

Fall 1983

PenQuest Volume 3, Number 2

Tess Gallagher

Judith Mizrahi

Dottie Fletcher

Rick Wagner

William Slaughter
University of North Florida

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unf.edu/penquest>

 Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Last, First. "Article Title." PenQuest Volume 3, Number 2 (1983): pages. Web. Date accessed. <http://digitalcommons.unf.edu/penquest/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at UNF Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in PenQuest by an authorized administrator of UNF Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [Digital Projects](#).

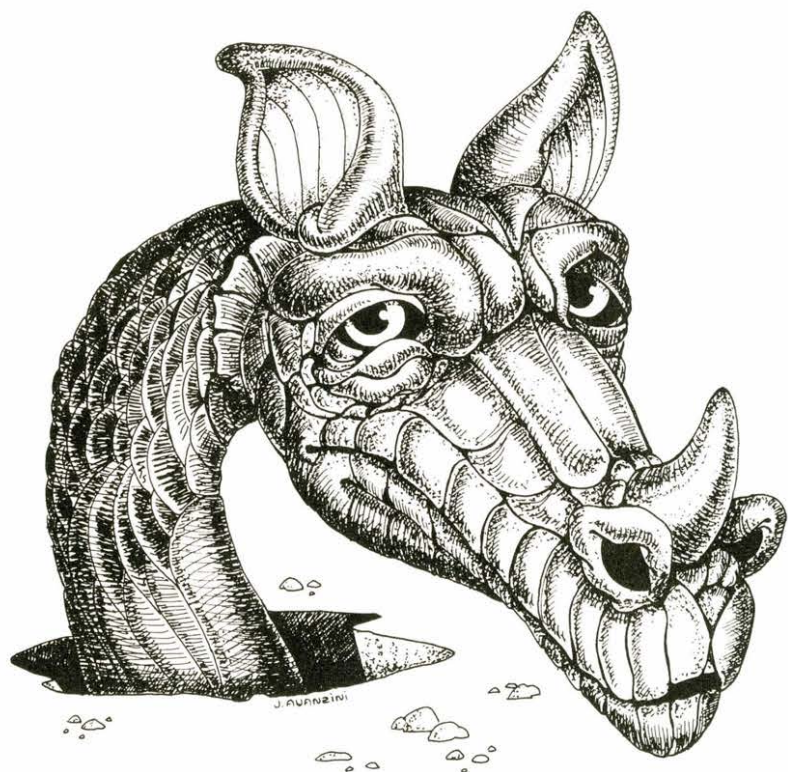
© Fall 1983 All Rights Reserved

Authors

Tess Gallagher, Judith Mizrahi, Dottie Fletcher, Rick Wagner, William Slaughter, Steve Balunan, Anne Calloway, Carol Grimes, Win Lyons, Barbara Ritchey, Jerry Nelson, Bruce Abbey, Howard Denson, Linda Willcox, and Helen Hagadorn

PENQUEST

Joe Avanzini



Editor: Judith Williamson
Assistant Editor /
Graphic Designer: Linda Willcox
Literary Advisor: William Slaughter
Graphics Advisors: Robert Cocanougher
Paul Karabinis
Paul Ladnier
Dave Porter

Special thanks to: Anne Kachergus, Sid Gray, Gary Bell, the Student Government Association, and all who contributed to this issue in creative material, time and moral support. We would also like to encourage the continuing cooperation and support of students, faculty and alumni, that PenQuest may remain a source of pride and achievement for the University of North Florida.

Publisher:
Brut Printing
503 Parker Street
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

Editorial and Business Office:
PenQuest
Language and Literature Department
Room 2649, Building 8
University of North Florida
Jacksonville, Florida 32216

Submissions, including name, address, and telephone number, should be made to the editorial and business office. No submissions can be returned, so be sure to keep a copy of your work.

PenQuest, a public document, was promulgated at an average cost of 2.00 per copy, funded by the Student Government Association, to provide an outlet for student talent in the fields of literature and visual arts.

Cover design by Liz Morrow

Table of Contents

Vol. 3, No. 2, Fall 1983

Prose

Hannukah Harbor	20
Jerry Nelson	
The Storm Pit	26
Howard Denson	

Poetry

Woodcutting on Lost Mountain	2
Tess Gallagher	
Women I have loved	8
Dottie Fletcher	
Untold Stories	10
William Slaughter	
Two German Women	12
Dottie Fletcher	
Tourists	15
Carol Grimes	
Rollin' Bones	18
Barbara Ritchey	
Night-letter	22
William Slaughter	
Domestic	24
Carol Grimes	
Hattie	30
Dottie Fletcher	

Illustrations

Joe Avanzini	inside front cover
Judith Mizrahi	7
Win Lyons	16-17

Photography

Rick Wagner	9
Steve Balunan	11
Anne Calloway	14
Steve Balunan	19
Bruce Abbey	23
Steve Balunan	25
Judith Mizrahi	29
Linda Willcox	31
Helen Hagadorn	32

for Leslie

Our father is three months dead
from lung cancer and you light another Camel,
ease the chainsaw into the log. You
don't need habits to tell us
you're the one most like him, but you tell
yourself, you do. Maybe the least loved
carries injury farther
into tenderness for having first to
pass through forgiveness. You
passed through. "I think he respected me
at the end," as if you'd waited a life time
to offer yourself that aloud to me.

"Top of the mountain!" your daughter cries.
She's ten, taking swigs with us
from the beer can in the January sun. We see
other mountain tops and trees forever.
A mountain could get lost in all this, right
enough, even standing on it, thinking this
is where you are.

"Remember the cabins we built when we were
kids? The folks logging Deer Park and
Black Diamond." My brother nods, pulls
the nose of the saw into the air as a chunk
falls. "We built one good one. They brought
their lunches and sat with us
inside -- spam sandwiches on white bread,
bananas for dessert and Mountain Bars, white
on the inside, pure sugar on
the inside -- the way they hurt your teeth.

Sawdust sprays across his knee, his face closes in thought. "Those whippings." He cuts the motor, wipes his forehead with an arm. "They'd have him in jail today. I used to beg and run circles. You got it worse because you never cried. It's a wonder we didn't run away." "Away to where?" I say. "There's no away when you're a kid. Before you can get there you're home."

"Once he took you fishing and left me behind," my brother says.
"I drew pictures of you sinking all over the chicken house. I gave you a head but no arms. We could go back today and there they'd be, boats sinking all down the walls."

His daughter is Leslie, named after our father. Then I think -- 'she's a logger's daughter, just like me' -- and the thought pleases as if the past had intended this present. "You didn't know you were doing it," I tell my brother, Morris, "but you figured how to stay in our childhood." "I guess I did. There's nothing I'd rather do," he says, "than cut wood. Look at that --" he points to stacks of logs high as a house he's thinned from the timber "They're going to burn them. Afraid somebody might take a good tree for firewood, so they'll burn half a forest. Damn, that's the Forest Service for you. Me -- I work here, they'll have to stop me."

Leslie carries split wood to the tailgate and I toss it into the truck. We make a game of it, trying to stack as fast as her father cuts. "She's a worker," Morris says. "Look at that girl go. Sonofagun, I wouldn't trade four boys for her."

Sawdust sprays across his knee, his face closes in thought. "Those whippings." He cuts the motor, wipes his forehead with an arm. "They'd have him in jail today. I used to beg and run circles. You got it worse because you never cried. It's a wonder we didn't run away." "Away to where?" I say. "There's no away when you're a kid. Before you can get there you're home."

"Once he took you fishing and left me behind," my brother says.
"I drew pictures of you sinking all over the chicken house. I gave you a head but no arms. We could go back today and there they'd be, boats sinking all down the walls."

His daughter is Leslie, named after our father. Then I think -- 'she's a logger's daughter, just like me' -- and the thought pleases as if the past had intended this present. "You didn't know you were doing it," I tell my brother, Morris, "but you figured how to stay in our childhood." "I guess I did. There's nothing I'd rather do," he says, "than cut wood. Look at that --" he points to stacks of logs high as a house he's thinned from the timber "They're going to burn them. Afraid somebody might take a good tree for firewood, so they'll burn half a forest. Damn, that's the Forest Service for you. Me -- I work here, they'll have to stop me."

Leslie carries split wood to the tailgate and I toss it into the truck. We make a game of it, trying to stack as fast as her father cuts. "She's a worker," Morris says. "Look at that girl go. Sonofagun, I wouldn't trade four boys for her."

No sir." He picks up the maul, gives a yell and whacks down through the center of a block thick as a man. It falls neatly into halves. "Look at that! Now that's good wood. That's beautiful wood," he says, like he made it himself.

I tell him how the cells of trees are like the blood cells of people, how trees, are the oldest organisms on the earth. Before the English cut the trees off Ireland, the Irish had three dozen words for green. He's impressed, mildly, has his own way of thinking about trees.

Tomorrow a log pile will collapse on him and he will just get out alive.

"Remember the time Dad fell the tree on us and momma saved us, pushed us into a ditch? It's a wonder we ever grew up."

"One of the horses they logged with, Dick was his name, Old Dick. They gave him to Ownie Brown and Dick got into the house while everyone was gone and broke all the dishes. Dishes -- what could they mean to a horse? Still, I think he knew what he was doing."

Ownie's wife, Sarah, had fifteen kids. She's the prettiest woman I'll ever see. Her son Lloyd took me down to the railroad tracks to show me the dead hounds. "We had too many so they had to shoot some." The hounds were skeletons by then, but they haven't moved all these years from the memory of that dark glen. I look at them, stretched on their sides, twin arches of bones leaping with beetles and crawlers into the bark-rich earth. Skipper and Captain -- Cappy for short. Their names and what seemed incomprehensible -- a betrayal -- which meant those who had care of you might, without warning, make an end of you in some godforsaken, heartless place. Lloyd spat like a father between the tracks, took my hand and led me back to the others.

Twenty years settles on the boys
of my childhood. Some of them loggers.
“It’s gone,” they tell me. “The Boom Days
are gone. We thought
they’d never end, there were
that many trees. But it’s finished,
or nearly. Nothing but stumps
and fireweed now.”

“Alaska,” Morris says, “that’s where the trees
are,” and I think of them, like some lost tribe
of wanderers, their spires and bloodless blood
climbing cathedral high into the moss-light
of days on all the lost mountains of
our childhoods.

Coming into the town we see the blue smoke
of the trees streaming like a mystery
the houses hold in common.
“Doesn’t seem possible --,” he says, “a tree
changed into a haze you could
put your hand through.”

“What’ll you do next, after the trees are gone?”

“Pack dudes in for elk.”

“Then what?”

“Die, I guess. Hell, I don’t know, ask
a shoemaker, ask a salmon...
Remember the time I was hunting and got lost,
forgot about the dark and me with no coat, no
compass? You and Dad fired rifles from the road
until I stumbled out. It
was midnight. But I got out. It’s a wonder
I could tell an echo from a shot, I was so cold,
so lost. Stop cussing, I told the old man, I’m
home, ain’t I? ‘You’re grown,’ he kept saying,
‘you’re a grown man.’
I must be part wild. I must be part tree or part
deer. I got on the track and I was lost

but it didn't matter. I had to go where it led.
I must be part bobcat."

Leslie is curled under my arm, asleep.

"Truck rocks them to sleep," Morris says.
piece of junk. I hope I don't get stopped. Look
at her sleep! right in the middle of the day.
Watch this: 'wake up honey, we're lost. Help me
get home. You went to sleep and got us lost.'
She must be part butterfly, just look at those eyes.
There -- she's gone again. I'll have to carry
her into the house. Happens every time.
Watch her, we'll go up the steps and she'll be
wide awake the minute I open the door.
Hard to believe, we had to be carried into houses
once, you and me. It's a wonder we ever
grew up."

Tomorrow a log pile will collapse
and he'll just get out alive.

He opens the door. Her eyes start,
suddenly awake.

"See, what'd I tell you. Wide awake. Butterfly,
you nearly got us lost, sleeping so long.
Here, walk for yourself. We're home."

PenQuest is pleased to present this never-before published poem
by renowned American poet Tess Gallagher, a recent visitor to
our campus.



Maria Teresa
has the hands of an angel
old hands that rest
in a lap without aprons
smooth hands as young as
her hands when she brought home
babies and gave them
to nurses in starched caps.

Maria Teresa
has the hands of an angel
pure as white porcelain
bearing no love marks
squeezes might leave
her hands, like an angel's,
that never touch ground
or small, dirty faces
or tired-man shoulders,
hold tight
to the rosary
heaped in clean skirts.

Maria Teresa
has the hands of an angel
with no signs of aging,
no signs of life.



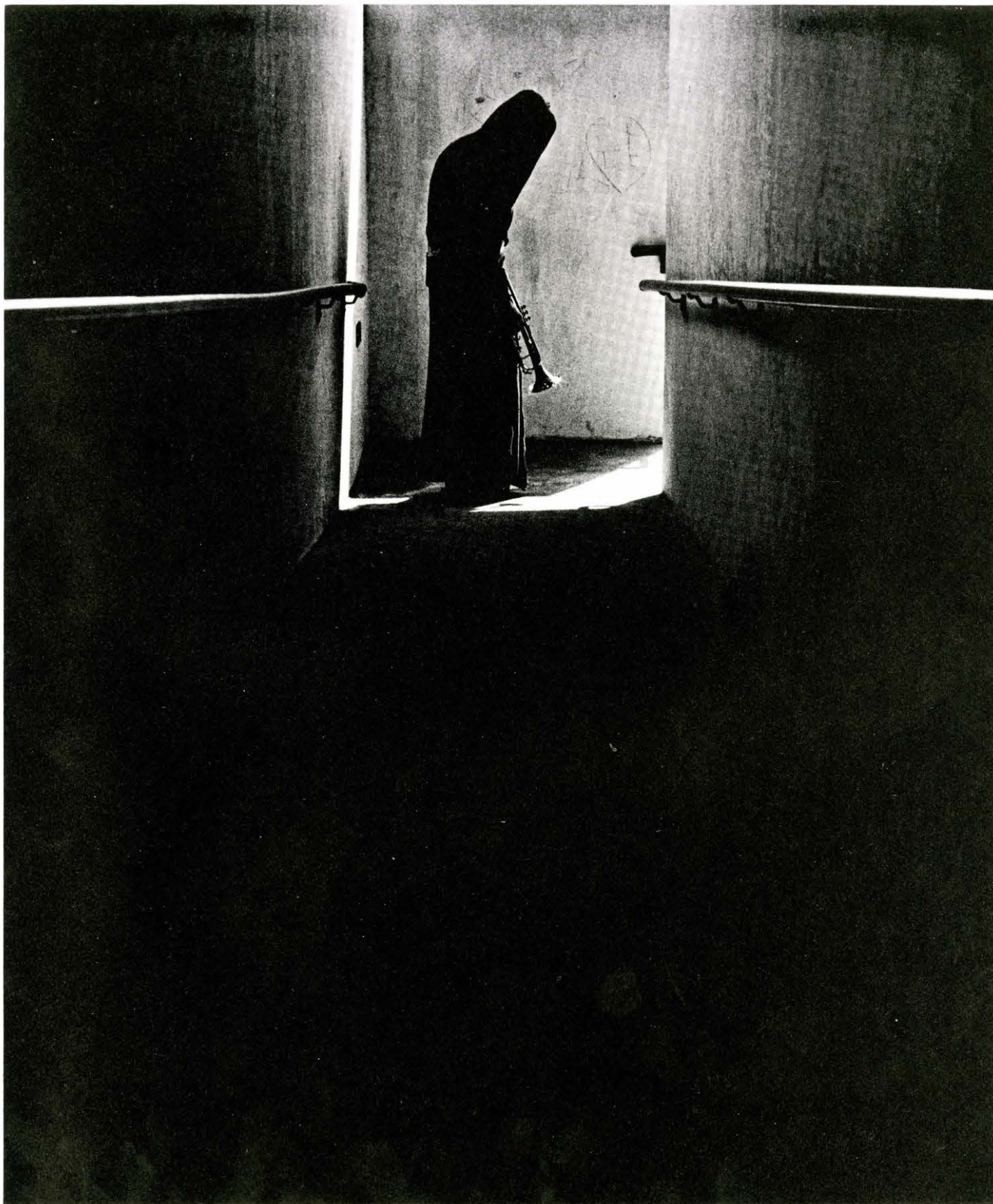
He rarely speaks, but when he does...
it's all divination and conjury.

He prizes exact words only.
Says water, and water's there.

Or his dead wife's name,
and her presence

fills the trembling air.
His small industries appall.

What stories he has to tell,
he'll not tell. Ever.



Anna is tall.
She holds herself proudly
and little girls
march behind her
to the shores of lakes
to pleasant places.
She reassures with forceful smiles
and clipped sharp words
small girls obey
She has become the leader
who never came
to lead her
out of Dresden
away from bombings
and American planes
gunning down school girls
in the streets
gunning down Little Sister
before her eyes
Never again
will Anna leave her
ever.

Miriam feels shame
when she looks
on the soft underside
of her forearm
and sees the tattooed number.
She covers it
with lacy sleeves
and sweet perfume
but she can't forget
the child that once wore
the blue number.
She was so alone
so alive
when so many were dead.
She speaks the Kaddish
with tightly closed eyes
squeezing out memories
too horrible to see
and the snyagogue matrons
avert their eyes
should any blue
show through
at the end
of Miriam's cuff.

Anne Calloway



I saw a girl at Mesa Verde.
Saw her cheeks, her teeth
So formed, they seemed to me
More lovely, with more mystery
Than relics wrought in savage artistry.

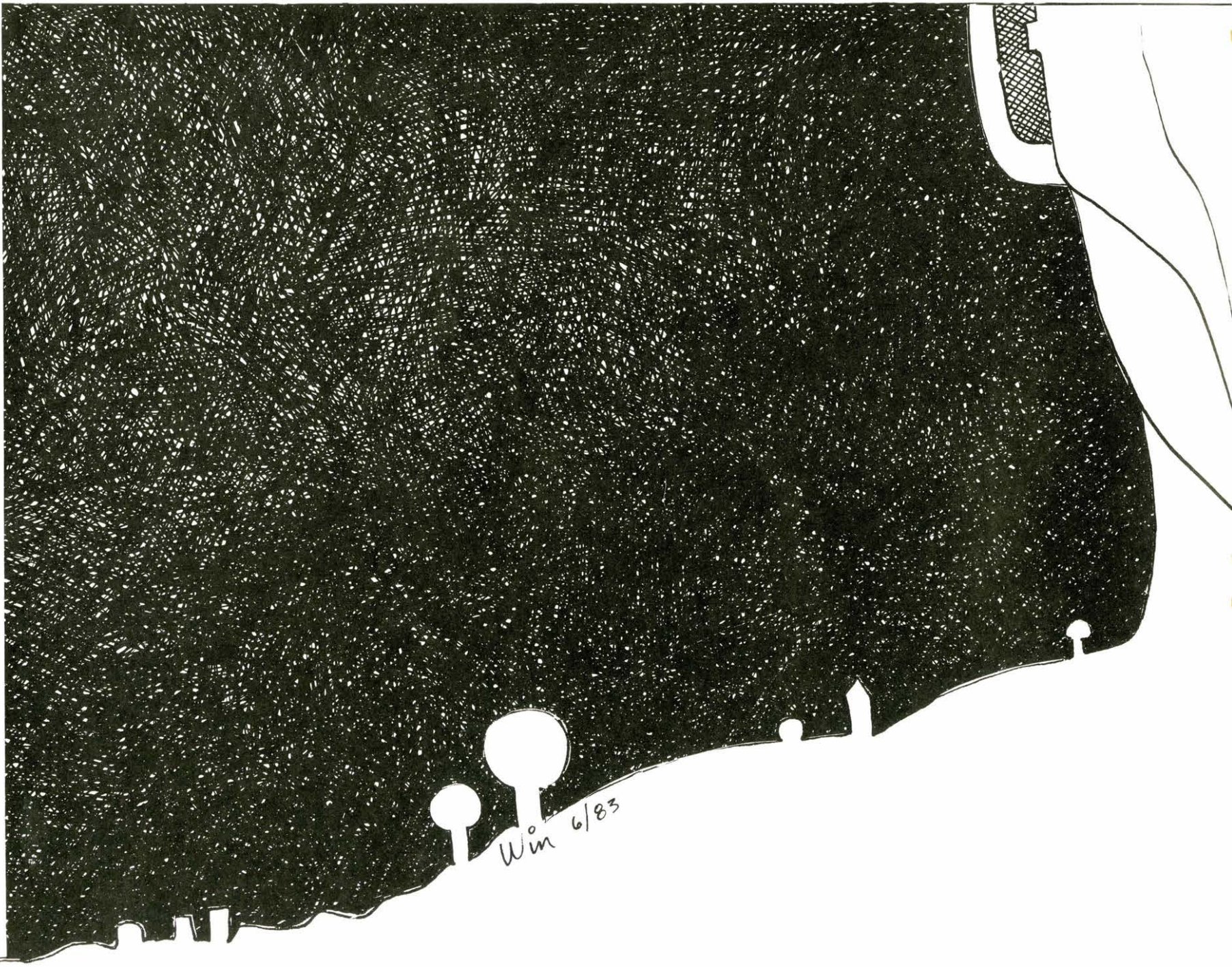
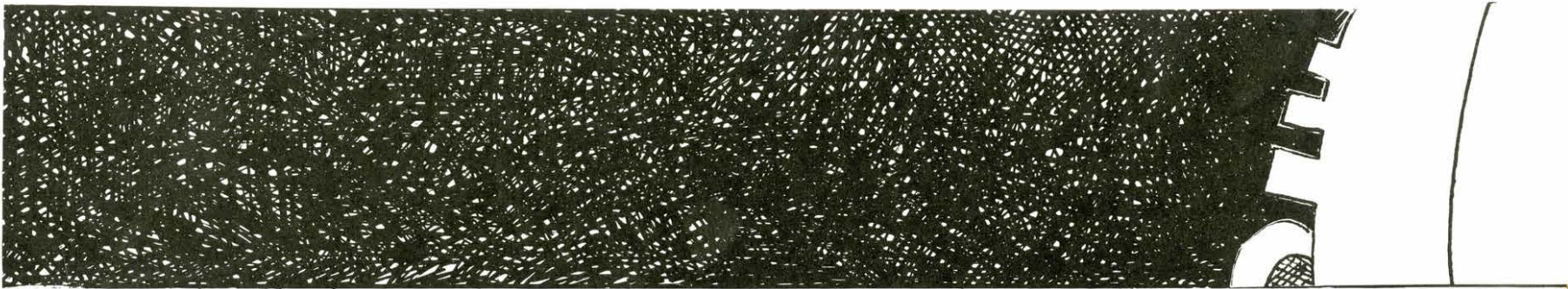
She was what I had meant to be.

I saw my father's eyes
Snatched from the carved cliffs
Snap at her brazen beauty
Follow her sloping hips.

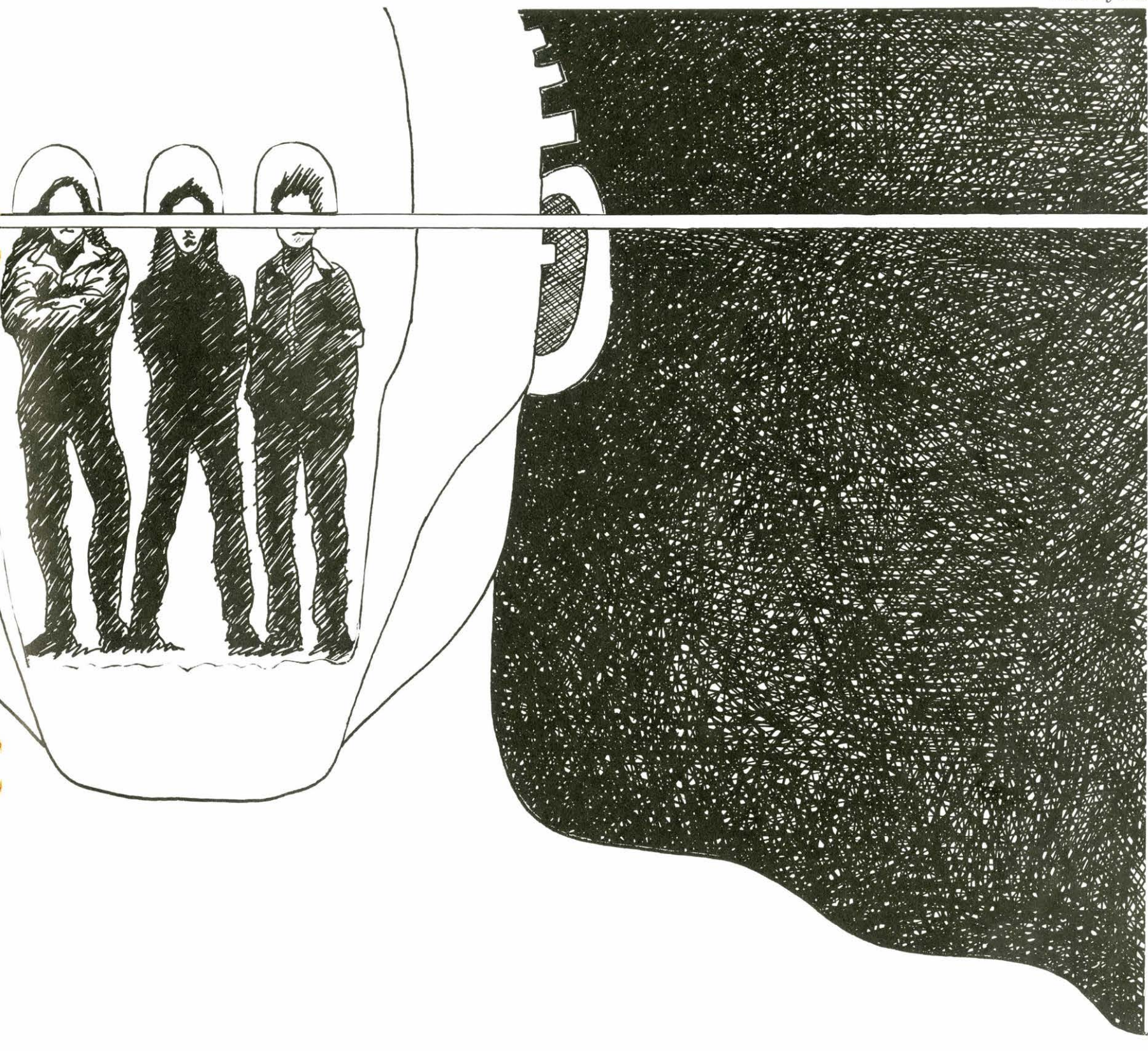
She sauntered by intently

Her blue-black hair lashed at me,
Standing there beside the path,
And cut me cruelly.

Me in my guise of fourteen.



Win 6/83



Rollin' bones
In the street
Twenty-two black men
On his beat.
A siren sounds,
All's a flutter,
When the Pig's around,
No black's a brother.
Everybody's
On his own.
One is caught
And one alone.

Back of a squad car
Saturday night,
Cursing his luck
And cursing the white,
While somewhere else
And sometime later
The game goes on
Stakes even greater.
Twenty-one black men
On his beat,
Rollin' bones
In the street.



“Did you bring the music, Jerry?” Joe asked me. Joe, who is on the short and bald side, plays piano for our trio. He knows every popular tune ever written. One time when we were playing at Ponte Vedra, an elderly woman asked him to play some music from George White’s Scandals of 1923 and Joe played three songs.

Anyway, that part about the music is an inside joke. I have a pocketful of index cards with the names of the tunes and the key and that’s the music. We just know the songs by memory.

Tonight we were playing at the gym of a Jewish school with attached synagogue. We called it Hanukkah Harbor or the Jewish-American Club. Tonight I was the leader so the name of the trio was “Jerry and the Geriatrics.” I’ve been playing sax for pay since I was twelve years old.

The gym was a full-sized basketball court with a small stage at one end. Travel posters featuring the Eiffel Tower, the changing of the guard, Tel Aviv, and the surf at Wakikki were hung up around the walls.

“I’m on the dance committee and we want a lot of Latin music today,” a stocky woman told us. “You can see our theme - Latin America,” and she pointed to the travel posters.

“Okay, we’ll play all the rhumbas and cha-chas you want,” I told her.

“Cancel ‘Around the World.’ We will start off with ‘Hello, Dolly,’” I told Joe and Sam. Sam, our septuagenarian drummer, once played with some big name bands. He’s fat and bald, too, but still has a steady beat and keeps up with the latest Latin rhythms. Sam doesn’t keep fresh batteries in his hearing aid and sometimes Joe will talk to Sam simply mouthing the words but not sounding them. Sam slaps at his hearing aid set in his shirt pocket and Joe starts talking normally. Works every time.

“I’m on the dance committee and we want you to play more Jewish dances tonight. We want more Hora and Frailahs, particularly,” Mr. Witten told us. Mr. Witten had been a member of the club for twenty-five years and was one of the band’s friends when it came time to signing a new contract. We would pay attention to him. He’d get all the Jewish dances he wanted.

We started playing “Star Dust.” I played the first chorus and let Joe have the second chorus. A white-haired old lady came up to me and said, “I just thought of a good number for you to play - ‘Star Dust.’”

I looked closely at her and saw she was totally sincere. “Yeah, that is really a good dance tune. We’ll play it for you right away,” I assured her.

Whenever we play a request for someone, one of us always tries to get his attention and point to him so he will know we are playing his song. If you don’t do this, he will come up at intermission and tell us “You never did play my request.”

“I’m chairman of the dance committee and we’ve got to talk over the program,” Mr. Nussbaum announced. Mr. Nussbaum owns a couple of theatre chains but knows absolutely nothing about music. I’d trade my knowledge of music for his theatres any day of the week.

“We want you to play while we eat,” Mr. Nussbaum advised. “We are serving lox, bagels, and cream cheese tonight. Did you know that lox is now ten dollars a pound? Then, right after we eat, we’ll have the entertainment. I’ve got the Morris Family and they have their own music.”

“Jerry, did he say the Morris Family? Aren’t they the bunch who sing all that religious music - gospel music? Is the Rabbi here?” Joe asked me in apprehension.

I looked around the crowd and located the Rabbi. He was a tall black-haired man. He was animatedly talking to another man.

“Yes, Joe the Rabbi is here. Wonder how he likes gospel music.”

I was standing up playing clarinet when a man in dark glasses shuffled to the band. He reached out, grabbed the bell of my clarinet and said, “It’s all right. I’ve got it.”

“Hey, man, turn loose. I can’t play if you are holding my horn,” I yelled.

“It’s okay. I won’t drop the mike. I know this song and I want to sing it.”

“You don’t have the microphone. You’ve got my clarinet. Turn loose!” I tried to wrest the horn away from him but he held on determinedly.

A gray-haired woman came running up. “Leon, you don’t have the mike. You have this man’s horn. Let the horn go and I’ll get you the mike.”

She looked at me and said, “Leon has been having a little trouble with his eyes lately.”

A few minutes later, a man whose appearance could only be described as portly came up and said, “Say, you folks are playing too loud. Everybody is complaining about it. I’m on the dance committee.”

Joe waited until the member had left and said, “We have only three instruments, a five-watt amplifier, and we are playing a full-sized basketball court and we are too loud? The U.S. Marine Band couldn’t fill up this barn.”

The committee members started serving the food while we played a medley of Irish songs. For some reason, this group always liked Irish songs.

Mr. Nussbaum was up on the stage now and bellowed to us, “Play a drum roll.” Sam played his version of a drum roll. It sounded like two Coke bottles rolling down a flight of stairs.

“Now, for your entertainment, we proudly present the Morris

Family,” Nussbaum was shouting at the top of his voice trying to be heard above the din.

“Talk about Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Sing about Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.” The Morris Family, ten strong, sang into microphones and were amplified by huge loudspeakers set across the stage. “Believe in Jesus and be saved,” the song continued. The amplified sound was so overpowering, it was impossible to ignore it.

Like spectators at a tennis match, four hundred eyes swung toward the Rabbi who sat transfixed in his chair. Suddenly he leaped out of his chair and shrieked, “Not in my synagogue, they’re not! Not in my synagogue!” He began a rush to the stage where the Morris Family Gospel Singers were blithely singing their Christian song. The Rabbi was livid with anger and his paleness contrasted sharply with his dark clothing. Just before he arrived at the stage, two burly members of his congregation intercepted him and, taking his arms, began to lead him to a side room.

The Morris Family was through with their first song and the silence was broken by the cries of the Rabbi. “What idiot did this? I want to see Nussbaum!” His indignation and rage were apparent in the tone of the Rabbi’s voice. The Morris Family was now singing, “If You Don’t Know Jesus, You Will Never Be Saved.” Mr. Nussbaum was not in evidence.

“Looks like the program is finally over,” Sam whispered to me. “Everybody has left the place.”

“Yes, they are standing outside and in the halls waiting for the singing to end and the dance to start again. They will come back in as soon as they hear our music. We will start with ‘In the Mood.’ We have got to get the party going again.”

As soon as we started playing, everyone came in and resumed their seats at their tables and started dancing. The party continued as though nothing had happened.

Flora, a tall buxom blond of indeterminate age, wearing a sleeveless white evening gown, one of the very few evening gowns on the floor, came to the bandstand and advised, “I’m ready to sing my number now.” (Flora sang a little song every party.)

I told the band, “Let’s play ‘I Could Have Danced All Night.’”

Flora once confided in me. “I used to have a nightclub act. I sang all over the Catskills on the Borscht Circuit and that’s where I learned to sell a song. You can’t just stand there and sing. You’ve got to have showmanship. You’ve got to *move*. That’s what sells a song.”

Flora began singing. As she sang, her feet moved in a soft-shoe routine. It looked as if she had a bad case of athlete’s foot which she was trying to scratch without removing her shoes.

Flora got to the end of the song. As she sang, “I could have danced, danced, danced,” she extended her arms successively higher on each *danced*. It was apparent that Flora had forgotten

to shave or had put on the evening gown as an afterthought. Joe appraised her hirsute growth and remarked, “Looks like Flora and Lady Gillette never got acquainted.”

“Let me have the mike,” the club president asked, “it’s time for the birthdays and anniversaries.”

“Ladies and gentlemen, if you will please take your seats, I want to announce the birthdays and anniversaries.”

Nobody moved to their seats. Nobody stopped talking. Nobody even turned around.

Sam reached over to the amp and gingerly turned up the volume knob. Immediately a large cloud of black smoke arose from the old amplifier. The smoke smelled like resin and spread among the tables. The club members sitting nearby hastily got out of their chairs and moved toward the exit doors.

“Pull the plug, pull the plug!” bawled the president. The plug was twenty feet away on the end of a long extension cord. Sam placidly went over to the outlet and pulled the plug. The smoke kept billowing out of the amplifier for a full minute after Sam pulled the plug. A club member picked up a small fire extinguisher from the kitchen and started wildly spraying foam as soon as he left the kitchen door. A trail of foam showed his exact route. He sprayed the amplifier and part of Sam’s drum set with white foam. Sam had a rag and was trying frantically to get the foam off his drums. It was probably the first time the drums had been cleaned in years.

The announcements were now over. The club members were filing out of the gymnasium and Mr. Nussbaum, his once-a-year duties over, said, “Everything okay with you fellows? Did you get some bagels? Sorry, we ran out of lox.”

“Mr. Nussbaum,” I said, “can’t you do something about this piano? It’s way out of tune. It needs a tuning real bad.”

“What do you mean?” Mr. Nussbaum was indignant. “We just had the piano painted. Looks good to me. Say, you men might as well pack up. Everybody is leaving. It was a good party.”

“Yeah, it was a good party.”

I'm writing this
in and from a country
'where women cry out
to be abused'

Who said that?
Did you?

Ghosts are ghostlier
after midnight
than before...

My past is always catching
up with me. How
far away are you?

Looking through
your telescope,
burning

my old letters.
Life expands.

It disfigures too.



If ever you asked me
to mend your shirt
I would stroke
its soft frayed edges
and bring it
smelling of tobacco and
sweat
to my face
and as I sewed
I would start
at the brown

smallness

of my hands.



It was a mystery who had sold the bad moonshine that blinded Olan Forsyth. The reputable bootleggers in the county - Martin Bragg, Bailey Boykins, and Greasy Felix Higginbotham - all denied they would sell poisonous shine, especially since it would be damning to their future trade. They all said it had to be a newcomer in the county who didn't have sense enough to stay away from old radiators.

When Olan Forsyth tapped his way into the Walden Cafe with his new white cane, he felt the tension caused by this mystery. An awkward and unnatural silence swept the room and hushed even the town characters at the roundtable. He knew that they did not know what to say to a man who had been blinded - a man who had refused to name his likely poisoner.

There was a pregnant pause before they all exploded at once with conversation, welcoming him back and asking how he was getting along with his cane. Olan Forsyth's ear for voices caused him to believe that either Martin Bragg or Bailey Boykins was at the large table or in a nearby booth.

Forsyth brushed off any sympathetic remarks from the men with whom he had communed over cups of coffee and apple pie and doughnuts. "I ain't dead," he said. "And the doc says that, except for my eyes and a heart that needs watching, I ought to live so long until the governor himself has to come up and wring my neck to get me off this earth." He waved in the direction of the courthouse land office where he had worked for twenty years. "I got my retirement from the county and my disability check, so I know there's going to be food on the table. Even got a new microwave to cook it in. And even blind, I can make it to the storm pit if a twister comes up tornado alley again."

The waitress filled Forsyth's coffee cup and said, "That sure is a fine storm pit, Mr. Forsyth. Not one of those red mud and rotten plank pits that my daddy built. And you do get a lot of tornadoes in your area."

Another awkward silence. Forsyth imagined someone asking, "Olan, who *did* sell that juice to you?" He knew that Martin Bragg or Bailey Boykins regularly checked the drop point next to Forsyth's tool shed. Forsyth left a note about how much he wanted in one spot and the money in another spot, and the transaction could take place while he was at work and while state or county agents were elsewhere.

Someone cleared his throat and asked, "That storm pits's solid concrete, isn't it, Forsyth?"

Another voice added, "That thing could take a direct hit from a A-bomb." The roundtable crew laughed vigorously, trying to resurrect the frivolity that had died earlier.

Forsyth nodded and laughed, too. "My brother helped me pour that pit after those tornadoes hit us back in the 50's. My brother moved out of tornado alley area in a May, and -" He sighed. "- then a tornado killed him and his family in their new mobile

home in a July. Since it didn't do no good to move, I told myself then that, as long as I could see a tornado coming on, I wouldn't be caught in another. There's a certain look that the hills get right before a twister." Forsyth sucked on his teeth. "Of course, with no eyes, I now have to sniff like a bird dog to keep up with the changes in the weather."

"I always have to listen to the radio to tell when a twister's coming," some voice said.

Another coffee drinker changed the topic: "What do you use the storm pit for when it's not storming, Forsyth?"

Forsyth smiled faintly. Now, he would throw out the bait that would hook the guilty moonshiner. "Oh, it has some of my sister Lizzie's preserves out there...and I also keep my liquor supply in the pit."

"You ain't afraid nobody will steal it while you're in the house, are you?" somebody joked.

"Only my eyes are bad, not my ears. I noticed when I got back from the hospital that I can hear anything that moves out there, except when the air compressor and water pump kick on with my air conditioner going. So, except when that racket is going on, I can still take a 'sound shot' with my shotgun." Forsyth finished his coffee and added. "Yep, I got Lizzie's preserves out there, some canned okra and maters, and, locked up in a footlocker, my drinkin' whiskey, including all that stuff that did the damage to my eyes. That batch will be there until the federal man comes out from Birmingham next week. I reckon he's going to want to take it with him to get the fingerprints off."

During the sudden silence at the table, Forsyth rose and announced, "I've got business to attend to, boys." He slapped two quarters on the table. "Y'all come out and visit sometime." Forsyth put his hand on a nearby counter and guided himself outside the cafe to where his sister was waiting. He extended his elbow to be guided across the street to the parking lot of the grocery store.

Forsyth ignored Lizzie's chatter about the gossip she had picked up in the supermarket and nodded absentmindedly at her praise of his ability to walk unaided with his cane. Instead, Forsyth estimated how long it would take Bragg or Boykins or Greasy Felix to realize that the fingerprints on the jugs would send them to prison for years. Forsyth sighed, knowing that there probably weren't any prints on the jug. He tended to wipe the large jugs clean before bringing them into the house. But the knights of the Walden Cafe roundtable didn't know that.

From past decades of solving the world's problems at the large table of the cafe, Forsyth knew that the town characters thrived on discussions of justice, personal and legal revenge, and the odds of beating the law because of the absence of witnesses or hard evidence.

As his sister eased her car out through the small town streets,

past the city limits, and out into the country, Forsyth savoured the scene of the guilty moonshiner learning about his visit. Olan Forsyth had a vivid imagination and recreated the cafe in his mind, as he imagined Bragg or Boykins, astonished, spilling his coffee as he was told what Forsyth said, or Greasy Felix, feigning coolness, claiming he was not concerned ("He didn't buy that stuff from me"), but panicking inside all the while. Though blind, Forsyth "saw" the technicolor reality of the scene and even smelled the noontime scent of hamburgers sizzling, coffee perking, and lemons being squeezed into iced tea. He imagined each moonshiner being convicted of poisoning him and weeping as the judge pronounced lengthier and lengthier sentences.

Except...except there probably weren't any prints on the jug, and the courts would not be able to prove that the moonshine came specifically from any one man.

When the car stopped suddenly and Lizzie pulled up the brake, Forsyth realized that the forty-five-minute trip to his country house was over. By now, Martin Bragg was sliding into a chair at the roundtable even if he hadn't been there during Olan's visit. As Lizzie put the groceries on the shelves and set a plate of food before him, Forsyth imagined with each spoonful that he was Bragg or Boykins receiving each bit of news. As Lizzie removed his empty plate, Forsyth knew that a sick man would be forcing a smile at the waitress at that instant.

"You seem to be in a good mood, Olan," Lizzie said later, as she climbed behind her wheel to go home.

"Why not? I'm home from the hospital, my therapy's over, and I've had a pleasant trip into town with my favorite sister."

"You shouldn't be here by yourself, though."

"Let's don't start another fight, Lizzie. I'm staying here by myself." He patted his side. "I'm wearing this beeper you got me, so, if anything goes wrong, all I got to do is push this and it'll alert folks at your house and Cliff's and -"

"You got your glycerin pills, Olan?"

He patted his shirt pocket. "Lizzie, I'm going to be all right, but there is one thing you can do: call me when it gets dark, so I can click on my lights. One of my friends might drop in if it looks like I'm still up."

That evening, he listened to the news on the television and clicked off the set during the cacophony of a game show. He rocked on his porch until Lizzie called to tell him that night had come. Forsyth pulled shut the venetian blinds in the living room and cut on one light. He turned on the air conditioner and washed his few dirty dishes until he heard the water pump kick to life. As he rinsed off the dishes, he felt the small frame house vibrating with the sound of the air conditioner. He checked the hands of a kitchen clock with his fingers until fifteen minutes had passed. Then he slipped outside onto the back porch and listened to the chorus of crickets.

He could also hear noises from the storm pit. Smiling, he tiptoed down the back steps and felt for a string that would guide him in a half-circle to the boarded-over old well and from there to the storm pit.

Forsyth could hear somebody cursing inside the storm pit as the person struggled to jimmy open the footlocker in which the liquor would have to be hidden. From the sound of leather soles

scraping on the concrete, Forsyth deduced that the man was turning around every few seconds to check if he was alone. The man probably would shine a light every few seconds toward the house.

Hearing the lock popping loose from the locker, Forsyth hurried to the side of the metal door and bolted it. Grinning, he challenged, "Who's that trespassing on my property?" He waited a few seconds. "Come on. Answer up. Who's in there? Don't say. 'Nobody but us chickens,' 'cause I know better." He grinned at the silence and imagined Martin Bragg and Bailey Boykins or Greasy Felix trying to figure his next move. The man would shine his light in vain trying to find a crack that would enable him to force the door open, but he would go through his frantic search only after Forsyth had left. It would take him hours to realize he was practically entombed in concrete.

Forsyth followed the line back to the well and the house and slept soundly for the first time since he was taken to the hospital months before. Around midnight, he heard a faint clanging and knocking from the storm pit, but he cut on the room air conditioner in the bedroom, and the humming drowned out the sounds.

During the next day, Forsyth avoided the storm pit in order to add to his captive's tension. Forsyth sat on the porch and visualized the panic in the pit. If the visitor had brought a gun, he would not have fired it off against the concrete wall, lest the ricochet cut him to pieces; eventually he would have fired it at the metal door, without effect. Certainly, if the visitor had a gun, he would not kill Forsyth as long as he was locked up.

That evening, after his sister Lizzie had left, Forsyth returned to the storm pit. Unlatching a steel shutter and flipping it open, Forsyth idly spoke toward the small window, "Well, now, exactly who do we have here?"

"For God's sake, Mr. Forsyth, please let me out of here, and I'll get off your property."

Forsyth cocked his head, trying to place the voice. "You're not Greasy Felix. You're either -"

"I'm Bailey, Mr. Forsyth. Please let me go."

"Let's don't rush things, Mr. Boykins. You blinded me, and I want you to think about how you can make up for what you did to me. You used to be a man of integrity, and a person could trust what you made and sold."

"Mr. Forsyth, I didn't know the whiskey was bad, really."

"Quit whining, Mr. Boykins. That fellow Wheedle over at the Gap bought some of your juice, and he died, on a Monday. You knew about it then. And you dropped off that stuff in there on a Wednesday. Yes, Mr. Boykins, you knew. Of course, it's a blessing that what I bought only blinded me and nothing else."

Boykins persisted, "I ain't lying. I really didn't know."

"Ignorance of the law and the quality of your own moonshine ain't no excuse," Forsyth said with finality.

"You can't leave me in here. I'll die."

"Oh, you'll only be here until the federal man comes. I guess your flashlight batteries are dead now, but you saw there's a pallet to sleep on and breakfast bars to munch on. The astronauts eat them. And if you get thirsty, there's that liquor in the footlocker." Forsyth ignored Boykins' gasp and continued, "Too bad

I removed the preserves and vegetables. They had a right good amount of liquid in them.” As he was latching the shutters, Forsyth mused, “Real liquor is better than potlikker anytime, eh, Mr. Boykins?”

During the next day, Forsyth rocked on the front porch and chatted with an afternoon visitor about the summer heat. In the house, the television blared out commercials, quiz shows, and occasional bulletins about tornadoes in eastern Mississippi. Outside, the compressor kicked on to help mar the tranquillity of the countryside. Forsyth listened hard to discern cries of help from the storm pit, and, in his imagination, he heard every hoarse scream and racking gasp from Boykins’ body. In reality, however, he knew that, if there had been a sound, only he would have known that it wasn’t from a television show.

Lizzie dropped by in the late afternoon and brought the gossip as she prepared his big meal of the day. “That Bailey Boykins has disappeared,” Lizzie said. “The word is that the police were going to arrest him. He must be in California by now. His wife Barbie claims she doesn’t know where he is. Poor thing, I don’t know why a good woman like that’s got to get tied up with someone like Bailey Boykins. Trash like that would steal the fur coat off the family cat if they could find the zipper.” In her business-like manner, Lizzie clip-clopped across the kitchen and put up the dishcloth. “You call me or beep me if you need me. I’ve got to get home.”

That night, when Forsyth opened the shutters to the storm pit, he heard a desperate voice: “Mr. Forsyth, please. I’ve got to have water. You - you can’t do this to me. It ain’t right, regardless of what you think I did. The Bible, it says that vengeance ain’t yours or mine. It’s the Lord’s.”

“That’s true, Brother Boykins, but the Old Testament also says that you take an eye for an eye. Anyway, you just trust in the Lord and quit worrying. I’m only an old blind man with a heart condition, and I don’t have no control over what you do. I don’t know how long you can last without water. I *believe* you will make it until the federal man comes. I also don’t know if all of that liquor you sold me was bad or just that one bottle. You might be able to drink some of it or all of it, without any harm coming to you. It’s a matter between you and the Lord.”

The next day, when Lizzie started up her car to leave, she fretted about her clean clothes on the line and about the storm that was coming up. But Forsyth was not listening. He kept nodding, trying to hurry her up. When he could no longer hear her car in the distance, he hurried to the storm pit so fast he got slight rope burns on his hands from the string to the pit.

Without waiting for darkness, Forsyth flipped open the metal shutters. There was no sound. “You in there, Boykins?”

A weak voice asked, “Do you have the window open, Forsyth? I can’t see the stars.” A hand reached out from the small window and felt about. An oak leaf swirled in the growing breeze and caught on Boykins’ fingers.

“It’s daylight out here, Boykins.”

There was a sigh of infinite hopelessness. “Then you’ve won, Forsyth...I’m cold stone blind.”

Forsyth cackled, for he well understood that tone of voice. Only a newly blinded man sounded that way. It was his own voice from a few months past.

A speck of dust flew into Forsyth’s eye, and he fluttered an eyelid trying to work up enough tears in his eyes to wash the speck out. “Well, Mr. Boykins, I need to let you out while it’s still daylight. Your car is over there in the woods some place, and I’m sure you’ll want to get on home.” The wind was blowing harder and flapping Forsyth’s clothing against his arms and legs. “I wouldn’t worry about that federal man. I never did get around to calling him. Anyway, since you’ve been out here, it wouldn’t prove anything with your fingerprints over everything, so the bottles can’t be used as evidence against you.”

Forsyth pulled the bolt on the metal door and opened it an inch, until he cocked his head to listen to the sky and hills. “It’s coming! It’s happening again!” He knew it: there was that sound again in the distance. He tried to remember the times before, and he sucked in lungful after lungful of air, trying to smell the coming storm. He tried to force his dead eyes to let him see that certain look on the horizon. Suddenly, in his mind, he saw the scene with technicolor brilliance. “It’s there!” Dizzily, he felt a roaring, yes, one growing steadily louder, like - yes! - like a train on a track.

“Oh, God,” he whispered, “a twister!”

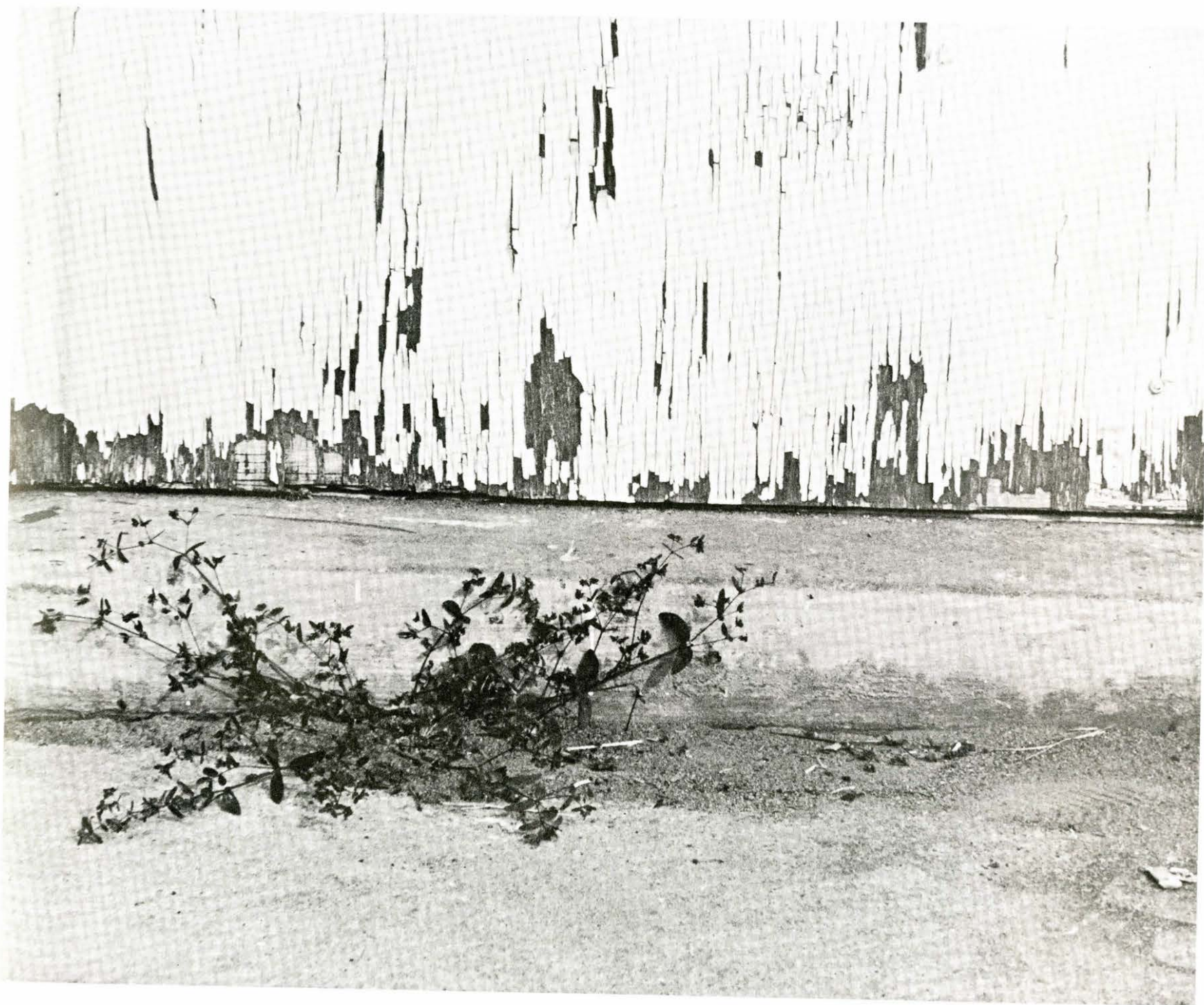
He braced himself to jerk open the door and throw himself to safety inside the storm pit, but the metal door slammed shut. Forsyth pulled on the door, but felt Boykins holding it and bolting it from the inside. Forsyth felt the roaring grow much louder. The funnel, a giant one, had to be in his fields somewhere.

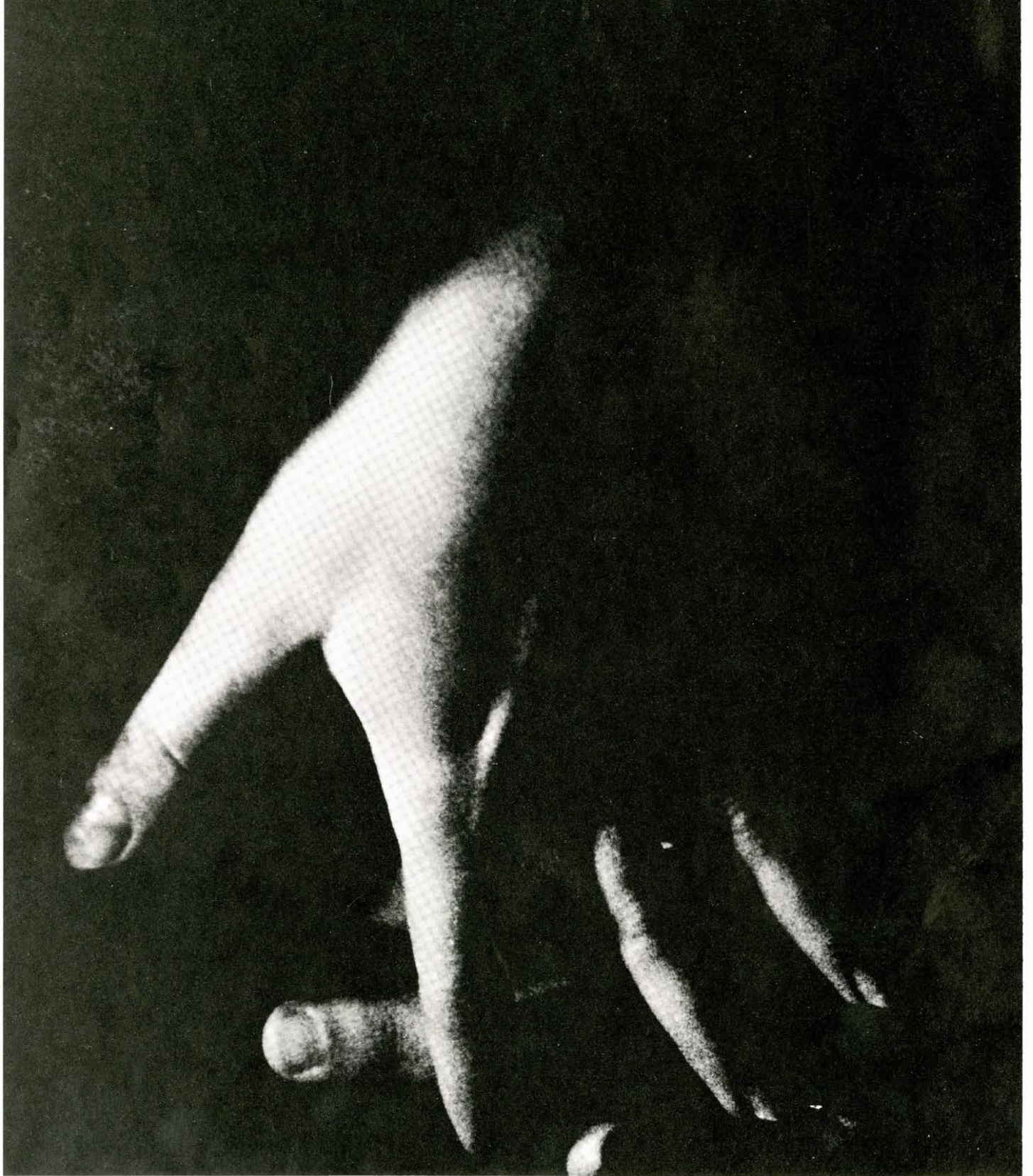
He tried to jerk harder at the door, but his arms had turned numb on him. “Boykins, save me! Open this damned door!” Screaming, Forsyth could no longer hear even his own desperate cries, as he felt a tornado tear through his yard and house, obliterating his world and ripping into his own chest in its final moment of fury.

As the crickets competed with the drone of the air conditioner from the house, Forsyth’s body, hands clutching the chest, lay next to the storm pit, while inside there was the laughing and weeping of Bailey Boykins.



The nigra maid
Grandmama used
had witch black eyes
that hated me
I knew she'd take
a stick to me
if given half a chance
so I made sure
that all my games
stayed close to Grandmama's skirts.
Every now and once again
I'd feel
those pin-point eyes
on me
on my white neck
squeezing me down
and when I'd look
to meet her gaze,
she'd open up
the back screen door
spit at the air
in our backyard
then let
the door
slam hard.







UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA

