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NEW WEST

SOULED OUT
Eldridge Cleaver Admits He Ambushed Those Cops



SOULED OUT

In reflecting on his metamorphosis from a black revolutionary to a born-again Christian, Eldridge Cleaver admits he deliberately ambushed the Oakland police in the 1968 shoot-out, discusses his relationship with the FBI and reveals his affair with a foreign president's mistress.

By Kate Coleman

THE BIG MAN in the navy blue pinstripe suit might have been a businessman, or even a successful boxer wearing his street clothes. He looked powerful and substantial despite the implicit humility of his folded hands at rest in front of him and his head half bowed in deference to the judge. There was a hint of smugness about his eyes, a hint that had been there so long it was hard to say whether it derived from the tectonics of flesh and bone or from the defiance that had shaped his early years.

Time had changed Eldridge Cleaver, the 44-year-old man awaiting sentence this past January for the celebrated 1968 shoot-out between Black Panthers and Oakland police that had martyred seventeen-year-old "Little Bobby" Hutton and sent Cleaver, the Panther minister of information, into a seven-year exile in Canada, Cuba, Algeria and France.

In his best-selling book *Soul on Ice* Cleaver had described his metamorphosis from rapist and drug dealer to Malcolm X apostle to Marxist revolutionary who became, virtually over-

night, one of the leading exponents of black liberation in America.

Then in *Soul on Fire*, published by a small religious publishing house, he described his gradual disaffection with socialism and revolution. There was a moment in France when he was on the brink of suicide. Pointing his 9 mm Browning automatic to his temple, he waited for the courage to pull the trigger: "I looked up at the moon and saw . . . a profile of myself. . . . As I stared at this image, it changed, and I saw my former heroes paraded before my eyes . . . Fidel Castro, Mao Tse-tung, Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, passing in review—each one appearing for a moment of time, and then dropping out of sight, like fallen heroes. Finally, at the end of the procession, in dazzling, shimmering light, the image of Jesus Christ appeared." Cleaver, never one to be daunted by the notion of bold change, began making arrangements to turn himself in to the FBI and face trial in the United States.

Once he was back in this country, he became a born-again Christian and was accepted by the likes of Ruth Carter



"I would rather be with the littlest Moonie than with Billy Graham," Cleaver has boasted.

Stapleton and Watergate felon Charles Colson. Another born-again, Art DeMoss, owner of National Liberty Corporation, one of the largest mail-order insurance companies in the country, put up half the \$100,000 bail to get him out of Alameda County Jail.

Cleaver became a hit on the Bible circuit, lecturing on campuses, preaching on television and giving Christian witness around the country.

It was not long, however, before Cleaver had alienated many of his newfound soulmates through his sudden affinity with the Unification Church of Korean evangelist Reverend Sun Myung Moon. "I would rather be with the littlest Moonie than with Billy Graham," he proclaimed, to the outrage of the traditionalist flock.

Now, in the first week of the new decade, Leroy Eldridge Cleaver stood before Judge Winton McKibben in Alameda County Superior Court. The jury box was full of reporters, many of whom had been following his case for years. Some noted the physical changes time had wrought. His six-foot, one-inch frame was burdened with about 30 extra pounds. His close-cropped hair was flecked with gray. Decked out in his three-piece suit and crisp white shirt, he was a far cry, indeed, from the gaunt-cheeked revolutionary in sleek turtleneck and bad-ass black leather jacket of 1967.

Cleaver stood charged with three counts of assault against three Oakland cops—carrying a maximum sentence of fifteen years—stemming from the 1968 shoot-out. Three months before, a tentative deal had been struck between his lawyer and the Alameda County district attorney's office: If Cleaver would plead guilty to the three counts of assault, the more serious charges of attempted murder would be dropped.

Considering that three of Cleaver's codefendants in the shoot-out had been convicted in a jury trial and gone to state prison (Black Panther party chief of staff David Hilliard did four years) and that the other four had pleaded guilty and served a year in county jail, Cleaver's bargain was sweet. Too sweet, apparently, for the probation department, which recommended that Cleaver not be put on probation. But Judge McKibben had the tacit approval of the district attorney's office if he wished to disregard the recommendation.

"It would be highly vindictive," the judge pronounced, "to impose a prison sentence on you. I am satisfied there has been improvement and change for the better." He then sentenced Cleaver to five years' probation with the condition that he perform 2,000 hours of as yet undetermined community service.

His legal troubles behind him, Cleaver stepped outside the courtroom and into the glare of television lights. Immediately he took a flying leap into Oakland's volatile politics by launching a blistering attack against three of the city's prominent black politicians—Mayor Lionel Wilson, County Supervisor John George and Congressman Ron Dellums. He accused them of using the issue of police brutality in the black community as "a political football."

The immediate issue was a proposed civilian police review board for Oakland, a hot topic in the nonwhite-majority city since in the past year there had been nine shooting deaths of blacks by Oakland cops.

A few days later, Cleaver called a press conference directly in front of the house where, twelve years before, he and Bobby Hutton had had the shoot-out with the cops. Standing before a heavy oaken lectern he had brought along for the occasion and dressed in a coarsely fashioned blue denim

ankle-length robe of his own design, he escalated his attack on "the Wilson-George-Dellums machine," calling them—and former Panther leader Elaine Brown—"cowards" and "scoundrels" who had "connived with the FBI, feeding them information about black organizations." He offered no details to prove his case.

He denounced them for their support of the proposed police review board, which he bizarrely characterized as "a rubber stamp for murder."

"We need police as heroes. We must depoliticize the police and let them go about their business."

Reporters and others who had followed Cleaver's fortunes hardly knew what to make of his dramatic turnaround on the subject of the police. Was he paying off a deal with the Alameda police? Was he, as Elaine Brown had suggested in a press conference after Cleaver's return, an FBI informer or a CIA agent? Or was he just getting a little public revenge on Brown and Dellums and other erstwhile supporters who had refused to help him when he wanted to return to this country?

OAKLAND POLICE SERGEANT Nolan Darnell has a particular reason to question Cleaver's sincerity. He well remembers the night of April 6, 1968. Sitting at his desk in a dingy office of the traffic division of the Oakland police administration building, Darnell told me that this was the first time he had ever spoken to a reporter about the fateful night. The gag order that had been in effect for twelve long years had finally been lifted with the final adjudication of Cleaver's case. The enforced silence had decidedly distorted the facts of the case, according to Darnell:

"It was right after the death of Martin Luther King. Me and my partner were on a routine patrol. We were on Union Street when I saw a man standing on the driver's side of a car. He closed the door and ran around to the other side. Suddenly, without warning or any provocation, the bullets were coming at us from every angle. . . ."

In apocalyptic flashes, the 27-year-old police officer saw his partner, Officer Richard Jensen, slump down in the car. "He was hit like nine or ten times. I thought he was dead. Immediate panic set in. As I was getting out of the car to get a better aim, I got hit. Then I fired a couple of shots. I told myself, 'Don't empty your revolver.' I still had four rounds left." Darnell got back into the car and called in a 940-B: Officer Needs Help.

When reinforcements arrived, the attackers fled. Darnell helped Jensen into an ambulance. Both were treated at a local hospital. Jensen had been wounded thirteen times; Darnell was shot in the shoulder. Over 50 bullets and bullet fragments were later discovered in their patrol car.

After their departure, the second stage of the siege began. By then dozens of Oakland and Emeryville patrol cars had converged on the area. Cleaver and Hutton had taken refuge in a nearby basement. As police searched the vicinity for suspects, shots rang out from the Cleaver hideout. After more heavy fire exchange, Cleaver and Hutton were finally flushed out by a firebomb. "Little Bobby" came out first, hands up. Cleaver emerged hands up and stripped to the waist. No one knows which cop fired first, but the bullets dropped Hutton dead in his tracks. Cleaver was taken into custody, and many people thought his life had been saved only by the fact that he was half naked and couldn't have been said to be concealing a gun.

"The thing that really hurt me at the time," Darnell

"Did you deliberately ambush the cops?" I asked. I looked up and met his eyes. "Yes."

recalled, "was that afterward Cleaver went around saying he had been collecting food for a Huey Newton picnic when we stopped *him*. He said we were after him because he was the Peace and Freedom party presidential candidate. Hell, I didn't even know who Eldridge Cleaver was!" While Cleaver's version was accepted as gospel truth on the Left, Darnell was prohibited from telling his version by the court-ordered gag—"It was like being punched at with your hands behind your back.

"Then Cleaver comes back to the country after all these years and says he's seen the light. And they let him get away with it! Well, nothing's been said to vindicate myself and Officer Jensen. His Christianity? Maybe if he'd been honest, maybe if he'd told the truth about that night and admitted he'd attacked us without provocation, maybe then I might have said, 'Hey, this guy's sincere.'"

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER sat across the table from me at one of Oakland's esteemed Chinese restaurants, deftly delivering slippery Peking dumplings into his mouth with his chopsticks and sidestepping my questions with the same adroitness.

"Did you ambush the police back in 1968?"

"I wasn't charged with ambushing the police," he answered evenly.

"I'm not asking about the charges. Did you deliberately ambush the cops?"

"For reasons of delicacy—not legal ones—I don't want to be misunderstood," he began in the slow, deliberate drawl that can be so irritating when he uses it to evade a direct question. "I am no longer in favor of going after the police with guns. I can only say that now because I believed in 1968 that it was necessary to drive the police out of the community with guns. It is still serious and explosive, because nine black men were killed here in the last year.

"With that context clear . . ."—he paused until I looked up from my notepad and met his eyes—" . . . yes."

It was a startling admission of guilt. The Panthers had steadfastly maintained that they had never attacked first, that they armed only in self-defense. But even the formidable array of weaponry recovered near the scene of the shoot-out—from repeating pump-action shotguns and M-16s to high caliber pistols—hardly seemed the stuff of self-defense.

On the other hand, J. Edgar Hoover used the FBI in a wholesale attempt to destroy the Panthers, which he called the most dangerous political group in America—supplanting the Communist party. An August 25, 1967, memorandum to local FBI offices called for agents to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit or otherwise neutralize the activities of black nationalists." Between 1968 and 1969 alone there were 31 raids by police agencies on Panther offices in eleven states. The 1969 killings of Panthers Fred Hampton—*asleep* in his bed when police broke in—and Mark Clark by Chicago police were the most infamous examples of local cops surpassing even the zeal of the FBI.

Nevertheless, sources close to the Panther hierarchy at the time of the Cleaver shoot-out assured me that the ambush of the police by Cleaver and the other Panthers was deliberate, intended to launch a coordinated series of skirmishes with police—skirmishes that would spark ghetto uprisings across the country.

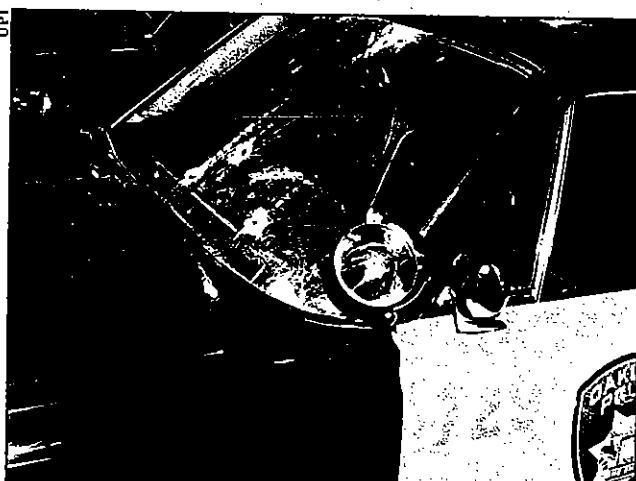
Cleaver's candor in acknowledging that now, twelve years later, answers some questions but raises others. For example, what exactly was and is his relationship with the FBI?

In *Soul on Fire* Cleaver wrote: "Most of all, I hated prisons. There was nothing in life that I hated more than a prison. . . ." Did he hate prisons enough to swap information for leniency?

Another former Panther's account of his own experience in jail suggests that the FBI, at least, would have been willing. This former Panther says that he was questioned extensively by the FBI throughout his jail term. FBI agents offered to get him out of jail in exchange for his cooperation as an informant. They also offered him \$2,000 plus \$500 a month for the duration of his cooperation. After he repeatedly refused, one agent asked him, "Are you a religious man? What do you think of Jesus Christ?" The prisoner concluded that there was a connection between the FBI and the born-again Christian movement in prison.

When I first asked Cleaver about his relationship with the FBI, he waved the question away contemptuously. "One thing I find unacceptable," he said angrily, "is people criticizing me for coming back and changing my politics, my religion—falsely accusing me of selling out to the CIA, the FBI, of testifying in Senate hearings. I've never done that!"

In a sudden burst of defiance, as if to prove that he served



Testaments to the violence of 1968: An Eldridge Cleaver in exile (left); a shot-up Oakland police car; a recovered arsenal.

Two FBI agents met Cleaver in Paris and escorted him back to New York. "We talked all the way."

no master but Eldridge Cleaver, he began talking like the old Eldridge, bragging of the passports and visas he forged for American plane hijackers and others on the run—documents that were, he claimed, eventually nabbed by the FBI.

He insisted that he had always observed "the convict code: Never snitch, and never take it in the ass. It gets to be your pride."

Weeks later Cleaver told me more details about the FBI contact. Two FBI agents, one black, one white, met him in Paris and escorted him back to New York. "We started talking in Paris, and we talked all the way to New York."

He was arrested and booked in November 1975 and eventually released for transfer under FBI auspices to federal prison in San Diego, remaining in that facility for several months before being sent north to Alameda County, where he was jailed until he made bail in the summer of 1976.

He acknowledges that in San Diego he and local FBI agents had wide-ranging discussions. "They asked me a lot of stuff. Most I thought they already knew. They'd show me pictures of fugitives." Fugitives he *knew* they *knew* he *knew*.

He told of one agent who was introduced to him as their "Eldridge Cleaver expert," a man who had read Cleaver's books and old *Ramparts* articles. "I felt sorry for him," he laughed.

"Look," he said with sudden sharpness, "I talk to the FBI the way I talk to you. I don't shit in my pants when they interrogate me. The FBI expected me to be at their mercy. I've been interrogated all my mother-fucking life. If anyone wants to accuse me. . . ."

His silence was one of scorn. He knew what he was doing. He followed The Code. He was smart enough to outmaneuver pigs, Lefties and the FBI.

Alameda County deputy district attorney Tom Orloff says there was no interference or interceding on behalf of Cleaver by the FBI in any way in the shoot-out case. (Cleaver faced two other charges: unlawful flight to avoid prosecution, a federal crime but infrequently pursued when a fugitive is apprehended, according to law enforcement sources; and parole violation for a 1958 conviction on assault, originally carrying a maximum fourteen-year sentence but obviated by the California Supreme Court decision to limit the indeterminate sentence.)

WHEN I FIRST encountered Cleaver at a Christmas party in the *Newsweek* offices this winter, I was surprised to see him sitting alone on an office couch openly smoking a joint. Sitting and talking with him then I heard no "praise the Lord" and nary a word of God, Jesus or any other hint of the born-again movement.

Instead, he was quite willing to discuss in graphic detail and in language laced with profanity the sexual and drug habits of some of his former associates in the Black Panther party. It seemed an odd way to behave at a party crawling with journalists.

His very openness excited my curiosity, and I asked him on the spot if he would be willing to cooperate on a story for *New West*. I wanted to know if his Christianity was for real.

His posture did not change after he agreed to be interviewed. He exhibited no hypocrisy in hiding his old reputed habits. When I spent the day with him making the rounds to see clergy ("I'm trying to radicalize them a little"), do errands and visit with the Moonies at their Project Volunteer digs in Oakland, the 200 miles or so we drove together were

embellished with more than a few joints. They were my offering. He apparently possessed none of his own but felt no compunction about smoking the evil weed. I wondered if his Christian friends knew.

Cleaver took me along to pay a visit to Reverend Donald Green, whose Christian Center Church is situated in the desolate outer Mission District of San Francisco. Fortyish, solidly built, sporting a trim mustache, the affable Reverend Green ushered us into his tiny, overheated office.

The two men chatted comfortably for several hours, their mutual warmth and respect readily apparent. If sometimes I had the feeling that Cleaver was visiting the preacher as some kind of spiritual probation officer, it was also clear that Green was a little bit in awe of Cleaver's smarts and sophistication.

At the outset of the visit, Cleaver presented Green with a blue denim robe identical to the one he himself wore and of his own design—a far more fitting garment for manufacture by a born-again Christian than his famous codpiece pants, which never quite caught on.

Reverend Green slipped it on over his suit. It was roomy enough for his girth. He thanked Cleaver for the gift.

"A preacher sets an example for the whole community," Cleaver half teased. He explained that Green's was free, of course, but for any of his flock who inquired, the price was \$60. The robe actually sold in some stores for double that, Cleaver claimed. He had a sliding scale based on what he thought he could get.

After extolling the virtues of a gown for male attire, Cleaver assured the reverend that the robes were "made with the loving hands and dedication of the Christian ladies." The sewing klatch to which Cleaver belonged sometimes met and made the robes in the upstairs apartment of his rented home. (I suddenly had a fantasy of a born-again sweatshop operating out of his attic.)

Cleaver talked serious sewing with the attentive clergyman, as if these robes were his means of income. He quoted yardage, dollars and cents. But he could be eloquent about the spiritual side of sewing as well, sounding like the Job of the bobbin set: "I believe sewing came from God, but I used to think it was a humiliation for me. It was women's work. For two and a half years I worked in the prison sewing shop. I regarded it as a scar on my soul. I relate to it now as a skill."

The conversation turned to the recent disposition of Cleaver's criminal charges. Cleaver denounced the 2,000 hours of community service work as "slavery"—another scar on his soul.

It was at this point that Cleaver brought up the subject of his current involvement with Project Volunteer, a Moonie food-giveaway program operating out of a huge warehouse in Oakland's industrial sector. Cleaver wanted to do his community service there. (Cleaver's probation officer expressed surprise at this. "He's never mentioned wanting to work there, nor has he given any preferences about what kind of work he wants to do. I don't think working with the Moonies would be acceptable to us.")

At the mention of the Moonies, Green sat up in the chair behind his small desk, all alert. It was clear that he, like most Christian regulars, viewed the Unification Church as anathema. Cleaver's vocal support of the Moonies was already embarrassing his friends in the born-again movement. Green wanted to know what the deal was.

Cleaver's response raised as many questions as it provided answers. He told Green he approved of the food giveaway

Was it Cleaver's charm with women that enabled him to get asylum from Valéry Giscard d'Estaing?

because it was for poor people—most of whom were blacks in Oakland. Through his connections with Christian ministers Cleaver had, he said, brought church groups and poor parishioners to the warehouse to share in the Moonie largesse.

"Were the Moonies recruiting blacks?" I asked.

"They want any kind of zombie they can get," Cleaver retorted flippantly.

He talked about *Divine Deception*, the 280-page book about the Moonies he's almost completed. In it he says he exposes the control techniques of the church.

Sometimes Cleaver intimated that he hung out with the Moonies as part of a Christian mission to enlighten the misled followers of Moon. Yet a moment later he restated the remark that set the regular Christian community on its heels last summer. "I'd rather be with the littlest Moonie than with Billy Graham."

When Green looked confused, Cleaver said with impatience, "I am not a Moonie! I am not a Moonie spy!"

When Green pressed him again, Cleaver said he had been devoting energy to loosening some of the obsessive ties between church members and their draconian methods. "I got a Moonie to talk to his parents."

I found those parents in a condominium in San Francisco's Twin Peaks. Ruth Schnee, a round, pleasant looking woman with a rosy complexion, is an interior designer. She and her husband, Edward, a merchandiser, live in Detroit but were out here on an extended visit to guest lecture at the University of California. Both are active in groups of parents with children in cults. They testified at a White House conference on the family. They are dedicated to curbing the excesses of many cults, but they profess an equal opposition to violation of the constitutional rights of cult members and therefore eschew kidnapping and forced deprogramming.

Their son Jeremy, they told me, is Eldridge Cleaver's assigned "spiritual father" in the Moon church, or so Eldridge told them when he telephoned them totally out of the blue in Detroit last December. He called to offer himself as a go-between in setting up a meeting with their son.

"Jeremy had refused all our phone calls," Ruth recalled, pausing in her crocheting. "I wrote three letters a week to him, but no answers. Eldridge assured us he'd do everything possible."

After dozens of phone calls back and forth, and face-to-

face meetings with Eldridge and, occasionally, Kathleen, Ruth and Edward had their meeting with Jeremy inside the Moonie enclave at Camp K. Shortly thereafter—again, through Cleaver's intercession, the Schnees believe—they met again with Jeremy at Camp K for five hours.

The next day Ruth received a phone call from Cleaver. "Eldridge wanted to know why we hadn't called. Had the second meeting taken place? We told him we wanted to see Jeremy away from the rest of the Moonies. He told us he was expecting Jeremy to meet him at his house in Menlo Park at noon, that they were planning to go out to lunch together. He said we could shoot down there at nine so we could talk. We did. Eldridge said to us, 'What do you suppose Jeremy's reaction would be if he came and found you here?'"

"You're calling the shots," we said. We waited."

Jeremy did show up. It was the first time he had visited the Cleaver household unaccompanied by other Moonies. When he saw his parents there he freaked out. Eldridge then commanded Jeremy to "go and kiss your mother," which he did. Shaken, he asked if he and Cleaver were still going to lunch. (He would later tell Cleaver that he thought he'd been set up for a kidnapping.)

The Schnees' last encounter with Cleaver left them totally baffled.

"Eldridge had talked to us before about his plans to open a sort of halfway house—a place where Moonie kids could go to get away from the communal discipline of the church but without cutting the cord altogether. At first he only asked us for moral support," Ruth remembered, "but then it took a strange twist. He called us up one day and said, 'I have all these kids here who don't want to go back to Camp K. Please help me.' He wanted to find them a place to stay. I envisioned a massive deprogramming situation, and we started checking around for a facility. In the meantime we asked Eldridge to give us the names and ages of these kids, and we'd get to their parents as fast as we could. We wanted the parents to be involved in the situation. He said he'd call back."

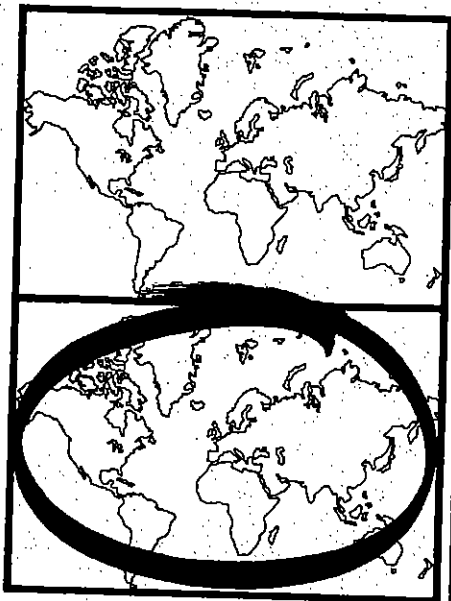
"He never did zilch," Edward concluded. "It looked like the kiss-off."

A little more than a month ago Cleaver appeared on the religious television show *700 Club* and talked about his book and the Moonies. "I said what I thought of them," he told me later. "That they *do* take advantage, that they *do*



Cleaver entering Alameda County Jail in 1976 (left), and today with wife, Kathleen (center), and children, Maceo, eleven, and Joju, nine.

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manipulate, that they *do* deprive their members of sleep. I don't go to their facilities anymore. I'm not welcome. They really wrote me off after I criticized them." He claims that eight Moonies defected with him.

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER has fought many battles in his life, but none with more passion, or more abiding interest, than the war between men and women. In the sixties he viewed white women as the instrument of his revenge against the white ruling class man. "I became a rapist," he wrote in *Soul on Ice*. "To refine my technique and *modus operandi*, I started out by practicing on black girls in the ghetto . . . and when I considered myself smooth enough, I crossed the tracks and sought out white prey. . . Rape was an insurrectionary act. It delighted me that I was defying and trampling upon the white man's law . . . and that I was defiling his women."

He has long since abandoned this position and appears to be a man who loves deeply when he loves. His two great loves have been women in the public eye—his former lawyer, Beverly Axelrod, and his wife, Kathleen, the beautiful upper-class black woman he met when she was working with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. "Zooooooooooooom went the keys of her electric machine," he recalls in *Soul on Fire*. "I was absolutely married at that office introduction."

She, in turn, was enamored of his warrior status as a revolutionary who had come out of the mythic and violent California prison system.

Although he and Kathleen have been married since 1967, Cleaver still wears the mantle of ladies' man. He is attractive to women, pays attention to them in a way that seems to exclude everything and everyone else, a form of flattery women find agreeable. He doesn't push. He's not aggressive that way. When the Panthers and Cleaver were the epitome of radical chic, he didn't have to do much more than show off his one pierced earring and black turtleneck sweater. Being a felon and a revolutionary was irresistible in the late sixties.

I had heard rumors for a number of years that it was his charm with women that enabled him to get political asylum from the president of France, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

As the story went, the two men met through a rich, smart, aristocratic beauty who was having affairs with them both. According to some accounts, the woman even rented a plush apartment for Eldridge away from Kathleen and the kids, with a red Porsche thrown in as part of the arrangement.

In fact, according to various accounts, Giscard frequented the same premises and once borrowed the Porsche to return

to the presidential palace—and crashed into a milk truck. Pointed stories appeared in the French press asking where the chief of state went after office hours.

Cleaver was reluctant to say anything about this woman, whom he calls by the pseudonym "Fanchon," but he did admit, "your basic structure is correct." Such an admission, however, was a very delicate matter: "It's not nice to be accused of being involved with the president's mistress."

When I first rendezvoused with Cleaver in a restaurant near his Menlo Park house, he immediately informed me that my request to interview Kathleen later that same day could not be granted.

"She doesn't want to see you," he said, which surprised me, since she had already cordially agreed to it.

"I don't understand. Why not?"

"Her face is messed up."

"What do you mean? What happened?"

"I disciplined her!" His eyes challenged me as he waited to see the effect of the gauntlet he had thrown down.

"You hit her in the face?"

"Yes. She needed disciplining."

There began a discourse on a husband's right to discipline his wife. He rambled on about how the institution of marriage is "fatally undermined" when a husband cannot "inflict corporal discipline upon his wife and children." He blamed the increase in murders in modern times on "the attempt of man to maintain authority over rebellious women." He spoke of a woman's marriage vow, which, he intoned with emphasis, is to "love, cherish and obey."

A couple of weeks later, Kathleen felt sufficiently repaired to receive me in the Cleaver home. At 33 she still reflects her upper-class background. It's her whole demeanor and grace. It was there even back when she was in great demand as the female Panther firebrand, when she wore a huge Afro, black leather and her omnipresent oversize sunglasses. Now she wears a cropped reddish Afro, contact lenses and a touch of eye shadow to heighten her green eyes. I noted all this and the still-pink scar and crosshatch of stitches on her upper lip.

When I repeated Cleaver's remarks about a husband's right to "discipline" his wife, she denied the principle but somehow managed to defend her husband.

"Many men believe they have the right to use corporal discipline. I don't think it's his right as a husband. But I have a tendency to be hot-tempered." Kathleen's argument was that she provokes her husband: "Women will be very verbal. A woman agitates, uses words . . . then he'll hit you."

Her final case rested on the definition of "wife beating," which, she said, her husband did not do. "A wife beater goes

out, gets stinko once a week and then beats her good. It's not tied to anything rational. I don't consider our arguments physical fights."

Though she can be glib in her criticism of her husband—"He needs to dominate. He has to be the boss"—she is deeply committed to her family. "I look upon marriage as a permanent arrangement. I believe it. And so does Eldridge."

WHATEVER THE TRUTH that underlies Eldridge Cleaver's many shifts of ideology, the fact remains that today he is a family man with a wife and two children to support. He has survived a violent adolescence, years in prison, the acrimonious split in the Panther leadership, governmental and police hostility, and now the dislike of former comrades. Although he has not always done it with grace, he has certainly shown spirit.

Yet his path, his way of doing things, seems just as elusive as ever. He prides himself, one suspects, in confounding everyone by behaving as he chooses. He fled to Cuba only to offend his hosts by consorting with local undesirables and helping a fugitive from Cuban justice. He went to Algeria under the name of international solidarity, black liberation and the end of imperialist oppression, and stayed to commit passport forgeries and run stolen cars across the Algerian border. Some of his activities were clearly money hustles, but sometimes even their financial success was dubious.

Today, the Cleavers appear to be running hard to maintain their lifestyle. And since Cleaver's chief benefactor, Art De-Moss, died in September, "there are money difficulties. I can't even make my car payments."

When I visited Kathleen in their modestly furnished \$700 a month rented house, I overheard two phone calls about money—one in which she instructed someone to redeposit a bounced check for the second time. Then the doorbell rang. A Chicano man and woman were asking to be paid. Kathleen, in broken Spanish, told them to come back later.

Kathleen takes it in stride. "We've always lived with money pressures," she said while offering me tips on how she and her family beat being evicted for nonpayment in Paris. (According to Kathleen, there's a Parisian law that says that no one can be evicted in the middle of winter. The Cleavers simply didn't pay rent, and stayed in the apartment until the warm weather arrived.)

Cleaver's former lover and lawyer, Beverly Axelrod, is suing him for a percentage of past and future earnings of *Soul on Ice*, potentially affecting any possible movie deals. On our last visit Cleaver told me they were being evicted from their house, and he has since moved to much more modest digs.

And now he is in trouble with the white born-again movement. "I've been excommunicated, removed from certain invitation lists—like the president's breakfast prayer meeting. They're taking measures against me.

"The evangelical movement can be vicious. I've turned out to be the guy who won't go away. Even black preachers have said, 'Eldridge Cleaver is not a Christian.' I have enmity between myself and every organized group on the map. I'm an effective iconoclast."

We walked out of the downtown Oakland restaurant. It was starting to rain. He opened my umbrella and offered to drive me to my car. "Right now, I'm functioning as a spiritual guerrilla. . . ."

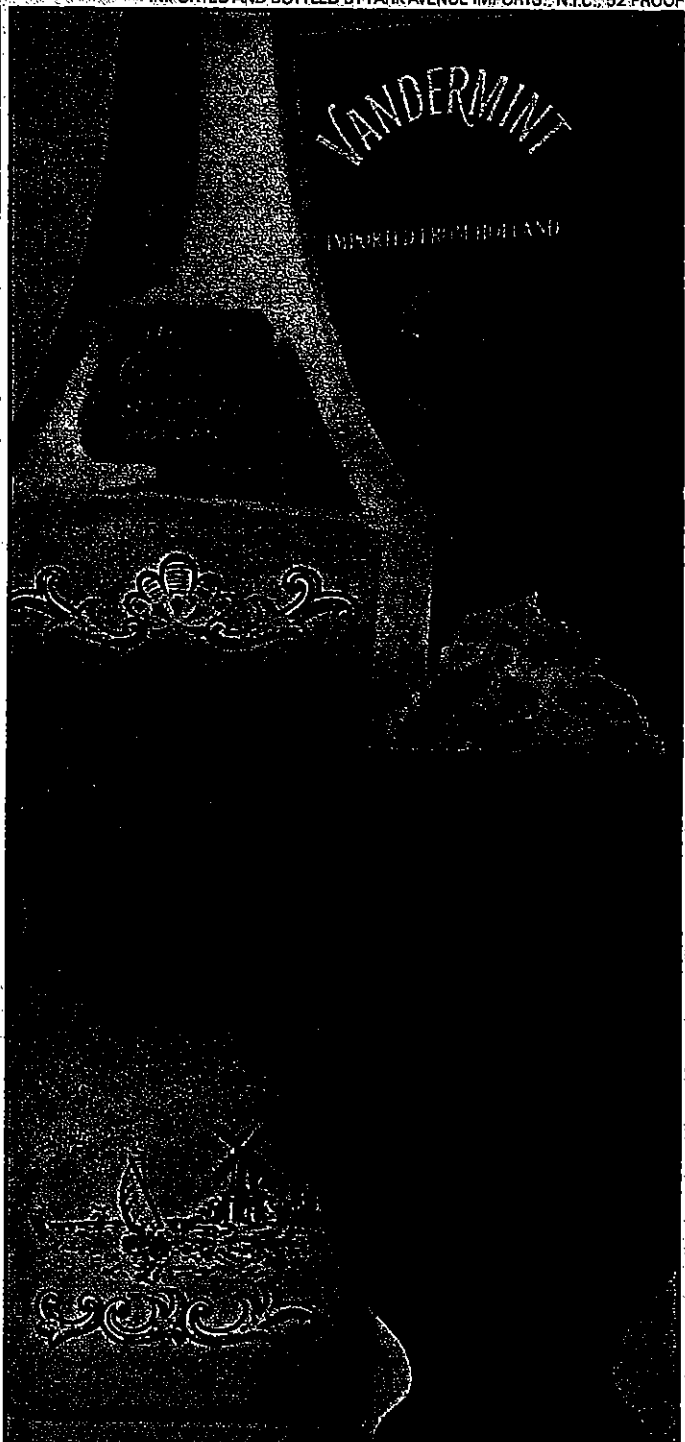
As we drove to the parking lot, I thought about how he had tried to set up so many hustles, and how they always seemed to fall apart, but only after a while. He *was* honest, but he hustled himself.

"Do you have a joint?" he asked as I got out of the car.

I shook my head no. The rain was coming down hard.

"The reason I've never been corrupted," he said, turning to face me for the last time with a big grin, "is because the thing I like most in this world is pussy."

I waved good-bye. The soldier of God drove off in the rain. ■



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