

"Remember, what you're doin' today is a great thing. Be proud, be dignified, hold your head up high." With those words Jim Bevel began organizin' the hundreds a' children who'd turned up this mornin' in answer to his call. This was the third day a' the child marches. They began on 'D' day, Thursday, when over nine-hundred kids got arrested. I held back that day, my courage only gettin' me to the sidelines. Friday was the same. Even though it seemed a little easier to make the jump after seein' that the dogs 'n hoses had been held back on that first day, I still couldn't do it. But now, today, Sataday May 4th, here I was. Me 'n Amie Reynolds had made a pact. We'd do it together, be each other's march buddy, each other's support.

So, at nine a'clock that mornin', I found myself squashed up alongside Amie in a pew at Sixteenth Street Baptist, waitin' for what I was sure was gonna be the scariest moment a' my life. A group of 'bout fifty was 'bout to pour out a' the main entrance onto Sixteenth Street. This was meant to draw the police towards 'em, while the main group—over two hundred of us—silently made our way out the back, two-by-two, 'n marched 'round the police, headin' for downtown.

We sat there waitin' as the first group left. Within minutes the whirr a' police sirens filled the church, 'n then the unmistakable voice a' Bull Connor. He ordered the marchers to stop, but there was no reply.

"Arrest them!"

Those two words rang out loud 'n clear. Little did Mister Connor know that they was our signal, 'n next thing we was on our feet headin' out through the rear exit. With so many of us there, it took another five or so minutes before me 'n Amie spilled out onto Fourteenth Street. The light from the sun blinded me for a moment. I blinked three or four times, then looked 'round me. Those ahead of

us had already stretched out as far as I could see, a solid line a' schoolchildren marchin' in twos.

There was no sign a' the police. They musta' still been busy with the group 'round front. Realizin' this, I turned to Amie at my side.

"Looks like we've tricked ol' Bull Connor already," I said, surprised at how shaky my voice sounded.

"He'll catch up," she replied, grabbin' my hand. We both squeezed at the same time, smiled at each other, then looked ahead. We strode forward, keepin' step with those ahead of us. As we rounded Fourteenth Street 'n came up towards Kelly Ingram Park, I felt glad to have Amie by my side. Even though we'd had a kinda fallin' out the other day, we both knew that what we was doin' now was more important than any a' that. This was serious, 'n everythin' else in my life could wait 'til I done what I had to do.

The sound a' singin' soon made its way down the line. Jim had encouraged this, sayin' it was a great way to take your mind offa your fear. I thought it was a great way to let ol' Bull Connor know where we was at, too. But I guess we weren't out there to hide from him, so pretty soon I joined in 'n the words of 'Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'round filled the air.

We'd got to the start a' the downtown area before Bull Connor's men'd managed to group against us. But long before they arrived we'd already drawn the attention a' the local White people. They was small groups at first, runnin' alongside us, yellin' their meanest insults. But the closer we got to downtown, the larger the crowds 'n, I noticed, the more they was made up of older people. Along the way it was mainly teenage boys who'd run alongside us, provin' what men they were. But here was what looked like the parents a' those boys—women in curlers 'n men in ties. Pity they didn't

have no better manners than their kids, I thought. Actually, I noticed, it was the women who was the worst of all. Standin' there, they was screamin' at us with words that woulda got me beat black 'n blue.

We tried not to look at the faces a' those people, tried to keep our eyes lookin' straight ahead. But, every now 'n then, I stole a glance towards them. There, jus' a few feet away from me, I saw men 'n women outta control with hatred—their faces all screwed up into ugly scowls, their voices screamin' out their hate filled words. I realized then that these people could really hurt us. They was so close an' their anger was so strong, that if any of 'em had attacked us, we'd be beaten half to death 'fore anyone could do anythin' 'bout it. Yet, in the face a' this, I noticed that I wasn't afraid. My nervousness had all but left me when we'd entered into the downtown area an' now, seein' these White adults with all this unexplained hatred for school kids they'd never seen before, I could only feel one thing—pity. I remembered Doctor Kings' speech 'bout hatred 'n what it can do to the hater, 'n I felt sorry for these people—these people who thought they was so much better than us 'n yet who had been blinded by their own hatred—a hatred that was jus' as unexplainable as it was undeserved.

Up ahead of us, above the noise a' the crowd, we could hear Bull Connor's voice over a loudspeaker. But rather than orderin' his men to begin arrestin' us, he was directin' his attention to the White crowds, tellin' 'em to get back. Slowly the people began obeyin' him, edgin' back a pace or two. But it wasn't enough for ol' Bull Connor, 'n pretty soon police officers was makin' their way down the lines, usin' their clubs to push people back even more. When they'd finished the nearest bystander woulda been more than a dozen feet away. That shoulda made us feel safer, but for me, it did the opposite. I had the feelin' that ol' Bull Connor wasn't so worried 'bout the crowd harmin' us. I figured he was more interested in makin' sure they wouldn't get hurt from whatever it was he was

plannin' to do to us. No sooner had this thought come to me than the sound a' barkin' dogs filled the air.

Our line a' marchers came to a standstill. Me 'n Amie strained to see what was happenin' up ahead. Through the double line that stretched on for two blocks we was able to make out the figures of a half dozen or so men facin' the front row marchers. They was wearin' long black jackets 'n they each seemed to be holdin' somethin' in their hand, but from way back there we couldn't see what. I let my eyes run back along the crowds, further away now but still as loud. It was then that I noticed there was Black folks gathered along the way also. The police had made sure to keep them well set off from the Whites, who outnumbered them by at least two to one. I looked over those folks, searchin' out any familiar faces. I was 'bout to look away when somethin' caught my eye. There, 'bout three rows back stood the one person who I knew could give me the strength to get through this. An', jus' seein' her there seemed to be enough. For in that moment a' recognizin' her, I seemed to get a rush a' power goin' through me that pushed all fear aside. Without even thinkin' bout it I called out to her.

"Miss Hattie!"

But she never heard me. My voice was drowned out by a terrible gushin' sound comin' from ahead of us. My attention went back on those men in the black coats way up front. What was in their hands was clear as ever now—fire hoses.

They'd turned on the tap of only one a' those hoses, but the noise a' that one hose was already enough to drown everythin' else out. From way back where we was, I saw the power a' that water rushin' outta the end a' that hose.

The first half dozen pairs a' marchers had dropped to the ground when they'd seen that hose goin' on. They'd gone into what Jim had called the fetal position. But I could tell that hose was still hurtin' 'em bad. The power of it, aimed full force on their backs, was enough to push them across the street 'n flyin' into the gutter. I hoped none of 'em got hit on the bare skin, 'cause those hoses was strong enough to rip the bark off a tree. They'd surely make a mess of a young Black kid's body.

Another hose came on, movin' further down the line, turnin' our nice straight line a' marchers into a twisted mass a' bodies, tossed 'bout the street like rag dolls. As they got closer to where we stood, I could make out the cuts 'n grazes that water was carvin' onto the bodies a' the kids up ahead. I saw a kid who only looked 'bout eight or nine who hadn't managed to get into the 'fetal' position in time. That hose picked her up offa her feet 'n threw her down on top a' those who was already on the ground. Someone grabbed her 'n pulled her down, coverin' her body with theirs.

By the time the third hose came into play, the word had come down the line for us to drop into position. Before goin' down, I stole a look over towards where I had spotted Miss Hattie. She was up front now, lookin' right at me. I called to her again, 'n outta all the noise 'n confusion I heard her reply.

"Remember Harriet Tubman!"

Next thing, I was on the ground, my knees tucked up to my chest 'n my hands protectin' my head.

"You okay, Angel?" I heard Amie's voice from alongside me.

"Yeah. How 'bout you?"

"I'm scared."

Her voice was shakin'. I lifted my head enough to look at Amie. She was in the same position as me, 'cept her body was heavin' up 'n down in a sobbin' cry. I reached out for her, huggin' her into my body.

"Don't worry girl," I whispered. "We'll do this together."

I knew I had to protect Amie. Without fear I looked up to see where those firemen was at. I saw one, no more than a dozen feet ahead a' me. He was controllin' the hose by himself, 'n the look on his face showed that he was gettin' some kind a' cruel pleasure outta all a' this. He had the hose poundin' into the back of a girl 'bout my age, 'n as it ripped apart her t-shirt I saw him smile. I felt my anger risin' inside a' me, 'n the thought a' jumpin' up 'n runnin' towards that fireman flashed through my mind. Instead, I lay down again, this time coverin' Amie's body completely with mine. Together we lay there 'n waited.

As I felt the first spray a' water pass over me, I tried to brace myself, to stiffen my body. I closed my eyes 'n tightened my grip on Amie. The noise a' that hose was right alongside me now.

BOOM!

It was as if a shotgun had jus' exploded inside a' me. The pain in my side was numbin' me. I bit my lip to stop from cryin' out.

Then relief. The hose was off me. I strengthened my grip on Amie, diggin' my nails into her wrists.

BOOM!

It hit me in the same spot, the left side a' my ribs. This time it stayed there, poundin' into me until I twisted to try to get some relief. Now the hose was aimed at my left arm 'n I felt my grip on Amie bein' torn away as my arm went flyin'. A terrible pain shot up 'n down my forearm.

BOOM!

The force a' my arm flyin' had spun me 'round 'n now the hose caught me full in the stomach. It threw me across the street, away from Amie. I crawled across the pavement only to be knocked back again. It was then that I realized this fireman was singlin' me out. His hose kept up its attack, pushin' me further 'n further back—closer 'n closer to the White crowds that was now cheerin' him on. After a while, I no longer felt the pain, 'cept for my arm. I jus' lay there, in the fetal position, gettin' swept back, until that fireman got bored with me. Finally the hose was offa me. I felt relieved, but only for a moment. For when I uncovered my eyes 'n looked up I found myself starin' into the faces a' half a dozen White people.

"Shoulda stayed in school, nigga girl!" screamed a middle-aged woman as she spat on me.

I was takin' in those words when a massive pain hit me in the side a' the head. My hands went there to protect me, but the pain came again. As the blood flowed down into my eyes, the pain overtook my head 'n arm 'n I prepared to die.