

Kamau and i were acquitted in the bank robbery trial in the Southern District of New York on January 28, 1973, and on the following day i was returned to new jersey. When i arrived at the morristown jail, there was a clump of reporters and photographers standing around. Morristown looked just like smalltown, usa. The jail was an ugly building attached to the kourthouse. There were a few other women in the jail and i was kept away from them. The only time i saw them was when i was being taken to or from my cell. They all appeared to be white, although i found out later that one was Black. The guards were all women, as old as the hills, and they had been working at the jail for an eternity.

There was a television and a radio in the cell, and it had been so long since i had been able to watch the news on television or listen to a static-free radio station that i went crazy. And i had turned into a crochet fiend. My poor mother was the unfortunate recipient of my early "creations." Brave, devoted person that she was, she thought they were pure genius.

We learned there were few, if any, Black jurors on the panel for the new trial. The news was depressing. The panel was selected from the voting rolls, and, since candidates running for office seldom represent the interests of Black and poor people, Blacks and the poor don't vote. But failing to vote means they don't sit on juries. Any chance that we would receive something even remotely resembling a fair trial was slim. We decided to try to have the trial removed to federal court. The chance of the feds taking over was slim, but it was worth the try. If the trial was held in the federal

kourt in Newark, at least we'd be assured of a few more Black jurors on the jury panel.

There were countless joint legal meetings, countless strategy sessions, and countless kourt appearances. My first look at the Morris County jury panel flung me into a terrible depression. There were only two or three Black jurors on each panel and they looked like extras in a soap opera. As a matter of fact, the whole jury panel looked like escapees from a soap opera. They dressed differently and had a whole different air about them than New York people. Morristown was supposed to be one of the ten richest counties in the country, and, looking at these people, i believed it. I could just see trying to explain to them what poor Black people in big cities go through. How could they understand someone becoming a Black revolutionary? They had so little to revolt against. They had bought the amerikan dream lock, stock, and barrel and seemed unaware that, for the majority of Black and Third World people, the amerikan dream is the amerikan nightmare.

Evelyn and i had resolved our differences and she was back on the case. She, Ray Brown, and Charles McKinney, Sundiata's lawyer, worked hard on the motion to remove the trial to federal kourt. But after a hearing, the federal judge remanded the case back to the state kourt. He hadn't even listened to our arguments. So we were right back where we had started: picking a jury in Morris County.

Jury selection droned on tediously. Sundiata and i kept ourselves from falling asleep or from having nervous breakdowns by laughing and talking. Just seeing Sundiata every day was such a comfort to me. We made up all kinds of little games and jokes, especially guessing the answers jurors would give to the trial judge's questions. We got to be pretty good at it. We could look at a person and pretty much know what he was going to say. Some glared at us hatefully while they waited to be called, as if they couldn't wait to give their opinion that we were guilty. They were so sure of exactly what happened. They recited detail after detail from newspapers and TV.

"Where were you hiding that night on the turnpike?" i wanted to scream at them. "I didn't see you!"

Others gave us crooked smiles in the hope that we would think they sympathized with us and would leave them on the jury. But there was not one bigot in the kourtroom. None of them said they had any prejudice against Black people.

"Do you have any Black friends?" the judge asked.

"Of course." But when asked if they had ever invited a Black person to their homes or been to the home of a Black person, the

answer was, invariably, no. On one panel, the judge asked everybody if they had ever called a Black person a nigger. They all said no, except for one woman, who said, "Well, when I was a child, we used to say 'Eeny, meeny, miny, mo, catch a nigger by the toe.'" After that, a whole bunch of them said the same thing. Sometimes their answers were so phony they were a joke. Except the joke was on us.

One day, a man being questioned told the judge what he had read about the case in newspapers and what he had heard on radio and TV. He tried to make it seem that he had just incidentally come across the news stories and that he had not really followed the case or paid much attention to it. Further, he denied having been affected by any of it.

"Have you ever read a book called *Target Blue*?"

Only a day or two before, the defense team had asked that that question be included in the voir dire. Robert Daley, who at one time was the public relations and publicity director for the New York City Police Department, had written the book *Target Blue*. An excerpt from the book was "coincidentally" printed in *New York* magazine on almost the exact day our trial was to begin. One or two chapters were about the Black Liberation Army. The book was a collection of sensationalism, groundless accusations, and outright lies. The few facts that were in those two chapters were distorted beyond recognition. I was referred to by name. Daley implied that i had been responsible for the deaths of numerous policemen. He called me the "soul" of the Black Liberation Army, the "mother hen" that "kept them fighting and kept them moving." According to the book, i had also robbed numerous banks and blown up a police car with a hand grenade during a police chase.

"Have you ever read *Target Blue*?" the judge asked.

"Er, er, yes."

Immediately the defense team submitted requests to the judge that additional questions be asked.

"When did you read this book?"

"As a matter of fact, I'm reading it now." Not only had he been reading the book, but he had it upstairs in the jury room. Although the defense team asked for an investigation, the judge refused. It was obvious the man had brought the book to court to show to the other jurors and that they had discussed it. After a lot of arguments made by our lawyers, the judge agreed to dismiss that juror and others in the panel with whom he had been close.

One day i was informed that the nazi party was demonstrating outside the court, marching up and down, complete with

swastikas, brown uniforms, and helmets. They carried "White power," "Save our police," and "Death penalty" placards. Other signs were printed with racist statements. Rumor spread that a cross had been burned in front of the home of one of our supporters. At the end of the day the nazis almost got into a fight with some of the few Black residents in Morristown.

A lot of people don't know it, but they've got more nazis and Ku Klux Klan in jersey than a little bit. Some of my friends call it "up South." Lou Myers, who was later one of my lawyers on this case, is from Mississippi. One day, in all earnestness, he told me he would rather try a case in Mississippi any day than try one in jersey.

I couldn't understand it. I was growing weaker and weaker. My energy seemed to have gone down the drain. All i wanted to do was sleep. I chided myself for trying to escape from reality instead of facing it. I had seen women in jail sleep their whole time away. I was afraid that was happening to me. I was so easily upset and reacted to everything in an exaggerated manner. My nerves were terrible. Every little thing affected me. All i did, all day, when there was no kourt, was sleep, eat, watch television, and listen to the radio. I was eating like food was going out of style. This also convinced me my nerves were going bad. I have seen people in prison gain twenty, thirty, forty, fifty pounds eating out of nerves and boredom. It gets to the point when all you have to look forward to is the meals. And that in itself is pitiful, because anyone who has ever been in prison knows how terrible the food is. Yet i was gulping that stuff down just like it was Mom's home cooking.

It wasn't until i sat down one day to do my exercises that i really suspected what could be wrong. I could barely get through ten sit-ups. Everything added up. I didn't dare hope, but, at the same time, down deep inside, i knew. As sure as i knew my own name, i knew that i was pregnant. But what was i to do next? I knew i had to see the doctor, but what in the world was i going to say? I had been in prison for eight months and it would really be weird to say, "Hey, i think i'm pregnant." I wanted to know for sure whether i was or not, but if i wasn't i didn't want the doctor to know my business. Because if i was, it would be only a matter of time before the whole world would know.

First thing the next morning, i saw the prison doctor. I told him all my symptoms, dropping hint after hint. He told me there was nothing to worry about, that i was just constipated.

As time wore on, it became harder and harder to wake up in the morning. When the guards came to wake me for kourt, i would

simply roll over and continue sleeping. They did everything to get me out of bed. They called. They threatened. They banged on the bars and anything else they could think of.

"Just don't come in this cell," i would tell them, feeling evil as the day is long. "You come in here and you put your hands on me and i'ma take your head right offa your shoulders." They must have known i meant it because they kept their distance until i was awake. I didn't care what they thought or said as long as they didn't put their hands on me. I wanted them to leave me alone. All i wanted to do was sleep.

I walked into kourt whenever i got up, no matter what time it was. The judge would go on and on about my lateness and admonish my lawyers for not having me in kourt on time, but it was hopeless. I didn't care what the judge said, what the guards said, or what anybody said. All i wanted to do was sleep.

I told Sundiata and one or two of the lawyers that i thought i was pregnant. They looked at me blankly, puzzled, as if i had an overactive imagination. Each day i felt more and more weird. I felt fragile and sick. I went back to the prison doctor, dropping more and more hints. I repeated my symptoms. Queasy stomach, stomach getting bigger, sick in the mornings, sleep all the time, etc. But he still didn't get the message and kept telling me this stuff about an intestinal disorder. I didn't know what to do next.

One day i woke up and could hardly move. I was sick as a dog and dizzy to boot. I got up for a minute, then sank back down on the cot, holding onto it for dear life. They called the prison doctor. I repeated the symptoms again, and this time he ordered some tests. He asked for a urine specimen. I was sure he had sent for a pregnancy test. I waited a few days and heard nothing. Then the nurse came and asked me for more urine. I was certain this meant the pregnancy test was positive and they were retesting just to be sure. I gave her the urine sample and waited.

When the doctor called me to his office, i knew he was going to tell me i was pregnant. Instead, he was smug and acted really on the stupid side. He kept making snide little remarks and i could tell he was trying to make fun of me. I asked him what was wrong with me and he repeated the same old stuff about a bowel disorder. Then he asked me some questions about my sex life.

"Ask your momma about her sex life," i said and went out of his office, slamming the door. Later that day, Ray Brown and Evelyn came to see me. Ray was in a jovial mood, laughing his head off.

"Well, you've really done it this time. I don't know what we're

going to do with you. His honor is going to give you a strong reprimand for getting pregnant during his trial."

"You mean i'm really pregnant?"

"It was in the doctor's report to the judge. Didn't you know?"

"No," i told him. "I was just in that slimy bastard's office this morning and he told me that i had something wrong with my intestines.

"He's pulling your leg," Ray said. "They did two or three pregnancy tests on you and they all came back positive. You're pregnant, all right. I can't believe it."

Evelyn was in a state of shock. "It's something," she said. Then she looked into space for a long time. "It's something."

"Judge Bachman's having a fit," Ray said. "I hear the FBI is going to conduct an investigation to determine how you got pregnant."

"Well, they better not try to come 'round me asking no questions," i told them. "I'll tell them that this baby was sent by the Black creator to liberate Black people. I'll tell 'em that this baby is the new Black messiah, conceived in a holy way, come to lead our people to freedom and justice and to create a new Black nation."

Sundiata and McKinney had joined us. Sundiata was elated. He couldn't get over it. He sat there grinning and slapping his knee. "I think it's beautiful," he kept saying. "I think it's absolutely beautiful." Everyone was in a jubilant mood. I was glad. I hadn't known how they would react.

"It's amazing," Evelyn said. "Out of all this misery a new life is conceived."

I was caught up in the mood, but i couldn't wait to get off alone in my cell to think about this. What had seemed like a remote dream was coming true. A baby. My mind was jumping and dancing.

I spent the next few days in a virtual daze. A joyous daze. A person was inside of me. Someone who was going to grow up to walk and talk, to love and laugh. To me it was the miracle of all miracles. And deeply spiritual. The odds against this baby being conceived were so great it boggled my mind. And yet it was happening. It seemed so right, so beautiful, in surroundings that were so ugly. I was filled with emotion. Already, i was deeply in love with this child. Already, i talked to it and worried about it and wondered how it was feeling and what it was thinking. I would lie in my cell wondering about his or her life, wondering what kind of life it would have. What kind of people it would love, what kind of values

it would have, and what it would think of all the madness that would surround it. Sometimes i felt so helplessly protective, wondering when my baby would be called nigger for the first time, wondering when the full horror and degradation of being Black in amerika would descend on my baby. How many wolves hid behind the bushes to eat my child?

But there were so many happy things that i thought about, too. I wondered when would be the first time my child would sit down and seriously appreciate the glory of a sunset and marvel at the wonders of nature. Or when he or she would smack lips and lick fingers over a sweet potato pie, or kiss strawberries and drink lemonade. It has always intrigued me how the world can be so beautiful and so ugly at the same time. I wanted, with all my being, for my baby to experience the many types and sides of love and friendship and to know and understand selflessness and generosity, struggle and sacrifice, honesty, courage, and so many of the sentiments that have given me strength and have made my life worth living. In these days, i was in such a state of sensitivity and thought that i barely noticed what was going on around me.

The next time my mother came to see me, my sister was with her. I was so happy to see them both. When i say "see," it is something of an overstatement, because in morristown jail there are little windows that you and your visitors peek through, and there are little holes through which you are supposed to talk, but to make yourself heard you are obliged to shout.

"Honey, you look pale," my mother shouted.

"Mommy, i'm pregnant."

"What is it, honey?"

"I'm pregnant, Mommy."

My mother smiled blandly. I repeated myself and she began to laugh. "How many months are you?"

"No, seriously, Mommy, i'm pregnant."

"Well, so am I," my mother said, this time laughing heartily. "I think it was my hysterectomy that caused it."

"No, Mommy," i pleaded. "You don't understand. I'm pregnant. I'm not joking."

"Who's joking, honey? Pregnancy is a serious matter," she said, trying to keep a straight face, "especially when the baby is born under immaculate conception and god is the father." She and my sister were having a giggling fit. "What are you going to name the baby?" my sister added. "Jesus?"

They just carried on. The more i insisted i was pregnant, the

more they laughed and cracked jokes. But, finally, my mother stopped laughing.

"Are you really pregnant?"

I told her that it happened in the kourt and that Kamau was the father.

"How do you feel?"

"Actually, kind of funny," i told her. "I can barely move and i'm just so tired."

In the visiting room on the prisoners' side, there were no chairs, so you had to stand up and talk. I was so tired, i just couldn't stand any longer. I sat down on the floor, leaning on the wall behind me so that they could see me. I couldn't see them, but we shouted to each other until the visit was over. I went up to my cell after the visit ended and immediately fell out. My mother went to the warden to complain about their refusal to provide chairs.

The next day Evelyn came to see me. "Your mother called me last night all the way from Morristown, as soon as she left you. She was worried to death that, with all you've been through, you'd finally been driven crazy. I told her not to worry, that you are, in fact, pregnant. I think she's in a state of shock. So's your sister. It's all over the papers. I brought them for you."

I couldn't believe it. Sure enough, there were the articles. The one in the New York *Daily News*, i remember, was especially sordid. All of the papers speculated about who the father was and how i had managed to become pregnant in jail. One of them hinted that a prison guard was the father.

"I'm sick, Auntie, i feel awful."

"Well, that's what happens when you're pregnant. You get morning sickness and all sorts of other strange ailments. It's only normal."

"Maybe you're right, but i'm having these pains down here," i told her, pointing to where the pains were. "And i can barely stand up."

She told me to go see the doctor and i told her how the doctor had acted.

"Well, go see him anyway, and have him examine you thoroughly. Meanwhile, I'll try to have you seen by a private gynecologist as soon as possible. I'll probably have to go to court."

She promised that she would do all that she could to get an outside doctor, and i went upstairs to see the jail doctor.

"Why did you lie to me and tell me all that junk about a bowel disorder?" was the first thing i asked him.

"Well, you lied. I just figured I'd get back at you. Anyway, you found out, like I knew you would."

I told him about my pains and he examined me.

"What's wrong?" i asked, anxiously.

"There's a chance you're threatening to abort."

"What?" i practically screamed.

"There's a chance that you're going to abort."

"I don't want no abortion," i cried out.

"It's probably the best course you could take now, and I'd recommend it. But that's not what I was talking about. I said that there was a chance you could spontaneously abort, have a miscarriage."

"Oh no!" i moaned. "What are you going to do?"

"Relax. It's probably nothing serious. It's nothing much to worry about."

"What do you mean, nothing much to worry about. I want this baby."

"Well, I can't force you to do anything, but my advice is to have an abortion. It will be better for you and for everyone else."

"I don't want nobody's abortion. But what are you going to do about this miscarriage thing? Isn't there something you can give me to keep me from having a miscarriage? Isn't there something that i can take to make sure i don't lose this baby?"

"No. There's nothing I can do now. We have to wait and see what happens."

"What do you mean, wait and see what happens? If i have a miscarriage, then it will be too late. Can't you call a gynecologist?"

"No. There's nothing I can do right now."

"You mean there's nothing you *will* do right now, don't you?"

"Take it any way you want to."

"Won't you at least call a gynecologist in to see me? You're not a specialist in this area."

"I don't need you to tell me what my specialties are," he said angrily. "It would be best for everybody concerned if you have an abortion, no matter which way you have it."

"Just who is everybody concerned?"

"Don't you worry about it. My advice to you is that you should go to your cell and lie down. Just lie down and rest your mind. Just lie down and stay off your feet. And if you go to the bathroom and see a lump in the toilet, don't flush it. It's your baby."

I raced out of his office and, when i got to my cell, i lay on the cot crying. I was worried to death. As far as i could see, they were

out to kill my baby. I couldn't lose this baby now, not now. It was meant to be; this baby was our hope. Our hope for the future. I tried to calm myself. I didn't want the baby to feel my anguish. Finally, i fell asleep.

The next morning, i waited anxiously for Evelyn and Ray Brown. Ray came first. I told him what had happened.

"Please," i begged, "get a doctor we can trust to see me today."

"I'll try to get one as soon as I can," Ray assured me. "I'll have to make some phone calls and then I've got to talk to the judge. He's having a fit, you know. He wants to resume the trial today. Don't worry, everything is going to be all right."

Ray and Evelyn came back in about an hour. "Don't worry," they told me, "the trial has been postponed until there is a report from our doctor. The judge has permitted you to be examined by your own gynecologist, and he's coming this afternoon, so cheer up." They did their best to take my mind off everything and to make me feel better. That day i felt worse than ever before.

"Is the doctor Black?"

"No, he's a Ku Klux Klan doctor," Ray Brown joked. I felt like my insides were going to drop out on the floor at any minute. Ray went outside to meet the doctor and came back followed by a tall, brown-skinned man. The man sure as hell didn't look like no doctor. He looked like Mr. Superfly himself. He had on a long fur coat, a jumpsuit, and platform shoes. But when i looked into his face, i was reassured. He was kind and very self-assured. He was gentle when he examined me and i was truly grateful. He asked a whole lot of questions in a careful, painstaking manner. I was really impressed.

"Would you tell me your name again?" i asked him, ashamed that i had forgotten it.

"Sure. That's an easy order. Ernest Wyman Garrett." He practiced in Newark and there was an air of Newark about him. I liked him instantly. He was one of those rare breed of Black professionals who haven't lost contact with the masses of Black people. He didn't have one trace of the affected bourgie speech and mannerisms that are so popular among the Black middle class.

I waited nervously for the verdict. "There's no doubt about it. You're pregnant. But I found blood in the vaginal canal, which can be a sign that something is wrong. There's a possibility that you are threatening to abort. This doesn't mean that you are going to have a miscarriage. The chances are good that you won't. The odds and medical statistics are in your favor.

He explained the different possibilities and the treatment he

was prescribing. I asked a million questions and, when he left, felt a whole lot better, just knowing there was someone i could trust taking care of me and the baby.

The days that followed are blurry in my mind. Most of the time i slept. The warden and the sheriff and the powers that were didn't like the idea of my having my own doctor, though. In their minds, the butcher, jailhouse-quackhouse doctor was good enough for me. And the fact that Dr. Garrett was Black infuriated them. They refused to let him examine me unless a white doctor, hired by the state, was present, and for the report to the judge, the white doctor had to examine me. Fortunately, he agreed with my doctor's findings. There was a lot of activity going on around me that I didn't understand. I was too out of it to try. I could see, though, that Evelyn and Ray were worried. I wanted to help them, to get to the bottom of what was happening, but i just didn't have the energy.

About two days after his first visit, Dr. Garrett came to visit me. When he finished examining me, he said, "Assata, I don't want to worry you, but I think you should be hospitalized. It's nothing serious, strictly a precautionary measure. You're in no condition to proceed with a trial. You need a few weeks of complete bedrest. There is a possibility the judge will try to push you into that trial right away, without regard for your medical condition. Assata, there is no way we are going to let that happen. I am prepared to fight all the way for your right as a human being to receive decent medical care and for your baby to be born healthy. I'm doing the same for you as I would for any other patient. You should be hospitalized. There isn't a responsible doctor in the world who wouldn't agree with that opinion. And I'm prepared to testify in any court that to deny you proper medical care would be tantamount to committing murder. I will be going, in a very short time, to give a medical report about your condition to the judge. I will do my best to convince him of the seriousness of this matter. I think he'll listen to reason. I'm sure the judge will go along with the findings of two board-certified gynecologists. But if worse comes to worst, and the judge denies our motion, I will see to it personally that this jail and the courtroom are surrounded by the right-to-life people by tomorrow morning."

I was too shot out to say much more than thank you. I was scared to death for my baby, but i knew that everything that could be done was being done and that was a load off my mind. I got dressed and waited for them to come and take me to kourt. I wanted to hear what was going on. When they didn't come for me, i became worried. What was going on? Why weren't they bringing

me to kourt? Why were they taking so long? What were they going to do? Were they going to try to make me go to trial like this? What were they planning to do?

Evelyn and Ray came in strutting and beaming. I knew everything was going to be all right. "What happened? Why didn't they bring me to kourt?"

"You're too sick to go to court." Evelyn laughed. "Haven't you heard that they don't let pregnant women into court? They figure it's a disease and are afraid everybody will catch it. We felt it was much better for you not to be moved. It went fine. They'll be taking you to a hospital as soon as they can make the arrangements. Dr. Garrett did a great job. After that speech, there was no way the judge was gonna force you to go to trial in your condition. The trial has been severed and Sundiata will go on with the trial alone."

"What?" i exclaimed. "But we had agreed that we would be tried together. Why can't they wait until i'm better?"

"Now, Assata, you know they're not gonna wait for you to have your baby to try Sundiata. They claim that being here in Morristown is costing them a fortune."

"It will be cheaper to try us together," i said. "Well, can't i at least see Sundiata and say good-bye to him?"

"We'll try," they said, "but we doubt if there will be time or if the sheriff will consent to it."

"I'm going to miss Sundiata."

"Yes. We know."

Later they put me on a stretcher and wheeled me into an ambulance. "Don't worry," i told the baby, "you're gonna be all right."

Love is contraband in Hell,
cause love is an acid
that eats away bars.

But you, me, and tomorrow
hold hands and make vows
that struggle will multiply.

The hacksaw has two blades.

The shotgun has two barrels.

We are pregnant with freedom.

We are a conspiracy.

After the Village, i lived with Evelyn on 80th Street between Amsterdam and Columbus in Manhattan. She had a garden apartment in a brownstone. Nothing grew in the garden but weeds, and it was where our neighbors threw their garbage. The apartment was one big room that we used for sleeping, eating, and living; it had a kitchen and a bathroom with an old-fashioned toilet up on a platform and an overhead tank so that you had to pull on a little chain to flush it. Evelyn always referred to it as the dump. She had it fixed up nicely, but it was just too small for two people, especially if one of them was me. I was a slob, and Evelyn went to great pains to train me in neatness. In a small place like that, when just a few things are out of place it looks like a hurricane passed through. And many times after a long day's work, poor Evelyn would be greeted with a hurricane, a tornado, and an earthquake at the same time. Gradually, i learned to keep things in something vaguely resembling order.

The neighborhood, for me, was exciting, full of character and different flavors. Central Park and Riverside Park were nearby, and i immediately fell in love with both of them. Then, also, there were plenty of museums nearby; i spent hour upon hour in the Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They were free then, and full of fascinating things. There were all kinds of stores for me to explore and examine, even though most of the time i didn't have any money. I was delighted with it all. And it was my first clear glimpse of the hierarchy of amerikan society.

Eightieth Street, like many of the nearby streets,

was changing. Most of the changing, however, had taken place before i got there. Most of the Germans had moved out and Blacks and Puerto Ricans were moving in. Evelyn told me that when she moved there it was so safe she had slept, in the summer, with the back door open and just the screen door latched. On 80th Street there might be three, four, five, or more people huddled into a one-room apartment. Sometimes the apartments were rented furnished with nothing but an old saggy bed, a chest of drawers, and a beat-up refrigerator and stove. You could usually tell them from the outside by the paper-thin plastic curtains shimmying in the wind. Most of the people on 80th Street were poor, although here and there were a few renovated apartments that catered to a clientele that was a little richer, usually "night people."

Seventy-ninth Street was directly behind us, but there was a world of difference between the two. It was an upper-middle-class street. Doctors and lawyers and a lot of performers lived there. Every day after school, i would hear an opera singer practicing. Maybe that's why i developed a profound dislike for opera. The people on 79th Street wouldn't dream of socializing with the people on 80th Street. They recognized our existence with a mixture of amusement, fear, and dislike. Eighty-first Street between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue was even richer. The lobbies were elegant and the doormen were splendidly attired. They were, for the most part, all white and not even slightly aware of the people who lived only a block away.

Farther over, toward the river, near West End Avenue or Riverside Drive, there was a middle-class neighborhood. The buildings were usually old, grandiose, and well kept. The people who lived there were mostly white, of course, with a few Blacks and mixed couples thrown in. The Upper West Side, as the neighborhood was called, was supposed to be a "liberal" stronghold. I have never really understood exactly what a "liberal" is, though, since i have heard "liberals" express every conceivable opinion on every conceivable subject. As far as i can tell, you have the extreme right, who are fascist, racist capitalist dogs like Ronald Reagan, who come right out and let you know where they're coming from. And on the opposite end, you have the left, who are supposed to be committed to justice, equality, and human rights. And somewhere between those two points is the liberal. As far as i'm concerned, "liberal" is the most meaningless word in the dictionary. History has shown me that as long as some white middle-class people can live high on the hog, take vacations to Europe, send their children to private schools, and reap the benefits of their white skin privileges, then

they are "liberals." But when times get hard and money gets tight, they pull off that liberal mask and you think you're talking to Adolf Hitler. They feel sorry for the so-called underprivileged just as long as they can maintain their own privileges.

Sometimes i walked over to the East Side, on the other side of Central Park. If Riverside Drive was like another city, then the East Side was like another world. English nannies pushed fancy baby carriages (they called them trams) through the eastern side of Central Park. The only Black people you saw were servants or, like me, those just passing through. Fifth Avenue, Park Avenue, chauffeur-driven cars, diamonds, and furs. The Upper East Side was for the sho nuff rich. When i'd walk through those streets, some looked at me as if i was an object from a museum or something. Once or twice, a doorman actually stopped me and asked where i was going. But i kept walking and looking. Sometimes, i'd have some fun and walk into one of the stores. I couldn't believe there were people who paid that kind of money for things. As soon as i'd step in, the salespeople were right on me. Sometimes i said i was just looking. Other times i would ask for outrageous things, like pickled feet. Usually, they would say, "What? What? What?" and i would burst out laughing. One time, i went into a grocery store and was asked who my mistress was.

I was always crazy about art and made it a point to visit any art gallery i discovered. Sometimes they acted snooty or disgusted. At first, i felt uneasy and out of place. But after a while, whenever they acted disgusted, i made a point of asking the price of each piece. They would turn so red and swell up so much that it was comical. I remember hating some of those people, but at the same time i wanted to be rich like them. Back then, i thought being rich was the solution to everything.

Four blocks from where we lived, there was still another world: 84th Street between Amsterdam and Columbus. Before it was torn down, it was voted the worst block in the city. When i was a kid, i never would have imagined that people could live so bad. Living in some of those apartments was like living in a coffin. I swear, there was one building that, when you walked past it in the summer, it stunk so bad it made you want to drop to your knees. Usually, i'd just sit on some stoop and watch the street. There was always something going on. Men standing around with do-rags on their heads, covering greasy process hairdos, making deals, laughing and talking and looking at the women passing by. Drunks and fights and drunken fights. The street was always alive and swarming with people. Survival and life were hanging out in the open like laundry

for everyone to see. Arguments, dirty deals, misery, and malice ran out into the streets like pus from open sores. There was something horrible and foreboding about the street, yet exciting at the same time.

Lil-Bit, who went to my school, lived on 84th Street. Her nickname was Lil-Bit, but i called her Fruit-fly because she was crazy about fruit. I liked to hang out with her because she was a good walker; we could walk for hours without getting tired. One day she asked me to come with her to get something from her house. When we got there i couldn't believe it. I thought i had seen some messed-up cribs before, but hers took the cake. She lived in a tiny little pea-green closet of a room, covered with wall-to-wall roaches. I just kept staring at Lil-Bit. She walked around in that horror house like it was normal. She didn't even try to kill the roaches. She just brushed them aside if they got in her way. When i left, i itched and scratched for hours.

When i met Lil-Bit's mother and started getting to know her and some of her neighbors, i got my first lesson in hopelessness. Lil-Bit's mother used to work in factories and laundries as a presser. But she burned her hand real bad and was on some kind of disability. She lived from day to day and from check to check. She was always sick, and sometimes her cough was so bad i thought she was going to die any minute. She acted like she was too tired or too weak to do much of anything. They had a hot plate, but most of the time they didn't even cook. They just ate sandwiches, usually lunch meat on white bread. Lil-Bit's mother never went anywhere except to the clinic or to the welfare office or to the bar on Amsterdam. Sometimes she would get drunk and start crying about some man she used to go with. She didn't know anything about what was going on in the world and she didn't seem to care. Eighty-fourth Street was her world and other worlds didn't really exist. When i was with Lil-bit and her mother i felt all kinds of things. Sometimes disgust and anger because they accepted anything and lived any old kind of way. Other times i felt sorry for them, and, still other times, i relaxed and enjoyed them because they were so easy and down to earth. But whenever i hung out with them it was down on the stoop. I would never go up into that house.

Evelyn kept my excursions at a bare minimum, though. She was strict and didn't play around. Every day, after school, i had to be in the house by four o'clock, and she would call home just to see that i had arrived safely. Evelyn didn't want me in the street too much because she said the neighborhood was bad and she didn't want me to get in any trouble. And she also wanted me to stay at

home and do my homework. After homework, i read. I have never been too fond of television and, besides, Evelyn had an excellent library. Those books were like food to me. Fiction and poetry were my favorites, although i liked history and psychology, too. I also liked to read about other countries and about all the different religions in the world. The only books i never touched were Evelyn's law books. They were dry and boring and Greek to me.

Evelyn was a store of knowledge and she knew about a whole range of subjects. We were always discussing or debating something. Hanging out with Evelyn, i started to think that i was cool and sophisticated and grown up and that i knew it all. You couldn't tell me nothing. I was just too cool. Evelyn and i went to museums and art galleries and the theater. On Broadway, off Broadway, she was turning me on to so many things. I started to view movies as an art form instead of just entertainment. I was learning what and how to order at restaurants. And my vocabulary and control of the English language were expanding greatly.

But life with Evelyn definitely had its ups and downs. Sometimes we got along famously and other times it was terrible. Evelyn was super-honest and she just could not tolerate my lying. I would try to tell the truth and try to be honest, but sometimes, especially if i was in a tight situation, i would lie. I had been in the habit of lying and it was easy for me to fall back into the old pattern. But it was futile to lie to Evelyn because she was a lawyer and would cross-examine me until i would inevitably trip myself up. Little by little, i got out of the habit, but it was a long and constant battle between us.

Our financial situation also had its ups and downs. One week we were "rich" and the next week we were "poor." Evelyn was determined to be a trial lawyer and to be in private practice. Most of her clients were Black and poor and most of the time they didn't have money to pay her. But Evelyn would defend them anyway. She was always up in arms about some injustice or other. I used to call her the "last angry woman." But whenever somebody did pay her, we were "rich." We would go out and celebrate. For a week or so we ate steaks and lamb chops, went to restaurants, took taxis; the next week we would be right back to riding subways and eating hamburgers. Evelyn was generous and extravagant, and she had absolutely no head for business. I usually did the shopping for us since i was more tight-fisted and practical. Once in a while, i'd be tempted to give myself a "five-finger discount," but Evelyn was so honest that it rubbed off on me. I was becoming so goody-goody i couldn't stand myself. I really underwent a great change.

Evelyn had great plans for my future. I was going to Junior High School 44, but Evelyn wasn't satisfied with the education i was receiving. J. H. S. 44 wasn't a bad school, but we were learning at a much slower pace than at my school in Queens. I don't remember too much about the school except for the music classes. Most of the class was Black or Puerto Rican and we all loved music. But we hated music class with a passion. The teacher talked to us as though we were inferior savages, incapable of appreciating the finer things in life. She lectured about symphonies and concertos and sonatas and the like in a snooty voice. A boy would mimic the gestures and expressions of the teacher and the rest of us would giggle and snicker as she played music. The teacher became more and more exasperated, saying, "Listen! Can't you listen? Don't you have ears? Can't you appreciate anything? I'm trying to get you to appreciate music and you all act as though you're deaf. I want you to stop talking! I want you to stop talking and listen! Do you hear me?" We got louder and louder and the teacher became more and more disgusted. She would scream at us and call us names like hooligans and ignoramuses. And we returned her insults.

We hated her because she thought the music she liked was so superior. She didn't recognize that we had our own music and that we loved music. For her, there was no other music except Bach and Beethoven and Mozart. To her, we were uncultured and uncouth. For her, Latin music, jazz, rhythm and blues were trashy and we were trash. She was a racist who would have denied it to the bitter end. A lot of people don't know how many ways racism can manifest itself and in how many ways people fight against it. When i think of how racist, how Eurocentric our so-called education in amerika is, it staggers my mind. And when i think back to some of those kids who were labeled "troublemakers" and "problem students," i realize that many of them were unsung heroes who fought to maintain some sense of dignity and self-worth.

Evelyn strongly "suggested" that i enter Cathedral High School in the ninth grade. I was not at all happy about the idea since i hated wearing a uniform and Catholic schools had a reputation for being so strict. But Evelyn kept on strongly suggesting and i got the message. I didn't mind the Catholic religious part of it, though, since i was going to mass regularly and i was kind of holy, holy that year. I took the test for Cathedral and passed, and it was firm that i was going to enter Cathedral the next September. I even started to feel happy about it. It was a change and i have always been a person who likes a change of scenery.

I usually spent my weekends with one of my girlfriends or

with my mother as much as possible. Toni was cool to hang out with and she knew where all the parties were. But we never had deep conversations so we never got really close. Bonnie and i met through Toni and began what was to be a best-friend relationship with an argument about Abraham Lincoln. We argued for hours until Bonnie's aunt told us to shut up and go to bed, since neither of us knew what we were talking about. Bonnie lived in the same building my mother lived in, and after that night we became close friends and talked about every subject on earth. Bonnie knew more than i did about what was happening in the world and we spent hours talking about Medgar Evers, sit-ins, freedom riders, etc. We began to write poetry about love and Black people, and sometimes we wrote morbid poetry about hate and death. As soon as we finished a poem we'd call each other and read it. After a while, we read poetry together. Dorothy Parker and Edna St. Vincent Millay were our idols. We read everything they wrote and even memorized their poems. After that, we read all different kinds of poets. We were "deep" and were forever in the library or a bookstore trying to find another poet who was "deep," too. The more we read, the more we wrote. And it came in handy in the street. If we didn't like somebody, or if we had some dispute with someone, we wrote a poem about them. We made up all kinds of "dozens" poems and laughed our heads off. We were young and old, happy and sad at the same time.

Usually, every summer, i went down South to visit my grandparents. When they had the business on the beach, i loved it. But they had lost two different buildings on the beach, both destroyed by hurricanes. After the last one was leveled, they operated a restaurant on Red Cross Street. I liked working in the restaurant sometimes, but it wasn't as much fun as working on the beach.

One of the last summers that i spent down South, the NAACP rented a building a few doors from my grandparents' restaurant, which was a great source of interest to me. I was forever walking by, standing in the doorway, or sliding discreetly into the building to see what was going on. I could hear them talk about integrating the South by sitting in, praying in, singing in, and about nonviolence. I was glad because i surely wanted segregation to end. I had grown up exposed to the degrading, dehumanizing side of segregation. I remember that when we traveled from North to South and vice versa we really felt the sting of segregation more acutely than at other times. We'd drive hours without being able to stop anywhere. Sometimes we would pull into a filthy old gas station, buy gas, and then be told that we were not permitted to use their filthy old

bathroom because we were Black. I can remember clearly squatting in the bushes with mosquitoes biting my bare buttocks, and my grandmother handing me toilet paper, because we could not find a place with a "colored" bathroom. Sometimes we were hungry, but there was no place to eat. Other times we were sleepy and there was no hotel or motel that would admit us. If i sit and add up all the "colored" toilets and drinking fountains in my life and all of the back-of-the-buses or the Jim Crow railway cars or the places i couldn't go, it adds up to one great ball of anger.

And so, when i saw these NAACP people, i was ready to do whatever it was that they were going to do. But they were very confusing. One day i was hanging around in the office and two men were talking about nonviolence and self-control. Then he walked around the room asking everybody questions.

"What would you do if they pushed you?"

"Nothing. I'd just keep on doing what i came to do."

"What would you do if they kicked you?"

"I'd pray to the Lord to forgive them for their sins."

"What would you do if they spit on you?"

"I'd just go on singing."

Well, that was just too much for me. I could take someone pushing me, hitting me, kicking me, but to sit there and let some craka dog spit on me, well, just the idea of it made me want to fight. To me, if someone spit on you, it was worse than hitting you, especially if they spit in your face. I tried to tell myself that i would just sit there and take it, but every muscle in my body, every instinct i had, rebelled against it. The man continued around the room asking everybody the same questions. When he came to me, i answered the same, too, except for the spitting question.

"I don't know," i told him.

"What do you mean, you don't know?"

"I just don't know."

"Well, little sister, we can see that you're just not ready. If you want your freedom, there's no sacrifice that's too big to make."

Everybody looked at me as if i was some kind of stupid idiot. I felt bad, but i still couldn't get used to the idea of letting somebody spit on me. The man said i wasn't ready, and i had to agree with him.

When i think back to those days, i feel such admiration and respect for the spirit of struggle and sacrifice that my people exhibited. They went up against white mobs, water hoses, vicious dogs, the Ku Klux Klan, trigger-happy nightstick-wielding police, armed only with their belief in justice and their desire for freedom.

I remember how i felt in those days. I wanted to be an amerikan just like any other amerikan. I wanted a piece of amerika's apple pie. I believed we could get our freedom just by appealing to the consciences of white people. I believed that the North was really interested in integration and civil rights and equal rights. I used to go around saying "our country," "our president," "our government." When the national anthem was played or the pledge of allegiance spoken, i stood at attention and felt proud. I don't know what in the hell i was feeling proud about, but i felt the juice of patriotism running through my blood.

I believed that if the South could only be like the North, then everything would be all right. I believed that we Black people were really making progress and that the government, the president, the supreme kourt, and the congress were behind us, so we couldn't go wrong. I believed that integration was really the solution to our problems. I believed that if white people could go to school with us, live next to us, work next to us, they would see that we were really good people and would stop being prejudiced against us. I believed that amerika was really a good country, like my teachers said in school, "the greatest country on the face of the earth." I grew up believing that stuff. Really believing it. And, now, twenty-odd years later, it seems like a bad joke.

Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them. Once you study and really get a good understanding of the way the system in the United States works, then you see, without a doubt, that the civil rights movement never had a chance of succeeding. White people, whether they are from the North or from the South, whether it was in 1960 or 1980, benefit from the oppression of Black people. Those who believe that the president or the vice-president and the congress and the supreme kourt run this country are sadly mistaken. The almighty dollar is king; those who have the most money control the country and, through campaign contributions, buy and sell presidents, congressmen, and judges, the ones who pass the laws and enforce the laws that benefit their benefactors.

The rich have always used racism to maintain power. To hate someone, to discriminate against them, and to attack them because of their racial characteristics is one of the most primitive, reactionary, ignorant ways of thinking that exists.

A war between the races would help nobody and free nobody and should be avoided at all costs. But a one-sided race war with Black people as the targets and white people shooting the guns is

ASSATA worse. We will be criminally negligent, however, if we do not deal
I40 with racism and racist violence, and if we do not prepare to defend
ourselves against it.

STRANGER

Everything you love
is from a different world.
Hungry,
you turn your nose up
at my peas and rice.

I was taken to Roosevelt Hospital in Metuchen, new jersey, and shackled to the bed by my foot. Dr. Garrett had established that i was one month pregnant. When he visited me he demanded that the shackles be removed at once (based on the elementary principle that proper treatment, both mental and physical, of a woman threatening miscarriage would not seem to include being chained to a bedpost). My mental stability was also threatened by the round-the-clock guards who sat outside my hospital room with shotguns trained at my head.

After ten days, i was discharged from the hospital over the objections of my doctor, brought to the middlesex county jail for men, and kept in solitary confinement from February 1974 until May 1974.

At first, they wouldn't even give me milk. Since pork was served as a staple meat almost daily, i began to slowly starve. (In county jails it goes like this: one sheet, one horse blanket, a metal cup; your cell is raided if you have luxuries, like salt.) They did everything they could to thwart the care Dr. Garrett was trying to give me. They hired their own doctor and insisted that whenever my doctor saw me, their man had to be present. This meant a severe limitation on the number of visits Dr. Garrett could arrange because their doctor happened often "not to make it" out to the prison on the days examinations had been agreed to and scheduled.

My lawyers had initiated a lawsuit against the state of new jersey in federal court charging medical maltreatment and dietary abuse. Before the date the hearing was scheduled, i was extradited to the State of New York, which made the federal court action moot.

When i arrived at Rikers Island again, i was anemic and malnourished, according to my entrance physical. New jersey had been giving me iron pills, but i was anemic up to the last blood test before giving birth.

The pregnancy, or "special," diet at Rikers, in addition to the regular food, was powdered milk, juice, and a hard-boiled egg daily. This was my diet until i gave birth, and things seemed to go normally.

Meanwhile, the lawyers obtained another court order from the New York court permitting Dr. Garrett to continue treating me. When he first came to Rikers, i was in the infirmary. They told him the court order was "no good" and that he couldn't see me. I was left in a room for three days with a woman who turned out later to have active tuberculosis. It was May and they had turned the heat off. It got cold again and women who were having seizures, methadone withdrawal, and one sister who they said had pneumonia all piled blankets on their beds. The sister got worse and worse. Finally, they brought her to Elmhurst Hospital where they discovered she did have tuberculosis. I found this out later, when she was returned to Rikers, kept in isolation, and the doctors wore masks and gloves when they visited her.

I also had monilia, a vaginal discharge, which worsened because the Montefiore Hospital doctors assigned to Rikers could not agree about how it should be treated. They refused to treat the condition at all until my culture was returned from Elmhurst Hospital. By the time they managed to get the culture back, the whole inside of my thigh was chapped raw from the discharge, and i could barely walk.

Montefiore Hospital and the Health and Hospital Corporation went to court to prevent Dr. Garrett from delivering my baby. Their position was that since i was a prisoner it was not necessary for me to have the doctor of my choice. They also said he was "disruptive" because, when he did manage to see me, he "often wrote in my chart," which they found very disturbing. The kourt upheld them. I was only a prisoner!

I went into labor the morning of September 10, 1974, at 4 A.M. on 2 Main at Rikers, where i had been kept in the psycho ward. I got out of bed, took a shower, braided my hair, and packed. My labor was mild, a pinch every half hour, which rapidly became a pinch every fifteen minutes. At 11 A.M. i was sure i was on my way, but i had no doctor to confirm it, and i refused to go to the infirmary. Around noon i asked to call Dr. Garrett and they somehow got hold of him. (He was at Elmhurst Hospital trying to

persuade them to let him deliver my baby.) At about 3 P.M., he arrived at Rikers and i went up to the infirmary to meet him. He told me that i was "effaced" and definitely in labor. I would not allow the other doctors there to examine me.

I was taken to Elmhurst Hospital in a motorcade. It looked to me like a million police cars buzzing around the vehicle in which i, a woman in labor, was riding. And they all followed. Into Elmhurst Hospital and up to the delivery room. They surrounded the hospital.

There was a demonstration outside of Elmhurst Hospital in support of my right to choose the doctor who would deliver my baby, and Evelyn and Dr. Garrett held a press conference at the hospital to explain the situation. There were actually two policewomen inside the labor room and several outside. I was having contractions every five minutes. Finally, i let one of their doctors, a resident, examine me to see how the labor was progressing—which turned out to be a terrible mistake. When he finished, i was bleeding. After that, there was no way I would let any of them touch me again. I ordered them to bring me a stethoscope (to see if the baby's heart was beating normally) and a few other instruments i would need because, i said, "I am delivering the baby myself."

It was a standoff for a couple of hours. Then a nurse told me to walk around to ease the pain and encourage labor. I got up, then pretended to fall out (knowing how afraid they were of lawsuits), and the doctors rushed over to pick me off the floor. I knew they were worried. I stated again, "I am delivering the baby myself." I checked the baby's heart with the stethoscope. It was beating normally.

That, or the press conference, or the demonstration outside of the building seemed to do it. They told me that if i signed a release statement absolving them of all responsibility, they would let Dr. Garrett deliver my baby. I signed, making certain that they had no control over Dr. Garrett or over anything having to do with my labor. And that was that.

He took over. He examined me, listened to the baby's heart, and, at some point, broke my water. He explained carefully everything that would happen and answered all my questions. He gave me a local anesthetic in the cervix. I didn't want Demerol or a saddle block, but the paracervical block seemed O.K. At this point i was very tired.

After that i was still in labor but felt little pain. I went to sleep for a while. I woke up about 3:30 A.M. and i could feel the baby lowering and thought i could feel the baby's head. I called the

nurse. She said, without looking, that i wasn't "ready" yet. When i insisted, she looked and went running for Dr. Garrett. They wheeled me into delivery, he gave me a local anesthetic, and did the episiotomy. I pushed three times and she was here. At 4:00 A.M., Kakuya Amala Olugbala Shakur was born. I said, "Check that baby out" (just to ensure her subsequent safety). The birth itself was peaceful and beautiful—out of sight. It's very important for a woman to go through the birth experience with people she trusts.

Later that day, September 11, they still hadn't brought me the baby. Dr. Garrett had gone home to sleep and, when he returned, at 6 P.M. that day, i still hadn't seen the baby. He reminded them that i was supposed to breastfeed her. They told him he hadn't "written a prescription" for breastfeeding. Finally, they brought me the baby and i breastfed her every four hours—another incredibly beautiful experience. The nurses from the nursery were very friendly and kind and kept me informed about the baby's condition. But the staff in D-11, the psycho ward where i was kept in a tiny, guarded room, were something else again.

They allowed me only one shower a day. No toothbrush or toothpaste, only mouthwash. They don't furnish it, a friend can't bring it, and the prison won't allow it. I had to beg them for a bra while i was nursing. The prison refused to let me bring one. Many strange doctors tried to examine me to hasten my discharge and get rid of me. I came close to physically brawling with a couple of them because i refused their examinations. Finally, they discharged me anyway, without the consent of my doctor. The Commissioner of Corrections, Benjamin Malcolm, had signed a paper taking all responsibility for my discharge.

They put me in an ambulance, chained me to a stretcher, and brought me back to the Women's House of Detention at Rikers Island. They took me straight to the infirmary and said, "You will have to stay here and be examined." I was really depressed, having been separated so abruptly from my baby. I said, "I don't want to be here. I won't be examined here. Send me to PSA [punitive segregation area: solitary confinement], anywhere. I don't care. I just have to be somewhere by myself. Just leave me alone."

That's not quite what they did. When i refused examination, i walked out of the infirmary and they called the goon squad (several large female officers). They all jumped on me and started beating me. They had me on the floor—eventually my arms and legs were chained. They dragged me by the chains to PSA and stopped only when a nurse asked them to please stop. So they put me on a mattress and dragged the mattress. They took me to the observa-

tion room and left me, hands and feet cuffed. I had no sanitary napkins, no means to wash myself. The cuffs cut into my skin (the scars are still visible), and my wrists were bleeding. Later i found out that i had received an infraction for slapping an officer in the face while they were beating me.

I still refused their medical examination. They finally brought me napkins. I was left on a mattress, on the floor, no bed and no shower. I was there for two weeks. I continued to refuse all their medical attention, insisting that Dr. Garrett examine me. I refused to eat, so eventually my breasts, which were full of milk, stopped hurting. They offered doctors of all kinds and drugs (mainly tranquilizers). They sent the psychiatrist, who had the nerve to ask me if i was depressed. The Disciplinary Board met in front of my cell and gave me an additional sentence of fourteen days in PSA. All other inmates were cleared out of PSA. During this time i was still refusing most food. I was so weak i fainted a couple of times. At that time it was also Ramadan, when it is forbidden to eat until sundown for the whole two weeks. I just ate once a day, when the food was edible, and for the first few days I ate nothing at all.

After two weeks, they said, "If you agree to be vaginally searched, you can go to your floor." I did and went to my floor. The next day the captain came down to my cell and informed me that they had decided to lock me up again for refusing a complete physical from the medical staff assigned to Rikers from Montefiore Hospital. What had happened was that when i was returned to my floor they told me that Dr. Garrett had been permitted to examine me and that he was at Rikers Island, that my lawyer had gone to court and the court had ruled that i could be examined by Dr. Garrett. So i waited. A white doctor came in and said in order for me to see my doctor, i must see him and be examined by him first. I refused. Then they brought in a Black doctor, who greeted me with, "Hey, soul sister." He was really sneaky. I refused him, too. So Dr. Garrett was forced to leave and I was put back in PSA. They threatened me with administrative segregation, so i sat on the floor and refused to move when my sentence in PSA was up. They gave me an infraction and a verbal reprimand and said the vaginal search would be sufficient. Then the next day they locked me up again.

This time, i was locked in my cell for a month. I continued to refuse most food. They let me out to shower whenever they felt like it. I began a hunger strike at one point, and after a few days in the tiny cell i was sick. I wondered how long i would have to hold out.

Evelyn had filed a writ of *habeas corpus* before the brooklyn

federal kourt against Commissioner Malcolm and Essie Murph, superintendent of the Women's House of Detention on Rikers, to force them to release me from punitive segregation. I was to appear in kourt for the hearing, but I didn't know the date. Then a deputy told me, "Your court date's been postponed. And your lawyer sends her advice: see a doctor." It was a lie. But I believed it. I was examined by the prison doctors under what I thought was Evelyn's advice.

So i was no longer locked. Just in jail. And separated from my child.

LEFTOVERS—WHAT IS LEFT

After the bars and the gates
and the degradation,
What is left?

After the lock ins and the lock outs
and the lock ups,
What is left?

I mean, after the chains that get entangled
in the grey of one's matter,
After the bars that get stuck
in the hearts of men and women,
What is left?

After the tears and disappointments,
After the lonely isolation,
After the cut wrist and the heavy noose,
What is left?

I mean, like, after the commissary kisses
and the get-your-shit-off blues,
After the hustler has been hustled,
What is left?

After the murderburgers and the goon squads
and the tear gas,
After the bulls and the bull pens
and the bull shit,
What is left?

Like, after you know that god
can't be trusted,
After you know that the shrink
is a pusher,

that the word is a whip
and the badge is a bullet,
What is left?

After you know that the dead
are still walking,
After you realize that silence
is talking,
that outside and inside
are just an illusion,
What is left?

I mean, like, where is the sun?
Where are her arms and
where are her kisses?
There are lip-prints on my pillow—
i am searching.
What is left?

I mean, like, nothing is standstill
and nothing is abstract.
The wing of a butterfly
can't take flight.
The foot on my neck is part
of a body.
The song that i sing is part
of an echo.
What is left?

I mean, like, love is specific.
Is my mind a machine gun?
Is my heart a hacksaw?
Can i make freedom real? Yeah!
What is left?

I am at the top and bottom
of a lower-archy.
I am an earth lover
from way back.
I am in love with
losers and laughter.
I am in love with
freedom and children.

Love is my sword
and truth is my compass.
What is left?

T

he next several years of high school passed uneventfully. Because i was spending weekends with my mother, we became closer. During my seventeenth year, however, i decided to quit school, get a job, and live on my own.

My entrance into the working world was a rude awakening. I didn't even know what most of the want ads meant. Auditor, copywriter, accounts receivable, key punch operator were all foreign words to me.

Every day i hit the pavement with my best "office-looking" clothes on and a pair of high-heel torture shoes. Every day i came home more frustrated than the day before. I didn't know how to do anything, had no experience, and was Black to boot. Finally, i paid some employment agency one or two weeks' salary for the privilege of getting me one of those dingy, boring, \$95-dollar-a-week jobs. I was one of those slaves where you pay a fifth of your salary for taxes, some more for social security, another \$5 a month for union dues, and the rest was not even enough to die on.

It seemed that the whole world was made up of things i couldn't afford. After i paid the rent on my furnished room, spent carfare, and bought food, i had just enough money to buy an air sandwich. The only saving grace was that i didn't have too much time to hang out. I was going to night school, so i would leave my boring job and go to boring night school to diagram sentences, memorize garbage, and prepare for a high school diploma that meant nothing in the job market. My life was being spent pushing around meaningless papers that had nothing to do with living. I wasn't doing anything positive. I wasn't making anything, creating anything, or contributing to anything. After a while, i wanted to tell them to take their

papers and their job and shove it.

But at first i wasn't like that. After weeks of looking for a job, i was grateful just to have one. I didn't think about low pay, indecent working conditions, no medical benefits, only one week vacation. I was just happy to be working. I identified with the job and talked about "our" company and told people what "we" manufactured. I wasn't making two cents over lunch money and talked like i owned the place. I remember once i was working at some joint where they made trailers. I had a job pushing papers. I told one of my aunt's friends that she should buy one of those trailers if she ever wanted one. She looked at me like i was crazy. "Why?" she asked. "Are they going to give me a discount?" I felt so stupid. It hit me. They wouldn't even give me a discount and i was working there.

The longer i worked at those places, the shorter my patience got. Half the time i didn't even want to hear that rinky-dink stuff they talked about at the office. I got sick of listening to gossip about the bosses and this and that and who was messing with who. After a while, i stayed pretty much to myself, and when i wasn't busy i would stick a book between some pages and read. That was back in the mid-sixties and papers were filled with stories about riots.

At the time, i really didn't know what to think about the riots. The only thing i can remember thinking was that i wanted to see the rioters win. In the office there was a group of secretaries who worked for the president or the vice-presidents. They looked down on those of us who worked in the general office and treated us like we were nothing. One day, i was in the bathroom and one secretary came in. She was spraying hair spray on a puffed-up French roll that was so hard it looked like it had been baked on. She began talking about this and that. I was surprised because she never talked to me. Then she started about the riots, "what a shame it was" that "those people" were so stupid and dumb for rioting because they were just tearing up their own neighborhoods and burning down their own houses. I didn't say anything. She prodded: "I said, isn't it a shame? Isn't it?" I didn't know what to say. It was true that Black people were burning down Black neighborhoods, but i didn't know how to deal with the question. She kept insisting. Finally, i said, "Yes," and walked out.

I was disgusted with myself. I hadn't wanted to agree with her, but i didn't know what else to say. I spent half the night thinking until i felt i had the answer. A few days later, the subject came up again. This time the whole bunch of front-office secretaries, who were friendly with the office manager, came into the general office. Before they had a chance to get any words out after "riot," i was on

their case. "What do you mean, they're burning down their houses? They don't own those houses. They don't own those stores. I'm glad they burned down those stores because those stores were robbing them in the first place!" They stood with their mouths open.

After that, the office manager went out of her way to hassle me. Miscellaneous whites began to ask my opinion about the riots, and i made sure they weren't disappointed. I knew it wouldn't be long before they fired me. The only reason i didn't quit was that i had nowhere to go and nothing else lined up. When i was finally fired, i was relieved.

Because my girlfriend Bonnie and i read a lot of fiction and poetry, we thought we were intellectuals. Neither of us had finished high school, but we used to go to this place on Broadway called the West End, dressed in what we believed to be our scholastic finery. It was one of those real college-type places, with pastrami sandwiches and pitchers of dark beer. We sat around trying to look "deep" until someone sat down and talked to us. After a while, we made friends with some African students who were studying at Columbia.

I loved to listen to the Africans. They were intense, serious, and had so much dignity. I was introduced to African customs, and they spent hours explaining the various aspects of their cultures. Bonnie asked about their marriage ceremonies because she was dying to get married. I asked about the food because i loved it: curried chicken, groundnut stew (chicken in peanut sauce), and corn bread that you cook over the stove. You would break off a little piece, roll it into a ball, dip your thumb in the middle and make a spoon that you would fill with gravy and eat. It really made me think about how bad they've done us. We know everything about spaghetti and egg rolls and crepes suzette, but we don't know the first thing about our own food. When i was a little kid, if you had asked me what Africans ate, i would have answered, "People!"

One day, Vietnam came up. It was around 1964 and the movement against the war had not yet blown up in full force. Someone asked me what i thought. I didn't have the faintest idea. Back then, the only thing i read in the papers was the headlines, crime stories, comics, or the horoscope. I said, "It's all right, i guess." All of a sudden there was complete silence. "Would you mind explaining, sister, what you mean by 'it's all right, i guess'?" The brother's voice was mocking. I said something like "You know, the war we're fighting over there, you know, for democracy." It was clear, from the expressions around me, that i had said the wrong

thing. The brother i had come with looked like he wanted to crawl under the floor. "Who's fighting for democracy?" somebody asked. "We are. The United States." And then, as an afterthought, i added, "You know, they're over there fighting communism. Fighting for democracy." The brother held his head in his hands as if he had a headache. I knew i had said something wrong, but i couldn't figure out what. Thinking i had failed to state my case strongly enough, i continued repeating everything i had heard on television. Babbling. Which only made matters worse.

When i finished, the brother asked me if i knew anything about the history of Vietnam. I didn't. He told me. He explained French colonialization, exploitation, brutalization, the starvation and illiteracy; the long fight waged and won in the North and the u.s. involvement in propping up a phony government after the French got their butts kicked.

The brother was talking about names, places, and events just like he was from Vietnam or something. I sat there with my mouth hanging open. He knew all this stuff and he wasn't even studying history. I couldn't believe that this African, who didn't even live in the u.s. or in Asia, could know more than me who had friends and neighbors who were fighting over there.

Then he defined the u.s. government's role, that it was fighting for money, to defend the interests of u.s. corporations and to establish military bases. I didn't know whether to believe him or not. I had never heard of such a thing. "What about democracy?" i asked him. "Don't you believe in democracy?" Yes, he said, but the government the u.s. was supporting was not a democracy but a bloodthirsty dictatorship. He started running all kinds of names and dates on me and there was no way i could respond. There he was, talking about the u.s. government just like somebody would talk about a criminal. I just couldn't relate to it. But my mind was blown.

Despite that, i continued saying the first thing that came into my head: that the u.s. was fighting communists because they wanted to take over everything. When someone asked me what communism was, i opened my mouth to answer, then realized i didn't have the faintest idea. My image of a communist came from a cartoon. It was a spy with a black trench coat and a black hat pulled down over his face, slinking around corners. In school, we were taught that communists worked in salt mines, that they weren't free, that everybody wore the same clothes, and that no one owned anything. The Africans rolled with laughter.

I felt like a bona fide clown. One of them explained that

communism was a political-economic system, but i wasn't listening. I was just digging on myself. I had been hooping and hollering about something that i didn't even understand. I knew i didn't know what the hell communism was, and yet i'd been dead set against it. Just like when you're a little kid and they get you to believe in the bogeyman. You don't know what the hell the bogeyman is, but you hate him and you're scared of him.

I never forgot that day. We're taught at such an early age to be against the communists, yet most of us don't have the faintest idea what communism is. Only a fool lets somebody else tell him who his enemy is. I started remembering all the stupid stuff people told me when i was little. "Don't trust West Indians because they'll stab you in the back." "Don't trust Africans because they think they are better than we are." "Don't hang out with Puerto Ricans because they all stick together and will gang up on you."

I had learned, through experience, that they were all lies told by stupid people, but i never thought i could be so easily tricked into being against something i didn't understand. It's got to be one of the most basic principles of living: always decide who your enemies are for yourself, and never let your enemies choose your enemies for you.

After that, i began to read about what was happening in Vietnam. What the Africans had said was true. There were also articles about the u.s. army in Vietnam, their involvement in torture and forcing Vietnamese women to sell their bodies just to survive.

I was so confused. It just didn't make any sense to me. "Our government couldn't do anything that bad," i told Bonnie. There had to be some other information. I couldn't even understand what "we" were doing there in the first place. Some kind of treaty, they said, but it didn't make any sense. I got so disgusted at one point that i said i wasn't going to read the news anymore.

"Ignorance is bliss," Bonnie said.

"The hell it is," i answered. I damn sure didn't want to be as ignorant as i had been. When you don't know what's going on in the world you're at a definite disadvantage. I decided i'd keep trying to follow what was happening, but i still couldn't believe the u.s. was doing all the foul things i was reading in the newspapers.

"What do you mean, you don't believe it?" Bonnie asked. "Just take a look at what they're doing to you."

The difference between the Africans and the other friends i hung out with that summer was startling. I remember one day at the beach. Everybody is hee-hee happy. It's party time. A multi-

colored umbrella stands defiantly against the breeze. Blankets and silly-looking beach towels color the beach, along with soda cans and bottles of Bacardi and Johnnie Walker Black. Healthy-looking Black men, wearing turned-down sailor hats and college sweat-shirts with cutoff sleeves, lug ice chests and other stuff back and forth. An improvised outdoor sound system has been hooked up and Martha and the Vandellas are wailing in the background.

I am insisting on reading James Baldwin even though the wind keeps flapping the pages. Anguished voices scream and moan from the pages. Compressed ghettos threaten to explode. Poverty and fire and brimstone boil over into a deadly stew, but the "beautiful" people refuse to let me read in peace. My girlfriend has insisted on "fixing me up" with "Mr. Wonderful," who turns out to be an egomaniac decked out in monogrammed swimming trunks, a matching terrycloth robe, and a monogrammed towel to boot. Mr. Wonderful consents to grace me with his presence. His looks and manner tell me that i should be grateful because he is definitely what's happening. His ride is a red MG convertible, his crib is in Esplanade Gardens, and his gig is an assistant manager for some bank downtown. He is kool from his reel-to-reel tapedeck to his color TV, right down to his shaggy "bachelor rug," which he leeringly tells me about.

He drinks Remy Martin cognac and Harvey's Bristol Cream, uses a cologne i can't pronounce, and i wait, expectantly, for him to tell me his brand of toothpaste. He goes on and on about his trinkets and status symbols. "Look at this monogrammed mother-fucker," i think to myself. He is smug and insinuating. A Black version of "Bachelor Knows Best," or some such thing. I want to go back to James Baldwin, but i am surrounded by a group of people that talk too loud, looking and thinking somewhat like Mr. Wonderful. They are talking about Karmann Ghias, Porsches, Corvettes, and other cars that are deemed "in."

The conversation drifts on to co-ops and high-rise apartment complexes. A young man, who has mentioned more than once that he is an accountant, tells us the benefits of buying "property" on the Island. An insurance salesman says that he sells insurance out on the Island and pulls some business cards out of a little silver-colored case which he "just happens to have handy" in his beach bag. A redheaded schoolteacher who has eyes for the accountant says that she has always wanted a house on the Island with a big kitchen. After talk about the Island has exhausted itself, the conversation turns to places to go. French and Mexican restaurants are definitely "in," with a restaurant that sells fifty different kinds of

crepes winning hands down. One of the men, who is a poverty pimp, says that he has moved his offices to the Red Rooster bar and restaurant. Somebody laughingly asks if he isn't afraid to go into Harlem "with all them niggas." Everybody has some favorite restaurant on top of some building downtown. They don't talk about the food, just the scenery. Mr. Wonderful says he has a Playboy key and often eats at the Playboy Club.

I smile uneasily, feeling out of place. All this talk is giving me a headache. Some fraternity brothers invite me to dance. One tells me that i look like a Delta girl. "How does a Delta girl look?" i ask. "Just like you in a swimsuit." Mr. Wonderful glares at them. I am picking up snatches of conversation from all around me. Talks of grants, poverty programs, and democratic politics. Talk of the NFL, and the football season. Talk of Bergdorf Goodman, Bloomingdale's, and Saks Fifth Avenue. About speedboats and cruisers which nobody owns but everybody wants to.

Whiskey flows like water, and the speedboats turn into yachts. Everybody is just crazy about the islands: Jamaica, Bermuda, Nassau. Everybody is so chic. I'm so tired of hearing about it that I want to send them somewhere by way of foot—mine! It's a disgrace. Social workers talking about their clients like dogs, teachers who don't like to teach. A probation officer complaining about how dangerous his job is. A bunch of money-worshipers putting on a front for each other. Somebody asks me if i have my thing together. "Which thing?" i want to know. I take a walk up to the house to get away from it all. Some women are in the bathroom smoking reefer and blowing their hair dry. I go fishing in my bag for some aspirin. "Where'd you buy your suit?" one asks me. I don't want to say Klein's, but i say it anyway. "They have some nice things, sometimes," she says without conviction, dismissing me as a bargain basement case. They go back to talking about people and hair going back. They are putting on makeup to look like Black Barbie dolls on the beach.

I go back outside feeling like i'm from another planet. I feel lonely and serious. Something has been happening to me, a change that has been a long time coming. I want to be real. Am i the only bad-doing, hand-to-mouth, barely-making-it Black woman there? The struggle i've been going through and the struggle i've been seeing is too hard to lie about and i don't even want to try. I want to help free the ghetto, not run away from it, leaving my people behind. I don't want to style and profile in front of nobody. I want somebody i can relate to and talk about serious shit with.

This party is a lost cause. I get my beach towel and my book

and ease on down the beach a little piece. Looking out at the ocean, i wonder how many of our people lie buried there, slaves of another era. I'm not quite sure what freedom is, but i know damn well what it ain't. How have we gotten so silly, i wonder. I get back off into James Baldwin. I don't give a damn if Sag Harbor sags into oblivion. Me and James Baldwin are communicating. His fiction is more real than this reality.

My patience was zero. I didn't want to wait for something to happen. I was into living and living for now. I was hungry, starving for life, but at the same time i was growing more and more cynical every day. I wanted to go everywhere, do everything, and be everything, all at the same time. I wanted to experience everything, know how everything felt. I had many zigzag conflicting ideas rolling around in my head at the same time. One day i was happy just to be alive and young and moving. The next day i felt like the world was coming to an end. Everything in my life was jagged, sharp, unfinished edges. Nothing happened calmly. Nothing was like i had thought it would be when i was little.

My friends were dying from OD and going into the army. My girlfriends had babies and were looking and sounding old. Nice old men sitting in the park weren't nice old men at all but were busy masturbating under their newspapers. I got so i didn't believe in anything. It seemed that everybody was in some kind of bag, the dope bag, the whiskey brown paper bag, the jesus bag, the love bag, the sex bag, the make-it bag, and none of those bags were doing anybody any good. I was looking for my own bag, but the pickings were slim. I kept on looking nevertheless, running and moving and hanging out until i was running myself ragged. One day i'd be downtown hanging out with my hippy, blippy (Black hippy) friends. The next night i'd be uptown hanging out with the hustlers. But nothing seemed like it was for real, you know? The same dudes who would be talking slick and sniffing coke out of \$50 bills one day would be scrounging and begging for a loan the next. Even the most successful hustlers seemed to be nothing but flunkies and potential fall guys for the mafia. My friends from downtown weren't much better. At best, most of them were professional escape artists, into escaping the problems of the Black community or those of the white community. Some of them tried to escape through drugs, tripping over worlds that didn't exist on some kind of inner-space odyssey. But in their case, the drugs were usually not entirely self-destructive, although i know at least one who zoomed dead out of this world and didn't come back.

Through my hippy/blippy friends, i got turned on to a lot of things, though. I got into poets like Allen Ginsberg, Sylvia Plath, Ferlinghetti, all kinds of novelists, music, food, etc. I didn't relate to everything i checked out, but my horizons got a whole lot broader.

My growing impatience with petty bourgeois upward-bound "Negroes" came to a head when i went to work with a Black employment agency. Evelyn had gotten me a job there as a typist. The agency was located in Rockafella Center in the same building with Johnson Publications, the publishers of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. I was happy as hell to get the job since i was tired of working for white people. The people in the office were nice and the atmosphere was completely lacking in tension. The boss was decent enough, and i had a pretty good relationship with him and his secretary, under whom i worked. At first i was excited, glad to be around so many Black people who seemed to be doing so good. Everybody was into making it, moving up the ladder. Black men and women with long lists of degrees, and briefcases, were in and out of the place. They were sharp, dressed to a tee, and talking about junior executive training programs, poverty programs, etc. Some of them talked about those companies as if they were going to be the president of the board of directors in five years.

Once in a while i went to lunch with a young man who worked at Johnson Publications. But we always got into arguments. Especially about *Ebony* magazine. Half the time, in the fashion section they would have these elaborate evening gowns that cost thousands of dollars. When i asked him what Black people could afford to buy them and whether they were gonna wear them to the corner bar, he got insulted. He was one of those Black people who think that you are free if you can go in a store and buy expensive things. I told him that the only Black woman who could afford those dresses was Johnson's wife, and he got even more insulted. He told me that everything was changing, everything was so much better. I said that if things were so much better, how come every time a Black person got a good job or was a manager or something, it was news and was printed in *Ebony*. Our relationship ended abruptly when he accused me of always trying to bring Black people down and make it seem like we don't have nothing. I ended the matter by cursing him out and that was that.

These Black people went around acting as if there was no such thing as prejudice and that all you had to do was study and you could be president of the world. At the agency, we were working hard for an equal opportunity conference. The idea was to have Black college graduates from all over the country participate in

interviews with representatives from the major corporations in amerika. Almost all of the big corporations were involved, and the graduates paid a substantial fee, plus transportation and hotel fees, to participate in the conference. It worked like this: students made out résumés and the corporate personnel officers decided which applicants they wanted to see. It was a big, plush affair in a major New York hotel, with the penthouse suite and quite a few lower floors rented out to the conference. I just knew that hundreds of these young, "qualified" Black people were going to get jobs. I was proud to have helped bring the conference about. It lasted a few days, and by the time it was over, i was ready to go somewhere and have a good cry.

Some of those Black graduates had spent hundreds of dollars to come to the conference and didn't have one interview. The only graduates the corporations even wanted to see were math, science, engineering, and business majors. Some corporations only wanted to interview graduates in very specialized categories, like petroleum engineering or geological engineering. Since most had majored in subjects like English, history, sociology, etc., they were out of the running from the jump.

I was shocked and upset. After the conference, i went out with one of the Black "executives" i had met in the agency. "I don't understand it," i kept telling him. "Why would those companies pay all that money to participate in the conference if they aren't really interested in hiring anybody? It doesn't make any sense."

"It makes a lot of sense, if you think about it."

"Huh? I don't understand."

"Listen," he went on, "the government says that in order for those companies to keep their contracts, they have to at least make an effort to look for 'qualified Black personnel.' The law doesn't say they have to hire anybody. The law says they've only got to look."

I was furious. They had used poor dumb me just like they use a drug dealer to conspire against his own people. I was part of the plot and i didn't even know it. There were some Blacks who got jobs, but mainly the thing was a sham, to make things look good on paper. My friend and i got stupidly drunk, singing oldies by the Sherrills on Lexington Avenue, he telling me about what bastards the bosses were and about the trials and treacheries of the democratic party machine and telling me how i was gonna get another job as a go-go dancer in the ladies' room.

About a week later, i made up a résumé, described myself as a college graduate, and was hired as a marketing assistant. I didn't

believe in anything, and i wasn't gonna follow anyone's rules but my own. I got fired from that job a couple of weeks later, got another college job, and got fired from that too. I didn't care. I was going to deal with them just like they dealt with us. One time i got a job as a bookkeeper. I didn't know the first thing about it, but after i got the job i bought a couple of "bookkeeping made easy" books and when i didn't understand something I told them that we used a different system at the last place i worked.

The job involved a lot of cash and i had to be bonded. When you get bonded, they do a background check on you. The job wasn't too bad, and the boss was cool. It was an excellent way to learn bookkeeping and the insurance business. I knew they would fire me as soon as the report came in, but i didn't care. One day, my boss threw a detective's report on my desk. It had my name on it. I swallowed hard, knowing it was my last day. The more i read it, the more surprised i became. The report verified everything i had said: "Subject attended such and such high school," subject . . . graduated from such and such college," "subject worked at such and such places." They even reported that i lived on a quiet tree-lined street and that they had talked to my neighbors and learned that i was a nice person. I cracked up all the way home. Everything is a lie in amerika, and the thing that keeps it going is that so many people believe the lie.

But my patience was getting shorter and my temper was terrible. I was quick to tell people what i thought of them, and even i was surprised by my bluntness. Bonnie kept telling me, "Slow down, you're speeding, somebody's gonna give you a ticket." She was almost as restless and crazy as i was. We would check out things happening and make a joke of them. The world seemed to be so big and fixed and we couldn't think of anything to change it. Bonnie encouraged me to stop lying about going to college and go for real. "If you're smart enough to fool them, then you're smart enough to play their game." I knew that what she said made sense, but i had hated my last days in high school and had no desire to study anything else.

The only other person who stayed on my case and prodded me to go back to school was my friend from Kenya. We had grown to be serious friends. And we dug each other much more as friends than as lovers. He was studying economics out on Long Island, and we didn't get a chance to see each other much. Sometimes on the weekend we would hang out together. He was one of the few people i knew who was serious about almost everything he did in life and whose conversation was not just about his small world but about

the whole world. One weekend we had arranged to hang out. I think we were supposed to go and hear somebody play at Count Basie's club. My apartment looked like some kind of hurricane had hit it, and i was trying to ease out the door without letting him in. Somehow he managed to get a glimpse inside. "No, we aren't going anywhere," he said. "How can you live like this? If your house looks like this i can just imagine what your head looks like."

I was embarrassed, but i had to admit he was right. I had everything thrown every which way, clothes flung all over the place. It was a wreck. He suggested that instead of going out he would help me clean up and get organized. "You'll be all right if you just get yourself organized. You can do almost anything you want as long as you organize yourself to do it." I decided he was right. It was time to get my life in some kind of order. It was time to take control. Life was like a bus: you could either be a passenger and go along for the ride, or you could be the driver. I didn't have the foggiest idea where i wanted to go, but i knew that i wanted to drive. I decided the first thing i would do was go back to school. I returned home to live with my mother in her new apartment in Flushing, Queens.

CULTURE

i must confess that waltzes
do not move me.
i have no sympathy
for symphonies.

i guess i hummed the Blues
too early,
and spent too many midnights
out wailing to the rain.