

**"Loss and Texture"**

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## **The Blind Man**

Only after he had been carried  
to the mortuary and pronounced dead,  
only after his body was laid  
on its back, the spine stiffening  
ridges into his suit jacket,  
would they dare remove the dark glasses  
that had always covered his eyes.  
Carefully not touching  
the veiny bluing skin stretched  
over his temples and cheekbones,  
they removed the glasses  
and saw eyeless recesses  
and shadow-images--  
as though they had stared  
at the sun too long --  
of their own parents and children  
looking back at them.  
And they cut through  
his skull to see again,  
and found inside  
their own sun-bleached bones.

**Dali, Jesus, Me**  
**The Second Coming**

He, with his painting travels  
room to room, moustache twitching.  
He does not fear its wax melting,  
sees the future and paints  
decaying time an old tesseract and all that.

The other with us is not so calm.  
He hops from toe to  
toe, coming and then  
retreating, a nervous blue-green frog.  
He glances at the clocks, numb rituals,  
hanging from rusted nails in the walls.

Earthy air rises from cracks in the earth –  
with bare feet I sit on the grass,  
and remove my hat, watching feverish skies.  
Where I stand, pools of briny sweat lie  
thirsting on the ground  
that sags fleshlike under my feet.

I see the second again,  
balancing delicately  
worn feet on worn brick,  
stepping around an old well.  
Seeing no one, he holds back  
his hair with thin olive hands,  
and wishing perhaps to impregnate  
the earth, he falls slowly sinking,  
into recondite recesses,  
into pores of sodden ground.

Calmly, I leave, taking  
my hat and my soup pot (caldo).  
I hear chaos, badly played  
piano and crashing pots  
filled with fishes and bread and blood.

They ring in my ears as I step  
through broken glass – the shatters  
reflecting arcs of scarlet,  
golden, blue and emerald light  
from the newly-minted sun.

**On my shore**

the sea to one side,  
and land, the other,  
seaweed grows as stiff as the hand,  
whitened with age and the salt of the ocean,  
that rests just above the broken tidal line,  
and under whose cracked and lined nails  
the sand and Irish moss still are damp.

**In memory -- my second husband  
I am sorry, I cannot remember your face,  
your time, your lips, your hands, your voice.**

Sure, I remember then, my hair  
was blonde, curled around my ear;  
as my fingers pull, it turns stiff  
and gray.  
I walked along the curb,  
one knee bent, my other ankle swinging  
over the street gutter.  
You were behind me. I remember.  
But as I turn, to recall  
your face, nothing --  
I cannot recall a name, your family  
in a white house, green lawn, a red house,  
concrete sidewalks, trees overgrown pulling  
down the chain-link fence. Your features.  
On a map I cannot find the street we met,  
the curb I walked along, holding your hand  
behind me, steady.  
Just my eyes; I remember my own soft skin,  
especially I remember lying in bed, rolling  
my fingers lightly up over my hips  
onto my stomach, the small blonde hairs  
I remember too, soft.

## **Billie**

Instead, I sat surrounded by broken bottles,  
my head spinning. I was not crying out,  
but my head hurt and I laid on  
the ground, sweating.

Why would she have not returned  
with the washrag by now,  
to soothe me, hold my face,  
wash the blood from my lips  
where it dried until cracks  
formed and I licked it off  
with an abrasive tongue.

I cursed her and ran my hands  
over the broken glass; I moved  
my arms higher over my head,  
a glass angel in the concrete.  
I was so thirsty I could lick  
my sweat from my body, but it  
was salty and I wanted just  
one drop of water  
to touch my tongue.

My hands were around the soles  
of my feet; I held myself  
in this position  
long after I awoke from my dream.  
Slipping into sleep, I felt her touch  
very slightly my neck, my throat,  
my lips, and did not dare  
to open my eyes, filled  
as they were with warm  
empty tears.

## Museum

His most recent installation, which hadn't been accepted in the museum, as it was, he guessed, too large, was four-score hogs heads layered in two flattened trenches on either side of a long thin hill that fell in two lengthy concave arcs down from a sharp top edge. The sides of the pink hill sloped into the floor itself, and behind the whole thing were to be large photographs and paintings and drawings and sketches with pencil or coal shard on dark sheets of drawing paper; they were to be of the ocean waves. It was all meant to remind people of what the inside of the top of their mouths felt like when running the most sensitive part of the ring finger over the sides and down the thin taut slope in the middle. He wet his lips. He had deliberately stepped to the center of this large white room, but now he was frightened, beyond movement at first; his heart beat rapidly, and he stared at the walls, all entirely white with thin arcs of gray cutting into the floor from each wall, encroaching on the middle, where he stood in a near-perfect, incomplete circle. He felt his soul was poised to jump suddenly from his stomach, and he leapt out of the circle, ran to the doorway and, out of breath, looked back. It may not have been really sinister, but he didn't know what he had participated in. He didn't know what he might do now, or what effect it might ultimately have, and if none, wouldn't that even be worse, in the sense that it would have been there, existed, but was completely empty?

The piano in his house didn't work at all. It wasn't out of tune, the strings were all present and hooked up, but the keys would never depress. If they did, there was absolutely no sound. It was very frustrating, to have a piano that no one could play. He found it sad to see how people reacted to that too, which was why he never sent it to the museum. People would have tried to sound it, but would have been repelled at the very first touch, the instant they realized the keys didn't move; they would think it was a fake, and would be angry, disappointed and disconcerted, as he always was, with the piano.

## **Puzzle**

Glancing, I saw my reflection  
in the mirror-tiled walls spotted  
brown with water marks. The tiles  
distorted any perspective, frightening  
the order of the room. But lying on the bed,  
staring up again, there became nothing but white  
snow falling to my lips. Then, wandering  
in the watched ceiling, (my one true love, I might  
have said), he finally fell and sprawled straight down; a breath,  
he landed heavily, facing me outstretched, looking towards  
the snow-white mouths of the bed. I wound myself  
around the weight lying on me, tight, tightly,  
and right out of my arms, he flew, moving smoothly  
across the room, bouncing from the window  
behind my head and out the flimsy door, barely  
reflecting in the mirror-tiled wall opposite  
my belongings. His soles left last and finally.  
And slow again, his shadow lingered longer,  
a contorted frame image in the glass,  
separated, cut into squares of his  
parts, all fighting like a dozen  
wrong puzzle pieces to fit  
impossibly into their rightful places.



### **Sestina: Parere (to give birth)**

An arrow of god's pierced his new-born earth, in swift descent  
To unmarshalled plains, and waves of loess and sand.  
From sleep, serpents uncoiled from their raft on the silent ocean.

Rising in her orbit, the earth  
Turned sunward, and whales shattered the calm skin of the ocean.  
Aquifers flowed in rock deep beneath Asian wheat plains;  
Sidewinders were spat from twisting desert sands,  
In the heat elephants rose from trees that lay in sleep,  
And an angel began descent.

Unhindered, sunlight touched the final curve which, stretching in descent  
Around the roll of the earth,  
Fell sharply, the first precipice of sleeping  
Rock carved by the arms of the ocean;  
The sea's blue and seaweed colors crossing the sky over fiery sands  
Melded with the pitch of early monsoons in cascade toward the Asian plains.

Dried grasses, cane and bush of the plains  
Kindled fires; their sparks descended  
As falling stars, orange against the night sky. Rolling sands  
Cast shadowy desert forms, capturing the earth  
In the humps of camels carrying the ocean  
Across a deserted land that reflects the sun's diligent sleep.

Eyes opening thickly from an undisturbed sleep,  
Dark-skinned people joined the giraffe arching over the plains  
And the reddened crab crawling from land to ocean.  
The rains of the new seasons descended  
Upon these first few whose repast was the earth,  
Upon the dung-beetles stiffly moving grains of sand.

Like flying cottonwood seeds, the ashy sands  
Floated from volcanic mountains stirred from sleep,  
Covering the newly alive and the newly dead grasping the earth.  
Soil was shaped by human hands in the new plains.  
Dust rose steadily and soil descended  
Into tightening rows reaching toward the ocean.

Brown skin was rubbed white and raw in the salty ocean;  
Hands, hardened by the sun and cracked by sea sands,  
Smoothed bark into boats. Trees, in their descent  
From sky to earth, were torn from a cloudy sleep  
And cried out as the winds carried their moans across plains  
And over all of the bronzing earth.

The few who still consider such descent must think this god to be asleep,  
Seeing sands are constant, that grass grows untangled over the plains,  
That men grow pale, ocean no longer in them, losing life on earth.

## **Freedom**

What would Tycho Brahe think, his brass nose  
gleaming wildly the light reflected  
from German snow, if they had said, "You  
should be proud, you cannot smell."?

What would Beethoven think,  
as another's hands turned his face  
to the audience, to see them  
standing, elated, his music an ocean in them.

What would he think,  
touching the piano -- wood, ivory,  
hearing no note,  
his fingers on the keys.  
Frustrated  
by vibration, holding the music  
in his head, no sound  
penetrating the hollow of his ear?

What, when Deaf Culture roars  
and refuses to listen, or speak;  
when Deaf Culture refuses me  
because I do. When Deaf Culture makes  
music silence to a child, who can  
smell musty early-winter snow,  
can feel the body of a cello, the quick  
and full vibrations of the thin wood,  
can watch fingers move  
over tin whistle holes, an arm pumping  
breath to bagpipes, can see ivory keys,  
the orchestra, the tympani.

## I

A man sits on his stoep,  
barren cold nights,  
counting gold in his head,  
hearing coins drop and clink  
rattling together on the concrete  
pavement where he sits,  
each night and day  
knotted in a shawl  
that holds him upright,  
as his hands shake  
in contemplation.

## II

Across the way  
there is an old lady  
who is sitting  
surrounded by  
the night that darkens  
one degree at a time, choking  
the narrow streets.

## III

And finally there  
goes walking a couple  
whose steps are loud  
on the street as they  
walk past. In winter  
clothing, dark coats  
and scarves,  
they do not look  
at each other or  
into the street corners  
filled with vermin.  
Hesitantly, the man reaches  
a hand into his pocket,  
the woman pulls him closer.

## **the color of clover**

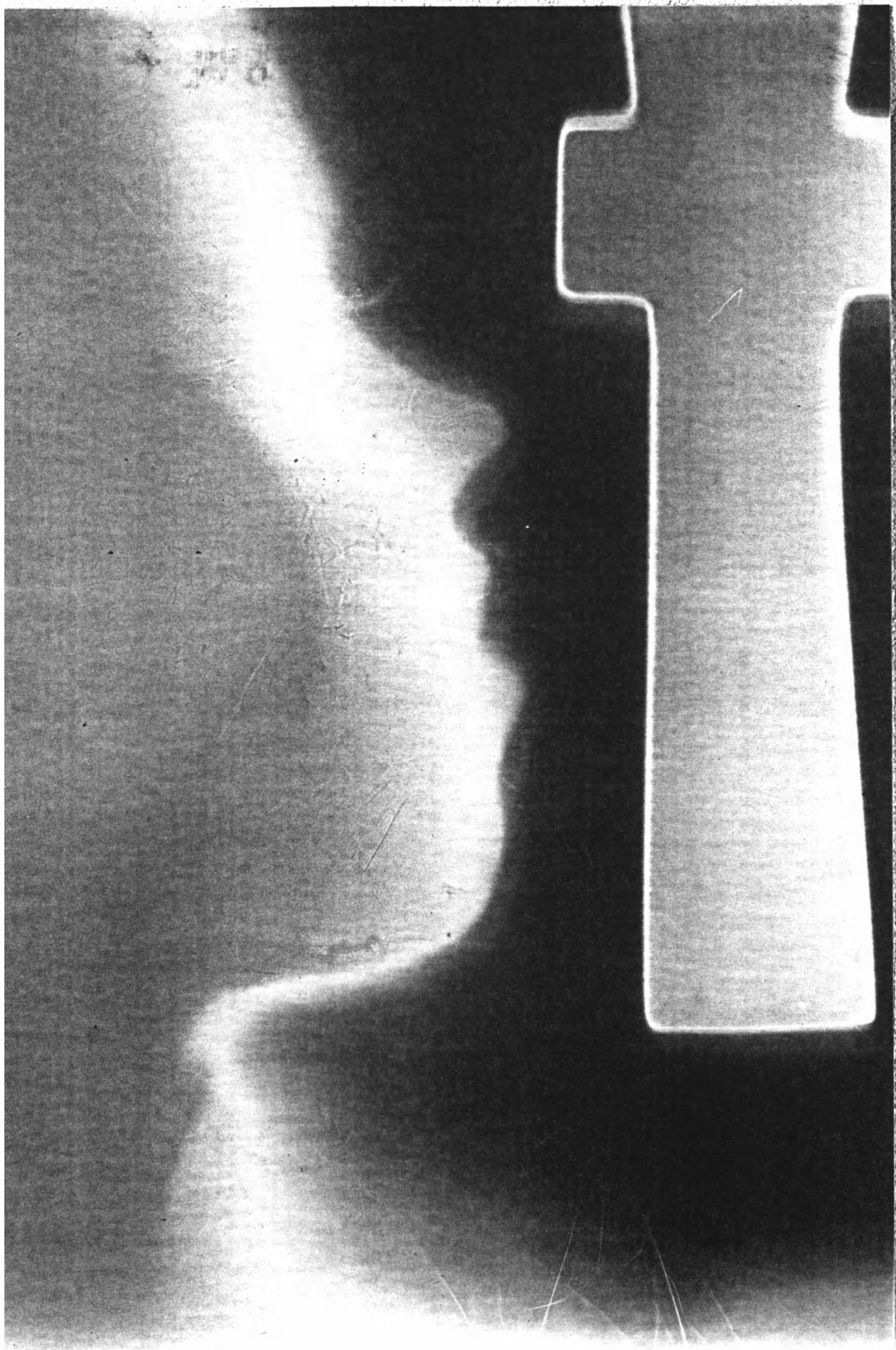
Why don't we go upstairs?  
Or, its lovely dark outside --  
we could step from the concrete,  
still warm -- onto the cool grass  
behind the . . . Yes? It's always  
best at night. Come. In this light,  
you can see the city, far away;  
the bareness of the grass-blades  
high and alone; they overtake  
its lights.  
The slight sun  
will be between us, as we are hidden  
within the unbidden dark blue  
and the glances of green sliding  
across the landscape. You can  
barely imagine the stars, hanging  
imperceptible, just beyond the  
last deep brown and copper  
strokes of sunset.

## **His Country**

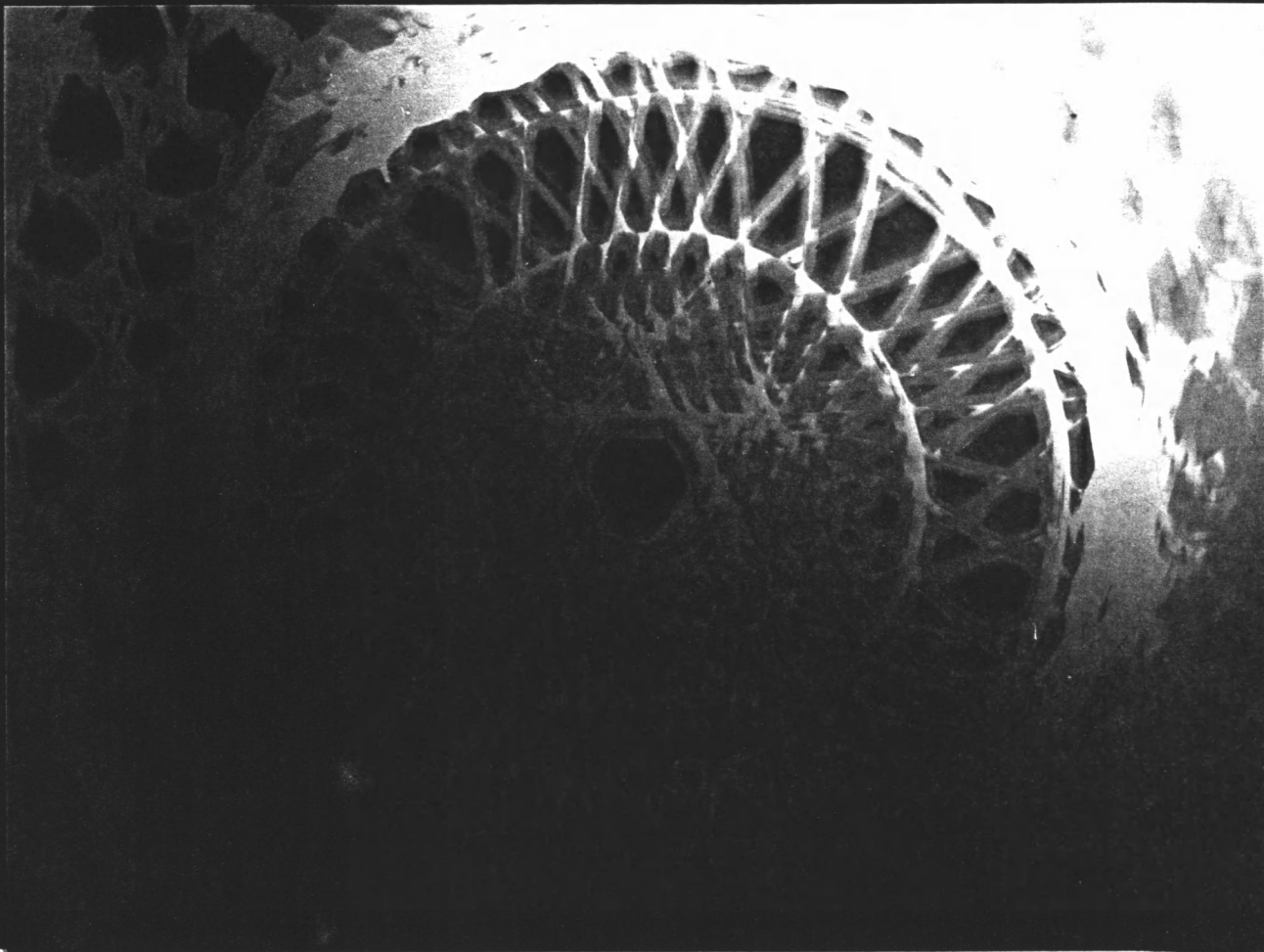
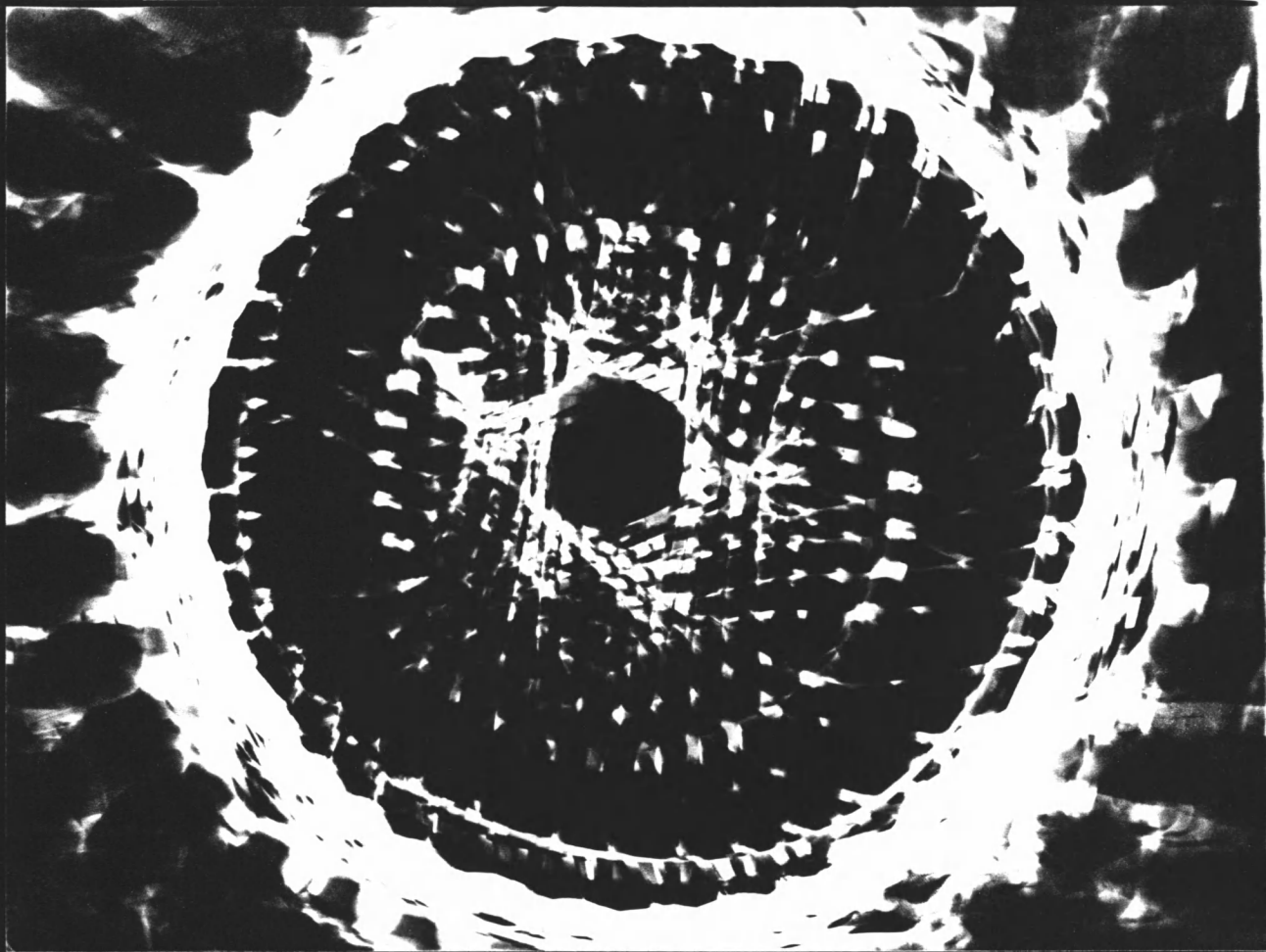
He said: In this part of the world,  
the mountains were strong, and held  
in their knotted hands our lives.  
In the summer as a child  
I would follow the dried ruts,  
fingers mapping the deepening relief,  
where the fresh water flowed every year.

Really they were hills,  
but still crept in our thoughts  
when we diligently prayed,  
telling with passages carved by ice  
that their power was poetic --  
my grandchildren hidden in the words,  
under the snow; still this,  
even robbed of their marrow  
by time and weather.

Now, they waste into dirt  
that is constantly dusting our faces  
and eyes. I breath these hills  
and exhale them. My breath  
has become ash; it is the first  
shovelful of dirt thrown into a grave;  
it mixes with the red-toned sky  
and we all walk silently;  
it follows us home.



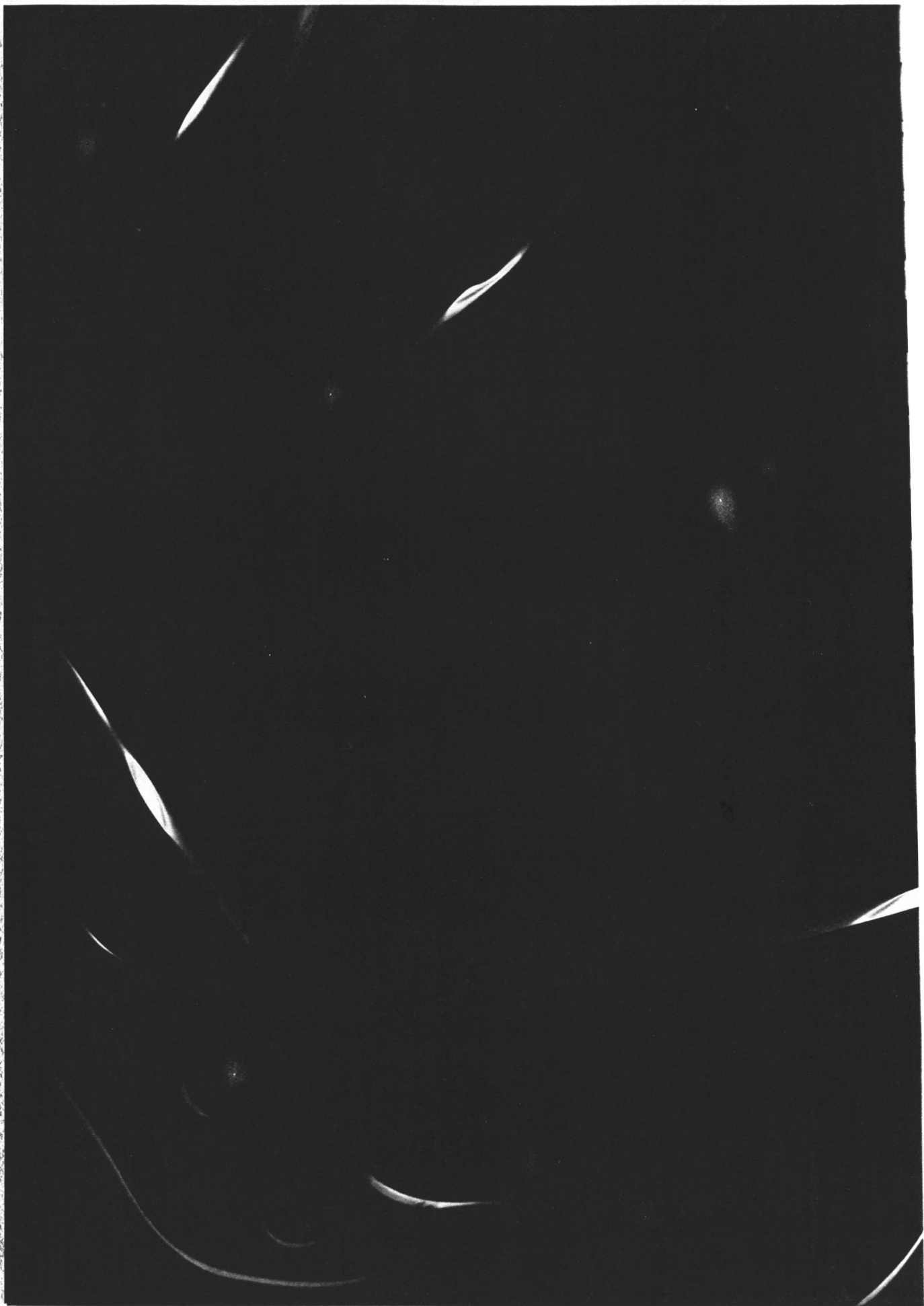




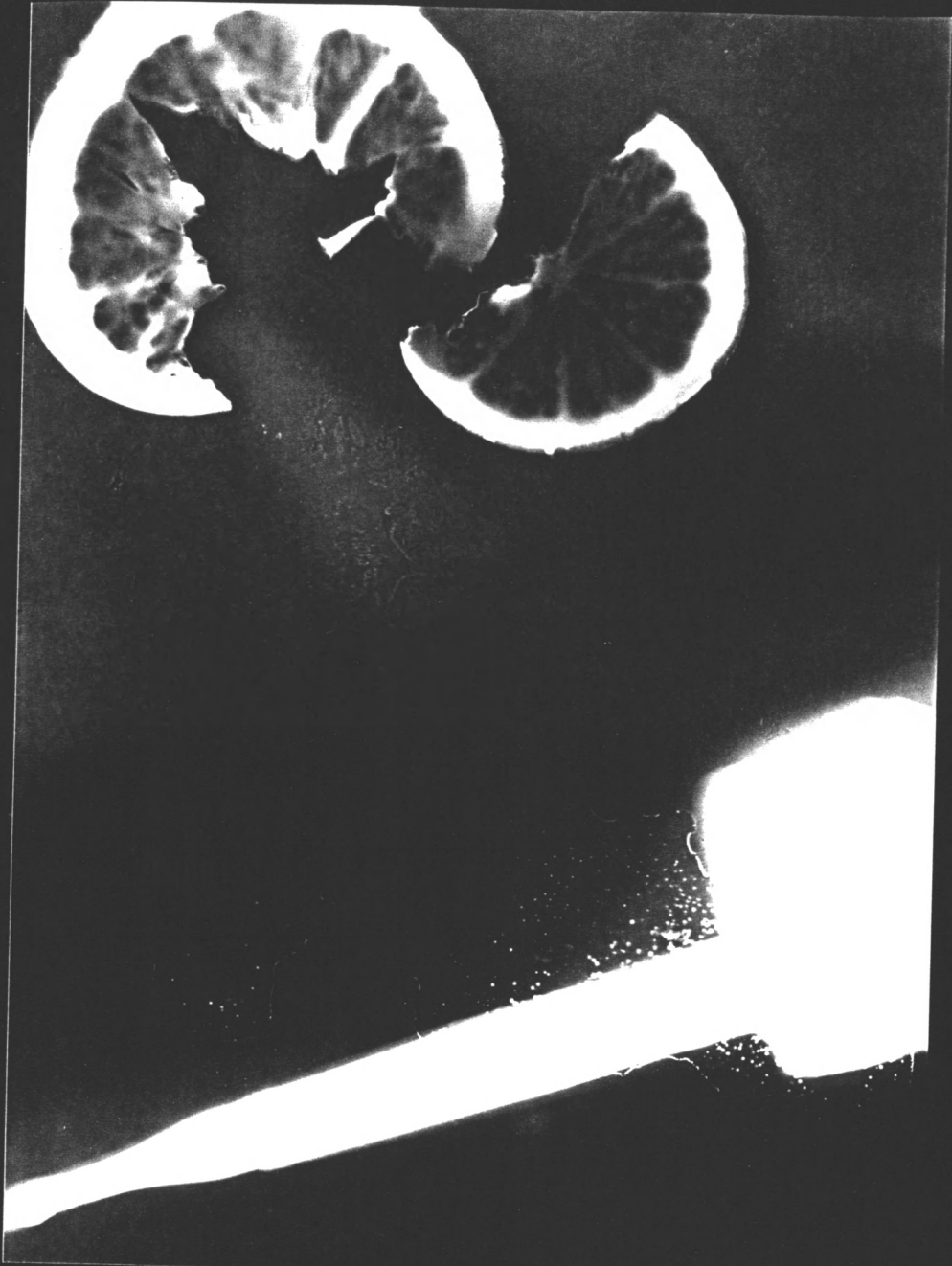


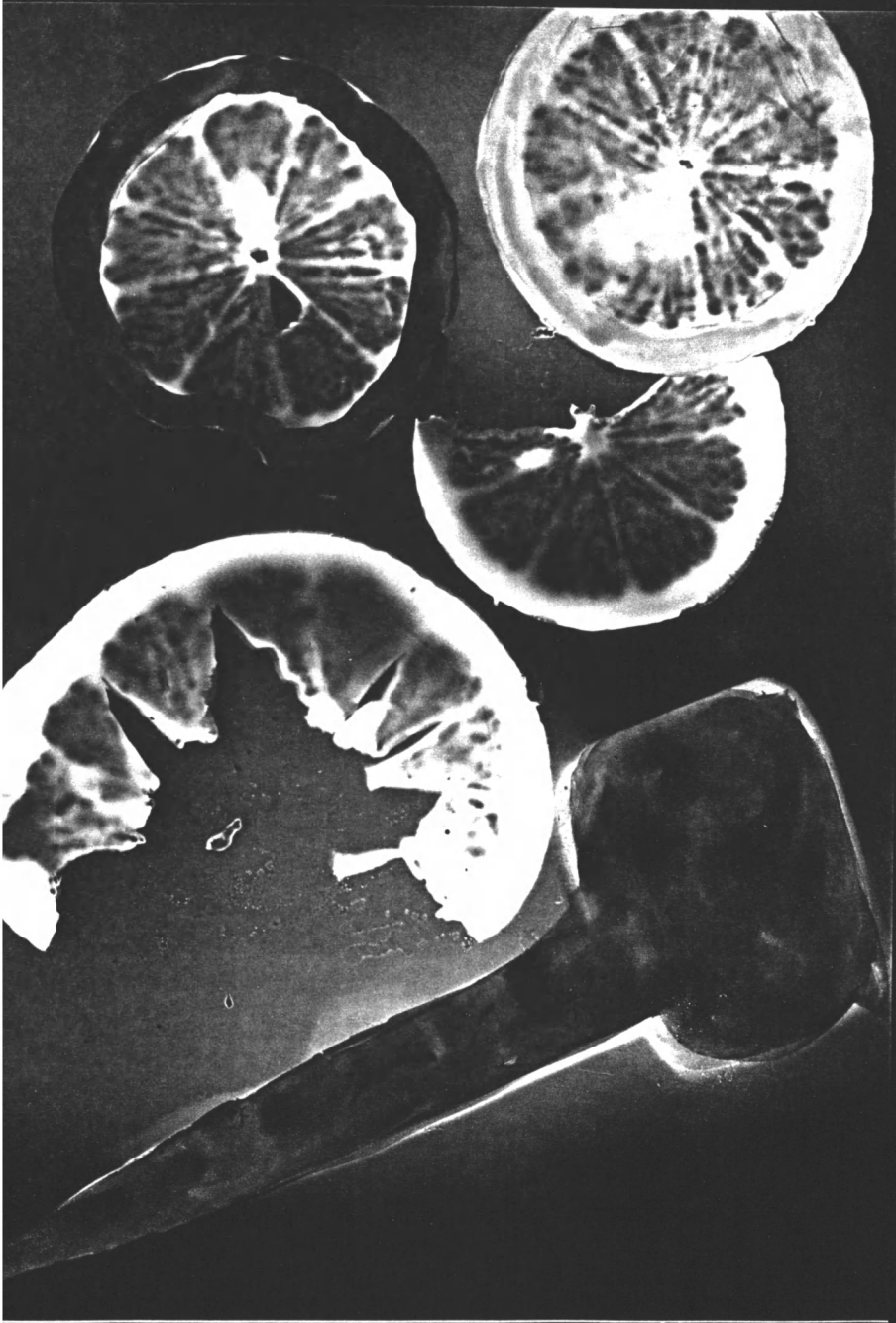




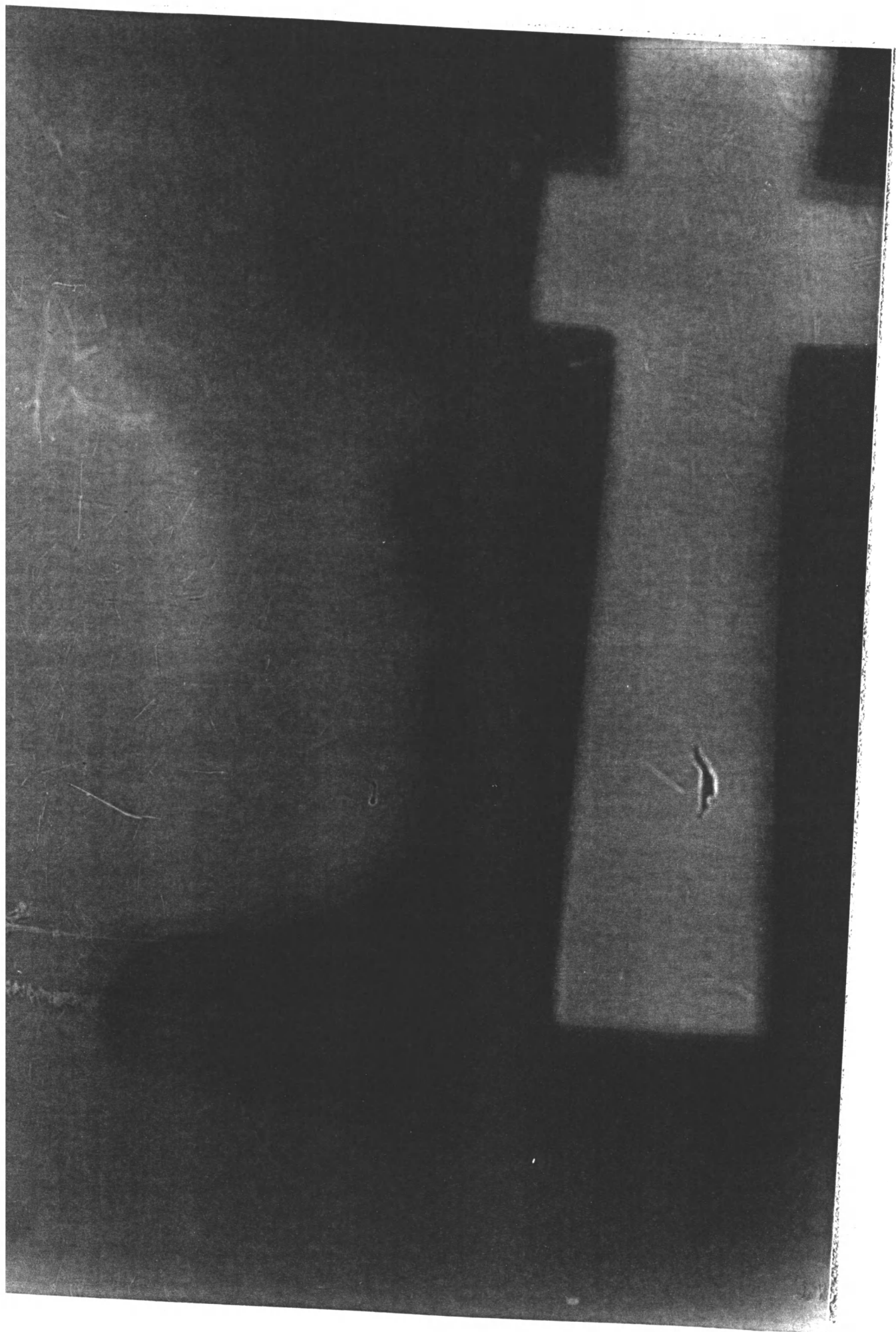
















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