

Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, Yale, Harvard, and the New School for Social Research. Among her novels are *The Lying Days* (Simon & Schuster, 1953; repr. Virago, 1983), *Occasion for Loving* (Viking, 1963; repr. Virago, 1983), *The Late Bourgeois World* (Viking, 1966; repr. Penguin, 1982), *A Guest of Honor* (Viking, 1970; repr. Penguin, 1988), *The Conservationist* (J. Cape, 1974; repr. Viking, 1975), *Burger's Daughter* (Viking, 1979), *July's People* (Viking, 1981), *A Sport of Nature* (Knopf, 1987), and *My Son's Story* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990). She has published numerous collections of stories, including *The Soft Voice of the Serpent and Other Stories* (Simon & Schuster, 1952), *Friday's Footprint and Other Stories* (Viking, 1960), *Not for Publication and Other Stories* (Viking, 1965), *Livingstone's Companions* (Viking, 1971), *Selected Stories* (J. Cape, 1975; repr. Viking, 1976), *A Soldier's Embrace* (Viking, 1980), *Something Out There* (Viking, 1984), and *Crimes of Conscience* (Heinemann, 1991). Stories from *Six Feet of the Country* (Simon & Schuster, 1956; Penguin, 1982) were dramatized for a television series with that title. In 1991, she received the Nobel Prize for literature.

## AFRICA EMERGENT

He's in prison now, so I'm not going to mention his name. It mightn't be a good thing, you understand. — Perhaps you think you understand too well; but don't be quick to jump to conclusions from five or six thousand miles away: if you lived here, you'd understand something else—friends know that shows of loyalty are all right for children holding hands in the school playground; for us they're luxuries, not important and maybe dangerous. If I said, I was a friend of so-and-so, black man awaiting trial for treason, what good would it do him?

And, who knows, it might draw just that decisive bit more attention to me. He'd be the first to agree.

Not that one feels that if they haven't got enough in my dossier already, this would make any difference; and not that he really was such a friend. But that's something else you won't understand: everything is ambiguous, here. We hardly know, by now, what we can do and what we can't do; it's difficult to say, goaded in on oneself by laws and doubts and rebellion and caution and, not least, self-disgust, what is or is not a friendship. I'm talking about black-and-white, of course. If you stay with it, boy, on the white side in the country clubs and garden suburbs if you're white, and on the black side in the locations and beerhalls if you're black, none of this applies, and you can go all the way to your segregated cemetery in peace. But neither he nor I did.

I began mixing with blacks out of what is known as an outraged sense of justice, plus strong curiosity, when I was a student. There were two ways—one was through the white students' voluntary service organization, a kibbutz-type junket where white boys and girls went into rural areas and camped while they built school classrooms for African children. A few colored and African students from their segregated universities used to come along, too, and there was the novelty, not without value, of dossing down alongside them at night, although we knew we were likely to be harboring Special Branch spies among our willing workers, and we dared not make a pass at the colored or black girls. The other way—less hard on the hands—was to go drinking with the jazz musicians and journalists, painters and would-be poets and actors who gravitated toward whites partly because such people naturally feel they can make free of the world, and partly because they found an embourgeoisement and appreciation there that was sweet to them. I tried the VSO briefly, but the other way suited me better; anyway, I didn't see why I should help this Government by doing the work-it-ought to be doing for the welfare of black children.

I'm an architect and the way I was usefully drawn into the black scene was literally that: I designed sets for a mixed color drama group got together by a white director. Perhaps there's no urban human group as intimate,

in the end, as a company of this kind, and the color problem made us even closer. I don't mean what *you* mean, the how-do-I-feel-about-that-black-skin stuff; I mean the daily exasperation of getting round, or over, or on top of the color bar laws that plagued our productions and our lives. We had to remember to write out "passess" at night, so that our actors could get home without being arrested for being out after the curfew for blacks, we had to spend hours at the Bantu Affairs Department trying to arrange local residence permits for actors who were being "endorsed out" of town back to the villages to which, "ethnically," apparently, they belonged although they'd never set eyes on them, and we had to decide which of us could play the sycophant well enough to persuade the Bantu Commissioner to allow the show to go on the road from one Group Area, designated by color, to another, or to talk some town clerk into getting his council to agree to the use of a "white" public hall by a mixed cast. The black actors' lives were in our hands, because they were black and we were white, and could, must, intercede for them. Don't think this made everything love and light between us; in fact it caused endless huffs and rows. A white woman who'd worked like a slave acting as PRO-cum-wardrobe-mistress hasn't spoken to me for years because I made her lend her little car to one of the chaps who'd worked until after the last train went back to the location, and then he kept it the whole weekend and she couldn't get hold of him because, of course, location houses rarely have telephones and once a black man has disappeared among those warrens you won't find him till he chooses to surface in the white town again. And when this one did surface, he was biting, to me, about white bitches' "patronage" of people they secretly still thought of as "boys." Yet our arguments, resentments and misunderstandings were not only as much part of the intimacy of this group as the good times, the parties and the love-making we had, but were more—the defining part, because we'd got close enough to admit argument, resentment and misunderstanding between us.

He was one of this little crowd, for a time. He was a dispatch clerk and then a "manager" and chucker-out at

a black dance club. In his spare time he took a small part in our productions now and then, and what he really was good at was front-of-house arrangements. His tubby charm (he was a large young man and a cheerful dresser) was just the right thing to deal with the unexpected moods of our location audiences when we went on tour—sometimes they came stiffly encased in their church-going best and seemed to feel it was vulgar to laugh or respond to what was going on, on stage; in other places they rushed the doors, tried to get in without paying, and were dominated by a *tsotsi*, street urchin, element who didn't want to hear anything but themselves. He was the particular friend—the other, passive half—of a particular friend of mine, Elias Nkomo.

And here I stop short. How shall I talk about Elias? I've never even learned, in five years, how to think about him.

Elias was a sculptor. He had one of those jobs—messenger "boy" or some such—that literate young black men can aspire to in a small gold-mining and industrial town outside Johannesburg. Somebody said he was talented, somebody sent him to me—at the beginning, the way for every black man to find himself seems inescapably to lead through a white man. Again, how can I say what his work was like? He came by train to the black people's section of Johannesburg central station, carrying a bulky object wrapped in that morning's newspaper. He was slight, round-headed, tiny-eared, dunly dressed, and with a frown of effort between his eyes, but his face unfolded to a wide, apologetic yet confident smile when he realized that the white man in a waiting car must be me—the meeting had been arranged. I took him back to my "place" (he always called people's homes that) and he unwrapped the newspaper. What was there was nothing like the clumps of diorite or sandstone you have seen in galleries in New York, London, or Johannesburg marked "Africa Emergent," "Spirit of the Ancestors." What was there was a goat, or a goat-like creature, in the way that a centaur is a horse-like, man-like creature, carved out of streaky knotted wood. It was delightful (I wanted to put out my hand to touch it), it was moving in its somehow concretized diachrony, beast-man, coarse

wood-fine workmanship, and there was also something exposed about it (one would withdraw the hand, after all). I asked him whether he knew Picasso's goats? He had heard of Picasso but never seen any of his work. I showed him a photograph of the famous bronze goat in Picasso's own house; thereafter all his beasts had sex organs as joyful as Picasso's goat's udder, but that was the only "influence" that ever took, with him. As I say, a white man always intercedes in some way, with a man like Elias; mine was to keep him from those art-loving ladies with galleries who wanted to promote him, and those white painters and sculptors who were willing to have him work under their tutelage. I gave him an old garage (well, that means I took my car out of it) and left him alone, with plenty of chunks of wood.

But Elias didn't like the loneliness of work. That garage never became his "place." Perhaps when you've lived in an overcrowded yard all your life the counter-stimulus of distraction becomes necessary to create a tension of concentration. No—well all I really mean is that he liked company. At first he came only at weekends, and then, as he began to sell some of his work, he gave up the messenger job and moved in more or less permanently—we fixed up the "place" together, putting in a ceiling and connecting water and so on. It was illegal for him to live there in a white suburb, of course, but such laws breed complementary evasions in people like Elias and me and the white building inspector didn't turn a hair of suspicion when I said that I was converting the garage as a flat for my wife's mother. It was better for Elias once he'd moved in; there was always some friend of his sharing his bed, not to mention the girls who did; sometimes the girls were shy little things almost of the kitchenmaid variety, who called my wife "madan" when they happened to bump into her, crossing the garden, sometimes they were the bewigged and painted actresses from the group who sat smoking and gossiping with my wife while she fed the baby.

And he was there more often than anyone—the plump and cheerful front-of-house manager; he was married, but as happens with our sex, an old friendship was a more important factor in his life than a wife and kids—

if that's a characteristic of black men, then I must be black under the skin, myself. Elias had become very involved in the theater group, anyway, like him; Elias made some beautiful *papier mâché* gods for a play by a Nigerian that we did—"spirits of the ancestors" at once amusing and frightening—and once when we needed a singer he surprisingly turned out to have a voice that could phrase a madrigal as easily as whatever the fore-runner of Soul was called—I forget now, but it blared hour after hour from the garage when he was working. Elias seemed to like best to work when the other one was around; he would sit with his fat boy's legs rolled out before him, flexing his toes in his fashionable shoes, dusting down the lapels of the latest thing in jackets, as he changed the records and kept up a monologue contentedly punctuated by those soft growls and sighs of agreement, those sudden squeezes of almost silent laughter—responses possible only in an African language—that came from Elias as he chiselled and chipped. For they spoke in their own tongue, and I have never known what it was they talked about.

In spite of my efforts to let him alone, inevitably Elias was "taken up" (hadn't I started the process myself, with that garage?) and a gallery announced itself his agent. He walked about at the opening of his one-man show in a purple turtle-necked sweater I think his best friend must have made him buy, laughing a little, softly, at himself, more embarrassed than pleased. An art critic wrote about his transcendental values and plastic modality, and he said, "Christ, man, does he dig it or doesn't he?" while we toasted his success in brandy chased with beer—brandy isn't a rich man's sip in South Africa, it's made here and it's what people use to get drunk on. He earned quite a bit of money that year. Then the gallery owner and the art critic forgot him in the discovery of yet another interpreter of the African soul, and he was poor again, but he had acquired a patroness who, although she lived far away, did not forget him. She was, as you might have thought, an American lady, very old and wealthy according to South African legend but probably simply a middle-aged widow with comfortable stock holdings and a desire to get in on the cultural ground floor

of some form of art collecting not yet overcrowded. She had bought some of his work while a tourist in Johannesburg. Perhaps she did have academic connections with the art world; in any case, it was she who got a foundation to offer Elias Nkomo a scholarship to study in America.

I could understand that he wanted to go simply in order to go: to see the world outside. But I couldn't believe that at this stage he wanted or could make use of formal art school disciplines. As I said to him at the time, I'm only an architect, but I've had experience of the academic and even, God help us, the frenziedly non-academic approach in the best schools, and it's not for people who have, to fall back on the jargon, found themselves.

I remember he said, smiling, "You think I've found myself?"

And I said, "But you've never been lost, man. That very first goat wrapped in newspaper was your goat."

But later, when he was refused a passport and the issue of his going abroad was much on our minds, we talked again. He wanted to go because he felt he needed some kind of general education, general cultural background that he'd missed, in his six years at the location school. "Since I've been at your place, I've been reading a lot of your books. And man, I know nothing. I'm as ignorant as that kid of yours there in the pram. Right, I've picked up a bit of politics, a few art terms here and there—I can wag my head and say 'plastic values' all right, eh? But man, what do I know about life? What do I know about how it all works? How do I know *how* I do the work I do? Why we live and die?—If I carry on here I might as well be carving walking sticks," he added. I knew what he meant: there are old men, all over Africa, who make a living squatting at a decent distance from tourist hotels, carving fancy walking sticks from local wood; only one step in sophistication below the "Africa Emergent" school of sculptors so rapturously acclaimed by gallery owners. We both laughed at this, and following the line of thought suggested to me his question to himself: "How do I know how I do the work I do?"—although in me it was a different line of thought from his—

I asked him whether in fact there was any sort of traditional skill in his family? As I imagined, there was not—he was an urban slum kid, brought up opposite a municipal beerhall among paraffin-tin utensils and abandoned motor-car bodies which, perhaps curiously, had failed to bring out a Duchamp in him but from which, on the contrary, he had sprung, full-blown, as a classical expressionist. Although there were no rural walking-stick carvers in his ancestry, he did tell me something I had no idea would have been part of the experience of a location childhood—he had been sent, in his teens, to a tribal initiation school in the bush, and been circumcised according to rite. He described the experience vividly.

Once all attempts to get him a passport had failed, Elias's desire to go to America became something else, of course: an obsessive resentment against confinement itself. Inevitably, he was given no reason for the refusal. The official answer was the usual one—that it was "not in the public interest" to reveal the reason for such things. Was it because "they" had got to know he was "living like a white man"? (Theory put to me by one of the black actors in the group.) Was it because a critic had dutifully described his work as expressive of the "agony of the emergent African soul"? Nobody knew. Nobody ever knows. It is enough to be black; blacks are meant to stay put, in their own ethnically apportioned streets in their own segregated areas, in those parts of South Africa where the government says they belong. Yet—the whole way of our lives are maneuvered, as I say, is an unanswered question—Elias's best friend suddenly got a passport. I hadn't even realized that *he* had been offered a scholarship or a study grant or something, too; *he* was invited to go to New York to study production and the latest acting techniques (it was the time of the Method rather than Grotowski). And *he* got a passport, "first try" as Elias said with ungrudging pleasure and admiration; when someone black got a passport, then, there was a collective sense of pleasure in having outwitted we didn't quite know what. So they went together, *he* on his passport, and Elias Nkomo on an exit permit.

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An exit permit is a one-way ticket, anyway. When you are granted one at your request but at the government's pleasure, you sign an undertaking that you will never return to South Africa or its mandatory territory, South West Africa. You pledge this with signature and thumb-print. Elias Nkomo never came back. At first he wrote (and he wrote quite often) enthusiastically about the world outside that he had gained, and he seemed to be enjoying some kind of small vogue, not so much as a sculptor as a genuine, real live African Negro who was sophisticated enough to be asked to comment on this and that: the beauty of American women, life in Harlem or Watts, Black Power as seen through the eyes, etc. He sent cuttings from *Ebony* and even from *The New York Times Magazine*. He said that a girl at *Life* was trying to get them to run a piece on his work; his work?—well, he hadn't settled down to anything new, yet, but the art center was a really swinging place, Christ, the things people were doing, there! There were silences, naturally; we forgot about him and he forgot about us for weeks on end. Then the local papers picked up the sort of news they are alert to from all over the world. Elias Nkomo had spoken at an anti-apartheid rally. Elias Nkomo, in West African robes, was on the platform with Stokely Carmichael. "Well, why not? He hasn't got to worry about keeping his hands clean for the time when he comes back home, has he?" —My wife was bitter in his defense. Yes, but I was wondering about his work—"Will they leave him alone to work?" I didn't write to him, but it was as if my silence were read by him: a few months later I received a cutting from some university art magazine devoting a number to Africa, and there was a photograph of one of Elias's wood sculptures, with his handwriting along the margin of the page—*I know you don't think much of people who don't turn out new stuff but some people here seem to think this old thing of mine is good*. It was the sort of wry remark that, spoken aloud to me in the room, would have made us both laugh. I smiled, and meant to write. But within two weeks Elias was dead. He drowned himself early one morning in the river of the New England town where the art school was.

It was like the refusal of the passport; none of us knew

why. In the usual arrogance one has in the face of such happenings, I even felt guilty about the letter. Perhaps, if one were thousands of miles from one's own "place," in some sort of a bad way, just a small thing like a letter, a word of encouragement from someone who had hurt by being rather niggardly with encouragement in the past . . . ? And what pathetic arrogance, at that! As if the wisp of a letter, written by someone between other preoccupations, and in substance an encouraging lie (how splendid that your old work is receiving recognition in some piddling little magazine) could be anything round which the hand of a man going down for the second time might close. Because before Elias went under in that river he must have been deep in forlorn horrors about which I knew nothing, nothing. When people commit suicide they do so apparently out of some sudden self-knowledge that those of us, the living, do not have the will to acquire. That's what's meant by despair, isn't it—what they have come to know? And that's what one means when one says in extenuation of oneself, *I knew so little about him, really*. I knew Elias only in the self that he had presented at my "place"; why, how out of place it had been, once, when he happened to mention that as a boy he had spent weeks in the bush with his circumcision group! Of course we—his friends—decided out of the facts we knew and our political and personal attitudes, why he had died: and perhaps it is true that he was sick to death, in the real sense of the phrase that has been forgotten, sick unto death with homesickness for the native land that had shut him out forever and that he was forced to conjure up for himself in the parody of "native" dress that had nothing to do with his part of the continent, and the shame that a new kind of black platform-solidarity forced him to feel for his old dependence, in South Africa, on the friendship of white people. It was the South African government who killed him, it was culture shock—but perhaps neither our political bitterness nor our glibness with fashionable phrases can come near what combination of forces, within and without, led him to the fatal baptism of that early morning. *It is not in the private interest that this should be revealed.* Elias never came home. That's all.

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But his best friend did, towards the end of that year. *He* came to see me after he had been in the country some weeks—I'd heard he was back. The theater group had broken up; it seemed to be that, chiefly, he'd come to talk to me about: he wanted to know if there was any money left in the kitty for him to start up a small theatrical venture of his own, he was eager to use the know-how (his phrase) he'd learned in the States. He was really plump now and he wore the most extraordinary clothes. A Liberace jacket. Plastic boots. An Afro wig that looked as if it had been made out of a bit of karakul from South West Africa. I teased him about it—we were at least good enough friends for that—asking him if he'd really been with the guerrillas instead of Off-Broadway? (There was a trial on at home, at the time, of South African political refugees who had tried to "infiltrate" through South West Africa.) And felt slightly ashamed of my patronage of his taste when he said with such good humor, "It's just a fun thing, man, isn't it great?" I was too cowardly to bring the talk round to the point: Elias. And when it couldn't be avoided I said the usual platitudes and he shook his head at them—"Hell, man," and we fell silent. Then he told me that that was how he had got back—because Elias was dead, on the unused portion of Elias's air ticket. *His* study grant hadn't included travel expenses and he'd had to pay his own way over. So he'd had only a one-way ticket, but Elias's scholarship had included a return fare to the student's place of origin. It had been difficult to get the airline to agree to the transfer; he'd had to go to the scholarship foundation people, but they'd been very decent about fixing it for him.

He had told me all this so guilelessly that I was one of the people who became angrily indignant when the rumor began to go around that, he was a police agent: who else would have the cold nerve to come back on a dead man's ticket, a dead man who couldn't ever have used that portion of the ticket himself, because he had taken an exit permit? And who could believe the story, anyway? Obviously, *he* had to find some way of explaining why he, a black man like any other, could travel

freely back and forth between South Africa and other countries. He had a passport, hadn't he? Well, there you were. Why should *he* get a passport? What black man these days had a passport?

Yes, I was angry, and defended him, by proof of the innocence of the very naiveté with which—a black man, yes, and therefore used to the necessity of salvaging from disaster all his life, unable to afford the nice squeamishness of white men's delicacy—he took over Elias's air ticket because he was alive and needed it, as he might. I have taken up Elias's coat against the cold. I refused to avoid him, the way some members of the remnant of our group made it clear they did now, and I remained stony-faced outside the complicity of those knowing half-smiles that accompanied the mention of his name. We had never been close friends, of course; but he would turn up from time to time. He could not find theatrical work and had a job as a travelling salesman in the locations. He took to bringing three or four small boys along when he visited us; they were very subdued and whisperingly well-behaved and well-dressed in miniature suits—our barefoot children stared at them in awe. They were his children plus the children of the family he was living with, we gathered. He and I talked mostly about his difficulties—his old car was unreliable, his wife had left him, his commissions were low, and he could have taken up an offer to join a Chicago repertory company if he could have raised the fare to go back to America—while my wife fed ice-cream and cake to the silent children, or my children dutifully placed them one by one on the garden swing. We had begun to be able to talk about Elias's death. He had told me how, in the weeks before he died, Elias would get the wrong way on the moving stairway going down in the subway in New York and keep walking, walking up. "I thought he was foolin' around, man, you know? Jus' climbin' those stairs and goin' noplace?"

He clung nostalgically to the American idiom; no African talks about "noplace" when he means "nowhere." But he had abandoned the Afro wig and when we got talking about Elias he would hold his big, well-shaped head with its fine, shaven covering of his own wool propped between his hands as if in an effort to think

more clearly about something that would never come clear; I felt suddenly at one with him in that gesture, and would say, "Go on." He would remember another example of how Elias had been "acting funny" before he died. It was on one of those afternoon visits that he said, "And I don't think I ever told you about the business with the students at the college? How that last weekend—before he did it, I mean—he went around and invited everybody to a party, I dunno, a kind of feast he said it was. Some of them said he said a barbecue—you know what that is, same as a *braai*veils, eh? But one of the others told me afterwards that he'd told them he was going to give them a real African feast, he was going to show them how the country people do it here at home when somebody gets married or there's a funeral or so. He wanted to know where he could buy a goat."

"A goat?"

"That's right. A live goat. He wanted to kill and roast a goat for them, on the campus."

It was round about this time that *he* asked me for a loan. I think that was behind the idea of bringing those pretty, dressed-up children along with him when he visited; he wanted firmly to set the background of his obligations and responsibilities before touching me for money. It was rather a substantial sum, for someone of my resources. But he couldn't carry on his job without a new car, and he'd just got the opportunity to acquire a really good second-hand buy. I gave him the money in spite of—because of, perhaps—new rumors that were going around then that, in a police raid on the house of the family with whom he had been living, every adult except himself who was present on that night had been arrested on the charge of attending a meeting of a banned political organization. His friends were acquitted on the charge simply through the defense lawyer's skill at showing the *agent provocateur*, on whose evidence the charge was based, to be an unreliable witness—that is to say, a liar. But the friends were promptly served with personal banning orders, anyway, which meant among other things that their movements were restricted and they were not allowed to attend gatherings.

*He* was the only one who remained, significantly, it

seemed impossible to ignore, free. And yet his friends let him stay on in the house; it was a mystery to us whites—and some blacks, too. But then so much becomes a mystery where trust becomes a commodity on sale to the police. Whatever my little show of defiance over the loan, during the last year or two we have reached the stage where if a man is black, literate, has "political" friends and white friends, *and* a passport, he must be considered a police spy. I was sick with myself—that was why I gave him the money—but I believed it, too. There's only one way for a man like that to prove himself, so far as we're concerned: he must be in prison.

Well, *he* was at large. A little subdued over the fate of his friends, about which he talked guilelessly as he had about the appropriation of Elias's air ticket, harassed as usual about money, poor devil, but generally cheerful. Yet our friendship, that really had begun to become one since Elias's death, waned rapidly. It was the money that did it. Of course; he was afraid I'd ask him to begin paying back and so he stopped coming to my "place," he stopped the visits with the beautifully dressed and well-behaved black infants. I received a typed letter from him, once, solemnly thanking me for my kind cooperation and, etc., as if I were some business firm, and assuring me that in a few months he hoped to be in a position, etc. I scrawled a note in reply, saying of course I darned well hoped he was going to pay the money he owed, sometime, but why, for God's sake, in the meantime, did this mean we had to carry on as if we'd quarreled? Damn it all, he didn't have to treat me as if I had some nasty disease, just because of a few rands.

But I didn't see him again. I've become too busy with my own work—the building boom of the last few years, you know; I've had the contract for several shopping malls, and a big cultural center—to do any work for the old theater group in its sporadic comings-to-life. I don't think he had much to do with it anymore, either; I heard he was doing quite well as a salesman and was thinking of marrying again. There was even a—yet another—rumor, that he was actually building a house in Dube, which is the nearest to a solid, bourgeois suburb a black can get in these black dormitories outside the white

man's city, if you can be considered to be a bourgeois without having freehold. I didn't need the money, by then, but you know how it is with money—I felt faintly resentful about the debt anyway, because it looked as if now *he* could have paid it back just as well as *I* could say I didn't need it. As for the friendship; he'd shown me the worth of that. It's become something the white man must buy just as he must buy the cooperation of police stool pigeons. Elias has been dead five years; we live in our situation as of now, as the legal phrase goes; one falls back on legal phrases as other forms of expression become too risky.

And then, two hundred and seventy-seven days ago, there was a new rumor, and this time it was confirmed, this time it was no rumor. *He* was fetched from his room one night and imprisoned. That's perfectly legal, here; it's the hundred-and-eighty-day Detention Act. At least, because he was something of a personality, with many friends and contacts in particular among both black and white journalists, the fact has become public. If people are humble, or of no particular interest to the small world of white liberals, they are sometimes in detention for many months before this is known outside the eyewitness of whoever happened to be standing by, in house or street, when they were taken away by the police. But at least we all know where *he* is: in prison. They say that charges of treason are being prepared against him and various others who were detained at the same time, and still others who have been detained for even longer—three hundred and seventy-one days, three hundred and ten days—the figures, once finally released, are always as precise as this—and that soon, soon they will be brought to trial for whatever it is that we do not know they have done, for when people are imprisoned under the Detention Act no one is told why and there are no charges. There are suppositions among us, of course. Was he a double agent, as it were, using his *laissez-passer* as a police spy in order to further his real work as an underground African nationalist? Was he just unlucky in his choice of friends? Did he suffer from a dangerous sense of loyalty in place of any strong convictions of his own? Was it all due to some personal, unguessed-at bond

it's none of our business to speculate about? Heaven knows—those police spy rumors aside—nobody could have looked more unlikely to be a political activist than that cheerful young man, second-string, always ready to jump up and turn over the record, fond of Liberace jackets and aspiring to play Le Roi Jones Off-Broadway.

But as I say, we know where he is now; inside. In solitary most of the time—they say, those who've also been inside. Two hundred and seventy-seven days he's been there.

And so we white friends can purge ourselves of the shame of rumors. We can be pure again. We are satisfied at last. He's in prison. He's proved himself, hasn't he?

Racism can breed complicity  
in policy. indifference to