

Also by Rubin "Hurricane"  
Carter  
Eye of the Hurricane: My Path from  
Darkness to Freedom

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Rubin "Hurricane" Carter's fight  
record reprinted from The Ring  
Encyclopedia, 1967, by permission  
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First hardcover edition published by  
Viking in 1973

First paperback edition published  
by Warner Books in 1974

This edition published 2011 by  
Lawrence Hill Books

An imprint of Chicago Review  
Press, Incorporated

814 North Franklin Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60610

ISBN 978-1-56976-567-8

Printed in the United States of  
America

5 4 3 2

Promised to . . .

Mae Thelma, who  
blessed my life with Theodora,  
who  
together . . .

create the only two reasons why I  
am

not lying flat on my back, knocked  
out cold!

And . . .

everything else is irrelevant.

Acknowledgments

On this page I would like to  
mention the least first—the ungodly

nemeses in my life who have made it necessary for me to write this book: the corrupt and vindictive officials who played their roles to a T in this tightly woven drama to bury me alive, aided and abetted by laws which simply do not protect the sovereign rights of the individual, as the Bill of Rights requires, but the blatant wrongs of a select few.

This is not to say that no pure gems have passed through this wretched life of mine, because they came in droves, the most important one being Linda Yablonsky, my editor, the beautiful—and sometimes disturbing—woman, who waged an uphill battle in her efforts to make a writer out of a fighter, hoping to show in the final analysis that the pen is indeed mightier than the sword. But without her nourishing the literary seed, this story might not have been told in this particular medium.

My deepest appreciation is also extended to all those beautiful and courageous people who, at the risk of being incarcerated themselves, still appeared in court to testify in my behalf, stood firm on what they knew to be the truth, and suffered miserably for it at the hands of Madam One-Eyed Justice. Those people were Mrs. Catherine McGuire, Mrs. Anna Mapes, Merrit Wimberly, Welton Deary, Edward Allen, Hector Martinez, and John "Bucks" Royster.

I would also like to thank Peter Rush, Ronald Lipton, Frederick Hogan, and Billy Kilroy—four honest police officers—who at one time or another during the past seven years traveled on their own

volition to the Rahway State Prison to offer their assistance in the struggle to set me free.

A special accolade goes to Frank Earl Andrews, for his guidance in making The Sixteenth Round a reality; to Mrs. Eleanor Howard, for her consistent words of encouragement, which somehow always managed to come when times were bleak; to Dave Anderson of The New York Times, whose enlightening articles exposed my fate to the public; and finally, to Richard Solomon—my main kazaam—who at times could be both warm and friendly, yet coldly precise and highly critical, and who always had his mind set toward furthering our common goal—my freedom.

Lastly, I would like to offer my gratitude to all the people—especially those millions of little ones—who, despite their Constitutional guarantees, are always subjected to the abuse of the law. Their strength has always been a constant reminder to me that love, compassion, beauty, and hope can still survive, even under this oppression.

For this I thank you one and all.

—RUBIN CARTER

September 1, 1973

Rahway State Prison,  
New Jersey

[Table of Contents](#)

[Also by](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[THE PRELIMINARY](#)

[THE FIRST ROUND - The Beginning](#)

THE SECOND ROUND - The  
Birth of Vengeance

THE THIRD ROUND - A Fight  
for Life

THE FOURTH ROUND - Hell  
Hath No Fury Like the State  
Home's Scorn

THE FIFTH ROUND - Here  
Come the Headwhoppers!

THE SIXTH ROUND - The  
Death of a Young Soul

THE SEVENTH ROUND -  
Vindictiveness

THE EIGHTH ROUND - Free,  
Free at Last!

THE NINTH ROUND - The  
Epitome of Ignorance

THE TENTH ROUND -  
Getting It All Together

THE ELEVENTH ROUND -  
Trying to Make It Real

Compared to What?

THE TWELFTH ROUND -  
Prison Is a Place Called Hell

THE THIRTEENTH ROUND -  
Hit 'Em Hard and Hit 'Em Fast

THE FOURTEENTH ROUND  
- The Awful Scream of Silence

THE FIFTEENTH ROUND -  
American Justice—Jersey  
Style

THE SIXTEENTH ROUND -  
What Will Your Verdict Be?

PRIZE FIGHTING RECORD -  
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Hill Books

THE  
PRELIMINARY

At about 3:00 a.m. on June 17,  
1966, the late-night calm of  
Paterson, New Jersey, was  
suddenly shattered by the voices of  
an angry white mob that had  
gathered in front of a dilapidated  
old bar and grill. The crowd

furiously pushed and shoved against a cordon of police officers who had surrounded the tired nightspot, trying to get a look at the four bullet-riddled, blood-smeared bodies lying on the floor inside. Their attention was momentarily diverted as a five-car, sirenscreaming cavalcade sped around the corner and screeched to a grinding halt in front of the tavern. Several shotgun-bearing policemen leaped out of their cars and scrambled around a white Dodge that they had just escorted to the scene.

The chattering mob pressed closer as the police forced the two black occupants of the car out onto the street. The two men were confused by the hostile reception the mob gave them, and they had reason to be. I know, because I was one of them.

"Get out of the car!" a bull-faced cop snarled as he pulled open the door. "Stand up against that wall over there, and don't move until I tell youse to!"

Whatever else was wrong, I knew that getting out of that car might prove to be by far the worst thing I could do. "What the hell did you bring us here for, man?" I asked, but the cop just backed away and snaked out his pistol.

"Shut up!" he barked. There was complete silence around us now. Everybody in the street must have heard me when I swallowed. The cop pulled the hammer on his pistol back to full cock. "Just get up against that wall, and shut up!" he growled.

Before I could think of anything more to say, a paddy wagon and

several more ambulances added further confusion to the already congested area. I felt myself being roughly searched, along with John Artis, a twenty-year-old boy who had been riding with me. Then we were pushed into the stinking rear of the paddy wagon and it took off, leaving my car behind.

My mind began racing for an explanation, but I could find none. Things were happening too fast. Before I had grasped the full significance of my predicament, the wagon slid to another halt at Paterson's St. Joseph's Hospital. Surrounded by squads of fully armed cops, we were hustled out of the truck and into an emergency operating room. There, a crew of doctors and nurses were frantically trying to save the life of a balding middle-aged white man. He had been shot in the head. The bullet had made a jagged exit from his left eye. The room, along with almost everything in it, was all white. Cops dressed in blue, with white faces, crowded around us. Not a black man in the bunch. The sickly odor of ether hung in the air, and the room reeked of dried blood. I hated hospitals. Especially this one.

"Can he talk, Doc?" asked the bull-faced cop who a few minutes earlier had acted like he was Quick-Draw McGraw.

The doctor was clearly irritated by our sudden intrusion into his operating room. He glanced back over his shoulder, giving the cops, and then John and me, an annoyed look. When he spoke, it seemed to be with extreme reluctance.

"Yes, he can talk," he said finally. "But only for a moment."

With the aid of one of the nurses, he raised the victim's head. The man was weak, pale, and seemed nearly dead; he had a ragged hole in his face where his left eye had been.

"Can you see clearly, sir?"

Quick-Draw asked, absurdly. "Can you make out these two men's faces?"

The wounded man nodded weakly.

"Are these the two men who shot you?"

For what seemed an eternity, the injured man stared at me intently with his one remaining eye, glanced at John, then stared back at me some more. I almost cried with relief when he began to shake his head from side to side.

"But sir!" the cop said urgently.

"Are you sure these are not the men?"

Then I saw it coming. Everything suddenly fell into place. I realized with a deep-seated uneasiness that if, in fact, two black men had shot this man, then it would make no difference to him that I was short, and the boy with me tall; that I was bald, bearded, and ugly while John Artis had no hair on his face at all; that I was black as virgin soot, and he as yellow as the sun—because to this critically injured man teetering there on the brink of death, all black people would look the same, especially those the cops had brought in.

I stood there watching the tortured expressions of pain wash over the one-eyed man's face, and felt a sharp pang of my own. But unlike his, mine came only with the memory of my past run-ins with the cops, of past incarcerations and

hostilities. I closed my eyes and clenched my fists in rage, and at that moment I might indeed have been able to commit murder.

"Dirty sonofabitch!" The words spurted out of me so loudly and suddenly that everybody in the room turned in surprise and stared. "Dirty motherfucker!" I cried out again, and heard the despair in my voice. Dirty motherfucker, I thought. Here I go again.

### THE FIRST ROUND

#### The Beginning

RUBIN, my Christian name, comes from the Book of Genesis, chapter 29, verse 32 of the Holy Scriptures. Other than both of us being black, that's about the only thing the Bible and I ever had in common.

.HURRICANE is the professional name that I acquired later on in life. It provides an accurate description of the destructive forces that rage within my soul.

CARTER is the slave name that was given to my forefathers who worked in the cotton fields of Alabama and Georgia, and was passed on to me. The name is like any other—worthless—but it's the one that appears on my birth certificate.

The kindest thing that I can say about my childhood is that I survived it. I was born of devout Christian parents, May 6, 1937, in Delawanna, New Jersey, a small suburb of Clifton in Passaic County.

My father, like his father and his eleven brothers, were all God's little children—preachers of the faith. Since I was the youngest of three sons, and neither of my



brothers desired to tread on the heels of our religious father, it was always hoped that when I became of age, I would be the one to follow in his footsteps and choose the ministry as my way of life.

Considering that my father was a senior deacon in an impressive Baptist church, and that my family was thought to be somewhat better off than most, I can't really say that I was a victim of circumstance, or that the environment of my early life was unkind to me. I simply didn't have to bear the hardships and miseries that some of my black brothers and sisters living in the ghettos did; trigger mechanisms of violence—such as inadequate supplies of food, clothing, or shelter—were absent. My family didn't have the very best in material advantages, but we always managed to live comfortably.

I don't know at what age one becomes aware of the problems—or rather, the moral precepts—society lays down for us to live by, but since my earliest recollections are of a time I pressed my nose against an icy window pane to watch the snow falling outside, and of heat, this autobiography begins around the age of five.

This was during the winter of 1942, a cold, bleak period in the United States: Pearl Harbor had just been bombed, and America was at war with two flanking countries at the same time. Fuel and food were being assiduously rationed out, and confrontations across both seas were rampaging furiously. At that time my family consisted of three boys and two girls: Lloyd Junior was the oldest; then came Lillian,

James, and myself; then Beverly, the baby.

Our home was in a four-family apartment building in Passaic, and since we didn't enjoy the modern conveniences we have today, our principal fuel was wood or coal.

Our friendly heat-maker was a monstrous, fuel-devouring fourplated burner, which we considered ourselves extremely lucky to have; not all families had stoves of this caliber then. Although our coal bill was exceptionally high, the stove was something we cherished.

My mother and father, Bertha and Lloyd, were born and raised in Georgia. On very cold evenings our family would gather around that homely stove and roast peanuts that had been sent to us by relatives still living in the South, while Dad would tell us strange stories about his childhood on the farm.

He would talk about stubborn mules named Sam or Jennie—white mules who wouldn't plow unless you called them "sir." He also told us about the snakes, coachwhipping snakes that could beat a man to death; ghosts that could scare a man to death; and tobaccochewing crackers whose greatest pastime was tarring niggers, hanging niggers, and just plain killing black folks on some general principle.

Although I didn't understand the reasons for the things the crackers did to the niggers in Dad's stories, I would listen, enthralled, as his voice turned to an emotional whisper and his eyes brightly burned. Taking off my shoes, I would spread my legs out toward the warmth of the stove and allow

my mind to race through the Georgia swamps with some big, terrorstricken nigger who had a pack of whooping crackers and howling dogs hot on his trail. Man! I was scared to death just thinking about it. But these were times we all enjoyed, pleasant evenings we always looked forward to.

Each family in our building had equal floor space in the basement for the storage of their coal—providing they had any. Since it was the duty of us boys in the family to replenish the fuel supply whenever we needed it upstairs, one of us would have to go back and forth to the cellar at least four or five times a day.

One day this irritating task fell to Jimmy. With the coal box in the house nearly empty, Jimmy, being very obedient (my father would tear his ass up if he wasn't), hurried to the cellar and was confronted with a neighboring family's son—the dreaded bully of the block—who, to make an already bad situation worse, was stealing our coal.

This young fellow was so bad he was even nicknamed "Bully." With flat African features pasted to a high-ridged head that easily could have belonged to a pancake-faced gorilla, he was short, powerful, shiny black—so black that a blue shadow seemed to lie upon him—and ugly enough to break daylight with his fist.

This lad's home was somewhere in the deep bayou country—Mississippi, I think—and it was very easy to picture him, even at this tender age, walking behind an old gray mule, sniffing farts, or picking cotton. This sucker was out

there, and mean as a black bear during mating season.

Jimmy, on the other hand, was not a rough type. He was slender and more inclined to use brains than brawn. (His overt display of intelligence later carried him to bachelor's, master's, and doctor's degrees.) His handsome face, which was usually smiling, marked him as being good-natured and of a pleasant disposition. All in all, Jimmy was meek and kind of humble and, I venture to say, somewhat on the timid side.

Physical conflict was not his cup of tea. Unfortunate as it might have been, this was one confrontation he couldn't avoid: if he didn't get the coal and let the fire in the stove go out, my father would skin his ass alive when he came home from work that night. So it was either an ass-whupping downstairs or an asswhupping upstairs. Jimmy chose the former, and rightly so.

What went on downstairs he later told us himself. It seemed that when he first stumbled upon Bully stealing our coal it scared him almost to death. He knew he couldn't stop, or beat, this black gorilla, so he decided to try a little cunning, hoping to appease Bully, get our coal, and get the hell out of there.

"Hi, Bully," Jimmy called, with a sheepish grin on his face.

But Bully wasn't going for none of that funny shit. Without further provocation—other than that of getting caught stealing our coal—he sprang on my brother and unleashed a brutal attack that left Jimmy thoroughly beaten. Jimmy got out of that basement as fast as his little

legs could carry him, making it upstairs for safety and assistance. Meanwhile big bad Bully, confident that there was no one to stop him now, returned to pillaging our coal. Help for little Jimmy was not to be found upstairs. My mother and father had already gone to work, leaving my oldest brother in charge. Lloyd Junior undoubtedly could have taken care of the little hoodlum, had he seen fit, but, from what I saw, he had little inclination to do so and displayed no concern in the matter whatsoever. This was more than I could bear. Jimmy was hurt, crying something awful. His nose was already swollen, spreading across his face, blood pouring from it constantly. But no one paid any attention to him —no one except me—as he sobbed through his story. Listening, I was confused: this situation was asking too much of my inexperienced mind. My emotions completely overpowered what little sense of reason I had, if indeed I had any at all. Every fiber of my body became taut with the anticipation of what must be done. My only thought was that the Carter family had to be avenged. I imagine it was because I was immature that the only thoughts that came to me were those of violence. Bully's size and strength, prowess and daring, never entered my mind. Without uttering a word, and before anyone could think to stop me, I bolted down the stairs. When I reached the cellar, I vaguely made out the outline of Bully's body in the obscurity of the coal bin. His features blended almost perfectly into the blueness of

the coal he was stealing—this cat was just that black. Then, as my eyes became accustomed to the darker darkness around him, I realized that my quarry had not yet discovered me. He had his broad back to me and was nonchalantly heaping Lloyd Carter's coal into his bucket.

The element of surprise was in my favor. At that time I didn't know anything about fighting fair; in fact, I didn't know anything about fighting, period. But before my roguish opponent could straighten up and defend himself, I hurled my body into him with all my might, and with a vengeance that shocked even me. I hadn't known I was capable of such feelings.

Bully tripped and went down. I crouched over him, whaling like mad, until he finally managed to fight his way back to his feet. We stood toe to toe, slugging it out, swinging for all we were worth. Then I landed a sizzling haymaker against his bullet head, and he started backing up, with me crowding him, firing on him. The fighting became easier then, and I found I liked it. The more we fought, the better I seemed to get. A shiver of fierce pleasure ran through me. It was not spiritual, this thing that I felt, but a physical sensation in the pit of my stomach that kept shooting upward through every nerve until I could clamp my teeth on it. Every time Bully made a wrong turn, I was right there to plant my fist in his mouth. After a few minutes of this treatment, the cellar became too hot for Bully to handle, and he made it out the door, smoking.

This was my first experience in fist fighting, and the fruits of my victory were sweet indeed. I could feel the pull of the little muscles interlinked and interchained from my fingertips to the small of my back. I felt the muscles in my legs too, from hip to toe, supporting me as I swayed, tired now. But dammit, I felt good. Even though I had come out with a busted lip, I had beaten the big bad block bully—and, man, I was hot-to-trot to fight some more. Bully, however, must have run straight home to his black mammy. I couldn't begin to guess at the excuse he gave for his appearance, but it must have been a winner. Because the moment my mother and father came home from work that night, they were confronted with Bully's weeping mammy screaming accusations of how unmercifully I had beaten her poor little manchild. My father entered my bedroom quietly and woke me up. I eased out of bed joyfully, not making a sound, being very careful not to arouse my sleeping brother. I was confident that Daddy was going to lavish royal praises on me for saving his coal, and I was just as anxious to tell him that I knew how to fight. I didn't want Jimmy awake for this, no, sir. I wanted to bask in the sunshine of Daddy's thanksgiving all by myself.

But when I entered the kitchen, my father yoked me with an unfamiliar roughness. He locked my head between his knees, pulled my pajama bottoms off, and whaled on my ass with the cord from the iron. I knew this wasn't for saving his coal. I jerked and sputtered, twisted and stuttered, desperately trying to

find out what I had done wrong. But all my inefficient struggles and tears were in vain. I couldn't talk. I had an acute speech impediment at that time and could never say three clear words that made any sense to anyone but me.

But what hurt more than anything else was that my father didn't even try to find out of his little son had been justified in his actions or not.

And being the deacon that he was—

I suppose—he readily accepted someone else's version because it had come from an adult, and not because it was the truth. He could at least have tried to get my side of the story, I felt, or even my brother's or Lillian's. No. He believed Bully's black picker-headed mammy—and I'll bet she was the one who had sent Bully over in the first place.

They surely didn't have any coal for themselves.

That beating is the first I can distinctly remember, and it was one of many just like it that would follow in its wake, some of which, I think, were totally uncalled for. But in my father's eyes they were ratified and sanctioned by the Holy Bible.

Thus began my first real awareness of my existence. I imagine such a blatant event was necessary to prod the faculties of my brain into full consciousness. It seems to me to have been similar to the birth of a baby—that is, to the moment the physician slaps the infant's buttocks and provokes his first sensations, indicating the proper functioning of his respiratory system.

Well, when my father got through with me that night, I couldn't say for



sure what it did for my respiratory system, but I knew damn well that it interfered with my system of sitting down for quite some time.

Early the following morning I was awakened with the rest of the kids for school. I was enrolled in the kindergarten of Public School No. 7 and had been there for one half-term. I remember the family being somewhat solemn as we sat down for breakfast that morning, although the table was, as usual, heaped with plenty of succulent goodies to eat: southern-fried ham, eggs and hominy grits, steaming hot biscuits with Argo syrup, and plenty of butter on the side.

Man! Even though my butt was blistered, there was nothing wrong with my stomach, and I was ready to grease. But before anyone dared touch a morsel of food on the table, my father, seated at its head with his eyes closed and his hands folded, began his daily ritual of saying grace. We all had to follow his example.

"Dear Lord," he would reverently begin, "we are thankful for the food which we are about to receive . . . ."

But on that morning I didn't close my eyes. I just sat there looking at my daddy as his voice droned on emotionally, wondering how he could be talking to the Lord in such a convincing manner and know that he had unnecessarily abused me the night before. I couldn't understand it, and I was hurt. Hurt as only a small boy could be when his dad, his idol, has rejected the one contribution he feels he had made to the family—saving their coal.

When school was out that day,

Jimmy came to take me home. We all attended the same school, so the task of taking me back and forth fell into the hands of Lloyd, Lillian, and Jimmy. I remember the weather as being very mean that wintry afternoon. It had been snowing exceptionally hard all day, and the snowdrifts were piled high.

As we struggled homeward, Jimmy suddenly clutched his stomach, became violently sick, and fell to the ground, vomiting. The whites of his eyes were the only signs of life I could detect in his dark face, and he trembled as if he were freezing over. This really scared me, and I immediately threw myself to the ground in the snow beside him and grabbed his coat, trying to pull him up.

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" I cried, brushing snow off his face. "Get up! Get up, Jimmy. Jimmy, please get up." But he didn't seem to hear me. He just lay there, shivering, gagging, and trying to catch his breath. A group of school kids gathered and stood around looking at us like damn fools, but no one offered any help. Eventually someone—an older student, more than likely—told some teachers about what was taking place outside, and they rushed to help my brother. I was kneeling beside him in a snowdrift when they came and threw me aside to get to him.

I don't know why, but somehow I got the impression that they were handling him much too roughly for people trying to help him. This feeling reactivated my newly discovered fighting abilities, and as they struggled to pick Jimmy up, I tore into them for all I was worth,

punching, kicking, and biting anything that got in my way. "Leave my brother alone!" I cried, fighting desperately and feeling that same extraordinary sensation of the previous day welling up in me again. "Leave him alone! Leave him alone!" I fought all the more furiously as they got him up and started for the building. Somebody grabbed me from behind and held on so I couldn't get away. I stopped struggling and just stood there, crying in frustration, wondering what was happening to my brother. When at last I was set free, I began walking in the direction I thought would take me home. I stumbled blindly, not really knowing where I was going, until a warm arm slithered around my shoulders.

"C'mon, Rubin," a sweet voice whispered. "Jimmy's gonna be all right. C'mon, let's go home." I stopped and looked up, and there was Lillian with a sad smile on her face. But it was a smile that filled my heart with joy, for I could see the tenderness and affection in her eyes as she hugged me tighter. I leaned closer, feeling the warmth of her arms around my shoulders, and somehow everything seemed to be a little better. We turned around, and she took me home.

That night, when the family had seated itself at supper, Jimmy was still among the missing. As my mother set a steaming plate of collard greens upon the table, I asked her the question that had been bugging me all day. "Ma, wh-whewh-whe-where's Jimmy?" I stammered.

"Hush up, Rubin," she scolded

fondly, but with sadness in her voice. "Jimmy's going to be all right. We will just have to do without him for a while. But we'll all go to see him pretty soon." And so we did; the rest of the winter was consumed mainly by going to the hospital to visit him. Jimmy, it turned out, had come down with double pneumonia, and for weeks he was more dead than alive. My mother and father accepted the news, and the expense, like the champs they were.

While Jimmy was a boy he was always the sickly type, susceptible to anything. I can vividly remember the time he caught the measles and deliberately rubbed himself against me so that he could have a playmate while the rest of the kids were in school. When finally we both had the measles, Jimmy laughed like a sonofabitch, happier than a fag in a Turkish bath.

In a time between Jimmy's illnesses, my mother also went to the hospital, and the next time I saw her I had a new sister, named Rosalie. Now that puzzled the hell out of me. I mean, I had always been under the impression that babies were found under cabbage leaves, and this new development seemed mighty strange to me. Here I was with a brand-new baby sister, and, as I knew doggone well, my father didn't have a vegetable garden.

## THE SECOND ROUND

### The Birth of Vengeance

In the following spring, 1943, my father bought a new house, which naturally aroused much interest in

our family. We were all filled with the happy anticipation of moving to a different environment. The menial chores that usually were the cause of bickering among us children we performed quickly, quietly, and with astounding proficiency.

Our new home was located on Twelfth Avenue in Paterson, New Jersey. And to say the least, in comparison with Passaic, the neighborhood looked bad. We had taken it for granted that we would be moving to a locale that would by far surpass the neighborhood we had been living in. The new house was much larger and prettier than our previous one had been, but the streets were dirtier and made of unsightly cobblestones, with twisted trolley tracks cutting through them. When the family car and the moving van stopped in front of our new home, men, women, and children poured out of the neighboring houses and gathered on the sidewalks, watching our every move. They critically inspected the condition of our car, the style of clothing that we wore, the newness of our furniture—especially the floor-model radio. You can rest assured, they didn't miss much. They were like an audience of convicts watching a nude female perform.

The city itself was divided up into four sections—Up the Hill, Down the Hill, Crosstown, and Bunkerhill—and each sector had multitudes of rough, vicious young gangs controlling it. Our house was situated in the “Up the Hill” section. Each fellow residing in that particular six-block area—between Auburn and Carrol on the north and

south, and Godwin and Governor Streets on the east and west—be he black, white, or technicolor, was destined to become a member of a gang called the Apaches. If he didn't belong to the tribe, he ventured outdoors at his own risk. You couldn't go to school or the playground or even sit on your own front porch without a member of the Apaches trying to get to your black ass, or white ass, as the case might be. It didn't make any difference to them what color it was; if you didn't belong to the Apaches, then you had to be the enemy.

Man, it was like nothing I had even dreamed about before, a terrible, terrible place—not poverty-stricken, but simply one with a rough class of people. I learned sometime later that a white schoolteacher had owned our house before my father and had thought it best, in view of the violence surrounding it, to leave. But I found out that, violent and destructive as the neighborhood was, there was one good principle to be learned by all, and it has remained with me throughout my life. This was the acceptance of people, regardless of race, creed, or color. The simple truth was, these distinctions were never evident, and the subject was not discussed. There were no such people in our young lives as Mister Charlie or the Devil—meaning white people—or Aunt Mary and Boy—meaning our mothers and fathers.

Maybe I was foreseeing the future, I don't know, but I made it my business to ask Dad why we had moved to Paterson when our old neighborhood was so much nicer.

Now, usually he would have told me to shut up and mind my own business. This time, however, he must have detected a premonition in my voice. He explained that because of the increased size of our family we needed a bigger place to live. And with the purchase of this particular house, he had also bought an ice business to add to the family income.

Well, awright, then, I thought proudly. That makes all the difference in the world. Now we can show these nosy people that we're not trash—the Carter family are business folks.

After we were settled, our new home became a meeting place for young and old alike. I sometimes wondered if its attraction was due to the congenial, Christian disposition that my father made us reflect at all times, or to the fact that we were the first in the neighborhood to own a television set. In any case, everybody was welcome in the Carter house, and everybody came.

To say merely that my father was a good provider would not be doing him justice. His vigor, pride, and dedication to whatever he did—from raising a family of seven to preaching the Gospel on Sunday to slaving on two jobs six days a week—did much more than provide.

They brought respect and solidarity to the family.

But it was my mother, dark and beautiful, the strong, silent figure in the family, who exercised a subtle control over all. Out of concern for his health, Mom often begged my father please to slow down before he killed himself. In his own

defense on these occasions, Dad would seek comfort by quoting the Holy Scriptures.

"Bert," he would say to her, " 'whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.' " And he'd keep right on slaving, just as hard as ever. His work day would begin at five o'clock in the morning, when he picked up his ice from Crosstown and took it to the little icehouse around the corner to store it. Then he would make his rounds. He had to deliver the ice in the early morning, before his customers left for work, or the food they had in their iceboxes would go bad during the day. At three in the afternoon, he would lock up the icehouse and go to work at the Manhattan Rubber Company in Passaic. There he worked an eight-hour shift and returned home, bone-weary, at twelve. He got three or four hours of sleep, and then it started all over again.

It was my mother, finally, who conceived the idea that we boys should take over the management of the icehouse, so that our father could get some rest. At that time Lloyd Junior was fourteen years old, Jimmy was ten, and I was eight. When Mom presented the idea to my father, he grudgingly gave his consent. He did have some doubts about our using his truck to make the deliveries, but, after much thought, agreed to let us have it—with the stipulation that Lloyd Junior be the only one to drive it.

We had already boasted to our schoolmates—and convinced most



of them—that we had always been running the business, not our father. So, in order to give truth to our lies, we eagerly grabbed at Mom’s proposition.

Since I was unable to carry the heavy blocks of ice up three or four flights of stairs, my job was to cut the ice and service all the first-floor customers. I also had to stand on the running board of the truck and holler, “Ice! Iiiiiice man! Get yo’ ice while you can!” Then, when customers called to me, I would shout, “Whoooooooooa, mule!” Lloyd would stop on a dime and give it nine cents change, jump out of the truck, and then he or Jimmy would take the ice I gave them to the customer.

At times business came so hot and heavy that Lloyd would violate my father’s rule and let me drive. When that happened, you can’t imagine how proud I felt. No one could tell me that I wasn’t as much of a man as the others. Even though I had to sit on two or three pillows to look out the windshield, I was a man.

At the end of the hard day’s work, we returned home, bathed, ate our supper, and then joined the rest of the fellows in the neighborhood. As in most clubs or gangs, one had to be fearless, had to thrive on fighting to become a member with any recognition.

Because fighting, or going to war, was just like eating and sleeping—it was a necessity. And, to be sure, I had my share of fights. Perhaps I had the shares of some others as well. It seemed as if I was constantly being challenged by members of rival gangs and, more

often than not, by the constituents of my own. It was still impossible for me to talk without stuttering. I had to stomp my feet to force the words out of my mouth. And people usually got quite a kick from the way I stammered, but if they made the mistake of laughing out loud, I would fire on them immediately, if not sooner, and try to knock their fool heads clean off.

Before many moons had traversed the skies, my fighting reputation prospered, and I became known as one "good with his hands." I took to fighting like a duck takes to water. Even at my age I could outfight most of the Apaches' members, but those that I couldn't—those that might have whupped me if we tangled—didn't care to chance it. If there just had to be a fight with the Rube, the general feeling went, they made damn sure it was for a good reason, because I fought hard, and I fought to win.

With an overabundance of heart combined with crude skill, I was soon elected to the position of "war counselor." Now this bizarre incumbency was a utopian honor among gang members—and goddamn fools—because the job included choosing the place where a brawl was to be held, the weapons that were to be used, and the time the scramble would take place. But these were only a few obligations of the job. Usually there was a reciprocal declaration of war between rival gangs, and when war was declared, each club dispatched its war counselor to meet and set the rules for the impending conflict. On many occasions, however, the threatened baptism by fire could be

averted if the war counselors agreed to fight it out and settle the matter between themselves. So it shouldn't be too difficult to understand that the war counselor had to be the best, or at least one of the best, fighters in his clan. Too many people were depending on his abilities for him to be any less; he maintained the integrity of the club. I was proud of my position. It made me feel like a god. In my mind, I vaguely recalled some misbegotten slogan that went "Equality for all under God." I couldn't accept that. What with the position I held, and the gang's dependence upon my fighting skills, I felt uniquely superior. In the Apaches I was, in fact, accepted as a god, and there could be no equality in the world that I lived in—a world of conflict and confusion, where only the strong survived. We were looked upon as a rough, menacing phalanx, an antisocial mob. To live up to this reputation, I must admit, we performed deeds that one might easily classify as being against the best interests of society. But we were Apaches—so we raided the enemies' neighborhoods, fought to a standstill the marauding gangs that violated our territorial boundaries, and pillaged the downtown marketplaces. One day, while returning home from the movies, we decided to perform a feat of daring. There were about fifteen or twenty Apaches along, since the movie house was situated in enemy territory and we needed a show of force to deter any possible attack.

We were approaching a store that had racks and racks of clothing displayed outside on the sidewalk. The object of each Apache was to run past the display, grab as much of the merchandise as he could handle, and then escape without getting caught. The thought of keeping those clothes never entered my mind. Excitement, and the defiance of society, was our motivation. If, after we had stolen the clothing and made good our getaway, we could have returned it without further ado, we would have done so, gladly. The thrill was in eluding our pursuers, if there were any, and in putting the blame on that territory's own gang. As one of the fastest runners in our club, I was the second or third to reach the clothing racks. Aided and abetted by the loose shirt I was wearing that day, I crammed it with sweaters and polo shirts until I looked like a top-heavy freak. Then I spun around and ran like hell, heading for the hills. When I arrived home that midsummer afternoon, my mother and father were not in the house, and when my brothers and sisters spied all those clothes in my possession, they naturally claimed them for themselves. I took great pleasure in being able to give them something—even though that "something" wasn't mine to give. But it filled my heart to see them enjoying themselves, changing from shirt to sweater, back and forth, until they finally got what they wanted and the clothes were divided equally. When my father came home that evening—I was out with the gang—

and saw all his children wearing brand-new top clothes that he hadn't bought, he demanded to know where they had come from. And, being justifiably fearful of the harsh consequences if they were caught in a lie, my brothers and sisters naturally told him that Rubin had brought them home.

I returned later than usual that evening, slipped into the house, and crept upstairs to my bedroom, knowing that it was way past my curfew hour. Mom and Dad slept on the first floor, while we children slept upstairs.

Since each of us had his own room now, I had gotten into the habit of sleeping naked on warm nights. I had just made myself comfortable and was on my way to sleep, when my bedcovers were suddenly snatched off my body. "Rubin? Wake up, boy!" I heard my father's gruff voice demand. "Where did you get all of these clothes from, huh?"

Slowly, cautiously, I opened my eyes and found my father sitting on the bed. In his huge hands were the shirts that I had gleefully distributed a few short hours before.

"A lady gave them to me, Daddy," I lied instantly, stammering badly, but thankful that my mind could think much quicker than I could speak.

My father stood up and spread the shirts out on the bed. He indicated the price tags. "Now don't lie to me, boy," he said threateningly. "All of these shirts have price tags on them. So tell me why somebody would give them to you?"

I'm a dumb sonofabitch, I thought

to myself in disgust. Those price tags knocked the wind out of my lie. Why didn't you get rid of those tags, fool? I questioned my limited intellect. And then, though I knew that my father hated liars more than the people in hell wanted ice water, I stubbornly continued my prevarication.

"The woman gave them to me for working for her this afternoon, and she—"

"Awright, boy." My father held up his hands to silence me. "I'm going to buy that story. Now tell me where I can find this lady."

I lay there crouched up in fear, scared to death, and broke out in a cold sweat. I knew from the tone of my father's voice that he knew I was lying, and I knew that my goose was just about cooked. So, attempting to claim whatever leniency I could, I then tried to tell the truth.

"Daddy, I—I—"

"Yup! That's just what I thought!" he exploded with a ferocity that scared me even more. Then he dragged a thick belt from around his waist. "Boy, you've been lying to me all this time. Now I'm going to tear your ass up, and then I'm going to call the police. I won't have a lying thief for a son."

The heavy impact of the leather strap against my naked rump and shoulders produced a sharp sound that could be heard throughout the house. I'll wager my life that the cry I let out could be heard throughout the city. Each time my father lashed down with his cold-blooded belt, a welt the length and breadth of a pocket comb would take its place on my body. Several times, as I

struggled to escape the descending whip, his belt would find my face as its target, and it rendered one of my eyes temporarily sightless.

This was by far the worst whupping that I had ever received, and had it not been for my mother, I might have been seriously injured by my father's evangelical rage.

Waiting in the bedroom downstairs, my mother had suffered the noise and my increasingly feeble cries for help until she could resist no longer.

"Lloyd! Lloyd!" I heard her calling through the mist of pain that racked my body. "Don't hit him anymore. He's had enough."

And the hot belt fell no longer.

I withered there in agony, trying to feel sorry for myself. I attempted to soothe the pain by fanning it, but I couldn't muster up much remorse for my stupidity. I knew that I'd been wrong. Wrong first for stealing the clothes, and then for piling a stupid act on the wrong one, by bringing the clothes home. I should have known that my father wouldn't go for that kind of bullshit, and that I should have told him the truth. I don't know what I was thinking about in the first place.

Twenty or thirty minutes must have passed before I heard someone coming up the stairs again. I had been waiting impatiently for that sound, because it had always been my father's custom to return to the child he had punished and calmly try to reason with him. So before he could reach my door, I hobbled painfully out of bed and opened it up.

Then I almost shitted on myself. Standing on the threshold of my room, almost filling the doorway,

was a great big white man. But what really scared the hell out of me was that the man was dressed in a blue uniform, had a silver badge pinned to his chest, and wore an oversized pistol strapped to his waist. And if that doesn't add up to cop all over the world, there ain't no niggers in Harlem.

Thinking seriously about it now, it shouldn't have surprised me as much as it did. All that had been necessary for me to remember was that my father didn't pay courtship to lies. If he ever tells you that a mosquito can pull a plow, don't even bother about asking him how—just hook the motherfucker up. That's the type of man my father is. "Are you Rubin?" the policeman inquired.

"Ye-y-yes, sir," I stammered.

"Then put your clothes on, kid," he ordered, circling the room and picking up the stolen merchandise.

"We want to have a talk with you downstairs."

By the time I finished dressing, my surprise had turned to terror. When I finally stumbled down to the first-floor landing, I looked for my father to be waiting there for me—but he was nowhere in sight. The only other person I saw was another cop standing at the front door. He was holding it open.

"Where's his father?" the officer who had followed me down the stairs asked. It was the same question that was running through my mind.

But the waiting cop just clamped his hands to the seat of my britches, and shoved me out the door. "He don't wanna see this punk," he growled, pushing me down the front



stairs. "So I'm locking the little nigger up."

I was propelled into the back seat of their patrol car, and then we headed for the police station. En route to headquarters, the cop that had walked me down the stairs spoke to his partner:

"Joe, isn't this the call that we received earlier today about stolen clothes?"

"Yeah, I think so."

"Well, wasn't there supposed to be more of them?"

"The whole damn gang—or so it seemed," the driver acknowledged.

"But now that we've got this one, we'll get the rest of the black bastards too. You don't have to worry about that."

The two officers continued their conversation as if I was either deaf or didn't exist at all. They discussed the trouble in the city that various gangs, including the Apaches, caused and what they should do about it. Some of the remedies they suggested were exaggerated to the point of depravity, though I don't know if they were talking so sadistically just for my benefit or not. I do know it scared the hell out of me.

A few minutes later, and after much more conversation, we arrived at Headquarters and I was told to get out. As soon as my feet touched the ground, I had the impulse to run like hell.

As if he had read my mind, one of the cops cautioned me: "Little nigger," he said, "I wish you would run." He stood there patting his holstered pistol. "And I'll put a bullet right in your dead black ass!" Not even a damn fool, which I

wasn't, would have to think much on that statement. So the idea of running immediately evaporated from my mind. I didn't want a bullet in my black ass—or anywhere else for that matter. No, I'd just have to take my chances —if and when any came.

My escorts followed me into the stationhouse and led me up to a desk sergeant who was grinning as if they had just captured Baby Face Nelson. "Sarge," one of them said, "we caught one of the black punks who stole all of those clothes today, sir."

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