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LONG WALK TO FREEDOM

The Autobiography of

NELSON MANDELA



Little, Brown and Company

New York Boston

throughout my political life to fight alongside colleagues whose abilities and contributions were far greater than my own. Many others had paid the price of their beliefs before me, and many more would do so after me.

Before sentencing, I informed the court that whatever sentence the state imposed, it would do nothing to change my devotion to the struggle.

I do not believe, Your Worship, that this court, in inflicting penalties on me for the crimes for which I am convicted should be moved by the belief that penalties will deter men from the course that they believe is right. History shows that penalties do not deter men when their conscience is aroused, nor will they deter my people or the colleagues with whom I have worked before.

I am prepared to pay the penalty even though I know how bitter and desperate is the situation of an African in the prisons of this country. I have been in these prisons and I know how gross is the discrimination, even behind the prison wall, against Africans. . . . Nevertheless these considerations do not sway me from the path that I have taken nor will they sway others like me. For to men, freedom in their own land is the pinnacle of their ambitions, from which nothing can turn men of conviction aside. More powerful than my fear of the dreadful conditions to which I might be subjected in prison is my hatred for the dreadful conditions to which my people are subjected outside prison throughout this country. . . .

Whatever sentence Your Worship sees fit to impose upon me for the crime for which I have been convicted before this court, may it rest assured that when my sentence has been completed I will still be moved, as men are always moved, by their conscience; I will still be moved by my dislike of the race discrimination against my people when I come out from serving my sentence, to take up again, as best I can, the struggle for the removal of those injustices until they are finally abolished once and for all. . . .

I have done my duty to my people and to South Africa. I have no doubt that posterity will pronounce that I was innocent and that the criminals that should have been brought before this court are the members of the government.

When I had finished, the magistrate ordered a ten-minute recess to consider the sentence. I turned and looked out at the crowd before exiting the courtroom. I had no illusions about the sentence I would receive. Exactly ten minutes later, in a courtroom heavy with tension, the magistrate pronounced sentence: three years for

inciting people to strike and two years for leaving the country without a passport; five years in all, with no possibility of parole. It was a stern sentence and there was wailing among the spectators. As the court rose, I turned to the gallery and again made a clenched fist, shouting "*Amandla!*" three times. Then, on its own, the crowd began to sing our beautiful anthem, "*Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika.*" People sang and danced and the women ululated as I was led away. The uproar among the gallery made me forget for a moment that I would be going to prison to serve what was then the stiffest sentence yet imposed in South Africa for a political offense.

Downstairs, I was permitted a brief good-bye to Winnie, and on this occasion she was not at all grim: she was in high spirits and shed no tears. She seemed confident, as much a comrade as a wife. She was determined to brace me. As I was driven away in the police van I could still hear the people outside singing "*Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika.*"

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PRISON NOT ONLY robs you of your freedom, it attempts to take away your identity. Everyone wears the same uniform, eats the same food, follows the same schedule. It is by definition a purely authoritarian state that tolerates no independence or individuality. As a freedom fighter and as a man, one must fight against the prison's attempt to rob one of these qualities.

From the courthouse, I was taken directly to Pretoria Local, the gloomy red-brick monstrosity that I knew so well. But I was now a convicted prisoner, not an awaiting-trial prisoner, and was treated without even that little deference that is afforded to the latter. I was stripped of my clothes and Colonel Jacobs was finally able to confiscate my kaross. I was issued the standard prison uniform for Africans: a pair of short trousers, a rough khaki shirt, a canvas jacket, socks, sandals, and a cloth cap. Only Africans are given short trousers, for only African men are deemed "boys" by the authorities.

I informed the authorities that I would under no circumstances wear shorts and told them I was prepared to go to court to protest. Later, when I was brought dinner, stiff cold porridge with a half teaspoonful of sugar, I refused to eat it. Colonel Jacobs pondered

this and came up with a solution: I could wear long trousers and have my own food, if I agreed to be put in isolation. "We were going to put you with the other politicals," he said, "but now you will be alone, man. I hope you enjoy it." I assured him that solitary confinement would be fine as long as I could wear and eat what I chose.

For the next few weeks, I was completely and utterly isolated. I did not see the face or hear the voice of another prisoner. I was locked up for twenty-three hours a day, with thirty minutes of exercise in the morning and again in the afternoon. I had never been in isolation before, and every hour seemed like a year. There was no natural light in my cell; a single bulb burned overhead twenty-four hours a day. I did not have a wristwatch and I often thought it was the middle of the night when it was only late afternoon. I had nothing to read, nothing to write on or with, no one to talk to. The mind begins to turn in on itself, and one desperately wants something outside of oneself on which to fix one's attention. I have known men who took half-a-dozen lashes in preference to being locked up alone. After a time in solitary, I relished the company even of the insects in my cell, and found myself on the verge of initiating conversations with a cockroach.

I had one middle-aged African warder whom I occasionally was able to see, and one day I tried to bribe him with an apple to get him to talk to me. "*Baba*," I said, which means Father, and is a term of respect, "can I give you an apple?" He turned away, and met all my subsequent overtures with silence. Finally, he said, "Man, you wanted long trousers and better food, and now you have them and you are still not happy." He was right. Nothing is more dehumanizing than the absence of human companionship. After a few weeks, I was ready to swallow my pride and tell Colonel Jacobs that I would trade my long trousers for some company.

During those weeks I had plenty of time to ponder my fate. The place of a freedom fighter is beside his people, not behind bars. The knowledge and contacts I had recently made in Africa were going to be locked away rather than used in the struggle. I cursed the fact that my expertise would not be put to use in creating a freedom army.

I soon began to protest vigorously against my circumstances and demanded to be put with the other political prisoners at Pretoria Local. Among them was Robert Sobukwe. My request was ultimately granted, accompanied by a stern warning from Colonel Jacobs that serious consequences would result if I returned to my impudent ways. I don't think I ever looked forward to eating cold mealie pap so much in my life.

Apart from my desire for company, I was keen to talk with Sobukwe and the others, most of whom were PAC, because I thought that in prison we might forge a unity that we could not on the outside. Prison conditions have a way of tempering polemics, and making individuals see more what unites them than what divides them.

When I was taken to the courtyard with the others, we greeted each other warmly. Besides Sobukwe, there was also John Gaetsewe, a leading member of the South African Congress of Trade Unions; Aaron Molete, an ANC member who worked for *New Age*; and Stephen Tefu, a prominent Communist, trade unionist, and PAC member. Robert asked me to give them an account of my African tour, which I did gladly. I was candid about how both the PAC and the ANC were perceived in the rest of Africa. At the end of my narrative I said there were issues that I wanted us to examine. But after initially allowing Sobukwe and me a certain proximity, the authorities took pains to keep us apart. We lived in single cells along a corridor and he and I were given cells at opposite ends.

Occasionally, we did have a chance to talk as we sat next to each other on the ground of the prison courtyard sewing and patching up shabby old mailbags. I have always respected Sobukwe, and found him a balanced and reasonable man. But we differed markedly about the principal subject at hand: prison conditions. Sobukwe believed that to fight poor conditions would be to acknowledge the state's right to have him in prison in the first place. I responded that it was always unacceptable to live in degrading conditions and that political prisoners throughout history had considered it part of their duty to fight to improve prison conditions. Sobukwe responded that prison conditions would not change until the country changed. I completely agreed with this, but I did not see why that ought to prevent us from fighting in the only realm in which we now could

fight. We never resolved this issue, but we did make some progress when we submitted a joint letter to the commanding officer setting out our complaints about prison conditions.

Sobukwe never broke in prison. But in Pretoria he was a bit sensitive and testy, and I attribute this to Stephen Tefu. Tefu had become a kind of goad to Sobukwe, teasing, taunting, and challenging him. Even at the best of times, Tefu was a difficult fellow: dyspeptic, argumentative, overbearing. He was also articulate, knowledgeable, and an expert in Russian history. Above all, he was a fighter, but he would fight everyone, even his friends. Tefu and Sobukwe quarreled every day.

I was keen to discuss policy issues with Sobukwe, and one of the matters I took up with him was the PAC slogan "Freedom in 1963." It was already 1963 and freedom was nowhere to be seen. "My brother," I said to Sobukwe, "there is nothing so dangerous as a leader making a demand that he knows cannot be achieved. It creates false hopes among the people."

I said this in a most respectful manner, but Tefu jumped in and started to berate Sobukwe. "Bob," he said, "you have met your match with Mandela. You know he is right." Tefu continued in this vein, annoying Sobukwe to the point where he would tell Tefu, "Leave me alone." But Tefu would not stop. "Bob, the people are waiting for you. They are going to kill you because you have deceived them. You are just an amateur, Bob. You are not a real politician."

Tefu did his best to alienate me as well. Every morning, when we were visited by the warders, he would complain to them about something — the food, the conditions, the heat or the cold. One day, an officer said to Tefu: "Look, man, why do you complain every morning?"

"I complain because it is my duty to complain," Steve said.

"But, look at Mandela," the officer said, "he does not complain every day."

"Ah," said Tefu with disgust, "Mandela is a little boy who is afraid of the white man. I don't even know who he is. One morning, I woke up and found every newspaper saying, 'Mandela, Mandela, Mandela,' and I said to myself, 'Who is this Mandela?' I will tell you who Mandela is. He is a chap built up by you people for some reason that I don't understand. That is who Mandela is!"

* * *

We were joined for two weeks by Walter, who had been on trial in Johannesburg for incitement to strike while I had been in Pretoria. He was sentenced to six years. We had a number of opportunities to talk in jail and we discussed Walter's application for bail while his appeal was pending, a move I wholeheartedly supported. After two weeks he was released on bail, and he was instructed by the movement to go underground, from where he was to continue to lead the struggle, which he ably did.

Not long after Walter left, I was walking to the prison hospital with Sobukwe when I spotted Nana Sita in the courtyard about twenty-five yards away. Sita, the distinguished Indian campaigner who had led our defiance at Boksburg in 1952, had just been convicted by a Pretoria magistrate for refusing to vacate his house — the house he had lived in for more than forty years — which was in a precinct that had been proclaimed "white" in terms of the Group Areas Act. He was hunched over, and the fact that he was barefoot despite an acute arthritic condition made me uncomfortable in my own sandals. I wanted to go over to greet him, but we were marching under the eyes of a half-dozen warders.

Suddenly and without warning, I suffered a blackout. I crumpled to the concrete and sustained a deep gash above my left eye, which required three stitches. I had been diagnosed back in the Fort with high blood pressure and had been given certain pills. The cause of the blackout was evidently an overdose of these pills; I was taken off them, and put on a low-salt diet, which solved the problem.

That afternoon was my first scheduled visit from Winnie since I had been sentenced. Stitches or no stitches, I was not going to miss it. She was extremely concerned when she saw me but I assured her I was fine and explained what happened. Even so, rumors circulated that my health had broken down.

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IN OCTOBER 1962, during my trial, the ANC held its first annual conference since 1959. Because the organization was illegal, the conference took place in Lobatse, just over the border in Bechuanaland. The conference was a milestone, for it explicitly

linked the ANC and MK. Although the National Executive Committee stated, "Our emphasis still remains mass political action," Umkhonto was referred to as the "military wing of our struggle." This was done in part to try to quell the more irresponsible acts of terrorism then being committed by Poqo. Poqo, Xhosa for "independent" or "standing alone," was loosely linked to the PAC, and their acts of terrorism targeted both African collaborators and whites. The ANC wanted the people to see its new militancy, but also to see that it was controlled and responsible.

The government had decided to accelerate the program of "separate development" to show the world that apartheid allowed races their individual "freedom." The prototype would be the Transkei. In January 1962, Verwoerd had announced that South Africa intended to grant the Transkei "self-government." In 1963, the Transkei became a "self-governing" homeland. In November 1963, an election was held for the Transkei legislative assembly. But by a margin of more than three to one, Transkei voters elected members opposed to the homeland policy.

The bantustan system was nevertheless instituted; the voters had opposed it, but participated in it simply by voting. Though I abhorred the bantustan system, I felt the ANC should use both the system and those within it as a platform for our policies, particularly as so many of our leaders were now voiceless through imprisonment, banning, or exile.

Terrorism against the Bantu Authorities increased. As acts of sabotage mounted, so did the government's vigilance. John Vorster, the new minister of justice, who had himself been detained during World War II for opposing the government's support of the Allies, was a man unsentimental in the extreme. For him, the iron fist was the best and only answer to subversion.

On May 1, 1963, the government enacted legislation designed "to break the back" of Umkhonto, as Vorster put it. The General Law Amendment Act, better known as the Ninety-Day Detention Law, waived the right of habeas corpus and empowered any police officer to detain any person without a warrant on grounds of suspicion of a political crime. Those arrested could be detained without trial, charge, access to a lawyer, or protection against self-incrimination for up to ninety days. The ninety-day detention could be extended, as Vorster ominously explained, until "this side of eternity." The

law helped transform the country into a police state; no dictator could covet more power than the Ninety-Day Detention Law gave to the authorities. As a result, the police became more savage: prisoners were routinely beaten and we soon heard reports of electric shock, suffocation, and other forms of torture. In Parliament, Helen Suzman, the representative of the liberal Progressive Party, cast the lone vote against the act.

Increased penalties were ordered for membership in illegal organizations; sentences from five years to the death penalty were instituted for "furthering the aims" of communism or of other banned organizations. Political prisoners were redetained as I found out in May 1963, when Sobukwe's three-year sentence was up; instead of releasing him, the government simply redetained him without charging him, and then sent him to Robben Island.

Vorster also championed the Sabotage Act of June 1962, which allowed for house arrests and more stringent bannings not subject to challenge in the court, restricting the liberties of citizens to those in the most extreme fascist dictatorships. Sabotage itself now carried a minimum penalty of five years without parole and a maximum of death. Because the wording of the act was so broad, even activities such as trespassing or illegal possession of weapons could constitute sabotage. Another act of Parliament prohibited the reproduction of any statement made by a banned person. Nothing I said or had ever said could be reported in the newspapers. *New Age* was banned at the end of 1962, and possession of a banned publication became a criminal offense, punishable by up to two years in prison. Provision was also made for house arrest, the most well-known use of which was imposed on the white political activist Helen Joseph.

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ONE NIGHT, toward the end of May, a warder came to my cell and ordered me to pack my things. I asked him why, but he did not answer. In less than ten minutes, I was escorted down to the reception office where I found three other political prisoners: Tefu, John Gaetsewe, and Aaron Molete. Colonel Aucamp curtly informed us that we were being transferred. Where? Tefu asked. Someplace

very beautiful, Aucamp said. Where? said Tefu. "*Die Eiland,*" said Aucamp. The island. There was only one. Robben Island.

The four of us were shackled together and put in a windowless van that contained only a sanitary bucket. We drove all night to Cape Town, and arrived at the city's docks in the late afternoon. It is not an easy or pleasant task for men shackled together to use a sanitary bucket in a moving van.

The docks at Cape Town were swarming with armed police and nervous plainclothes officials. We had to stand, still chained, in the hold of the old wooden ferry, which was difficult as the ship rocked in the swells off the coast. A small porthole above was the only source of light and air. The porthole served another purpose as well: the warders enjoyed urinating on us from above. It was still light when we were led on deck and we saw the island for the first time. Green and beautiful, it looked at first more like a resort than a prison.

Esiquithini. At the island. That is how the Xhosa people describe the narrow, windswept outcrop of rock that lies eight miles off the coast of Cape Town. Everyone knows which island you are referring to. I first heard about the island as a child. Robben Island was well known among the Xhosas after Makanna (also known as Nxele), the six foot six inch commander of the Xhosa army in the Fourth Xhosa War, was banished there by the British after leading ten thousand warriors against Grahamstown in 1819. He tried to escape from Robben Island by boat, but drowned before reaching shore. The memory of that loss is woven into the language of my people who speak of a "forlorn hope" by the phrase "*Ukuza kuka Nxele.*"

Makanna was not the first African hero confined on the island. In 1658, Autshumao, known to European historians as Harry the Strandloper, was banished by Jan Van Riebeeck during a war between the Khoi Khoi and the Dutch. I took solace in the memory of Autshumao, for he is reputed to be the first and only man to ever escape from Robben Island, and he did so by rowing to the mainland in a small boat.

The island takes its name from the Dutch word for seal, hundreds of which once cavorted in the icy Benguela currents that wash the shores. Later the island was turned into a leper colony, a lunatic asylum, and a naval base. The government had only recently turned the island back into a prison.

* * *

We were met by a group of burly white warders shouting: "*Dis die Eiland! Hier gaan julle vrek!*" (This is the island. Here you will die.) Ahead of us was a compound flanked by a number of guardhouses. Armed guards lined the path to the compound. It was extremely tense. A tall, red-faced warder yelled at us: "*Hier is ek jou baas!*" (Here I am your boss!) He was one of the notorious Kleynhans brothers, known for their brutality to prisoners. The warders always spoke in Afrikaans. If you replied in English they would say, "*Ek verstaan nie daardie kafferboetie se taal nie.*" (I don't understand that kaffir-lover's language.)

As we walked toward the prison, the guards shouted "Two-two! Two-two!" — meaning we should walk in pairs, two in front, two behind. I linked up with Tefu. The guards started screaming, "*Haas! . . . Haas!*" The word *haas* means "move" in Afrikaans, but it is customarily reserved for cattle.

The warders were demanding that we jog, and I turned to Tefu and under my breath said that we must set an example; if we gave in now we would be at their mercy. Tefu nodded his head in agreement. We had to show them that we were not everyday criminals but political prisoners being punished for our beliefs.

I motioned to Tefu that we two should walk in front, and we took the lead. Once in front, we actually decreased the pace, walking slowly and deliberately. The guards were incredulous. "Listen," Kleynhans said, "this is not Johannesburg, this is not Pretoria, this is Robben Island, and we will tolerate no insubordination here. *Haas! Haas!*" But we continued at our stately pace. Kleynhans ordered us to halt, and stood in front of us: "Look, man, we will kill you, we are not fooling around, your wives and children and mothers and fathers will never know what happened to you. This is the last warning. *Haas! Haas!*"

To this I said: "You have your duty and we have ours." I was determined that we would not give in, and we did not, for we were already at the cells. We were ushered into a rectangular stone building and taken to a large open room. The floor was covered with water a few inches deep. The guards yelled: "*Trek uit! Trek uit!*" (Undress! Undress!) As we removed each item of clothing, the guards would grab it, search it quickly, and then throw it in the water. Jacket off, searched, thrown in the water. Then the guards

commanded us to get dressed, by which they meant for us to put on our soaking clothes.

Two officers entered the room. The less senior of the two was a captain whose name was Gericke. From the start, we could see that he was intent on manhandling us. The captain pointed to Aaron Molete, the youngest of the four of us and a very mild and gentle person, and said, "Why is your hair so long?" Aaron said nothing. The captain shouted, "I'm talking to you! Why is your hair so long? It is against regulations. Your hair should have been cut. Why is it long . . ." and then he paused and turned to look at me, and said, ". . . like this boy's!" pointing at me. I began to speak: "Now, look here, the length of our hair is determined by the regulations . . ."

Before I could finish, he shouted in disbelief: "Never talk to me that way, boy!" and began to advance. I was frightened; it is not a pleasant sensation to know that someone is about to hit you and you are unable to defend yourself.

When he was just a few feet from me, I said, as firmly as I could, "If you so much as lay a hand on me, I will take you to the highest court in the land and when I finish with you, you will be as poor as a church mouse." The moment I began speaking, he paused, and by the end of my speech, he was staring at me with astonishment. I was a bit surprised myself. I had been afraid, and spoke not from courage, but out of a kind of bravado. At such times, one must put up a bold front despite what one feels inside.

"Where's your ticket?" he asked, and I handed it to him. I could see he was nervous. "What's your name?" he said. I nodded my head toward the ticket, and said, "It is written there." He said, "How long are you in for?" I said again, gesturing toward the ticket, "It is written there." He looked down and said, "Five years! You are in for five years and you are so arrogant! Do you know what it means to serve five years?" I said, "That is my business. I am ready to serve five years but I am not prepared to be bullied. You must act within the law."

No one had informed him who we were, or that we were political prisoners, or that I was a lawyer. I had not noticed it myself, but the other officer, a tall, quiet man, had vanished during our confrontation; I later discovered that he was Colonel Steyn, the com-

manding officer of Robben Island. The captain then left, much quieter than he had entered.

We were then by ourselves and Steve, his nerves jangling, could not stop speaking. "We have provoked the Boere," he said. "Now we are in for a rough time." He was in the midst of speaking when a stocky fellow named Lieutenant Pretorius walked in. To our surprise, Pretorius spoke to us in Xhosa, which he seemed to know quite well. "We have looked at your records and they are not so bad. All except this one," he said, nodding toward Steve. "Your record is filthy."

Steve exploded. "Who are you to talk to me like that? You say I have a filthy record. You have read my files, eh. Well, you will find that all those convictions were for cases I was fighting for the rights of my people. I am not a criminal; you are the criminal." The lieutenant then warned Steve that he would charge him if he ever addressed him in that way again. Before leaving, the lieutenant said he was placing us in a single large cell with windows that faced outside and then added, rather ominously, "But I don't want you to talk to anyone through those windows, especially you, Mandela."

We were then taken to our cell, one of the best I had ever seen. The windows were large and within easy reach. From one set of windows we could see other prisoners and warders as they walked past. It was spacious, certainly large enough for the four of us, and had its own toilets and showers.

It had been an exhausting day and a short while later, after a supper of cold porridge, the others went to sleep. I was lying on my blanket on the floor, when I heard a tapping at the window. I looked up and saw a white man, beckoning me to come to the glass. I remembered the lieutenant's admonition and stayed put.

Then I heard the fellow whisper: "Nelson, come here." The fact that he knew my name intrigued me and I decided to take a chance. I went over to the window and looked at him. He must have realized that I thought he was white, because the first thing he whispered was, "I'm a Coloured warder from Bloemfontein." He then gave me news of my wife. There had been a report in the Johannesburg newspapers that my wife had come to see me at Pretoria Local, but

that they had not informed her that I had been taken to Robben Island. I thanked him for the information.

"Do you smoke?" he said. I told him that I did not and he seemed disappointed. I then got the idea: "Yes, but my comrades do." He brightened at this and said he would return in a few minutes with tobacco and sandwiches. Everyone was now awake. Tefu and John Gaetsewe smoked, and I split the pouch of tobacco between them, and we all divided the sandwiches.

For the next few weeks the Coloured warder came almost every night with tobacco and sandwiches. And each night I would divide up the tobacco evenly between Tefu and Gaetsewe. The warder was taking great risks, and he warned me that he was only prepared to deal directly with me, or the arrangement was off.

When we arrived on the island we had no idea how many other prisoners were there. Within a few days we learned there were about a thousand men, all Africans, all recent arrivals. Most of these men were common-law prisoners, but I knew there would be some political prisoners among them. I wanted to contact them, but we were completely isolated. For the first few days we were kept locked in our cell and not even permitted outside. We demanded to be taken to work like the other prisoners, and this was soon granted, but we were taken out alone, supervised by Kleynhans. Our first job was covering up some newly laid pipe and we were on a small hill and could see some of the island, which was wild and lovely.

We worked hard that first day, but on each succeeding day Kleynhans pushed us harder. He did this crudely, as one would urge on a horse or cow. "*Nee, man. Kom aan! Gaan aan!*" (No, man. Come on. Go on.) At one point, Steve, who was older than the rest of us, put down his shovel and was immediately threatened by Kleynhans. But Steve, in Afrikaans, responded: "You ignoramus who cannot even speak your own language properly — you cannot tell me what to do. I will work at my own rate, that is what I am prepared to do, and that is all I can do." Then, with great dignity, he picked up his shovel and resumed work. Steve had been a teacher of Afrikaans, and he not only spoke perfect Afrikaans but its antecedent, High Dutch. Steve would speak to the warders in a condescending and grandiloquent style that they probably did not understand. But they knew better than to engage him in a verbal battle.

There were two Kleynhans brothers on the island, both reputed to have viciously assaulted prisoners. We were looked after by the older brother, who must have been warned to restrain himself, for he never touched us. The younger one was under no such constraints. One day, we were walking back from work along a road and passed a workspan of several hundred prisoners carting sand in wheelbarrows. They were nonpolitical prisoners and both of our groups were ordered to halt while the two brothers had a chat; the younger brother ordered one of his men to polish his boots while he talked. I recognized some of the men in the other workspan as those who had been sentenced to death in the Sekhukhuneland peasant revolt of 1958, and I turned around to get a better look at them. The younger brother rudely ordered me to look the other way. I do not know how I would have reacted had I not been standing in full view of the other prisoners, but my pride was now at stake. I refused to turn around. The younger Kleynhans advanced with the obvious intent of assaulting me, but when he was a few steps away, his brother ran over, grabbed him, whispered a few words, and the incident passed.

One day we were visited by the head of prison, who was responsible for running all of Robben Island and had come to hear our complaints. Theron was a sour fellow who did not like to deal with prisoners face to face. I did not want to alienate him but I was not going to cringe. "We are grateful that you have come to see us," I said, speaking for the group, "because we have a number of problems which I am certain you will be able to sort out." I enumerated the problems and when I finished, he said, "I will see what I can do."

Perhaps he thought he had given in too easily because as he was walking out he turned to Tefu, who had a large belly, and said, "*Jou groot pens sal in die plek verdwyn*," Afrikaans for "That great stomach of yours is going to disappear here in prison." *Pens* means stomach, but is used to refer to the stomach of animals like sheep or cattle. The word for the stomach of a human being is *maag*.

Steve did not take kindly to the prison head's jab, and he was incapable of letting an insult go unanswered. "You know, Captain," he said, "there is nothing you can do to me that can truly affect me for I am a member of the most revolutionary political organization in the world, the Communist Party, which has a distinguished record

of service to oppressed people around the globe. You and your poor National Party will be on the ash-heap of history while we are ruling the world. I am better known internationally than your witless state president. Who are you? A small functionary not even worth paying attention to. By the time I leave prison I won't even know your name." Theron turned on his heel and left.

The nightly visits of our Coloured warder went a long way to mitigate the harshness of the island. But even with this luxury, Steve was still dissatisfied. Tefu was a heavy smoker; he would sometimes puff away the entire night, leaving himself no tobacco for the next day. Gaetsewe, however, conserved his tobacco, and never ran out. One evening, in a particularly irritable mood, Tefu confronted me. "Nelson," he said, "you are shortchanging me. You are giving Gaetsewe more tobacco than me."

This was not true, but I thought I would play a game with him. "Very well then," I said. "Every night when I get the tobacco I will first divide it into two portions and then I will let you choose which one you want." That night, and each night afterward, I separated the tobacco into equal piles and said to Steve, "Choose."

Tefu would be in an agony of indecision. He would look at both piles, his head swinging back and forth between the two. Finally, in frustration, he would grab one of the piles and go off and begin to smoke. Though this process seemed to me eminently fair — and also humorous — Tefu was still unhappy. He began to hover about when the warder came to the window in order to make sure that I was not hoarding the tobacco. This made the warder uncomfortable. "Look," he said to me, "I only deal with you. It is a question of security." I said I understood, and told Tefu that he could not be around when I was dealing with the warder.

The next night, however, when the warder came to the window, Tefu strode up to the bars and said to him, "From now on I want my own tobacco. Just give it to me directly." The warder panicked. "Mandela," he said, "you have broken our agreement. No more. I won't be bringing you these things." I shooed Tefu away and remonstrated with the warder. I said, "Look, man, this is an old chap," meaning Tefu. "And he's not very normal," I said pointing to my head. "Make an exception." So he softened and gave me the supplies, but warned if it happened again, that would be the end.

That night, I thought it necessary to punish Tefu. I said, "Now, look, you have jeopardized our supplies. You are not going to have my tobacco or sandwiches tonight. You have almost lost us these privileges. So we're cutting you off until you improve." Tefu was silent.

We stayed in one corner of the cell that night, eating our sandwiches and reading the paper the warder also brought for us. Tefu sat by himself in the opposite corner. Eventually we drifted off to sleep. At about midnight, I felt an arm on my shoulder, jostling me awake. "Nelson . . . Nelson." It was Tefu.

"Nelson," he said, speaking softly, "you have hit me in a weak spot. You have deprived me of my tobacco. I am an old man. I have suffered for my commitment to my people. You are the leader here in jail, and you are punishing me like this. It is not fair, Nelson."

He had hit *me* in a weak spot. I felt as though I had abused my power. He had indeed suffered, far more than I had. I had not eaten half my sandwich, and I immediately gave it to him. I roused Gaetsewe — I had given him all the tobacco — and asked him if he would share it with Tefu. Tefu was always difficult, but from that point on he behaved much better.

Once we started working, I got some sense of what life was like for other prisoners on the island. The authorities also moved some young political prisoners from the PAC into the cells opposite ours. At night, we were able to talk with them through the barred door. Among these young men, I discovered, was Nqabeni Menye, a nephew of mine from Mqhekezweni whom I had last seen when he was a baby in 1941.

We conversed about the Transkei and caught up on family history. One night, while his friends were gathered around him, he said, "Uncle, what organization do you belong to?" The ANC, I said, of course. My response caused consternation among those young men and suddenly their faces disappeared from the window. After some time, my nephew reappeared and asked me whether or not I had ever been a member of the PAC. I replied that I had not. He then said he had understood that I joined the PAC during my Africa tour. I told him that I had not, that I had always been a member of the ANC, and that I always would be. This again caused dismay among them and they vanished.

I later learned that PAC propaganda claimed that I had joined the organization when I was traveling elsewhere on the continent. Although I was not pleased to hear this, it did not surprise me. In politics, one can never underestimate how little people know about a situation. A short while later my nephew was back and asked me if I had met and talked with Sobukwe at Pretoria Local. I said that I had and that we had very good discussions. This pleased them and they said good night, and that was the last I saw of them.

A few hours later that same evening a captain came to our cell and commanded the four of us to pack our belongings. Within minutes my comrades were taken away, leaving me in the cell by myself. In prison, one counts oneself lucky to be able to wave good-bye to one's comrades. One can be in extraordinarily intimate circumstances with someone for months, and then never see the person again. It is dehumanizing, for it forces one to adapt by becoming more self-contained and insulated.

Now that I was alone, I was also somewhat anxious. There is sometimes safety in numbers; when you are alone, there are no witnesses. I realized I had not been served any food, and banged on the door: "Warder, I have not received my supper."

"You must call me *baas*," he yelled. I went hungry that night.

Very early the next morning I was taken back to Pretoria. The Department of Prisons released a statement to the press that I had been removed from the island for my own safety because PAC prisoners were planning to assault me. This was patently false; they had brought me back to Pretoria for their own motives, which soon became clear.

I was kept in solitary confinement at Pretoria Local. But prisoners are resourceful and I was soon receiving secret notes and other communications from some of the ANC people there. I had a communication from Henry Fazzie, one of the MK cadres who had undergone military training in Ethiopia and been arrested while attempting to return to South Africa. They were among the first ANC members to be tried under the Sabotage Act.

Through the prison grapevine, I attempted to help them with their defense and suggested they contact Harold Wolpe. I later heard that Wolpe was in police detention. This was my first intimation

that something had gone seriously wrong. One day, as I was being led away from the courtyard after exercise, I saw Andrew Mlangeni. I had last seen him in September of 1961 when he was leaving the country for military training. Wolpe, Mlangeni — who else was under arrest?

Early in 1961, Winnie had been banned for two years. I heard from another prisoner that Winnie had recently been charged with violating her bans, which could lead to imprisonment or house arrest. Winnie was headstrong; a banning order was just the type of thing that would make her angry. I had no doubt that she violated her orders, and I would never counsel her not to do so, but it concerned me greatly that she might spend time in prison.

One morning in July 1963, as I was walking along the passage to my cell, I saw Thomas Mashifane, who had been the foreman at Liliesleaf Farm. I greeted him warmly, though I realized that the authorities had undoubtedly led him to my passage to see if I recognized or acknowledged him. I could not help but do otherwise. His presence there could mean only one thing: the authorities had discovered Rivonia.

A day or two later I was summoned to the prison office where I found Walter; Govan Mbeki; Ahmed Kathrada; Andrew Mlangeni; Bob Hepple; Raymond Mhlaba, a member of the MK High Command who had recently returned from training in China; Elias Motsoaledi, also a member of MK; Dennis Goldberg, an engineer and a member of the Congress of Democrats; Rusty Bernstein, an architect and also a member of the COD; and Jimmy Kantor, an attorney who was Harold Wolpe's brother-in-law. We were all charged with sabotage, and scheduled to appear in court the next day. I had served just nine months of my five-year sentence.

In bits and pieces, I learned what had happened. On the afternoon of July 11, a dry cleaner's van entered the long driveway of the farm. No one at Liliesleaf had ordered a delivery. The vehicle was stopped by a young African guard, but he was overwhelmed when dozens of armed policemen and several police dogs sprang from the vehicle. They surrounded the property and a handful of officers entered the main building and the principal outbuilding. In the latter they found a dozen men around a table discussing a document. Walter jumped

out a window but was cut off by a snarling police dog. The arrests also included Arthur Goldreich, who had driven into the farm as the police raid was in progress.

The police searched the entire farm and confiscated hundreds of documents and papers, though they found no weapons. One of the most important documents remained right on the table: Operation Mayibuye, a plan for guerrilla warfare in South Africa. In one fell swoop, the police had captured the entire High Command of Umkhonto we Sizwe. Everyone was detained under the new Ninety-Day Detention Law.

Joe Slovo and Bram Fischer were fortunately not there at the time of the raid. But Joe and Bram often went to the farm two or three times a day. In hindsight, it is extraordinary that Liliesleaf was not discovered sooner. The regime had become stricter and more sophisticated. Wiretaps had become common, as was twenty-four-hour surveillance. The raid was a coup for the state.

On our first day in court we were not given the opportunity to instruct counsel. We were brought before a magistrate and charged with sabotage. A few days later we were allowed to meet with Bram, Vernon Berrangé, Joel Joffé, George Bizos, and Arthur Chaskalson, all of whom were acting for us. I was still being kept separately as I was a convicted prisoner, and these sessions were my first opportunity to talk with my colleagues.

Bram was very somber. In his quiet voice, he told us that we were facing an extremely serious trial and that the state had formally advised him they would ask for the supreme penalty permitted by law, the death sentence. Given the climate of the times, Bram said, this result was a very real possibility. From that moment on we lived in the shadow of the gallows. The mere possibility of a death sentence changes everything. From the start, we considered it the most likely outcome of the trial. Far lesser crimes than ours had recently been punished by life sentences.

Prison officials never let you forget that you might hang. That night, a warder rapped on my cell door at bedtime. "Mandela, you don't have to worry about sleep," he said. "You are going to sleep for a long, long time." I waited a moment and said, "All of us, you included, are going to sleep for a long, long time." It was small consolation.

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ON OCTOBER 9, 1963, we were picked up in a heavily fortified police van. It had a steel divider running along the center, segregating the white prisoners from the Africans. We were driven to the Palace of Justice in Pretoria, where the Supreme Court sits, for the opening of *The State versus the National High Command and others*, what later became known as *The State versus Nelson Mandela and others*, and is still better known as the Rivonia Trial. Near the court stands a statue of Paul Kruger, the president of the Republic of the Transvaal who fought against British imperialism in the nineteenth century. Underneath this Afrikaner hero is a quotation from one of his speeches. The inscription reads, "In confidence we lay our cause before the whole world. Whether we win or whether we die, freedom will rise in Africa like the sun from the morning clouds."

Our van was in the center of a convoy of police trucks. At the front of this motorcade were limousines carrying high police officials. The Palace of Justice was teeming with armed policemen. To avoid the enormous crowd of our supporters, who had grouped in front of the building, we were driven into the rear of the building and taken in through great iron gates. All around the building police officers with machine guns stood at attention. As we descended from the van, we could hear the great crowd singing and chanting. Once inside, we were held in cells below the courtroom before the opening of what was depicted in the newspapers at home and around the world as the most significant political trial in the history of South Africa.

As we emerged from the cells, each of the accused was accompanied by two armed warders. When we entered the ornate, high-ceilinged courtroom, we each turned to the crowd and made a clenched-fist ANC salute. In the visitors' gallery our supporters shouted "*Amandla! Nqawethu!*" and "*Mayibuye Afrika!*" This was inspiring, but dangerous: the police took the names and addresses of all the spectators in the galleries, and photographed them as they left the court. The courtroom was filled with domestic and international journalists, and dozens of representatives of foreign governments.