

I remember another person who is haunted, hear again the trembling voice of a white woman two of us met while visiting influential Albany families to try to talk with them about the peace walk. She is a middle-aged woman with a face that is still pretty, but anxieties have creased and crumpled it. "We love our colored people, we love them!" she exclaims, her hand on my arm, urgent, her face peering into mine with such an entreaty that I can't help reassuring her, "Of course you do. I know." Her hand is on my arm again. "They are happy here, with things just as they are! Happy, I know it!" She begs us to leave town. "I can see that you are dedicated people, you mean well, but oh dear, you'll just do harm, you don't understand!" I ask her as gently as I can, "But if they really are happy, how can our coming make any difference?" She stares at me, confused, then just begins to shake her head.

My thoughts of her are interrupted. A cop has come into the room that opens onto the cell blocks, and the man who was yelling before begins again: "Officer! Officer!"

"What?"

"I want to talk with you!"

"What do you want? Some service?"

The man yells, "I want to get out of here!" and the cop yells back, "We all do. We're in jail, too." He gives a snort of laughter and walks off. A door slams.

The prisoner gives a great roar of frustration: "Arrrrr! It's the stinkiest dirtiest cell I was ever in!" And he lifts his steel bunk on the chain by which it is slung from the wall, then drops it, lifts it, drops it, lifts it, drops it, *clang, clang, clang.*

The Negro he has been taunting calls out, "I'm just as drunk as you are and I'm not making all that racket!"

The white man cries, "Fuck you, black bastard, I ain't fucking with you! Your ancestors were goddam slaves!" But he stops.

I think myself back into the house of the pleading woman. Sunlight pours through tall windows into the room where we sit—plays on the polished furniture, on the silky rosy-patterned rugs. She offers us, in a graceful glass dish, caramels she has made herself. Her husband is particularly fond of them, she confides; she loves to make them for him, and also to arrange the flowers. She smiles a little girl's smile. I listen for the step of servants in the large house, but hear no sound. They exist, of course; the house and the encircling garden are beautifully cared for. At the mill her husband runs, they exist too, these people whose ancestors were her ancestors' slaves, and whom, without thinking, she still calls "ours"—without thinking, but her face, as she speaks the word, dented by anxieties.

I remember the term so often used against us: We are "outside agitators." Her face before my eyes, I think: Yes, agitators, but it is above all your own doubts about your lives which we agitate; when you insist that we are outsiders, it is because, in fact, we come too close to you.

I remember the cry with which she has met the two of us at her door. At her first vague, inquiring look, we have introduced ourselves as members of the peace walk. "Oh, I'm so distressed!" she exclaims, staring at us, and her cry and her staring look draw us in an instant surprisingly near. I feel almost as though we have been recognized as relatives from out of town, appearing at a time of troubles. She leads us quickly into the house, seats us beside her on a sofa, scanning our faces. Then almost before we can begin to speak, the words leap out: "We love our colored people, love them!"

She clearly needs to have us believe it and to be able to believe it herself. She has a soft heart, has to see herself as a loving person. But clearly, too, she loves with a love that pleads: Don't make it uncomfortable for me to love you. Please don't insist on showing me all that you are, all that you feel. Let me continue to love you as my happy servants.

There pass again in my imagination Negro faces met on the road in our walk, faces of two kinds. A car approaches, goes slowly by us. A Negro family. No glance meets ours. The eyes of all are carefully veiled as they pass. On no face are feelings legible; each countenance has been drained of them as by a blow. Only a seemingly endless patience can be read there. A second car approaches. A young Negro woman is alone at the wheel. At the sight of us, black and white, and the sight of our signs, her eyes open wide, and then her whole face leaps into life, feelings written upon it like skywriting. She flings up her arms, calls out, "Well, all right then!"

The noisy prisoner is shouting again: "Shut your big black mouth. Shut your big black mouth!"

I think: The lady who offered us her caramels would turn in horror from this yelling man. And she would turn in horror from these cages which hold us; she would weep, and mean it, if she could see us in here. And yet the man yells, actually, her own desperate wish, which she cannot bear to acknowledge; and it is the daydream she dreams that holds us between these steel walls. The charge against us could be said to be that we refused to make it easier for her to live with herself.

Why are we here? We are charged with refusing to take through Albany the one route Police Chief Laurie Pritchett told us he would allow—Oglethorpe Avenue. We have attempted to take a route that varied from his for five blocks and would have brought us into the business area, where more people could read our signs. We are here for trying this twice. Some of us tried on December 23 and served twenty-four days for it; more of us tried again on January 27 and sit here now. After that first arrest, the city attorney

argued in court that the issue was whether outsiders could come into Albany and tell the police chief how to run his department. Attorney C.B. King, who defended a few of us (others defended themselves), argued that the issue was whether "one Laurie Pritchett" could "pit himself against the highest law of the land" and claim the right to deprive us of freedom of speech. King, a local Negro, has experience of Pritchett's claims to power, for Albany has seen wave after wave of peaceful Negro demonstrations—or rather has not been allowed to see them. The Chief has always swiftly and tidily jailed the demonstrators; when the city jail has run out of space, he has farmed them out to the counties. At issue now—King knows, everybody knows—is not what a handful of peacewalkers is going to do (we would take a little more than half an hour to pass through and be on our way, if not arrested); it is really what nearly half the inhabitants of Albany are going to be allowed to do. Pritchett has been frank about it finally in his discussions with us. Oglethorpe Avenue marks a rough division between the city's black community and its white community. "While I'm here, nobody is ever going to demonstrate north of Oglethorpe." He is not even going to let us walk down the north side of that street. "If I let you, there'd be others." So the charge against us is really that we challenge his right to "shut the big black mouths" of those who want to demonstrate that they are not happy here. The city's more tenderhearted white citizens like to dream that Negro discontent does not exist, and they have delegated to Pritchett, and to the court, the power to enforce that dream.