out.

The most vulnerable sector was the dorm, and the forces there were to fight and pull back, letting the pigs have it if they could take it, move to the top of the steps and set up another barricade. The fourth and fifth tiers would help them after receiving word from a messenger. The material for the barricade was prearranged, and ready for assembly.

The main entrance was the responsibility of the comrades on the flats, and the second and third tiers, who could see if anything was jumping off and quickly join the fight. The annex was secured, with guards in every room watching pig movements from the height advantage and listening through the roof for some idiot to try to cut through with a torch and prepared to put something on the idiot pig's ass. There was no way we could have been taken by surprise. Security was checked and rechecked constantly. The pigs couldn't take the flats if they had come with guns. If they'd come with armored suits, we would have put dents in them. The demands had long been printed and through democratic vote the negotiating team was picked.

A few things had already become a hassle, however. The brothers who took over the commissary began to help themselves. And most of the brothers who were aware of it were irritated, and rightly so. This was quickly ironed out, however, in a very just and socialist manner. Since the commissary was in fact a means of exploitation, it was taken over and distributed evenly among the POWs.

That night too many of us roamed the building, many false alarms and rumors were cried out. Another thing that also began to show was, not a few inmates were not sharing the guard duty. However, a far more than adequate number did and were vigilant. Sandwiches and coffee were passed through the front gate and that night complaints about not getting anything to eat were heard, noted, and moved upon. However, we were plagued by dishonesty the entire time of the siege. A few were not getting their share and a few chowhounds were getting fat shares. Any inmates not receiving equal treatment was real bad, in a jail run by inmates, and was crucial.

One of the guards, one who'd issued an extra amount of harassment to inmates, tried to hang up. He either couldn't take being locked up or he feared "payback." Cause "payback is a motherfucker" and turnabout day was an entirely different thing to him than it was to us. The pig captain shook like a bowl full of clabber, although all captives were assured that no unprovoked attacks would be made. We at no time slunk to the slimy character of the pigs.

The next day two out of our seven captives were released as a sign of good faith so we could start negotiations, a black one and the white pig who'd tried to hang up. Negotiations began. The team did a good job that day, all demands were pressed, along with one demanding full TV coverage and the fascist press to come and serve a just function. Among the demands was that a judge from the so-called Supreme Court come to the jail and immediately begin hearings on bail reductions. The pigs tried to bypass the issues, saying that it was impossible to submit to anything so close to justice. So the brothers cursed them out and danced on back home, court was adjourned. Food was distributed and defense maintained.

Also, we began organizing tighter, all committees met, mapped out their plans of action and carried the word to every POW, within the confines. The second day found things in far better revolutionary order. The pigs were massing outside the building and were carefully watched from every corner. And as one comrade noted later, the pigs could not cut off any part of the building, and match an undetermined amount of pig power against a determined amount of black, Puerto Rican, and white power. Wasn't no cutting off one floor at a time, and couldn't but so many fit through a doorway or window at one time.

LeRoi Jones gave black people a poem, where he says that all you have to do is say the magic words.

"The magic words are: Up against the wall motherfucker this is a stick up! Or: Smash the window at night..." (from "Black People!" in LeRoi Jones' *Black Magic*, published by The Bobbs-Merrill Company)

Ain't that a rewarding sound. Kids love it. It can't be spelled. " " ain't it. " " ain't it. Some people can sound like cars. Hot rods even. Some can imitate a fire engine. But to hear the sound of glass breaking, glass must be broken. Some of us had to be restrained by the collective to cut down on the confusion at times. But it was good clean entertainment.

The next day, the Tombs exploded. And surprisingly enough three judges from the so-called State Supreme Court arrived on the scene. Progress was being made, a number of brothers had hearings and a few were cut loose. In all, over twenty hearings were held and a few bail reductions were the order of the day. A precedent was set; never before in the history of this racist empire had judges been summoned to a jail by inmates to hold court. It was only an act to obtain justice, although a few brothers' outcome was not pleasing. The judges didn't dig submitting to anything close to justice, but just did as much as they had to. It was good to see some of those brothers go to the streets.

Later that night we received bean pies from the Nation of Islam. On these a very weird development occurred. The thought was that it would be best to pass them out to those who were awake, since 90 per cent of those awake had been carrying the burden of most of the responsibilities; however, there were enough pies for everyone and the pies that were left over were devoured by a few people who had pies before, while a sizable amount of inmates did not receive any.

Over the radio, we heard about all the other uprisings in other jails and the support we were getting from the outside.

The next day, Sunday, there was no court held. But better yet: the people came out to support us in person, and demonstrations were held throughout the city by the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords Party. Again the negotiation team went out to rap and it is then that a split became evident.

McGrath, the state's man in charge of prisons, put out the word that we would release all of our prisoners. But in fact the agreement was if we see some signs of justice, then we would release

two more, and all our prisoners would be released after all the bail hearings were held. The pigs had stated that they would have bail hearings on everyone's bail in the jail except the Panthers in the Panther 21 case. Out of 366 prisoners of war only 23 had had hearings. That is a token gesture, not a sign of justice.

In this writer's opinion, we should have not given up shit, after giving up those first two captives in some motherfucking "good faith." But some members of the team went out there and fucked up, talking about letting all captives go. A general consensus of all inmates, after learning about the fuck-up, was to let two go. I agreed, too. We had to keep a just image and keep the pigs in the light on going back on their word. When the team announced what had happened, how it had done in our collective instructions, many of us were smoking mad. But after hearing everyone who had anything to say on the matter, we voted to release two more. The fuck-up was taken out of the negotiating team, and we prepared for an attack.

Two of our prisoners were released, and they and the rest were interviewed by newsmen. The three we had left were taken to different cells for security reasons. During this time I began to note signs of fear—the realization that the pigs could possibly charge our confines and result in a life-or-death struggle on a mass scale. This feeling began to flow like lava in the faces of many. If the pigs came with guns and we fought, many of us would die and many of them would die, and we would have guns. If they teargassed us and came with clubs, then the battle would take the form of a medieval war, the Crusades, a gory, bloody, extremely down-to-earth old-fashioned real war, extremely real. With every weapon used up to the invention of the gun, how many inside the building would die? Maybe all of us before the shit was over. But surely the count was too high for anyone not to consider the possibility of himself departing life via Branch Queens. "Encirclement faces" began to flash, and some were panic-stricken, near a state of shock. So many of them that had been right on with the building of barricades, surely they asked themselves, "What the fuck done come over me?" They began to vent their fears. It was funny as hell, a super-duper trip. Somebody down for action started singing, "Everybody wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die"—background music for niggers to punk out by—as a couple advanced cases shouted to "Let all the hostages go." It is not strange for a drowning man to grab for anything that may possibly save his life, and be found a day or weeks later—dead, with a "death lock" on a straw, a beer can or stick that couldn't have possibly saved him.

Now what would happen to our captives if such a battle took place? They would be *killed dead*, that's all. The frantic ones among us called for the release of all prisoners, as if to say, "In the name of reason, let's stop this thing, let's bring a halt to it." As the slaves began to return to their master and seek forgiveness, the warriors shouted, "Bullshit-punk motherfuckers, if we ain't got no captives we can't deal with nobody for nothing. That's the only thing that has stopped the pigs from coming in here already. We play it to a bust and if the pigs come we will fight, kill and die."

Do you—you who is reading this, here and now, know how it is to feel like nothing? Can you dig how it feels to be tired of feeling like nothing, a piece of shit? Can you dig how it feels to be a human being? A man? A man with a will and a purpose and a quest for justice? Can you relate to being a man for four days—and then stepping back into a cage, that houses a hollow shell, a bundle of blues, a being who receives whatever a treacherous society throws at him, who has been forgotten by so many people that he's forgotten his damn self, on your own accord? For the sake of an unjust peace? And a continuation of non-existence? Those of us who wanted

to be a man for five days and until death said, in effect, we ain't giving in another inch. We're prepared—and we want to fight anyway!

In barless jails across Babylon this question will arise, and it is one that will have to be answered, in word and in deed. Many will die with it on their minds, in the act of hesitating. And some will say that the question has nothing to do with being a man and will accept the cage and the death as their fate, and as the “overpowering” will of who does it to them. And some will continue to die every day until their final death is rationed out to them.

There are only two sides, and two things to do, after all the jive changes are gone through and all is said.

By that time Brooklyn House of Detention, Kew Gardens and Rikers Island had exploded, but were suppressed, only us and the brothers in the Tombs were still holding out. As a gesture of solidarity, it was brought to the floor that instead of releasing two more captives and cutting down so much on our bargaining position, we would release one and ask them to release one, since they had mucho bargaining power. I dug the hell out of that idea, but it didn't go over too tough.

Sunday night a new tactic was developed. All the lights were cut off. The pigs would have to deal with “darkies in the darkness.” That night the word was to make sure that, if possible, half of the guards in the jail would relax and get some sleep, while others stood and walked their post. It was getting very tense. The police were massed outside. It was explained that every night and every day would be an emergency situation, and we had to be prepared to hold out for as long as it took. I thought of six months and the periods that Japanese students had held universities. We had the upper hand, and we had it together. Many of the prisoners of war were almost to the point where we had to fight, as the pigs showed their racism by refusing a brother inmate emergency medical treatment that night. Early that day, we'd taken one of our hostages down the steps to get his shots, but after we did the doctor refused him, in fact the doctor placed the needle outside the barricade and rejoined the herd of pigs.

Because of the food shortage, we, after careful consideration, had torn part of a barricade down and raided the storage room, after which we had actually relocated it, without the pigs being aware. A small detachment got to work on the other storage room, but we decided to stop when the brother was asking for medical treatment, fearing that his case was one of life or death and that the pigs would hear the hammering and think that we were pulling another diversionary move and refuse the brother. We stopped but they did not consider not refusing the brother anyway.

The night passed into Monday morning, and as it did, people began to cluster in groups according to their feelings. Feelings had accelerated from an already supersonic speed. And the different undercurrents began to ascend to the sea of consciousness of all. Political consciousness varied in a fan of degrees; the tide of political consciousness had surely risen since the rebellion erupted. “Power to the people” and “off the pig” was shouted, and certainly understood and meant, by a large segment of prisoner population from the git-go. And cultural differences were brought to light at the start and not permitted to become barriers. Everything said in English at the meetings was also said in Spanish, from the onstart. And “brothers” became a thing of who thinks alike rather than a thing of who looks alike.

However, rumors were on the rampage, one that we, the Panthers, had taken over the rebellion and we were really running things and using the situation to project ourselves and to reap the political benefits from it. Other rumors came to the surface—that many of the members of the

security teams on the flats and elsewhere were getting more than their rightful share of the food, and different other groups were also, like the Panthers and the tier captains.

To that we, the Panthers, stated flatly that we would step out of the whole thing, go back to our tiers and get some sleep; and also that there should be a general meeting excluding us and there everything should be brought to light, in order to determine just what's true and what's bullshit. We also stated that we would abide by the majority. We wanted all the whispering in little cliques to be brought into the open so it could be righteously dealt with. The news media had projected us and from the jumping-off and all through their coverage of the siege we were credited for organizing the rebellion. We felt that the brunt of the reprisals would fall on us, we pictured another indictment in the tradition of Jimmy Garrison and Frank Hogan and laughed about it—we didn't give a flying fuck about no pigs or pig reprisals anyway; we felt good about getting into the rebellion, because we feel good when something is being done about the pigs running planet Earth, and are ready, willing, and able to take the struggle higher! Since we can't get along with the pigs, we can get it *on* with them and dance to the death to soul music. In fact, "Engine Engine No. 9" by Wilson Pickett is as good a song as any to get down to some sure-enough, sure-enough battle to.

As events developed and contradictions developed, militancy and vigilance began to dissolve on one end of the scale, as readiness to go into battle rose on the other. It was easy to see that regardless of what anyone was saying, the issue was to get justice for all the population. And the choice was that either the prisoners of war would fight to keep the upper hand, and keep our hostages to help ensure getting justice done, or we would give up our bargaining power and accept whatever comes.

All of us had by that time been subjected to sophisticated Fun-City-style flim-flams; our very presence in that dungeon was proof of that. And all of us should have known that instead of New York being nicknamed Fun City it should be known as Flim-Flam City. There is no pity in Flim-Flam City. At that stage of the game, a lot of us had been beaten and deceived, and seemingly should have known that for us to receive amnesty would set a bigger precedent than making a judge come to a jail to have hearings. Slimy-snake Lindsay, mayor of Flim-Flam City, knew better than that when he said it. All the pigs, McGrath on down to the little pawn pigs waiting outside the building, knew the statement of "no reprisals" was bullshit.

All the committees had rapped, and a general meeting was called to ask one question: "If the pigs attack, are we gonna kill the hostages?" Here are some of the responses: "Yeah." "Mother-fucking right." "No! No! No!" "Let's cut their throats, hang them, set them on fire and throw them out the eighth floor window." "We'll put them up to the window and tell the pigs to stop and if they keep coming, we'll throw them out one by one." A string of speakers one by one picked up the bullhorn and stated their case. One speaker—in essence: Let's do them in. Another—in part, in essence: This is revolution; if the pig come in here we'll off them! At that point an inmate approached me to rap, "You hear that, I've just been drafted into the army." Another, pointing to the floor, "You God-damn revolutionaries going to do all the time?" Another speaker, in essence and in quote, you read me, quote: "I think we have gone far enough. I think we should call a press conference and give the prisoners up." As he said that, I pictured the pig guard captain dying of a heart attack after hearing the earlier statements. During the people's arrest, he had flipped out, he was seeing things that no one else was: madmen at the back of his cell threatening to kill him. He was particularly hostile to the populace of Branch Queens before turnabout day, and like most racists, feared the people he victimized. He was looking to receive "payback." He "knew" it

was coming. His mental disorders turned inward to destroy him. For every push there is a pull in the opposite direction, and his crude realization of it wrecked him. Another pig had walked a path in the cell he was placed in, he paced back and forth so much that one brother commented that he might walk through to the next cell under him.

Finally a comrade shouted down at a speaker who had just taken the bullhorn: “Hey man, the pig can hear everything we’re talking about, we shouldn’t have an open meeting, talking about this shit.” For a time, things were submerged, but the question, still unresolved, bubbled. Many of us who wanted justice and were willing to pay the price and up the kitty, vowed to fight other POWs if necessary; and in many cases those who wanted to give the hostages up said that they would fight to do so. When asked what would they do if the pigs charged in, many said in effect that they would die before they would kill the hostages. We were getting close to going to war between ourselves, different groups began planning different moves to take the prisoners or to protect them. Which is not as unfortunate as the fact that the brothers who would rather die than ice three pigs were actually saying that the lives of these pigs had more worth than theirs. Black people have been conditioned to die behind any old bullshit for so long that taking those white pigs’ lives in response for murders of ourselves seemed to be incomprehensible to them. A crime against God, and three other white men.

We had been following the radio reports on the rebellions. They reported that one by one the other rebellions were smashed, and that after a long delay the brothers in the Tombs had given up, letting their hostages go. Then they began reporting the situation at Branch Queens in the manner of a football game. One station began saying that the police were massed outside the building and their forces were mobilized so heavy as to have been unseen since World War Two. This was psychological warfare. The station further stated that ten Black Panthers who were awaiting trial would probably get the blame for what happened. And so on and so forth and soo bee doo bee doo. A cold silence was maintained, mostly, in Branch Queens. Although a few bursts of laughter occasionally crackled in the darkness.

Then Flim-Flam’s chief executive—Lindsay—came over the radio and run down the same game on us that the slimy-bicycle-riding pig ran down on the brothers in the Tombs. A thirty-minute ultimatum for Branch Queens. Release all your hostages and there will be no reprisals. I had hoped aloud that the pigs would take for granted that no such transaction would take place and just charge in, for at that point another day of inaction was more destructive to the cause of justice than an assault on those seeking justice. To rumble then would have pulled the mass of us together in a truly revolutionary fashion. A victory—that is, to turn back the charge of the pigs—would have produced an army out of prisoners of war, who would then be drafted by their incarceration.

Now it was time to take a vote. “All right, as quietly as you can meet in the middle of your tier and starting from the fifth tier on down, give one vote for each tier. Should we turn the hostages loose or should we keep them and fight?” My only bone with the way that the voting was taken is that I think everyone should’ve voted individually—which would have been exact and so, fairer, more in the interest of the people. Some tiers were solidly against anything but fighting and some members of most tiers were down to fight. By giving each tier one vote those who were outnumbered on their particular tier’s opinion on a sticky two-sided issue were omitted. However, many believed we should come to an understanding as soon as possible. I felt that we had more time. At the same time I hoped that we would run out of time, but really knew we wouldn’t. If the half hour had run out Lindsay would have extended the time before the onrush of pigs, at least

until daylight. Fifth tier—"Turn them loose." Fourth tier—"Turn them loose." Third tier—"Turn them loose." Second tier—"Fight!" The flats—"Fight." The annex—"Fight." The dormitory—"Turn them loose."

A cluster of argument formed like an electric cloud. Militant brothers shouted from the floor, "Listen brothers, we'll go along with the majority because we don't want to fight you, but the pigs are gonna fuck you up anyway!" We knew.

A few brothers still considered fighting the non-warriors. "If you're going to turn them loose, bring them on down here." The ideas about taking the hostages away from the non-warriors became a thing of the past, some non-warriors nailed the lid on the coffin of the rebellion. They packed around the hostages and covered their heads with pillows, removed the barricade, rushed them to the gate, turned the hostages over and had the gate slammed in their faces.

It was a big let-down and all the Panthers and other brothers who were down came up to the annex with us. Some were crying, everything seemed over and surely not as much came out of it as was hoped. Food was opened up and a light partying atmosphere was created for two reasons: because all of us were hungry, and to cover up the pain of losing a battle we did not have a chance to fight. I knew that there was no way I could walk down those steps and submit to the pigs. All of us Panthers knew that we were marked men, marked for murder and torture. We also felt at that time that the brothers who'd come to the annex with us should have stayed with the others because their lives would be in *more* danger if they stayed with us. The explanation for the entire sequence of events is simply "growing pains," to those of us who believe that oppressed people *will* rise up and seek justice, and not long from now the people's struggle will evolve to the stage where in a similar situation the vote will be fight, fight, fight, fight, fight—and off the pigs, physically. We begged the brothers to leave, for what we felt then was their own good, and most of them reluctantly did.

Then brothers began running back. Saying that the pigs were killing different brothers down there, in the courtyard. The pigs had lined brothers up with their hands cuffed behind their backs and were beating them with billy clubs, baseball bats, and ax handles. We witnessed it from the windows, and waited for some more brothers to return. A couple of us went throughout the building to pick up certain weapons critical to our defensive position. When our detachment came back, and still no more brothers came up the steps, we closed the door, jammed the lock, and barricaded the door heavily. Then we took a large supply of food to the next floor, barricaded the steps, and set up posts in each of the rooms on the next two floors. Then while some of us shouted out of the bullhorn what was happening in the prison yard, why we were resisting, and to help us, the rest of us prepared for battle.

The pigs jeered to cover up the voice condemning their actions while others went about handcuffing brothers behind their backs, making them sit cross-legged on the ground and then beating them ruthlessly with their ax handles, baseball bats, and billy clubs.

We were preparing to fight a week if necessary, or even longer. Any battle up there would be a desperate motherfucker. We knew it and the pigs knew it. We were ready to fight to the death, and take as many pigs with us as possible. All our bargaining power was released to the enemy; we now had to fight not only for our lives but for a death that would be acceptable.

We were also telling the people what was happening, explaining the crimes being carried out by the gestapo, and asking them to please contact the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords Party, Jerry Lefcourt, Charles McKinney, William Crain, Bob Bloom, Shirley Chisholm, Herman Badillo, or Minister Farrakhan.

The day stretched to noon, and thanks to a couple of true reporters the out-and-out torture in the yard came to public light and our existence was recognized. But we still continued our vigilance. A couple brothers became overly paranoid, and some made a rope that could reach to the ground in order to get out in case of a fire, but most of us would have chosen dying in the fire over climbing out of that window on a rope.

Things began to look up and that evening we heard that our release was being negotiated by our lawyers versus McGrath. We had a little bargaining power again. We watched the news and saw one of the most accurate reports that we had seen. But we continued blasting from “the golden bullhorn” and seeing familiar faces on the streets, and finally we had a meeting with our lawyers and an unharmed release in the workings, so we packed up and prepared to depart.

We left the building by way of a “cherry picker.” Which is a pretty way-out way to leave any building. All power to the people. The people had saved us. They had come to our aid and we could thank them. All power to the people, we love you. Each one of us exchanged power salutes with the people, to me it was a religious experience. I saw a sister and thought, Now, I just seen a sister that looks finer than Carol. She had a red sweater on and she glowed from within. When I get out, I told myself, I’m going to get that Mickey-Fricky, hunt her down like a hound dog. I heard Hendrix, “I am gonna take you home, ain’t gonna do you no harm, you got to be mine alone!... Foxy lady.” Later I found out that it was Carol.

As the buses moved out, surrounded by a giant motorcade, what could we say but, “All power to the people.” The people made the pigs act in a civilized manner. Nixon had never received an escort like the one we had. All power to the people.

Devious-snake Lindsay’s evil designs had failed, his bicycle-riding through Central Park did not fool everyone. He is perfectly aware of what happened in that yard. All the committee members were tortured who didn’t hold out. He didn’t meet with them as he said he would, he met with his cohorts and plotted vicious reactionary plans. Lindsay is number-one pig in Flim-Flam City and to prove it he asked McGrath, his crimemate, to “investigate” the “alleged” attacks on prisoners.

It is a known fact that the pigs moved on the students of Columbia University with goals set to wreck their bodies and heads and Lindsay did nothing but appoint someone to “investigate” it. The same at Madison Square Garden, the same at Sheepshead Meadow, the same every time. Someone to “investigate.”

Well, I’ve investigated Lindsay. And the only difference between Lindsay in New York and Daley in Chicago is that Lindsay is sneakier and slimier and has no national conventions to expose him. He’s a deadly creep.

Well the pigs were really sorry-looking. As you know, they were out to kill us and they had told us so. Five pigs in a fit of reactionary frustration tore off their badges and at least one of them physically attacked Lindsay’s “whipping boy” aide and I’m willing to bet that a whole lot of women and children were assaulted by pigs after they found out they could not get to us. And I would like to tell those women and children that they ain’t got to take that shit. Move on the old man! Cut his throat, poison him, set him on fire while he’s asleep. The family that gets rid of cancers together, finds out the answers together.

As the buses holding political prisoners readied to pull off, the warden and his puppet troops entered the empty warehouse; it was a very comical scene, please try to picture it: their mental state seemed to be, “Well, back to work, we might not have no inmates, boys, but we got a jail to run and a job to do.” On that, the robot pigs marched into a totally unusable concentration camp.

We'd left Branch Queens in no shape to store people, to hold any people in against their will. The place would have to be surrounded by pigs like it was during the rebellion. So the warehouse is out of order. This is only the beginning. We are going to have our freedom and we'll tear down the jails with bars and the jails without bars and America will be unusable for pigs and fit for people. All Power to the People.

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Kuwasi Balagoon
From "Look for Me in the Whirlwind"
1971

Look For Me in the Whirlwind: The Collective Autobiography of the New York 21. New York:
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