

Freireich's wife is as small as Freireich is enormous, a tiny woman with a deep and obvious reservoir of strength. "I see the man. I see his needs," she said. He would come home from the hospital late at night, from the blood and the suffering, and she would be there. "She is the first person who ever loved me," Freireich said simply. "She is my angel from heaven. She found me. I think she detected something in me that could be nourished. I defer to her in all things. She keeps me going every day."

Haroldine grew up poor as well. Her family lived in a tiny apartment outside Chicago. When she was twelve, she tried the bathroom door—and couldn't get in. "My mother had locked the door," she said. "I got the neighbor from downstairs, who was the landlord. He opened the window and got in. We called the hospital. She died there. You don't really know when you're twelve or thirteen years old what is going on, but I knew she was unhappy. My father was away, of course. He was not a terrific father."

She sat in the chair in her husband's office, this woman who carved an island of calm out of the turbulence of her husband's life. "You have to realize, of course, that love doesn't always save people you want to save. Somebody asked me once, weren't you angry? And I said, no, I wasn't, I understood her misery.

"There are things that either build you up or put you down. Jay and I have that in common."

CHAPTER SIX

Wyatt Walker

"DE RABBIT IS DE SLICKEST O'
ALL DE ANIMALS DE LAWD EVER
MADE."

1.

The most famous photograph in the history of the American civil rights movement was taken on May 3, 1963, by Bill Hudson, a photographer for the Associated Press. Hudson was in Birmingham, Alabama, where Martin Luther King Jr.'s activists had taken on the city's racist public safety commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor. The photo was of a teenage boy being attacked by a police dog. Even to this day, it has not lost its power to shock.



Hudson gave his roll of film from that day to his editor, Jim Laxon. Laxon looked through Hudson's photos until he came to the boy leaning into the dog. He was, he said later, riveted by the "saintly calm of the young [man] in the snarling jaws of the German shepherd." He hadn't felt that way about a photograph since he published a Pulitzer Prize-winning photo seventeen years before of a woman jumping from an upper-story window in a hotel fire in Atlanta.

Laxon took the picture and sent it out over the wires. The next day, the *New York Times* published it above the fold across three columns on the front page of its Saturday paper, as did virtually every major paper in the country. President Kennedy saw the photograph and was appalled. The secretary of state, Dean Rusk, worried that it would "embarrass our friends abroad and make our enemies joy-

ful." The photo was discussed on the floor of Congress and in countless living rooms and classrooms. For a time, it seemed like Americans could talk of little else. It was an image, as one journalist put it, that would "burn forever...the thin, well-dressed boy seeming to be leaning into the dog, his arms limp at his side, calmly staring straight ahead as though to say—"Take me, here I am." For years, Martin Luther King and his army of civil rights activists had been fighting the thicket of racist laws and policies that blanketed the American South—the rules that made it hard or impossible for blacks to get jobs, vote, get a proper education, or even to use the same water fountain as a white person. Suddenly, the tide turned. A year later, the U.S. Congress passed the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, one of the most important pieces of legislation in the history of the United States. The Civil Rights Act, it has often been said, was "written in Birmingham."

2.

In 1963, when Martin Luther King came to Birmingham, his movement was in crisis. He had just spent nine months directing protests against segregation in Albany, Georgia, two hundred miles to the south, and he had limped away from Albany without winning any significant concessions. The biggest victory the civil rights movement had won to that point had been the Supreme Court's decision in the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954, declaring segregation of public schools to be unconstitutional. But almost a decade had passed and the public schools of

the Deep South were still as racially divided as ever. In the 1940s and early 1950s, most Southern states had been governed by relatively moderate politicians who were at least willing to acknowledge the dignity of black people. Alabama had a governor in those years named "Big Jim" Folsom, who was fond of saying "all men are just alike." By the early sixties, all the moderates were gone. The state-houses were in the control of hard-line segregationists. The South seemed to be moving backwards.

And Birmingham? Birmingham was the most racially divided city in America. It was known as "the Johannesburg of the South." When a busload of civil rights activists were on their way to Birmingham, the local police stood by while Klansmen forced their bus to the side of the road and set it afire. Black people who tried to move into white neighborhoods had their homes dynamited by the city's local Ku Klux Klansmen so often that Birmingham's other nickname was Bombingham. "In Birmingham," Diane McWhorter writes in *Carry Me Home*, "it was held a fact of criminal science that the surest way to stop a crime wave—burglaries, rapes, whatever—was to go out and shoot a few suspects. ('This thing's getting out of hand,' a [police] lieutenant might say. 'You know what we've got to do.')

Eugene "Bull" Connor, the city's public safety commissioner, was a short, squat man with enormous ears and a "bullfrog voice." He came to prominence in 1938 when a political conference was held in downtown Birmingham with both black and white delegates. Connor tied a long rope to a stake in the lawn outside the auditorium, and ran the rope down the center of the aisle and insisted—in

accordance with the city's segregation ordinances—that black people stay to one side of the line, and whites to the other. One of the attendees at the meeting was the president's wife, Eleanor Roosevelt. She was sitting on the "wrong" side and Connor's people had to force her to move to the white side. (Imagine someone trying that on Michelle Obama.)* Connor liked to spend his mornings at the Molton Hotel downtown, doing shots of 100 proof Old Grand-Dad Bourbon, and sayings things like, A Jew is just a "nigger turned inside out." People used to tell jokes about Birmingham, of the sort that weren't really jokes: A black man in Chicago wakes up one morning and tells his wife that Jesus had come to him in a dream and told him to go to Birmingham. She is horrified: "Did Jesus say He'd go with you?" The husband replies: "He said He'd go as far as Memphis."

Upon arriving in Birmingham, King called a meeting of his planning team. "I have to tell you," he said, "that in my judgment, some of the people sitting here today will not come back alive from this campaign." Then he went around the room and gave everyone a mock eulogy. One of King's aides would later admit that he never wanted to go to Birmingham at all: "When I kissed my wife and children good-bye down on Carol Road in Atlanta, I didn't think I would ever see them again."

King was outgunned and overmatched. He was the overwhelming underdog. He had, however, an advan-

* In William Nunnelle's biography of Connor, titled *Bull Connor*, Nunnelle identifies the relevant section of the Birmingham city code as section 369, which prohibited serving "white and colored people" in the same room unless they were separated by a partition seven feet high with separate entrances.

tage—of the same paradoxical variety as David Boies's dyslexia or Jay Freireich's painful childhood. He was from a community that had *always* been the underdog. By the time the civil rights crusade came to Birmingham, African-Americans had spent a few hundred years learning how to cope with being outgunned and overmatched. Along the way they had learned a few things about battling giants.

3.

At the center of many of the world's oppressed cultures stands the figure of the "trickster hero." In legend and song, he appears in the form of a seemingly innocuous animal that triumphs over others much larger than himself through cunning and guile. In the West Indies, slaves brought with them from Africa tales of a devious spider named Anansi.* Among American slaves, the trickster was often the short-tailed Brer Rabbit.† "De rabbit is de slickest o' all de animals de Lawd ever made," one ex-slave recounted in an interview with folklorists a hundred years ago:

* My mother, who is West Indian, was taught Anansi stories as a child and told them to my brothers and me when we were young. Anansi is a rascal, who is not above cheating and sacrificing his own children (of which he invariably has many) for his own ends. My mother is a proper Jamaican lady, but on the subject of Anansi she becomes the picture of mischief.

† In *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*, Lawrence Levine writes: "The rabbit, like the slaves who wove tales about him, was forced to make do with what he had. His small tail, his natural portion of intellect—these would have to suffice, and to make them do he resorted to any means at his disposal—means which may have made him morally tainted but which allowed him to survive and even to conquer."

He ain't de biggest, an he ain't de loudest but he sho' am de slickest. If he gits in trouble he gits out by gittin' somebody else in. Once he fell down a deep well an' did he holler and cry? No siree. He set up a mighty mighty whistling and a singin', an' when de wolf passes by he heard him an' he stuck his head over an' de rabbit say, "Git 'long 'way f'om here. Dere ain't room fur two. Hit's mighty hot up dere and nice an' cool down here. Don' you git in dat bucket an' come down here." Dat made de wolf all de mo' onrestless and he jumped into the bucket an' as he went down de rabbit come up, an' as dey passed de rabbit he laughed an' he say, "Dis am life; some go up and some go down."

In the most famous Brer Rabbit story, Brer Fox traps Rabbit by building a baby doll out of tar. Brer Rabbit tries to engage the tar baby and instead gets stuck, and the more he tries to free himself from the tar, the more hopelessly entangled he becomes. "I don't care what you do wid' me, Brer Fox," Rabbit pleads to the gloating Fox, "but don't fling me in dat briar-patch." Brer Fox, of course, does just that—and Rabbit, who was born and bred in the briar patch, uses the thorns to separate himself from the doll and escapes. Fox is defeated. Rabbit sits cross-legged on a nearby log, triumphantly "koamin' de pitch outen his har wid a chip."

Trickster tales were wish fulfillments in which slaves dreamed of one day rising above their white masters. But as the historian Lawrence Levine writes, they were also "painfully realistic stories which taught the art of surviving and even triumphing in the face of a hostile environment."

African-Americans were outnumbered and overpowered, and the idea embedded in the Brer Rabbit stories was that the weak could compete in even the most lopsided of contests if they were willing to use their wits. Brer Rabbit *understood* Brer Fox in a way that Brer Fox did not understand himself. He realized his opponent Fox was so malicious that he couldn't resist giving Rabbit the punishment Rabbit said he desperately wanted to avoid. So Rabbit *tricked* Fox, gambling that he could not bear the thought that a smaller and lesser animal was enjoying himself so much. Levine argues that over the course of their long persecution, African-Americans took the lessons of the trickster to heart:

The records left by nineteenth-century observers of slavery and by the masters themselves indicate that a significant number of slaves lied, cheated, stole, feigned illness, loafed, pretended to misunderstand the orders they were given, put rocks in the bottom of their cotton baskets in order to meet their quota, broke their tools, burned their masters' property, mutilated themselves in order to escape work, took indifferent care of the crops they were cultivating, and mistreated the livestock placed in their care to the extent that masters often felt it necessary to use the less efficient mules rather than horses since the former could better withstand the brutal treatment of the slaves.

Dyslexics compensate for their disability by developing other skills that—at times—can prove highly advantageous. Being bombed or orphaned can be a near-miss experience and leave you devastated. Or it can be a remote miss

and leave you stronger. These are David's opportunities: the occasions in which difficulties, paradoxically, turn out to be desirable. The lesson of the trickster tales is the third desirable difficulty: the unexpected freedom that comes from having nothing to lose. The trickster gets to break the rules.

The executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the organization led by King, was Wyatt Walker. Walker was on the ground in Birmingham from the beginning, marshaling King's meager army against the forces of racism and reaction. King and Walker were under no illusions that they could fight racism the conventional way. They could not defeat Bull Connor at the polls, or in the streets, or in the court of law. They could not match him strength for strength. What they could do, though, was play Brer Rabbit and try to get Connor to throw them in the briar patch.

"Wyatt," King said, "you've got to find the means to create a crisis, to make Bull Connor tip his hand." That is exactly what Walker did. And the crisis created by Wyatt Walker was the photograph of a teenage boy being attacked by a police dog—leaning in, his arms limp, as if to say, "Take me, here I am."

4.

Wyatt Walker was a Baptist minister from Massachusetts. He joined up with Martin Luther King in 1960. He was King's "nuts and bolts" man, his organizer and fixer. He was a mischief maker—slender, elegant, and intellectual,

with a pencil-thin mustache and a droll sense of humor. Every Wednesday afternoon he reserved for a round of golf. To him, women were always "dahlin'," as in "I'm not hard to get along with, dahlin's. I just have to have perfection." As a young man he joined the Young Communist League because—as he would always say, tongue planted firmly in cheek—it was one of the only ways a black person in those years could meet white women. "In college," the historian Taylor Branch writes, "he acquired dark-rimmed glasses that gave his face the look of a brooding Trotskyite." Once, when he was preaching in Petersburg, a small town in Virginia, he showed up at the local whites-only public library with his family and a small entourage in tow, with the intention of getting arrested for breaking the town's segregation laws. What book did he check out that he could wave in front of the assembled photographers and reporters? A biography of the great hero of the white South, Robert E. Lee, the Civil War general who led the Confederate Army in its battle to defend slavery. That was vintage Wyatt Walker. He was perfectly happy to be carted off to jail for breaking Petersburg's segregation laws. But he made sure to rub the town's nose in its own contradictions at the same time.

In Birmingham, King, Walker, and Fred Shuttlesworth formed a triumvirate. Shuttlesworth was the longtime face

* The historian Taylor Branch writes of Walker: "Walker was a hotspur. As a New Jersey high school student in the 1940s, he had heard Paul Robeson say that if being for freedom and equality meant being a Red, then he was a Red. Walker promptly joined the Young Communist League. One of his high school papers was a five-year plan for a Soviet-type economy in the United States, and he dreamed of carrying out technically ingenious assassinations against leading segregationists."

of the Birmingham civil rights struggle, the local preacher whom the Klan could not kill. King was the prophet, gracious and charismatic. Walker stayed in the shadows. He did not allow himself to be photographed with King. Even in Birmingham, many of Bull Connor's people had no idea what Walker looked like. King and Shuttlesworth were equipped with a certain serenity. Walker was not. "If you get in my way, I'll run smack dab over you" is how Walker described his management style. "I don't have time for 'good morning, good afternoon; how do you feel.' We've got a revolution on our hands."

Once, in Birmingham, when King was giving a speech, a two-hundred-pound white man charged the stage and began pummeling King with his fists. As King's aides rushed to defend him, McWhorter writes:

They were astounded to watch King become his assailant's protector. He held him solicitously and, as the audience began singing Movement songs, told him that their cause was just, that violence was self-demeaning, that "we're going to win." Then King introduced him to the crowd, as though he were a surprise guest. Roy James, a twenty-four-year-old native New Yorker who lived in an American Nazi Party dormitory in Arlington, Virginia, began to weep in King's embrace.

King was a moral absolutist who did not stray from his principles even when under attack. Walker liked to call himself a pragmatist. He was once attacked by a "mountain of a man"—six foot six, 260 pounds—when he was standing in front of a courthouse in North Carolina.

Walker didn't embrace his assailant. He got up and came back at him, and each time the man's blows sent Walker tumbling down the courthouse steps, he picked himself up and came back for more. The third time, Walker recalled later, "he caught me good, knocked me almost senseless. And I went back up a fourth time. By this time, you know, if I'd had my razor I'd have cut him."

One famous night, the three of them—Walker, King, and Shuttlesworth—were about to preach to fifteen hundred people at the First Baptist Church in Montgomery, when the church was surrounded by an angry white mob threatening to burn the building down. King, predictably enough, took the high road. "The only way we are going to save the people upstairs," he told the others, "is we who are the leadership have to give ourselves up to the mob." Shuttlesworth, imperturbable as always, agreed: "Yeah, well if that what we have to do, let's do it." Walker? He looked over at King and said to himself: "This man must be out of his goddam mind."* (At the last moment, federal troops came and dispersed the crowd.) Later, Walker would embrace nonviolence. But he always gave the sense that turning the other cheek wasn't something that came naturally.

"At times I would accommodate or alter my morality for the sake of getting a job done because I was the guy having to deal with the results," he said once. "I did it consciously; I had no choice. I wasn't dealing with a moral situation when I dealt with a Bull Connor." Walker loved

* Walker continued: "We were just going to give ourselves up to the mob and felt that would appease them. Let them beat us to death, I guess."

to play tricks on Connor. "I have come to Birmingham to ride the Bull," he announced, eyes twinkling, upon his arrival. He might put on a Southern drawl, and call in some imaginary complaint to the local police about "niggers" headed somewhere in a protest, sending them off on a wild goose chase. Or he might lead a march that wasn't a march, one that went around and around, through office lobbies and down alleyways, until the police were tearing out their hair. "Oh, man, it was a great time to be alive," he said, recalling the antics he got up to in Birmingham. Walker knew better than to tell King all that he was doing. King would disapprove. Walker kept his mischief to himself.

"I think Negroes like myself have developed almost a mental catalog of the tone of voices of how a white face speaks to them," Walker told the poet Robert Penn Warren in a long interview just after the Birmingham campaign ended. "But everything that a white person says is interpreted by the nuance of the tone of voice, or maybe the hang of the head, or the depth of tone, or the sharpness of the tongue, you know—things that in the ordinary, normal ethnic frame of reference would have no meaning, take on tremendous and deep and sharp meaning."

Warren then brought up the trickster folktales of the African-American tradition. You can almost see a sly smile cross Walker's face: "Yes," he replied, he found "pure joy" in poking fun at the "master," telling him "one thing that you knew he wanted to hear and really meaning something else."

People called Martin Luther King "Mr. Leader" or, in lighter moments, "De Lawd." Walker was Brer Rabbit.

5.

The plan Walker devised for Birmingham was called Project C—for confrontation. The staging ground was the city's venerable 16th Street Baptist Church, next to Kelly Ingram Park, and a few short blocks from downtown Birmingham. Project C had three acts, each designed to be bigger and more provocative than the last. It began with a series of sit-ins at local businesses. That was to draw media attention to the problem of segregation in Birmingham. At night, Shuttlesworth and King would lead mass meetings for the local black community to keep morale high. The second stage was a boycott of downtown businesses, to put financial pressure on the white business community to reconsider their practices toward their black customers. (In department stores, for example, blacks could not use the washrooms or the changing rooms, for fear that a surface or an item of clothing once touched by a black person would then touch a white person.) Act three was a series of mass marches to back up the boycott and fill up the jails—because once Connor ran out of cells he could no longer make the civil rights problem go away simply by arresting the protesters. He would have to deal with them directly.

Project C was a high-stakes operation. For it to work, Connor had to fight back. As King put it, Connor had to be induced to “tip his hand”—thereby revealing his ugly side to the world. But there was no guarantee that he would do that. King and Walker had just come from running their long campaign in Albany, Georgia, and they had failed there because the Albany police chief, Laurie Pritchett, had refused to take the bait. He told his police

officers not to use violence or excessive force. He was friendly and polite. His views on civil rights may have been unevolved, but he treated King with respect. The Northern press came to Albany to cover the confrontation between white and black, and found—to their surprise—they quite liked Pritchett. When King was finally thrown in jail, a mysterious well-dressed man—sent, legend had it, by Pritchett himself—came the next day and bailed him out. How can you be a martyr if you get bailed out of jail the instant you get there?

At one point, Pritchett moved into a downtown motel so that he could be on call should any violence erupt. In the midst of a long negotiating session with King, Pritchett was handed a telegram by his secretary. As Pritchett recalled, years later:

I...must have shown some concern over [it] because Dr. King asked me if it was bad news. I said, “No, it’s not bad news, Dr. King. It just so happens this is my twelfth wedding anniversary, and my wife has sent me a telegram.” And he says—I never will forget this and this shows the understanding which we had—he said, “You mean this is your anniversary?” And I said, “That’s right,” and I said, “I haven’t been home in at least three weeks.” And he said, “Well, Chief Pritchett, you go home tonight, no, right now. You celebrate your anniversary. I give you my word that nothing will happen in Albany, Georgia, till tomorrow, and you can go, take your wife out to dinner, do anything you want to, and tomorrow at ten o’clock, we’ll resume our efforts.”

Pritchett would not throw King in the briar patch. It was

hopeless. Not long afterward, King packed his bags and left town.*

Walker realized that a setback in Birmingham so soon after the Albany debacle would be disastrous. In those years, the evening news on television was watched in an overwhelming number of American households, and Walker wanted desperately to have Project C front and center on American television screens every night. But he knew that if the campaign was perceived to be faltering, the news media could lose interest and go elsewhere.

"As a general principle, Walker asserted that everything must build," Taylor Branch writes. "If they showed strength, then outside support would grow more than proportionately. Once started, however, they could not fall back....In no case, said Walker, could the Birmingham campaign be smaller than Albany. That meant they must be prepared to put upwards of a thousand people in jail at one time, maybe more."

Several weeks in, Walker saw his campaign begin to lose that precious momentum. Many blacks in Birmingham were worried—justifiably—that if they were seen with King, they would be fired by their white bosses. In April, one of King's aides spoke before seven hundred people at a church service and could persuade only nine of them to

* Pritchett actually came to Birmingham and warned Bull Connor about King and Walker. He wanted to teach Connor how to handle the civil rights tricksters. But Connor wasn't inclined to listen. "I never will forget, when we entered his office," Pritchett remembers, "his back was to us...some big executive chair, you know, and when he turned around, there was this little man—you know, in stature. But he had this boomin' voice, and he was tellin' me that they closed the course that day...said, 'They can play golf, but we put concrete in the holes. They can't get the ball in the holes.' And this gave me some indication as to what type of man he was."

march with him. The next day, Andrew Young—another of King's men—tried again, and this time found only seven volunteers. The local conservative black paper called Project C "wasteful and worthless." The reporters and photographers assembled there to record the spectacle of black-on-white confrontation were getting restless. Connor made the occasional arrest but mostly just sat and watched. Walker was in constant contact with King as King commuted back and forth between Birmingham and his home base in Atlanta. "Wyatt," King told him for the hundredth time, "you've got to find some way to make Bull Connor tip his hand." Walker shook his head. "Mr. Leader, I haven't found the key yet, but I'm going to find it."

The breakthrough came on Palm Sunday. Walker had twenty-two protesters ready to go. The march would be led by King's brother, Alfred Daniel, known as A.D. "Our mass meeting was slow getting together," Walker recalled. "We were supposed to march at something like two-thirty, and we didn't march until about four. In that time, people, being aware of the demonstration, collected out on the streets. By the time they got ready to march, there were a thousand people up and down this three-block area, lining up all along the sides as spectators, watching."

The next day, Walker opened the newspapers to read the media's account of what had happened, and to his surprise he discovered the reporters had gotten it all wrong. The papers said eleven hundred demonstrators had marched in Birmingham. "I called Dr. King and said, 'Dr. King, I've got it!'" Walker recalled. "I can't tell you on the phone, but I've got it! So what we did each day was we dragged out our meetings until people got home from

work late in the afternoon. They would form out on the side and it would look like a thousand folks. We weren't marching but twelve, fourteen, sixteen, eighteen. But the papers were reporting fourteen hundred."

It was a situation straight out of one of the most famous of all trickster tales—the story of Terrapin, a lowly turtle who finds himself in a race with Deer. He hides just by the finish line and places his relatives up and down the course, at strategic intervals, to make it seem like he is running the whole race. Then at the finish line, he emerges just ahead of Deer to claim victory. Deer is completely fooled, since, as Terrapin knows, to Deer, all turtles "am so much like an nurrer you can't tell one from turrer."

Underdogs have to be students of the nuances of white expression—the hang of the head, the depth of tone, or the sharpness of the tongue. Their survival depends on it. But those in positions of power have no need to *look* at the weak. Deer had disdain for the lowly Terrapin. To him, a turtle was a turtle. The comfortable elite of Birmingham were just like Deer. "They can only see...through white eyes," Walker explained, gleefully. "They cannot distinguish even between Negro demonstrators and Negro speculators. All they know is Negroes."

Connor was an arrogant man who liked to swagger around Birmingham saying, "Down here we make our

* This was a running theme with Walker. One time in Birmingham, the city filed an injunction against the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which meant that Walker had to appear in court. The question was: If Walker was tied up in court, how would he run the campaign? Walker's answer was to register with the court and then have someone else show up in his place every day thereafter. Why not? He said, "You know, all niggers look alike anyway."

own law." He sat drinking his bourbon every morning at the Molton Hotel, loudly predicting that King would "run out of niggers." Now he looked out the window and saw Terrapin ahead of him at every turn. He was in shock. Those imaginary one thousand protesters were a *provocation*. "Bull Connor had something in his mind about not letting these niggers get to city hall," Walker said. "I prayed that he'd keep trying to stop us.... Birmingham would have been lost if Bull had let us go down to the city hall and pray. If he had let us do that and stepped aside, what else would be new? There would be no movement, no publicity." *Please, Brer Connor, please. Whatever you do, don't throw me in the briar patch.* And of course that's just what Connor did.

A month into the protest, Walker and King stepped up the pressure. One of the Birmingham team, James Bevel, had been working with local schoolchildren, instructing them in the principles of nonviolent resistance. Bevel was a Pied Piper: a tall, bald, hypnotic speaker who wore a yarmulke and bib overalls and claimed to hear voices. (McWhorter calls him a "militant out of Dr. Seuss.") On the last Monday in April, he dropped off leaflets at all of the black high schools around the county: "Come to 16th Street Baptist Church at noon on Thursday. Don't ask permission." The city's most popular black disc jockey—Shelley "the Play-boy" Stewart—sent out the same message to his young listeners: "Kids, there's gonna be a party at the park."* The FBI

* Stewart was a huge figure in Birmingham. Every African-American teenager listened to his show. The second part of his message to his listeners was "Bring your toothbrushes, because lunch will be served." "Toothbrushes" was code for "be dressed and prepared to spend a few nights in jail."

got wind of the plan and told Bull Connor, who announced that any child who skipped school would be expelled. It made no difference. The kids came in droves. Walker called the day the children arrived "D Day."

At one o'clock, the doors to the church opened, and King's lieutenants began sending the children out. They held signs saying "Freedom" or "I'll Die to Make This Land My Home." They sang "We Shall Overcome" and "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around." Outside the church, Connor's police officers waited. The children dropped to their knees and prayed, then filed into the open doors of the paddy wagons. Then another dozen came out. Then another dozen, and another, and another—until Connor's men had begun to get an inkling that the stakes had been raised again.

A police officer spotted Fred Shuttlesworth. "Hey, Fred, how many more have you got?"

"At least a thousand more," he replied.

"God A'mighty," the officer said.

By the end of the day, more than six hundred children were in jail.

The next day—Friday—was "Double-D Day." This time fifteen hundred schoolchildren skipped school to come down to 16th Street Baptist. At one o'clock, they began filing out of the church. The streets surrounding Kelly Ingram Park were barricaded by police and firefighters. There was no mystery about why the firefighters had been called in. They had high-pressure hoses on their fire trucks, and "water cannons," as they were also known, had been a staple of crowd control since the 1930s in the early days of Nazi Germany. Walker knew that if the demonstrations grew so

large that they overwhelmed the Birmingham police, Connor would be sorely tempted to turn on the hoses. He wanted Connor to turn on the hoses. "It was hot in Birmingham," he explained. "I told [Bevel] to let the pep rally go on a while and let these firemen sit out there and bake in the sun until their tempers were like hair triggers."

And the dogs? Connor had been itching to use the city's K-9 Corps. Earlier that spring, in a speech, Connor had vowed to combat the civil right protesters with one hundred German shepherd police dogs. "I want 'em to see the dogs work," Connor growled, as things began to get out of control in Kelly Ingram Park—and nothing made Walker happier than that. He had children marching in the streets, and now Connor wanted to let German shepherds loose on them? Everyone in King's camp knew what it would look like if someone published a photograph of a police dog lunging at a child.

Connor stood watch as the children came closer. "Do not cross," he said. "If you come any further, we will turn the fire hoses on you." Connor's jails were full. He couldn't arrest anyone else, because he had nowhere to put them. The children kept coming. The firemen were hesitant. They were not used to controlling crowds. Connor turned to the fire chief: "Turn 'em on, or go home." The firemen turned on their "monitor guns," valves that turned the spray of their hoses into a high-pressure torrent. The children clung to one another and were sent sprawling backwards. The force of the water ripped some of the marchers' shirts from their bodies and flung others against walls and doorways.

Back at the church, Walker began deploying waves of

children to the other end of the park to open another front. Connor had no more fire trucks. But he was determined that none of the marchers cross over into "white" Birmingham. "Bring the dogs," Connor ordered, calling in eight K-9 units. "Why did you bring old Tiger out?" Connor shouted at one of his police officers. "Why didn't you bring a meaner dog—this one is not the vicious one!" The children came closer. A German shepherd lunged at a boy. He leaned in, arms limp, as if to say, "Take me, here I am." On Saturday, the picture ran on the front page of every newspaper around the country.

6.

Does Wyatt Walker's behavior make you uncomfortable? James Forman, who was a key figure in the civil rights movement in those years, was with Walker when Connor first deployed the K-9 units. Forman says that Walker started jumping with joy. "We've got a movement. We've got a movement. We had some police brutality." Forman was stunned. Walker was as aware as any of them just how dangerous Birmingham could be. He had been in the room when King gave everyone a mock eulogy. How could he be jumping up and down at the sight of protesters being attacked by police dogs?

After D Day, King and Walker heard it from all sides. The judge processing the arrested marchers said that the

* Forman writes: "It seemed very cold, cruel, and calculating to be happy about police brutality coming down on innocent people....no matter what purpose it served."

people who "misled those kids" into marching "ought to be put under the jail." On the floor of Congress, one of Alabama's congressmen called the use of children "shameful." The mayor of Birmingham denounced the "irresponsible and unthinking agitators" who were using children as "tools." Malcolm X—the black activist who was in every way more radical than King—said "real men don't put their children on the firing line." The *New York Times* editorialized that King was engaged in "perilous ventures in brinkmanship" and *Time* scolded him for using children as "shock troops." The U.S. attorney general, Robert F. Kennedy, warned that "schoolchildren participating in street demonstrations is a dangerous business," and said, "An injured, maimed or dead child is a price that none of us can afford to pay."

On the Friday night, after the second day of children's protests, King spoke at 16th Street Baptist Church to the parents of those who had been arrested that day and the day before. They knew full well the dangers and humiliations of being a black person in Birmingham. *Jesus said He'd go as far as Memphis*. Can you imagine how they felt with their children at that moment languishing in Bull Connor's jails? King stood up and tried to make light of the situation: "Not only did they stand up in the water, they went *under* the water!" he said. "And dogs? Well, I'll

* King thought long and hard before agreeing to use the children. He had to be talked into it by James Bevel. Their eventual conclusion was that if someone was old enough to belong to a church—to have made a decision of that importance to their life and soul—then they were old enough to fight for a cause of great importance to their life and soul. In the Baptist tradition, you could join a church once you were of school age. That meant that King approved of using children as young as six or seven against Bull Connor.

tell you. When I was growing up, I was dog bitten...for *nothing*. So I don't mind being bitten by a dog for standing up for freedom!"

Whether or not any of the parents were buying this is unclear. King plunged on: "Your daughters and sons are in jail....Don't worry about them....They are suffering for what they believe, and they are suffering to make this nation a better nation." *Don't worry about them?* Taylor Branch writes that there were rumors—"true and false"—about "rats, beatings, concrete beds, overflowing latrines, jailhouse assaults, and crude examinations for venereal disease." Seventy-five and eighty children were packed into cells intended for eight. Some had been bused out to the state fairground and held without food and water in stockades in the pouring rain. King's response? "Jail helps you to rise above the miasma of everyday life," he said blithely. "If they want some books, we will get them. I catch up on my reading every time I go to jail."

Walker and King were trying to set up that picture—the German shepherd lunging at the boy. But to get it, they had to play a complex and duplicitous game. To Bull Connor, they pretended that they had a hundred times more supporters than they did. To the press, they pretended that they were shocked at the way Connor let his dogs loose on their protesters—while at the same time, they were jumping for joy behind closed doors. And to the parents whose children they were using as cannon fodder, they pretended that Bull Connor's prisons were a good place for their children to catch up on their reading.

But we *shouldn't* be shocked by this. What other options did Walker and King have? In the traditional fable of

the Tortoise and the Hare, told to every Western schoolchild, the Tortoise beats the Hare through sheer persistence and effort. Slow and steady wins the race. That's an appropriate and powerful lesson—but only in a world where the Tortoise and the Hare are playing by the same rules, and where everyone's effort is rewarded. In a world that isn't fair—and no one would have called Birmingham in 1963 fair—the Terrapin has to place his relatives at strategic points along the racecourse. The trickster is not a trickster by nature. He is a trickster by necessity. In the next great civil rights showdown in Selma, Alabama, two years later, a photographer from *Life* magazine put down his camera in order to come to the aid of children being roughed up by police officers. Afterward, King reminded him: "The world doesn't know this happened, because you didn't photograph it. I'm not being cold-blooded about it, but it is so much more important for you to take a picture of us getting beaten up than for you to be another person joining in the fray." He *needed* the picture. In response to the complaints over the use of children, Fred Shuttlesworth said it best: "We got to use what we got."

A dyslexic, if she or he is to succeed, is in exactly the same position, of course. That's part of what it means to be "disagreeable." Gary Cohn leapt into the taxi, pretending he knew about options trading, and it is remarkable how many successful dyslexics have had a similar moment in their careers. Brian Grazer, the Hollywood producer, got a three-month internship after college as a clerk in the business affairs department at the Warner Bros. studio. He pushed a cart around. "I was in a big office with two union

secretaries," he remembers. "My boss had worked for Jack Warner. He was putting in his last hours. He was a great guy. There was this great office there, and I said to him, 'Can I have it?' The office was bigger than my office today. He said, 'Sure. Use it.' It became the Brian Grazer business. I could do my eight-hour workdays in one hour. I would use my office and my position to get access to all the legal contracts, business contracts, the treatments being submitted to Warner Brothers—why they passed, what they considered. I used that year to gain knowledge and information about the movie business. I would call someone every single day. And I would say, 'I'm Brian Grazer. I work at Warner Brothers business affairs. I want to meet you.'"

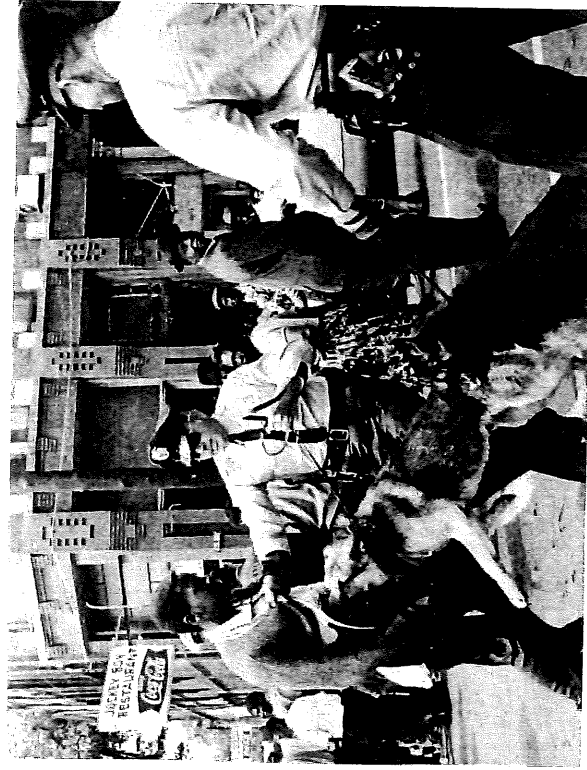
He was eventually fired, but only after he had stretched his three-month term to a year and sold two ideas to NBC for five thousand dollars each.

Grazer and Cohn—two outsiders with learning disabilities—played a trick. They bluffed their way into professions that would have been closed to them. The man in the cab assumed that no one would be so audacious as to say he knew how to trade options if he didn't. And it never occurred to the people Brian Grazer called that when he said he was Brian Grazer from Warner Brothers, what he meant was that he was Brian Grazer who pushed the mail cart around at Warner Brothers. What they did is not "right," just as it is not "right" to send children up against police dogs. But we need to remember that our definition of what is right is, as often as not, simply the way that people in positions of privilege close the door on those on the outside. David has nothing to lose, and because he

has nothing to lose, he has the freedom to thumb his nose at the rules set by others. That's how people with brains a little bit different from the rest of ours get jobs as options traders and Hollywood producers—and a small band of protesters armed with nothing but their wits have a chance against the likes of Bull Connor.

"I still t'ink Ise de fas'est runner in de worl'," the bewildered Deer complains after a race in which Terrapin has done something that would get him banished from every competition in the world. "Maybe you air," Terrapin responds, "but I kin head ou off wid sense."

7.



The boy in Bill Hudson's famous photograph is Walter Gadsden. He was a sophomore at Parker High in Birmingham, six foot tall and fifteen years old. He wasn't a marcher. He was a spectator. He came from a conservative black family that owned two newspapers in Birmingham and Atlanta that had been sharply critical of King. Gadsden had taken off school that afternoon to watch the spectacle unfolding around Kelly Ingram Park.

The officer in the picture is Dick Middleton. He was a modest and reserved man. "The K-9 Corps," McWhorter writes, "was known for attracting straight arrows who wanted none of the scams and payoffs that often came with a regular beat. Nor were the dog handlers known for being race ideologues." The dog's name is Leo.

Now look at the faces of the black bystanders in the background. Shouldn't they be surprised or horrified? They're not. Next, look at the leash in Middleton's hand. It's taut, as if he's trying to restrain Leo. And look at Gadsden's left hand. He's gripping Middleton on the forearm. Look at Gadsden's left leg. He's kicking Leo, isn't he? Gadsden would say later that he had been raised around dogs and had been taught how to protect himself. "I automatically threw my knee up in front of the dog's head," he said. Gadsden wasn't the martyr, passively leaning forward as if to say, "Take me, here I am." He's steadying himself, with a hand on Middleton, so he can deliver a sharper blow. The word around the movement, afterward, was that he'd broken Leo's jaw. Hudson's photograph is not at all what the world thought it was. It was a little bit of Brer Rabbit trickery.

You got to use what you got.

"Sure, people got bit by the dogs," Walker said, looking back twenty years later. "I'd say at least two or three. But a picture is worth a thousand words, dahlin'."⁸

* Walker makes a similar claim about the famous photographs of protesters being hit by Connor's water cannons. The people in the photographs, he says, were spectators like Gadsden, not demonstrators. And they had been standing outside 16th Street Baptist Church all afternoon—on a typically humid Birmingham spring day. They were hot. "They had gathered in the park, which is a shaded area. And the firemen had set up their hoses at two corners of the park, one on Fifth Street and one on Sixth Street. And the mood was like a Roman holiday; it was festive. There wasn't anybody among the spectators who were angry, and they had waited so long, and it was beginning to get dark now. So, somebody heaved a brick because they knew that—in fact, they had been saying, 'Turn the water hose on. Turn the water hose on.' And Bull Connor, then somebody threw a brick, and he started turning them on, see. So they just danced and played in the hose spray. This famous picture of them holding hands, it was just a frolic of them trying to stand up [unintelligible] and some of them were getting knocked down by the hose. They'd get up and run back and it would slide them along the pavement. Then they began bringing the hose up from the other corner, and instead of Negroes [unintelligible] they ran to the hose. It was a, it was a holiday for them. And this went on for a couple of hours. It was a joke, really. All in good humor and good spirit. Not any vitriolic response on the part of even the Negro spectators, which to me, again, was an example of the changing spirit, you know. When Negroes once had been cowed in the presence of policemen and maybe water hoses, here they had complete disdain for them. Made a joke out of it."