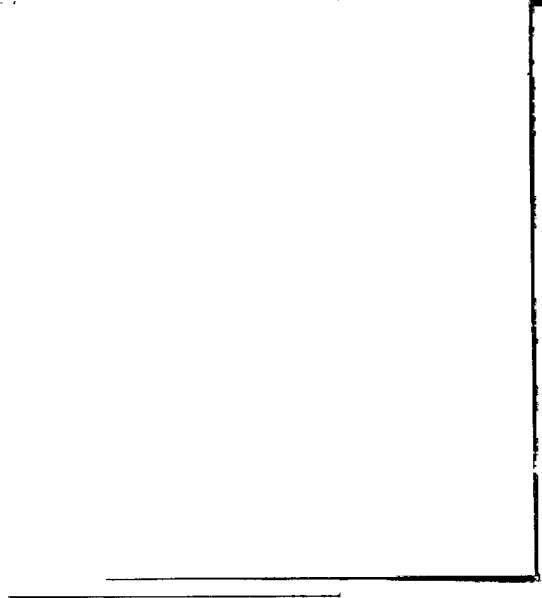


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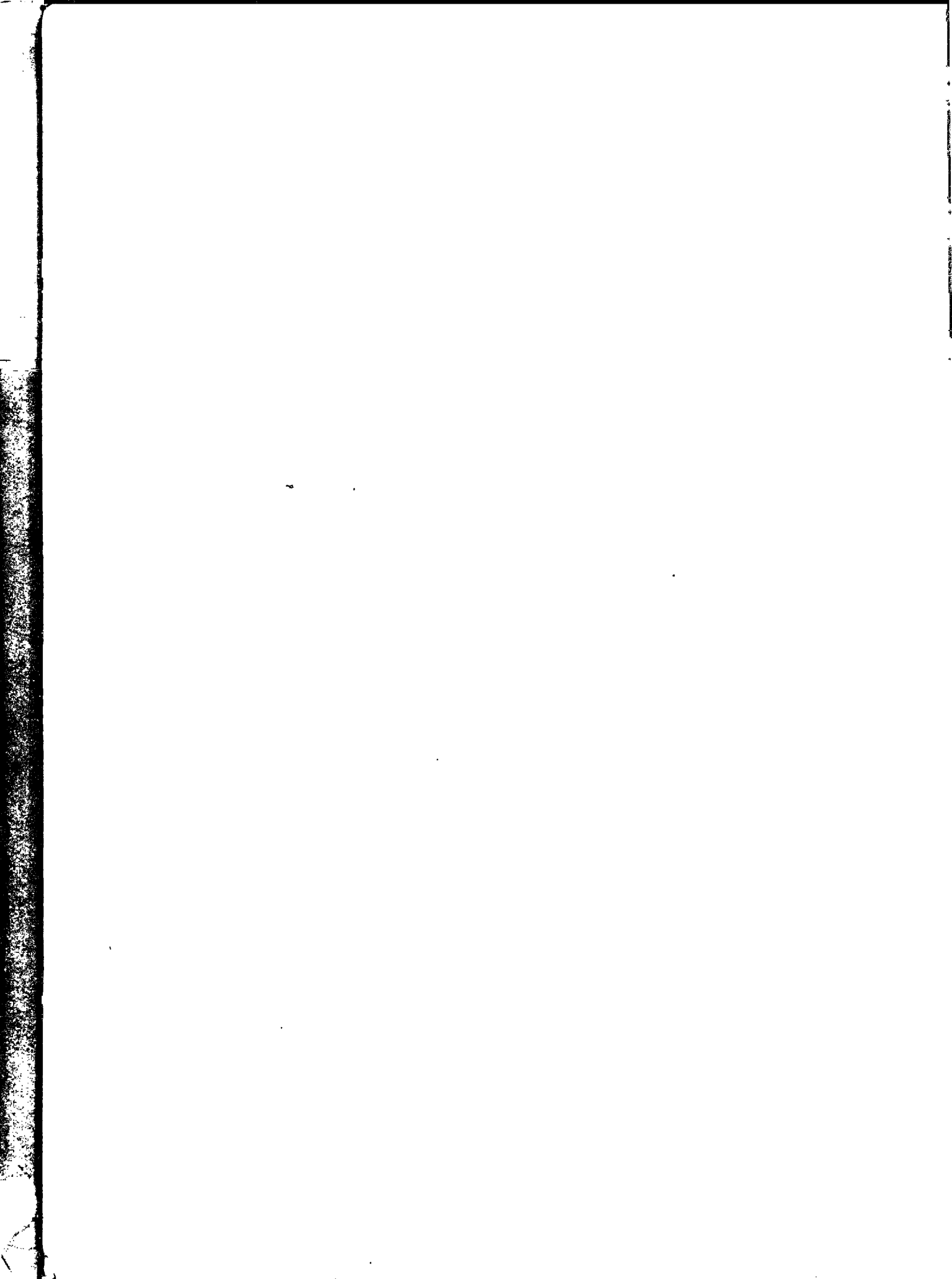
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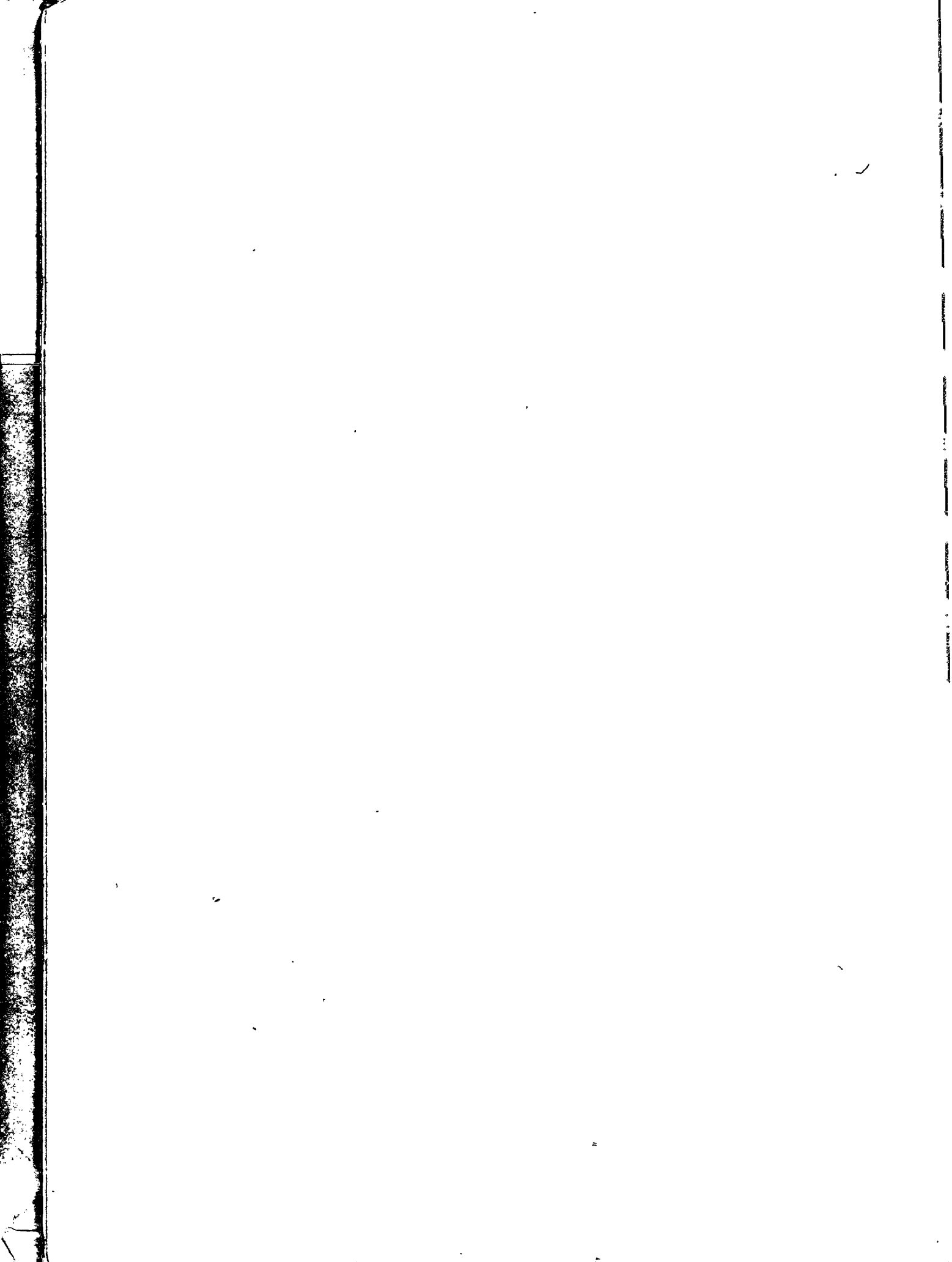
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THE GERANIUM

A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

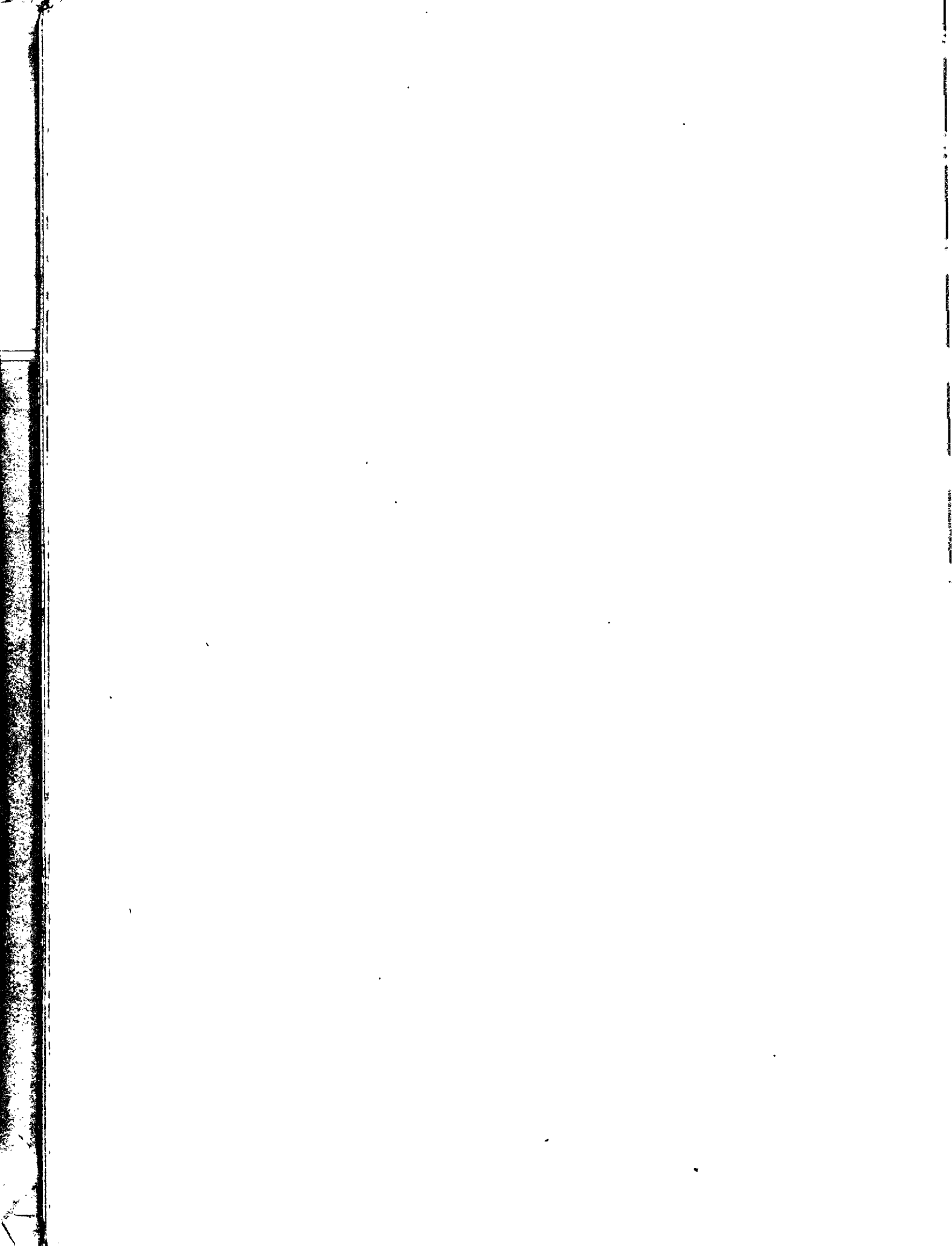
by

Flannery O'Connor



A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts, in the Department of English, in the Graduate College of the State University of Iowa

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To Paul Engle
whose interest and criticism
have made these stories better
than they would otherwise have
been.

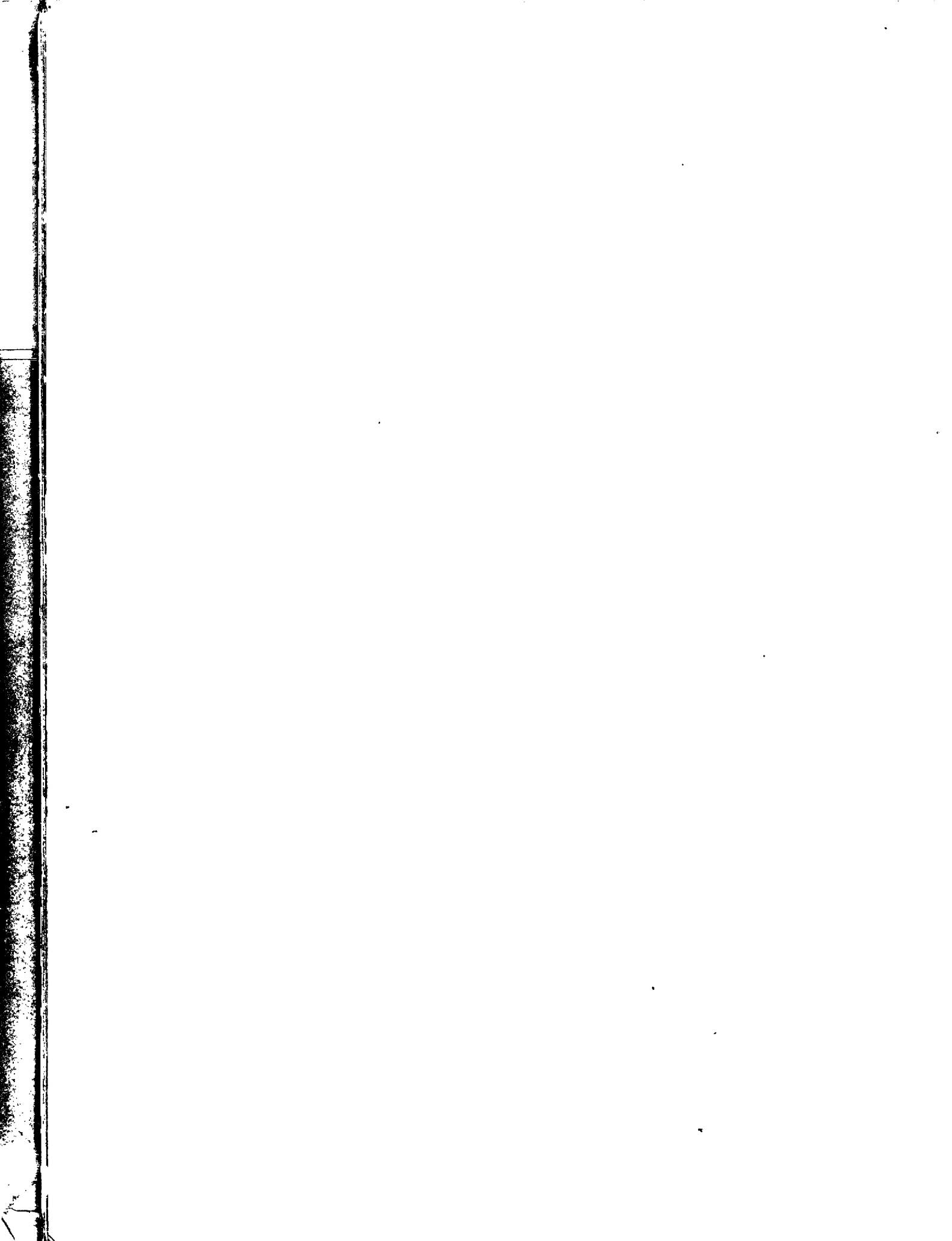
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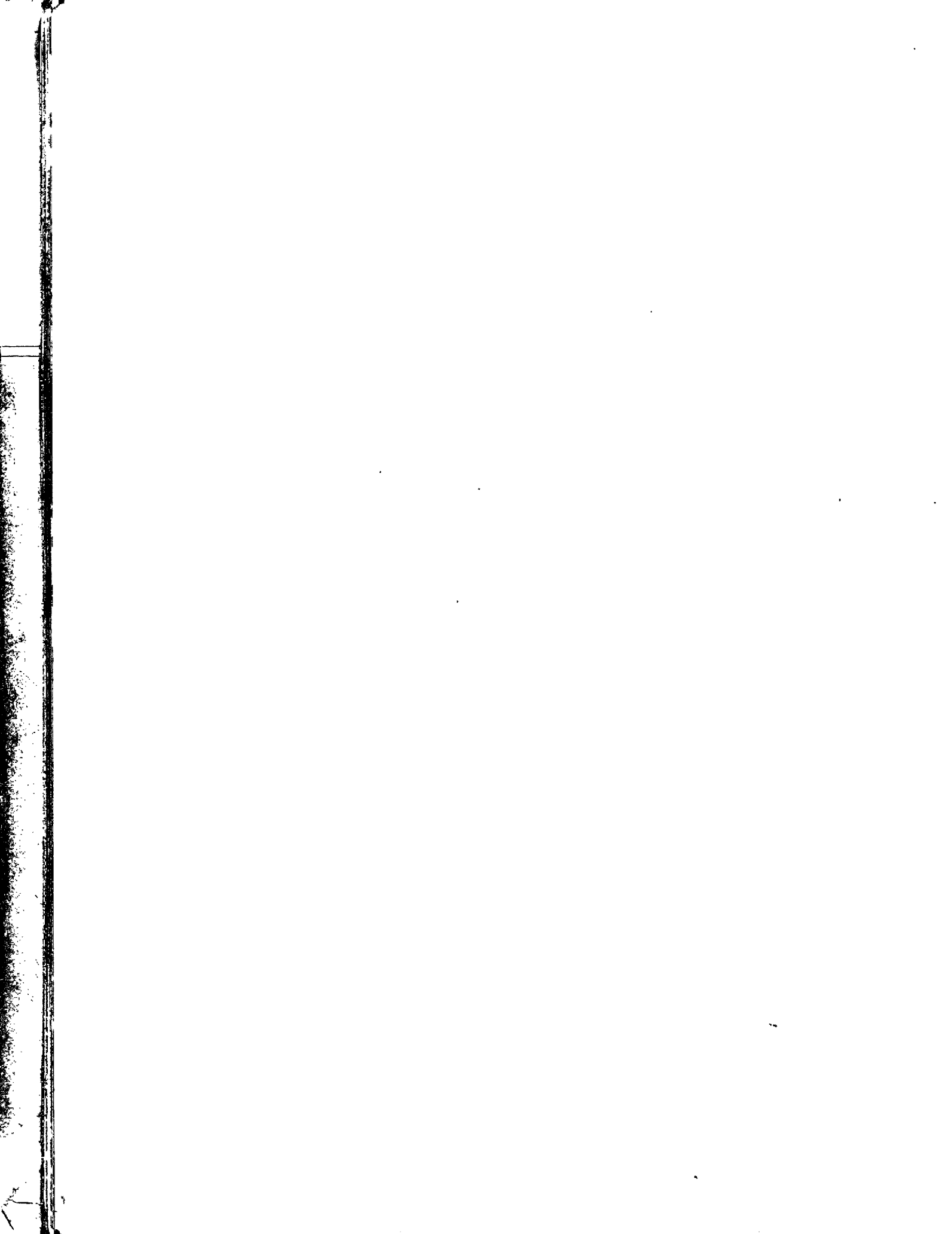
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THE GERANIUM

Old Dudley folded into the chair he was gradually molding to his own shape and looked out the window fifteen feet away into another window framed by blackened red brick. He was waiting for the geranium. They put it out every morning about ten and they took it in at five-thirty. Mrs. Carson back home had a geranium in her window. There were plenty of geraniums at home, better looking geraniums. Ours are sho nuff geraniums, Old Dudley thought, not any er this pale pink business with green, paper bows. The geranium they would put in the window reminded him of the Grisby boy at home who had polio and had to be wheeled out every morning and left in the sun to blink. Lutisha could have taken that geranium and stuck it in the ground and had something worth looking at in a few weeks. Those people across the alley had no business with one. They set it out and let the hot sun bake it all day and they put it so near the ledge the wind could almost knock it over. They had no business with it, no business with it. It shouldn't have been there. Old Dudley felt his throat knotting up. Lutish could root anything. Rabie too. His throat was drawn taut. He laid his head back and tried to clear his mind. There wasn't



much he could think of to think about that didn't do his throat that way.

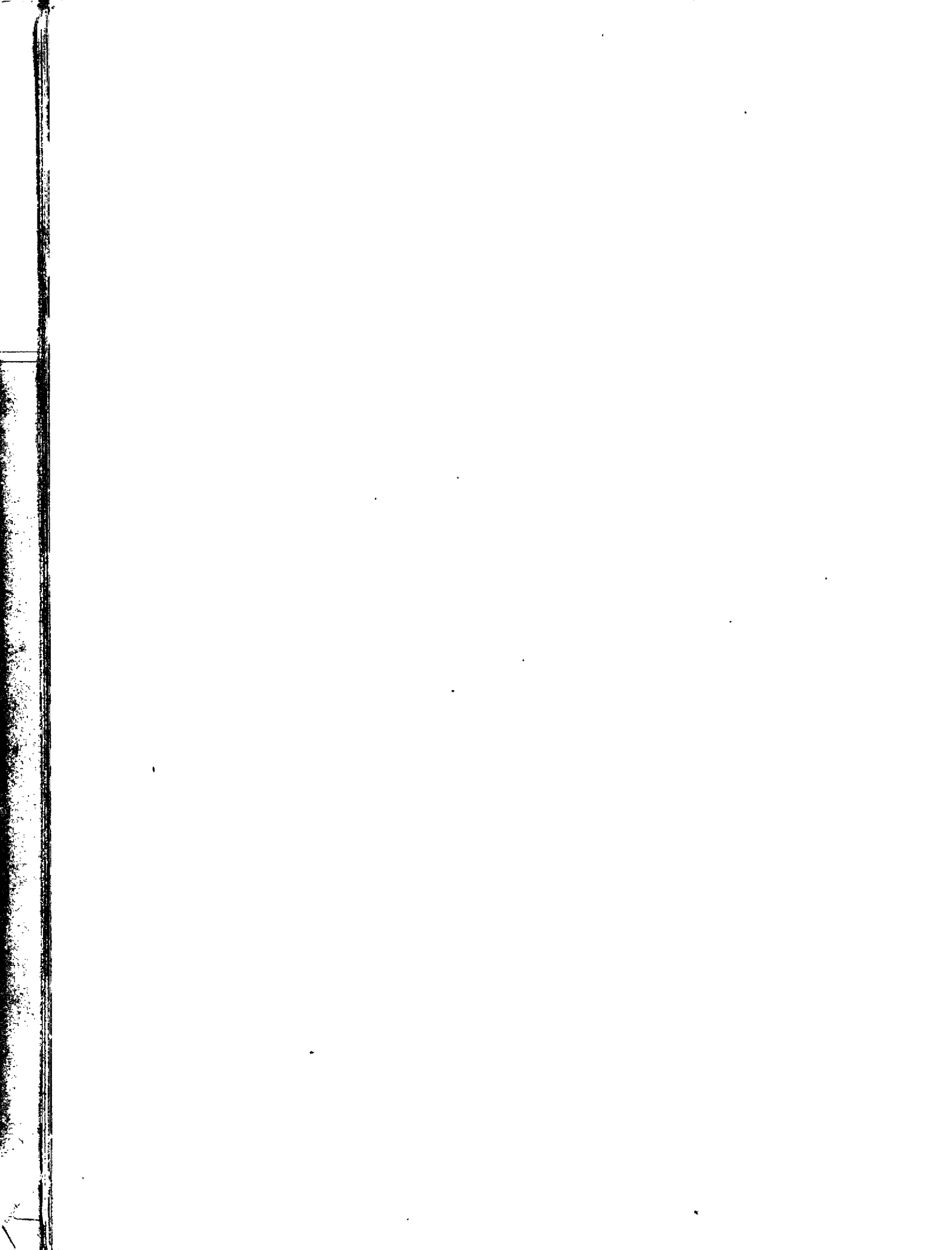
His daughter came in. "Don't you want to go out for a walk?" she asked. She looked provoked.

He didn't answer her.

"Well?"

"No." He wondered how long she was going to stand there. She made his eyes feel like his throat. They'd get watery and she'd see. She had seen before and had looked sorry for him. She'd looked sorry for herself too; but she could er saved herself, Old Dudley thought, if she'd just have let him alone--let him stay where he was back home and not be so taken up with her damn duty. She moved out of the room leaving an audible sigh to crawl over him and remind him again of that one minute--that wasn't her fault at all--when suddenly he had wanted to go to New York to live with her.

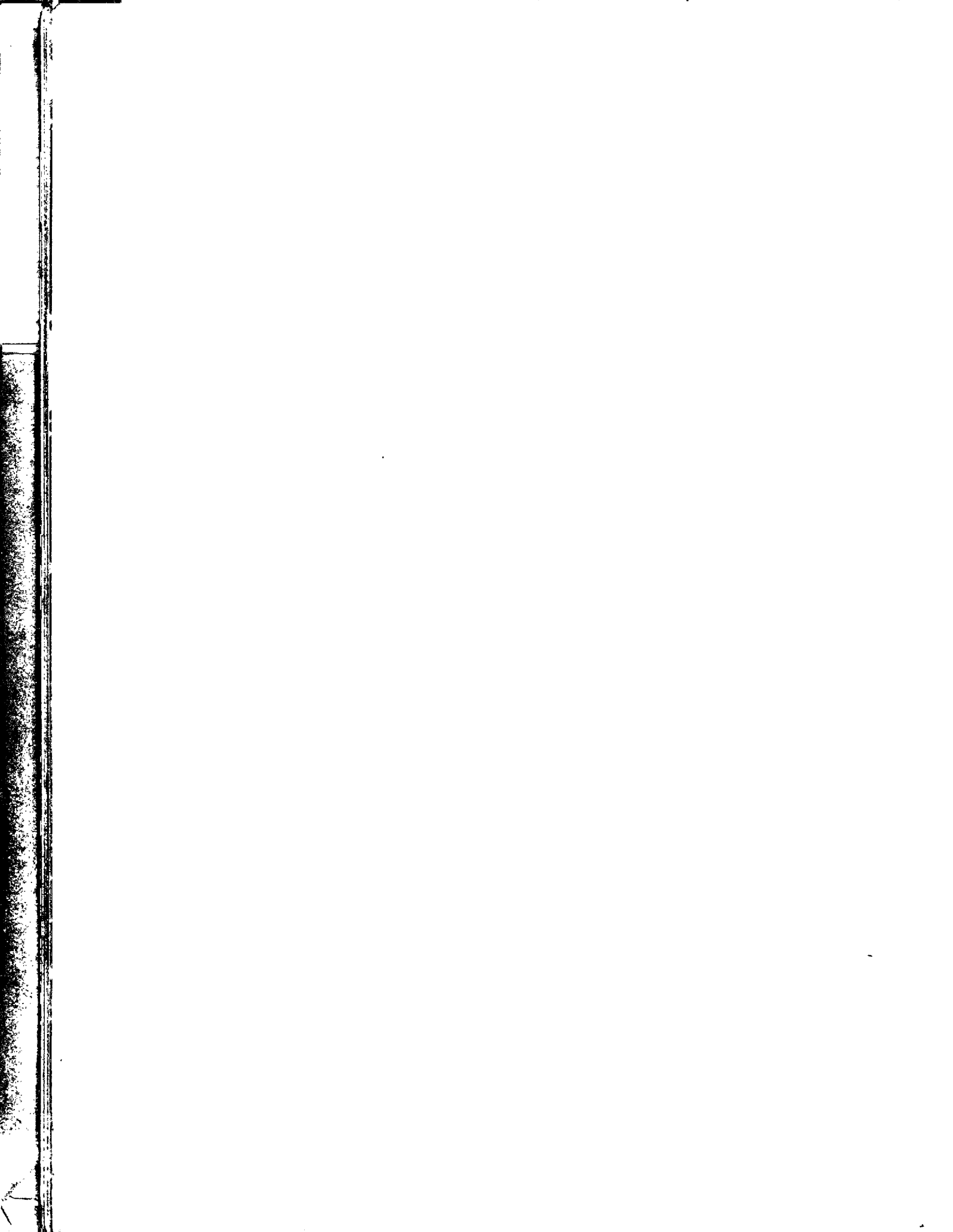
He could have got out of going. He could have been stubborn and told her he'd spend his life where he'd always spent it, send him or not send him the money every month, he'd get along with his pension and odd jobs. Keep her damn money--she needed it worse than he did. She would have been glad to have had her duty disposed of like that. Then she could have said if he died without his children near him, it was his own fault; if he got



sick and there wasn't anybody to take care of him, well, he'd asked for it, she could have said. But there was that thing inside him that had wanted to see New York. He had been to Atlanta once when he was a boy and he had seen New York in a picture show. "Big Town Rhythm" it was. Big towns were important places. The thing inside him had sneaked up on him for just one instant. The place like he'd seen in the picture show had room for him! It was an important place and it had room for him! He'd said, yes, he'd go.

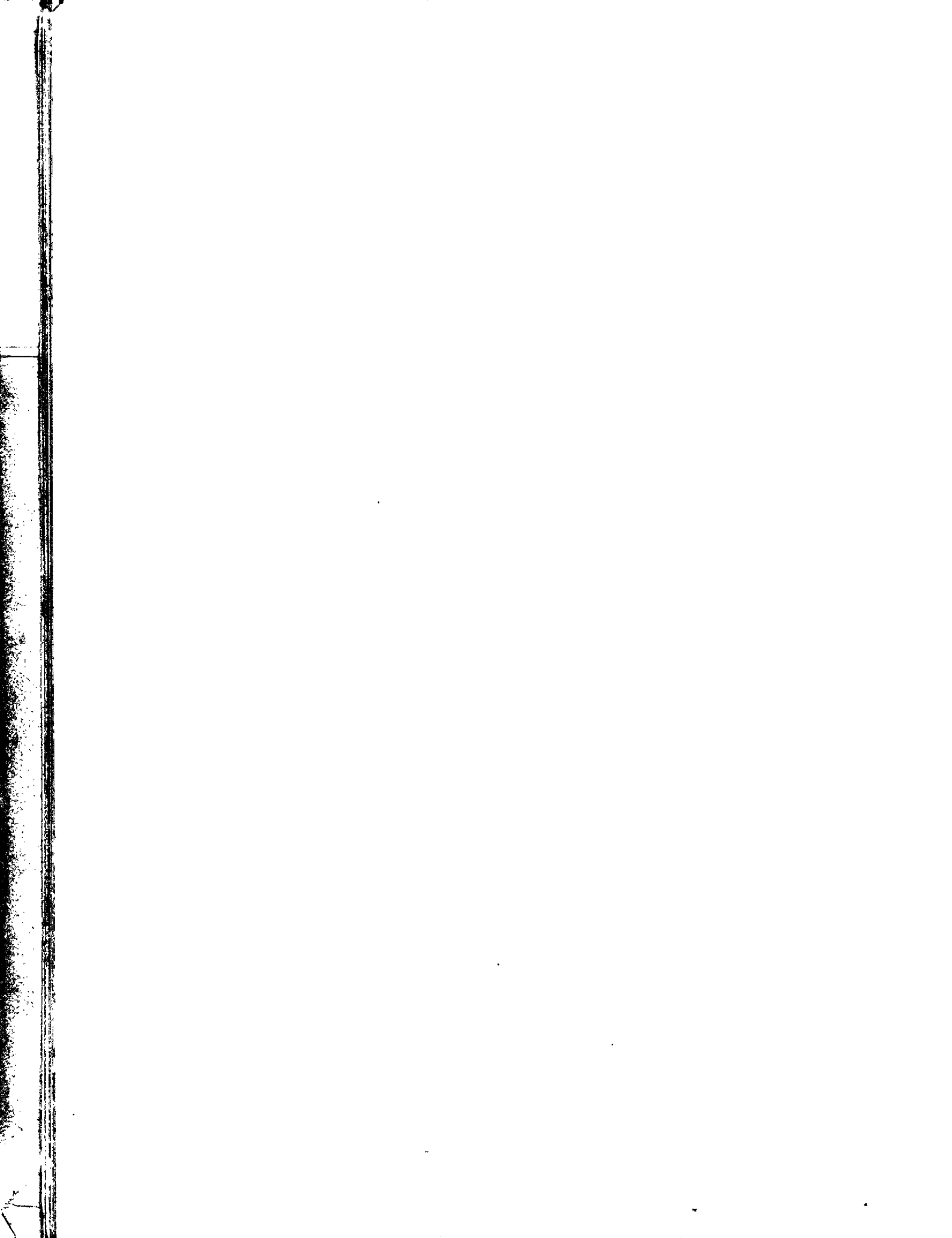
He must have been sick when he said it. He couldn't have been well and said it. He had been sick and she had been so taken up with her damn duty, she had wangled it out of him. Why did she have to come down there in the first place to pester him? He had been doing all right. There was his pension that could feed him and odd jobs that kept him his room in the boarding house.

The window in that room showed him the river-- thick and red as it struggled over rocks and around curves. He tried to think how it was besides red and slow. He added green blotches for trees on either side of it and a brown spot for trash somewhere upstream. He and Rabie had fished it in a flat-bottom boat every Wednesday. Rabie knew the river up and down for twenty miles. There wasn't another nigger in Coa County that knew it like he did. He



loved the river, but it hadn't meant anything to Old Dudley. The fish were what he was after. He liked to come in at night with a long string of them and slap them down in the sink. "Few fish I got," he'd say. "It took a man to get those fish, the old girls at the boarding house always said. He and Rabie would start out early Wednesday morning and fish all day. Rabie would find the spots and row; Old Dudley always caught them. Rabie didn't care much about catching them--he just loved the river. "Ain't no use settin' yo' line down dere, boss," he'd say, "ain't no fish dere. Dis ol' river ain't hidin' none nowhere 'round hyar, nawseh," and he would giggle and shift the boat downstream. That was Rabie. He could steal cleaner than a weasel but he knew where the fish were. Old Dudley always gave him the little ones.

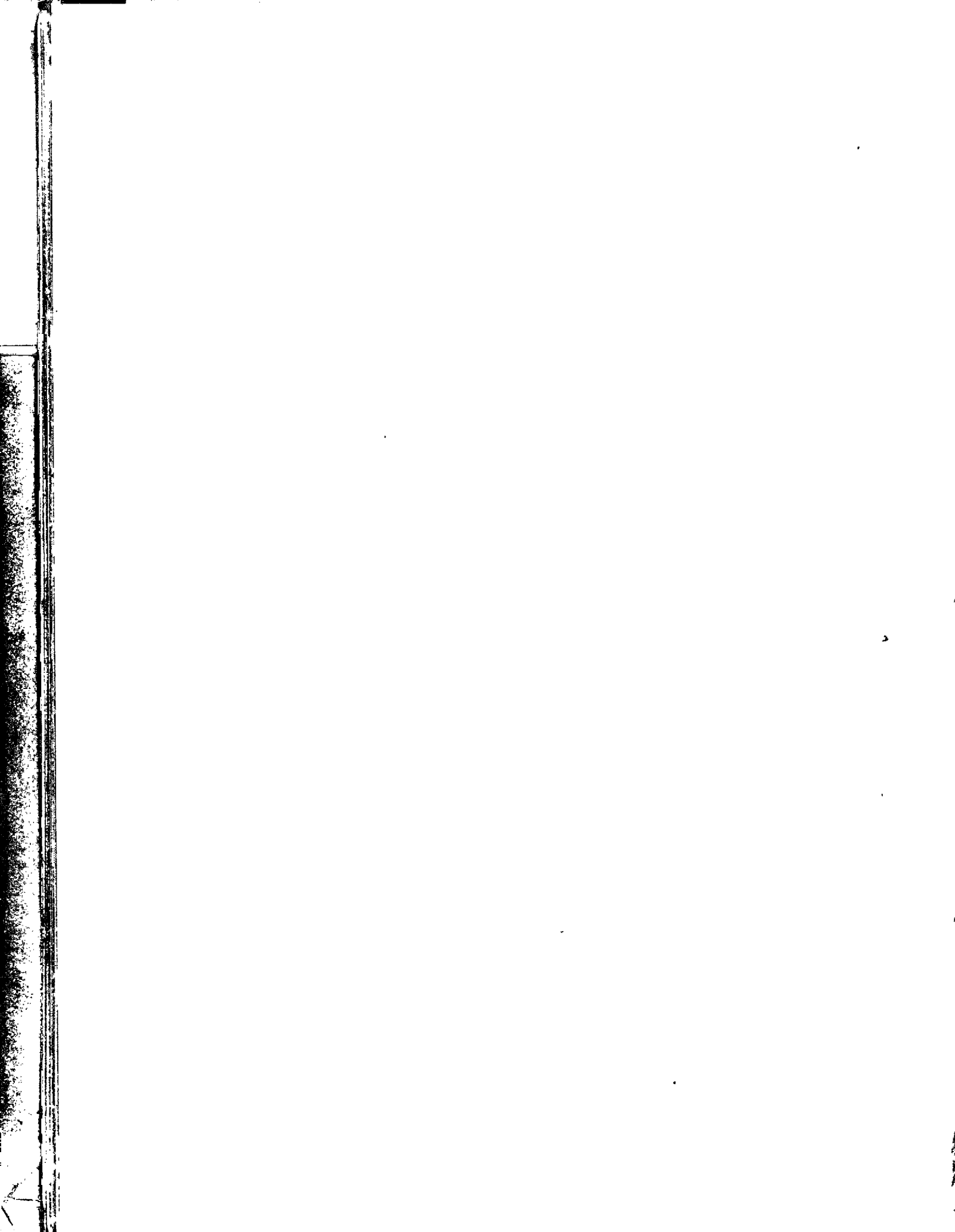
Old Dudley had lived upstairs in the corner room of the boarding house ever since his wife died in '22. He protected the old ladies. He was the man in the house and he did the things a man in the house was supposed to do. It was a dull occupation at night when the old girls crabbed and crocheted in the parlor and the man in the house had to listen and judge the sparrow-like wars that rasped and twittered intermittently. But in the daytime there was Rabie. Rabie and Lutisha lived down in the basement. Lutish cooked and Rabie took care of the



cleaning and the vegetable garden; but he was sharp at sneaking off with half his work done and going to help Old Dudley with some current project--building a hen house or painting a door. He liked to listen, he liked to hear about Atlanta when Old Dudley had been there and about how guns were put together on the inside and all the other things the old man knew.

Sometimes at night they would go 'possum hunting. They never got a 'possum but Old Dudley liked to get away from the ladies once in a while and hunting was a good excuse. Rabie didn't like 'possum hunting. They never got a 'possum; they never even treed one; and besides, he was mostly a water nigger. "We ain't gonna go huntin' no 'possum tonight, is we, boss? I got a lil' business I wants tuh tend tuh," he'd say when Old Dudley would start talking about hounds and guns. "Whose chickens you gonna steal tonight?" Dudley would grin. "I reckon I be huntin' 'possum tonight," Rabie'd sigh.

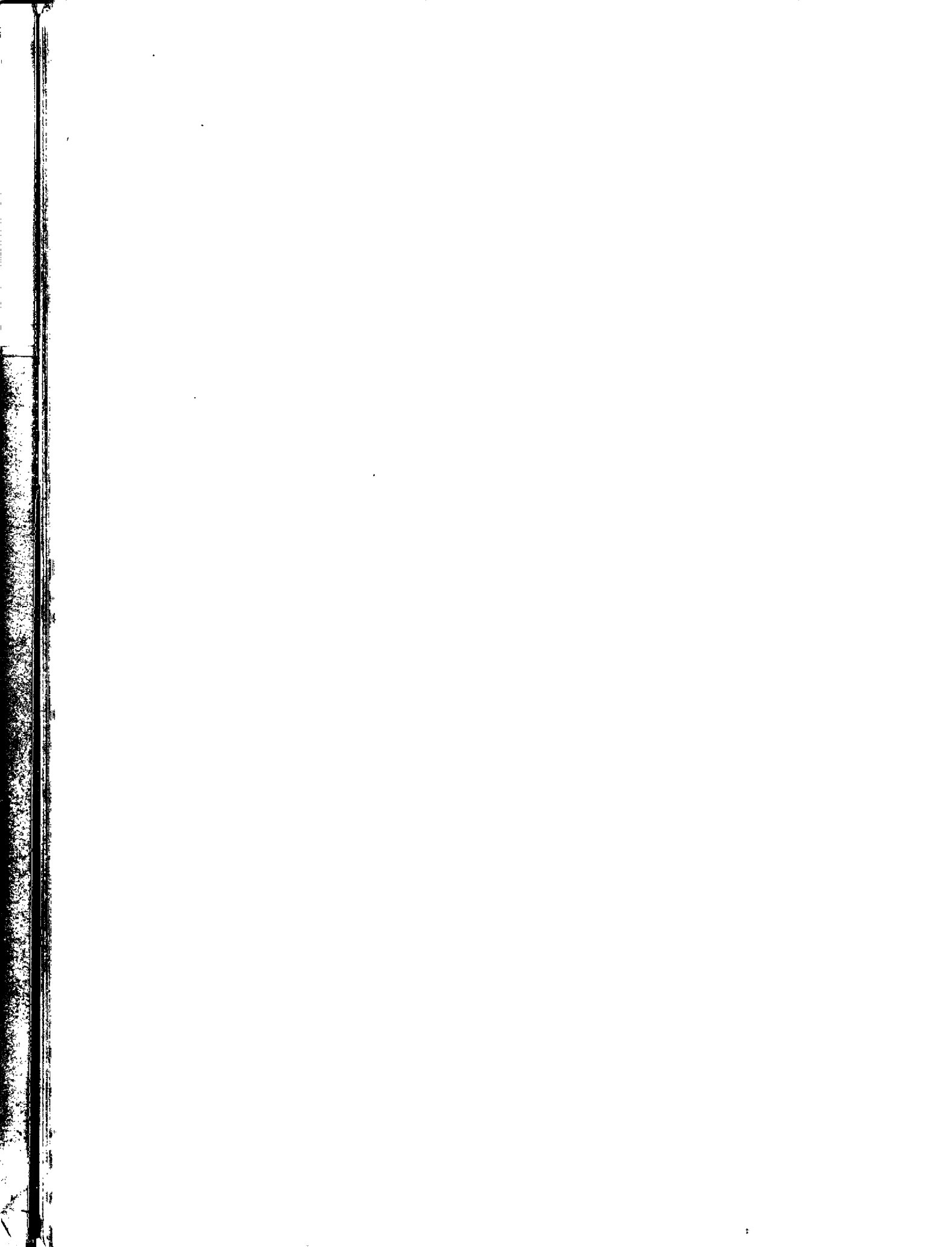
Old Dudley would get out his gun and take it apart and, as Rabie cleaned the pieces, would explain the mechanism to him. Then he'd put it together again. Rabie always marveled at the way he could put it together again. Old Dudley would have liked to have explained New York to Rabie. If he could have showed it to Rabie, it wouldn't have been so big--he wouldn't have felt pressed down.



every time he went out in it. "It ain't so big," he would have said. "Don't let it get you down, Rabie. It's just like any other city and cities ain't all that complicated."

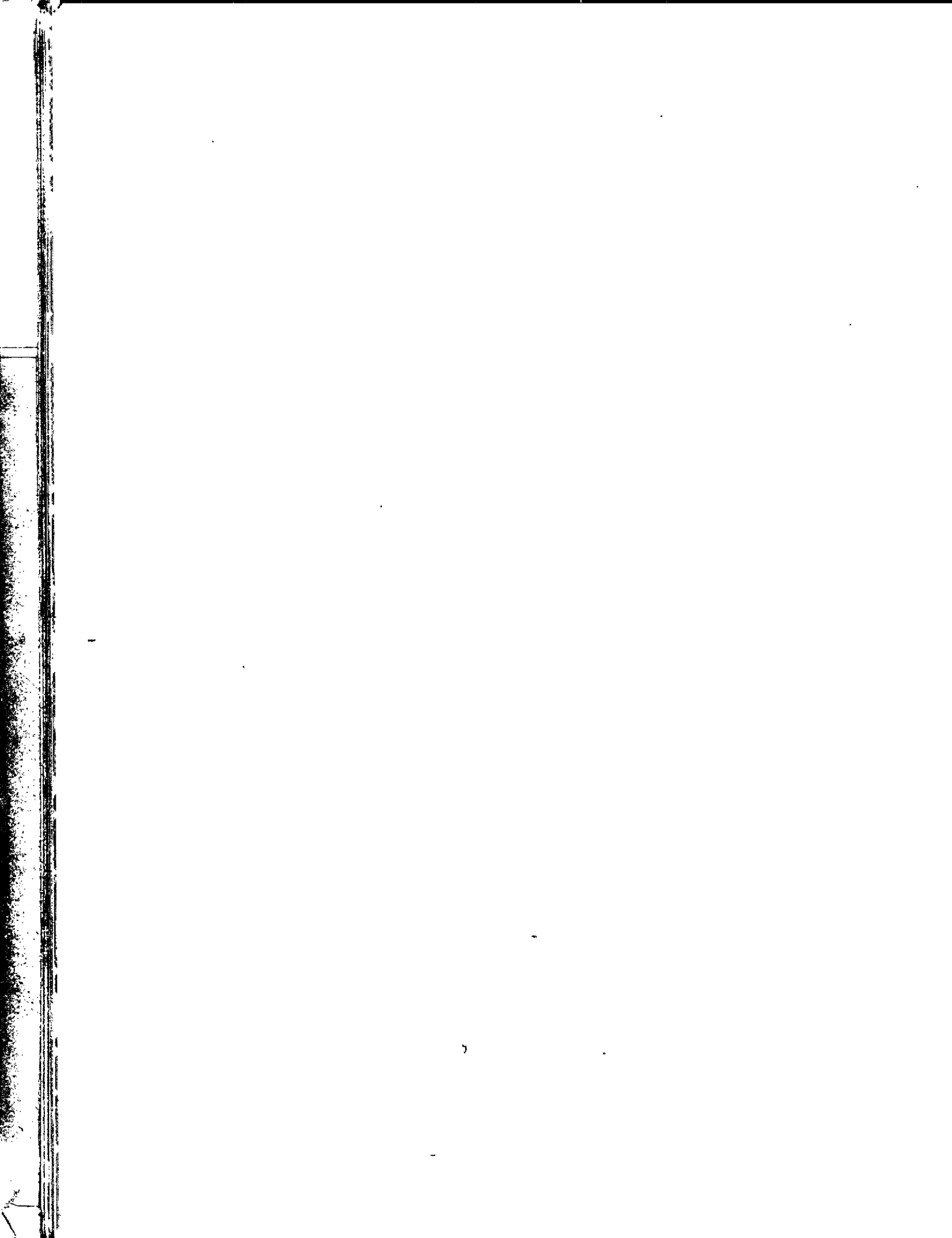
But they were. New York was swishing and jamming one minute and dirty and dead the next. His daughter didn't even live in a house. She lived in a building--the middle in a row of buildings all alike, all blackened-red and gray with rasp-mouthed people hanging out their windows looking at other windows and other people just like them looking back. Inside you could go up and you could go down and there were just halls that reminded you of tape measures strung out with a door every inch. He remembered he'd been dazed by the building the first week. He'd wake up expecting the halls to have changed in the night and he'd look out the door and there they stretched like dog runs. The streets were the same way. He wondered where he'd be if he walked to the end of one of them. One night he dreamed he did and ended at the end of the building--nowhere.

The next week he had become more conscious of the daughter and son-in-law and their boy--no place to be out of their way. The son-in-law was a queer one. He drove a truck and came in only on the weekends. He said "nah" for "no" and he'd never heard of a 'possum. Old Dudley slept in the room with the boy who was sixteen and



couldn't be talked to. But sometimes when the daughter and Old Dudley were alone in the apartment, she would sit down and talk to him. First she had to think of something to say. Usually it gave out before what she considered was the proper time to get up and do something else, so he would have to say something. He always tried to think of something he hadn't said before. She never listened the second time. She was seeing that her father spent his last years with his own family and not in a decayed boarding house full of old women whose heads jiggled. She was doing her duty. She had brothers and sisters who were not.

Once she took him shopping with her but he was too slow. They went in a "subway"--a railroad underneath the ground like a big cave. People boiled out of trains and up steps and over into the streets. They rolled off the street and down steps and into trains--black and white and yellow all mixed up like vegetables in soup. Everything was boiling. The trains swished in from tunnels, up canals, and all of a sudden stopped. The people coming out pushed through the people coming in and a noise rang and the train swooped off again. Old Dudley and the daughter had to go in three different ones before they got where they were going. He wondered why people ever went out of their houses. He felt like his tongue had slipped down in his stomach. She held him by the coat sleeve and



pulled him through the people.

They went on an overhead train too. She called it an "El." They had to go up on a high platform to catch it. Old Dudley looked over the rail and could see the people rushing and the automobiles rushing under him. He felt sick. He put one hand on the rail and sank down on the wooden floor of the platform. The daughter screamed and pulled him over from the edge. "Do you want to fall off and kill yourself?" she shouted.

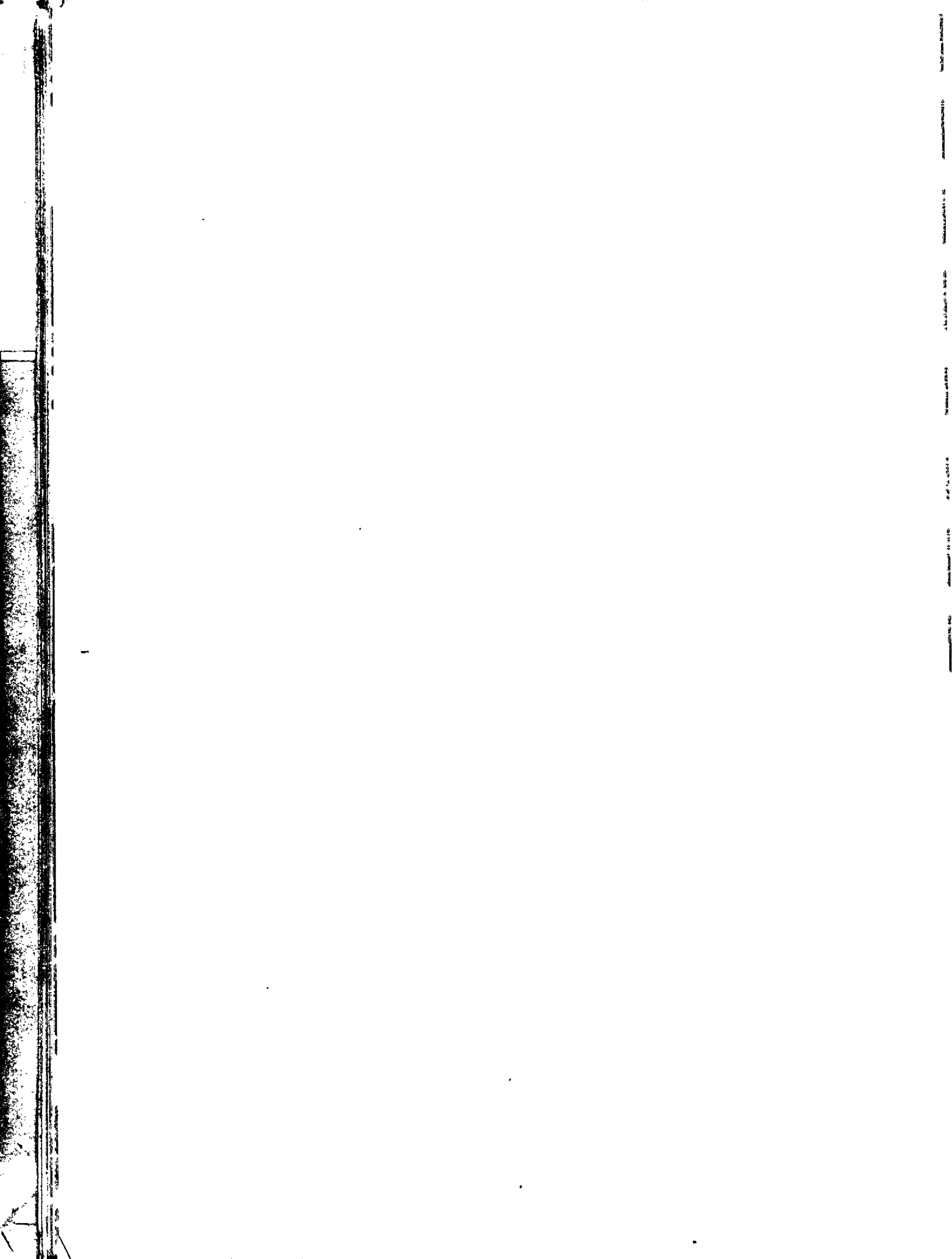
Through a crack in the boards he could see the cars swimming in the street. "I don't care," he murmured, "I don't care if I do or not."

"Come on," she said, "you'll feel better when we get home."

"Home?" he repeated. The cars moved in a rhythm below him.

"Come on," she said, "here it comes; we've just got time to make it." They'd just had time to make all of them.

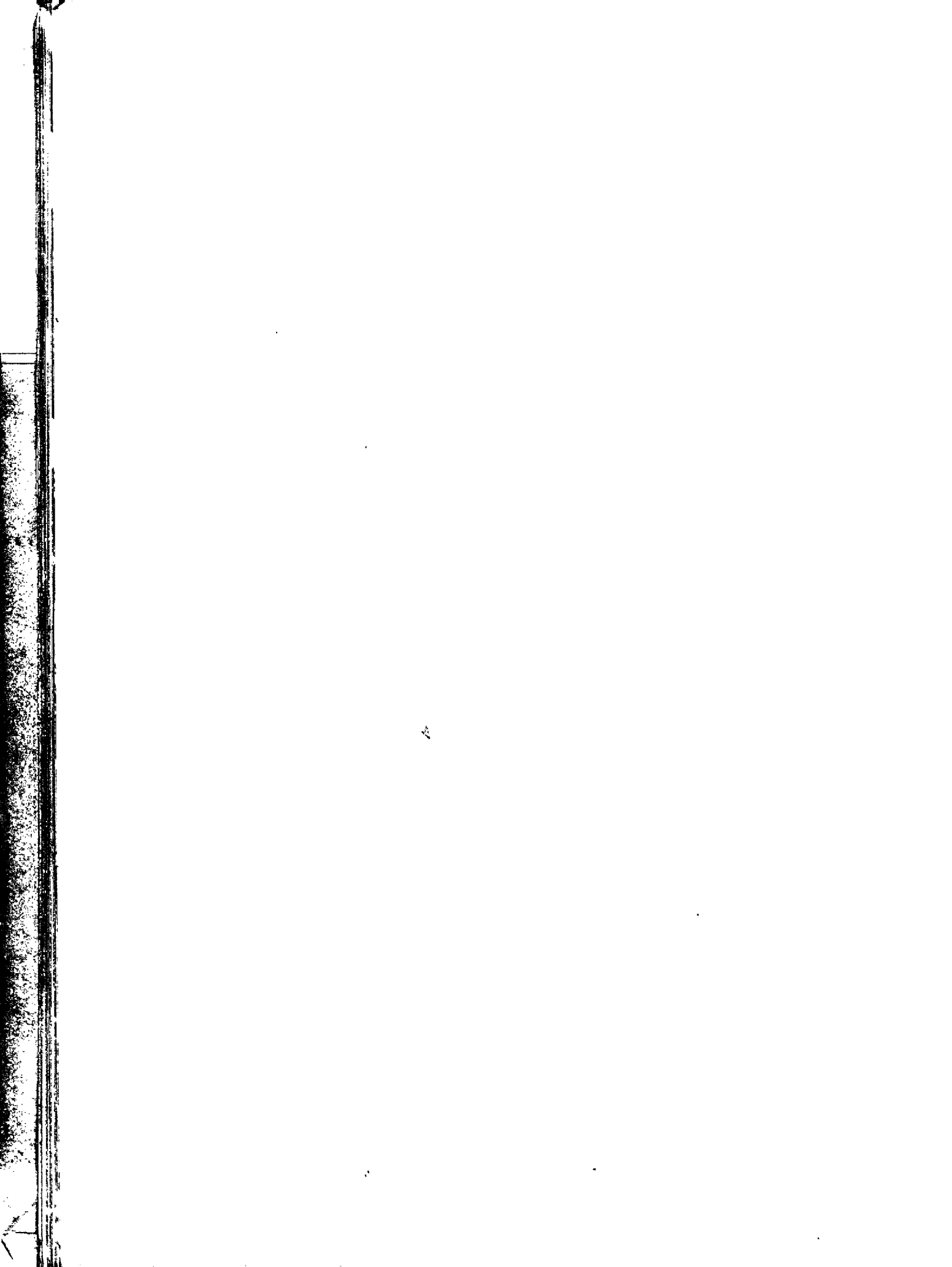
They made that one. They came back to the building and the apartment. The apartment was too tight. There was no place to be where there wasn't somebody else. The kitchen opened into the bathroom and the bathroom opened into everything else and you were always where you started from. At home there was upstairs and the basement and the



river and down town in front of Fraziers . . . damn his throat.

The geranium was late today. It was ten-thirty. They usually had it out by ten-fifteen.

Somewhere down the hall a woman shrilled something unintelligible out to the street; a radio was bleating the worn music to a soap serial; and a garbage can crashed down a fire-escape. The door to the next apartment slammed and a sharp footstep clipped down the hall. "That would be the nigger," Old Dudley muttered. "The nigger with the shiny shoes." He had been there a week when the nigger moved in. That Thursday he was looking out the door at the dog run halls when this nigger went into the next apartment. He had on a grey, pin-stripe suit and a tan tie. His collar was stiff and white and made a clear-cut line next to his neck. His shoes were shiny tan--they matched his tie and his skin. Old Dudley scratched his head. He hadn't known the kind of people that would live thick in a building could afford servants. He chuckled. Lot of good a nigger in a Sunday suit would do them. Maybe this nigger would know the country around here--or maybe how to get to it. They might could hunt. They might could find them a stream somewhere. He shut the door and went to the daughter's room. "Hey!" he shouted, "the folks next door got 'em a nigger. Must be



gonna clean for them. You reckon they gonna keep him every day?"

She looked up from making the bed. "What are you talking about?"

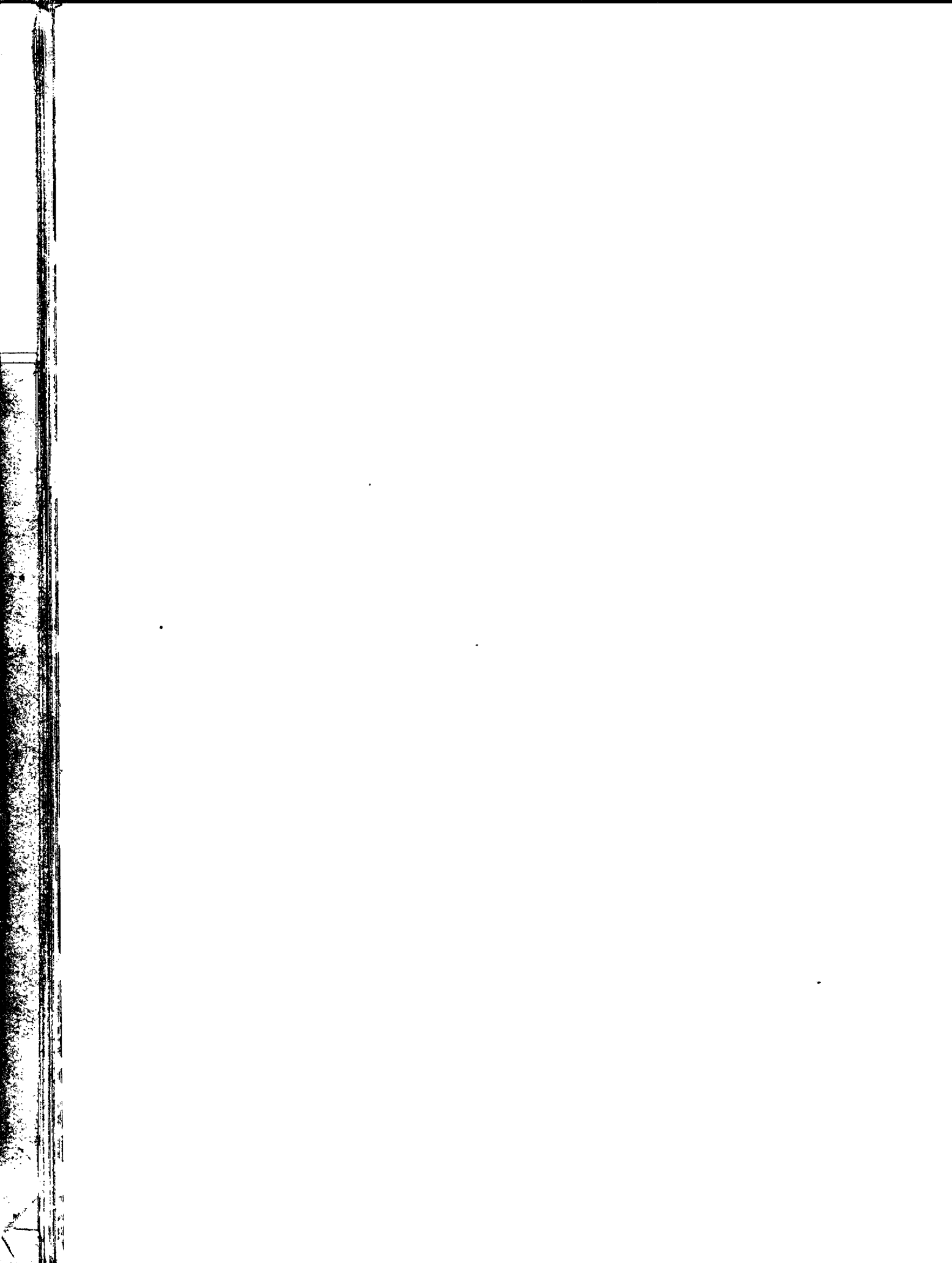
"I say they got 'em a servant next door--a nigger--all dressed up in a Sunday suit."

She walked to the other side of the bed. "You must be crazy," she said. "The next apartment is vacant and besides, nobody around here can afford any servant."

"I tell you I saw him," Old Dudley snickered. "Going right in there with a tie and a white collar on--and sharp-toed shoes."

"If he went in there, he's looking at it for himself," she muttered. She went to the dresser and started fidgeting with things.

Old Dudley laughed. She could be right funny when she wanted to. "Well," he said, "I think I'll go over and see what day he gets off. Maybe I can convince him he likes to fish," and he'd slapped his pocket to make the two quarters jingle. Before he got out in the hall good, she came tearing behind him and pulled him in. "Can't you hear?" she'd yelled. "I meant what I said. He's renting that himself if he went in there. Don't you go asking him any questions or saying anything to him. I don't want any trouble with niggers."

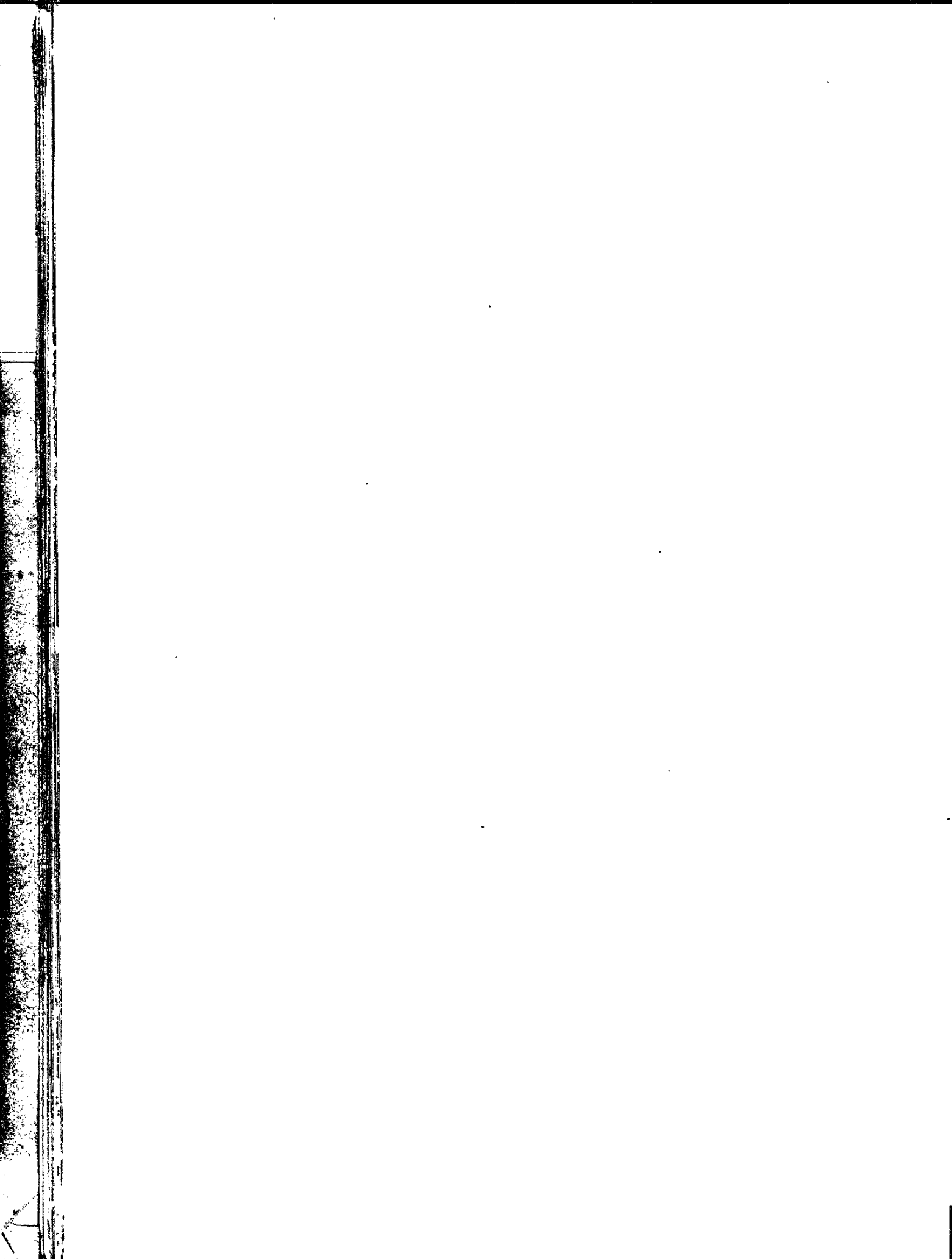


"You mean," Old Dudley murmured, "he's gonna live next door to you?"

She shrugged. "I suppose he is. And you tend to your own business," she added. "Don't have anything to do with him."

That's just the way she'd said it. Like he didn't have any sense at all. But he'd told her off then. He'd stated his say and she knew what he meant. "You ain't been raised that way!" he'd said thundery-like. "You ain't been raised to live tight with niggers that think they're just as good as you, and you think I'd go messin' around with one er that kind! If you think I want anything to do with them, you're crazy." He had had to slow down then because his throat was tightening. She'd stood stiff up and said they lived where they could afford to live and made the best of it. Preaching to him! Then she'd walked stiff off without a word more. That was her. Trying to be holy with her shoulders curved around and her neck in the air. Like he was a fool. He knew yankees let niggers in their front doors and let them set on their sofas but he didn't know his own daughter that was raised proper would stay next door to them--and then think he didn't have no more sense than to want to mix with them. Him!

He got up and took a paper off another chair. He might as well appear to be reading when she came



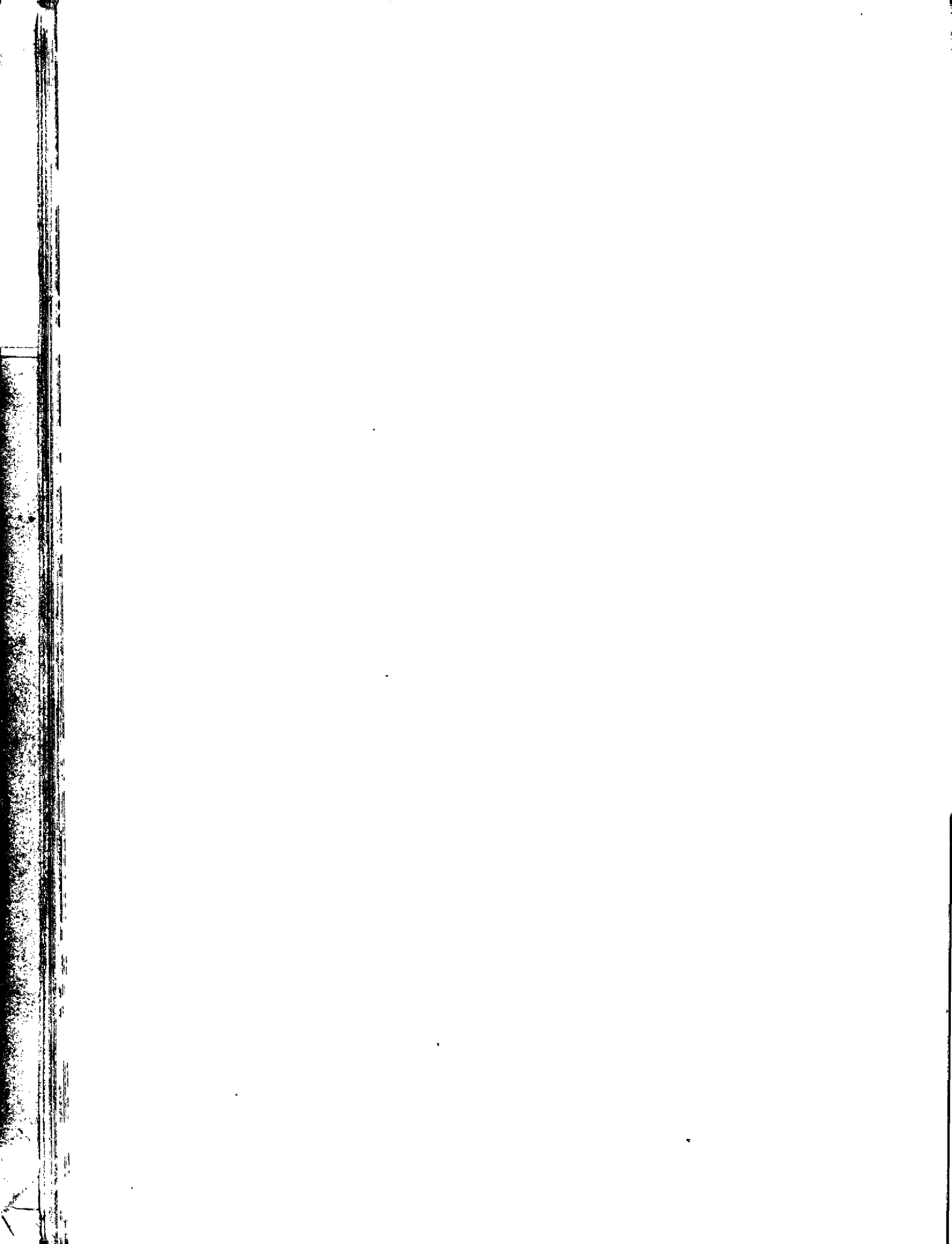
through again. No use having her standing there staring at him, believing she had to think up something for him to do. He looked over the paper at the window across the alley. The geranium wasn't there yet. It had never been this late before. The first day he'd seen it, he had been sitting there looking out the window at the other window and he had looked at this watch to see how long it had been since breakfast. When he looked up, it was there. It startled him. He didn't like flowers, but the geranium didn't look like a flower. It looked like the sick Grisby boy at home and it was the color of the drapes the old ladies had in the parlor and the paper bow on it looked like the one behind Lutish's uniform she wore on Sundays. Lutish had a fondness for sashes. Most niggers did, Old Dudley thought.

The daughter came through again. He had meant to be looking at the paper when she came through. "Do me a favor, will you?" she asked as if she had just thought up a favor he could do.

He hoped she didn't want him to go to the grocery again. He got lost the time before. All the blooming buildings looked alike. He nodded.

"Go down to the third floor and ask Mrs. Schmitt to lend me the shirt pattern she uses for Jake."

Why couldn't she just let him sit? She didn't need the shirt pattern. "All right," he said. "What

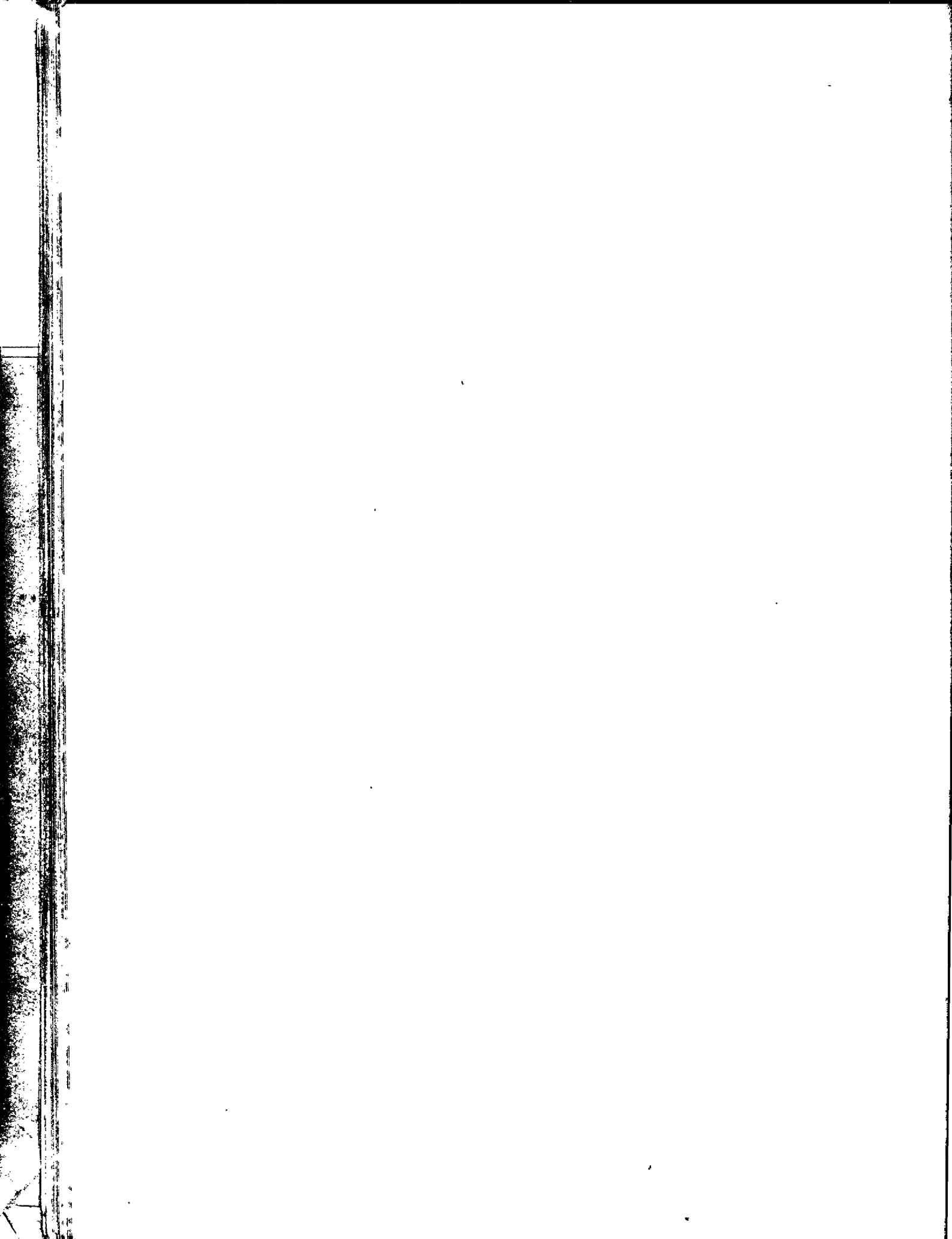


number is it?"

"Number 10--just like this. Right below us three floors down."

Old Dudley was always afraid that when he went out in the dog runs, a door would suddenly open and one of the snipe-nosed men that hung off the window ledges in his undershirt would growl, "What are you doing here?" The door to the nigger's apartment was open and he could see a woman sitting in a chair by the window. "Yankee niggers," he muttered. She had on rimless glasses and there was a book in her lap. Niggers don't think they're dressed up till they got on glasses; Old Dudley thought. He remembered Lutish's glasses. She had saved up thirteen dollars to buy them. Then she went to the doctor and asked him to look at her eyes and tell her how thick to get the glasses. He made her look at animals' pictures through a mirror and he stuck a light through her eyes and looked in her head. Then he said she didn't need any glasses. She was so mad she burned the corn bread three days in a row, but she bought her some glasses anyway at the ten cent store. They didn't cost her but \$1.98 and she wore them every Saddey. "That was niggers," Old Dudley chuckled. He realized he had made a noise, and covered his mouth with his hand. Somebody might hear him in one of the apartments.

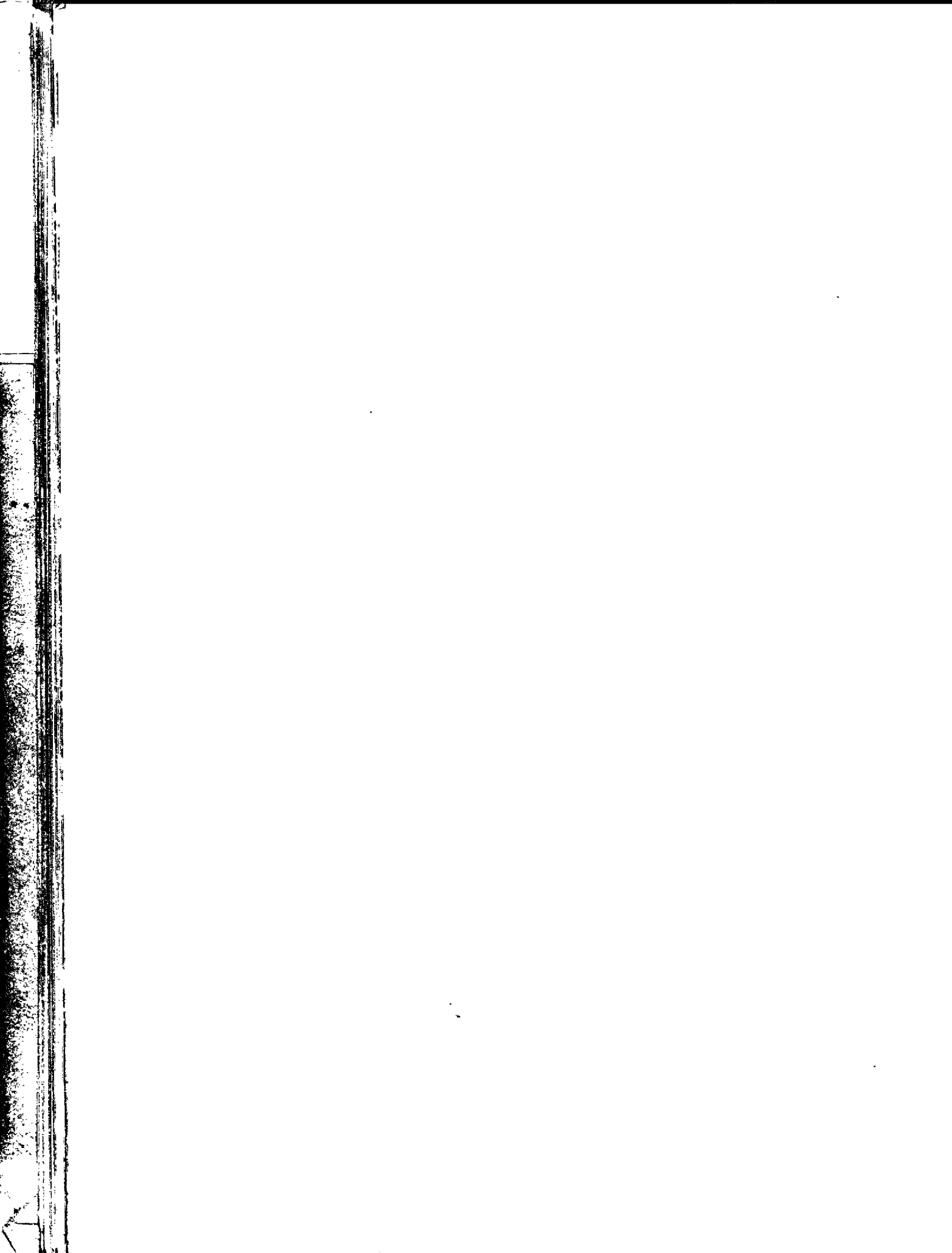
He turned down the first flight of stairs. Down



the second he heard footsteps coming up. He looked over the banisters and saw it was a woman--a fat woman with an apron on. From the top, she looked kind er like Mrs. Benson at home. He wondered if she would speak to him. When they were four steps from each other, he darted a glance at her but she wasn't looking at him. When there were no steps between them, his eyes fluttered up for an instant and she was looking at him cold in the face. Then she was past him. She hadn't said a word. He felt heavy in his stomach.

He went down four flights instead of three. Then he went back up one and found number 10. Mrs. Schmitt said O. K., wait a minute and she'd get the pattern. She sent one of the children back to the door with it. The child didn't say anything.

Old Dudley started back up the stairs. He had to take it more slowly. It tired him going up. Everything tired him, looked like. Not like having Rabie to do his running for him. Rabie was a light-footed nigger. He could sneak in a hen-house 'thout even the hens knowing it and get him the fattest fryer in there and not a squawk. Fast, too. Dudley had always been slow on his feet. It went that way with fat people. He remembered one time him and Rabie was hunting quail over near Molton. They had 'em a hound dog that could find a covey quicker'n any fancy pointer going. He wasn't no good at bringing them back but he



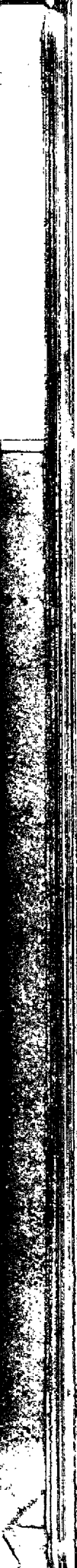
could find them every time and then set like a dead stump while you aimed at the birds. This one time the hound stopped cold-still. "Dat gonna be a big 'un," Rabie whispered, "I feels it." Old Dudley raised the gun slowly as they walked along. He had to be careful of the pine needles. They covered the ground and made it slick. Rabie shifted his weight from side to side, lifting and setting his feet on the waxen needles with unconscious care. He looked straight ahead and moved forward swiftly. Old Dudley kept one eye ahead and one on the ground. It would slope and he would be sliding forward dangerously or in pulling himself up an incline, he would slide back down.

"Ain't I better get dem birds dis time, boss?" Rabie suggested. "You ain't never easy on yo' feets on Monday. If you falls in one dem slopes, you gonna scatter dem birds fo' you gits dat gun up."

Old Dudley wanted to get the covey. He could er knocked four out it easy. "I'll get 'em," he muttered. He lifted the gun to his eye and leaned forward. Something slipped beneath him and he slid backward on his heels. The gun went off and the covey sprayed into the air.

"Dem was some mighty fine birds we let get away from us," Rabie sighed.

"We'll find another covey," Old Dudley said, "now get me out of this damn hole."

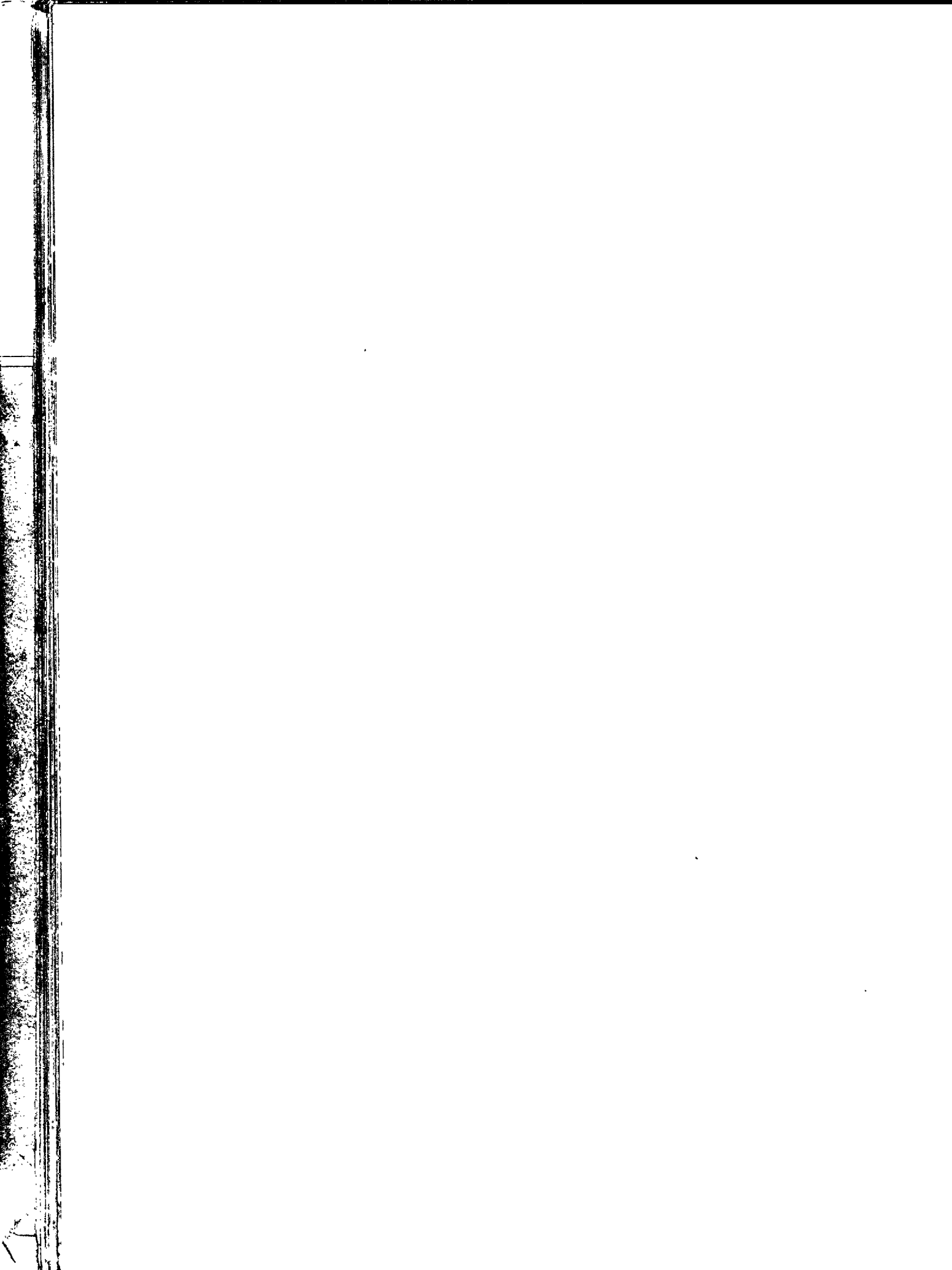


He could er got five er those birds if he hadn't fallen. He could er shot 'em off like cans on a fence. He drew one hand back to his ear and extended the other forward. He could er knocked 'em out like clay pigeons. Bang! A squeak on the staircase made him wheel around--his arms still holding the invisible gun. The nigger was clipping up the steps toward him, an amused smile stretching his trimmed mustache. Old Dudley's mouth dropped open. The nigger's lips were pulled down like he was trying to keep from laughing. Old Dudley couldn't move. He stared at the clear-cut line the nigger's collar made against his skin.

"What are you hunting, old timer?" the negro asked in a voice that sounded like a nigger's laugh and a white man's sneer.

Old Dudley felt like a child with a pop-pistol. His mouth was open and his tongue was rigid in the middle of it. Right below his knees felt hollow. His feet slipped and he slid three steps and landed sitting down.

"You better be careful," the negro said. "You could easily hurt yourself on these steps," and he held out his hand for Old Dudley to pull up on. It was a long narrow hand and the tips of the fingernails were clean and cut squarely. They looked like they might have been filed. Old Dudley's hands hung between his knees. The nigger took him by the arm and pulled up. "Whew!" he gasped, "you're



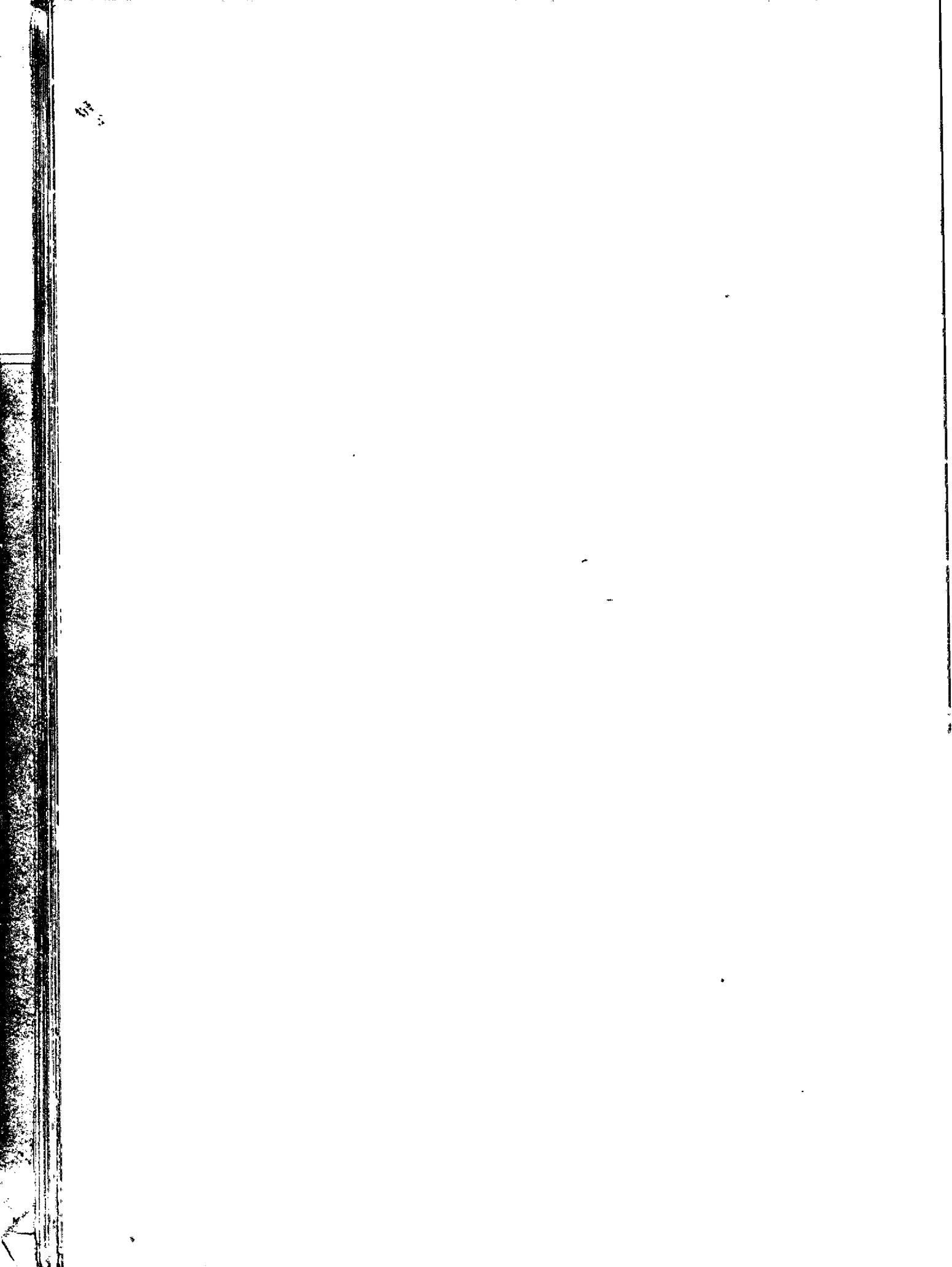
heavy. Give a little help here." Old Dudley's knees unbended and he staggered up. "The nigger had him by the arm. "I'm going up anyway," he said. "I'll help you." Old Dudley looked frantically around. The steps behind him seemed to close up. He was walking with the nigger up the stairs. The nigger was waiting for him on each step. "So you hunt?" the nigger was saying. "Well, let's see. I went deer hunting once. I believe we used a Dodson 38 to get those deer. What do you use?"

Old Dudley was staring through the shiny tan shoes. "I use a gun," he mumbled.

"I like to fool with guns better than hunting," the nigger was saying. "Never was much at killing anything. Seems kind of a shame to deplete the game reserve. I'd collect guns if I had the time and the money, though." He was waiting on every step till Old Dudley got on it. He was explaining guns and makes. He had on grey socks with a black fleck in them. They finished the stairs. The nigger walked down the hall with him, holding him by the arm. It probably looked like he had his arm locked in the nigger's.

They went right up to Old Dudley's door. Then the nigger asked, "You from around here?"

"Old Dudley shook his head looking at the door. He hadn't looked at the nigger yet. All the way up the stairs, he hadn't looked at the nigger. "Well," the nigger

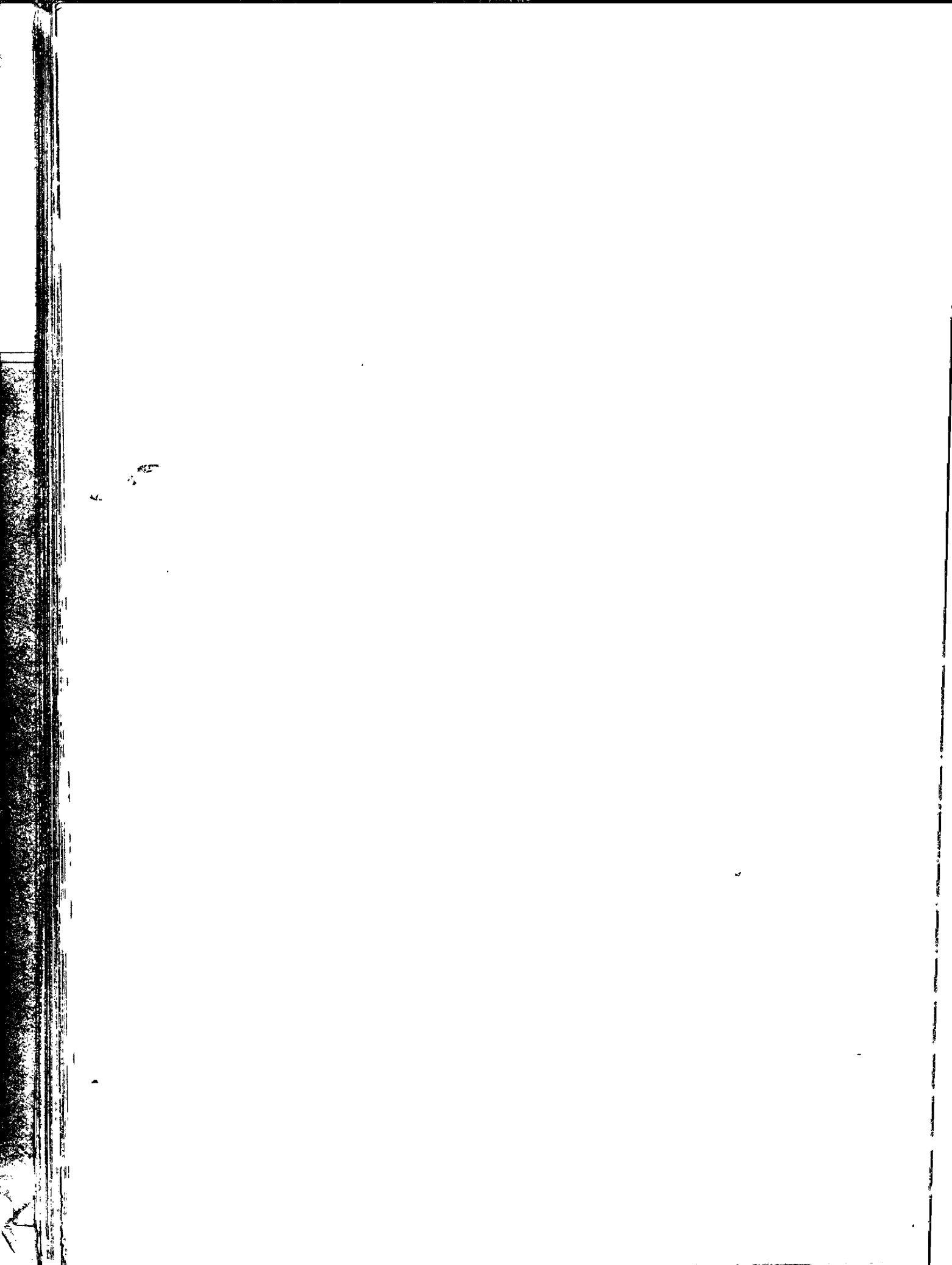


said, "it's a swell place--once you get used to it." He patted Old Dudley on the back and went into his own apartment. Old Dudley went into his. The pain in his throat was all over his face now, leaking out his eyes.

He shuffled to the chair by the window and sank down in it. His throat was going to pop. His throat was going to pop on account of a nigger--a damn nigger that patted him on the back and called him "old timer." Him that knew such as that couldn't be. Him that had come from a good place. A good place. A place where such as that couldn't be. His eyes felt strange in their sockets. They were swelling in them and in a minute there wouldn't be any room left for them there. He was trapped in this place where niggers could call you "old timer." He wouldn't be trapped. He wouldn't be. He rolled his head on the back of the chair to stretch his neck that was too full.

A man was looking at him. A man was in the window across the alley looking straight at him. The man was watching him cry. That was where the geranium was supposed to be and it was a man in his undershirt, watching him cry, waiting to watch his throat pop. Old Dudley looked back at the man. "It was supposed to be the geranium. The geranium belonged there, not the man. "Where is the geranium?" he called out of his tight throat.

"What you cryin' for?" the man asked. "I ain't



never seen a man cry like that."

"Where is the geranium?" Old Dudley quavered. "It ought to be there. Not you."

"This is my window," the man said. "I got a right to set here if I want to."

"Where is it?" Old Dudley shrilled. There was just a little room left in his throat.

"It fell off if it's any of your business," the man said.

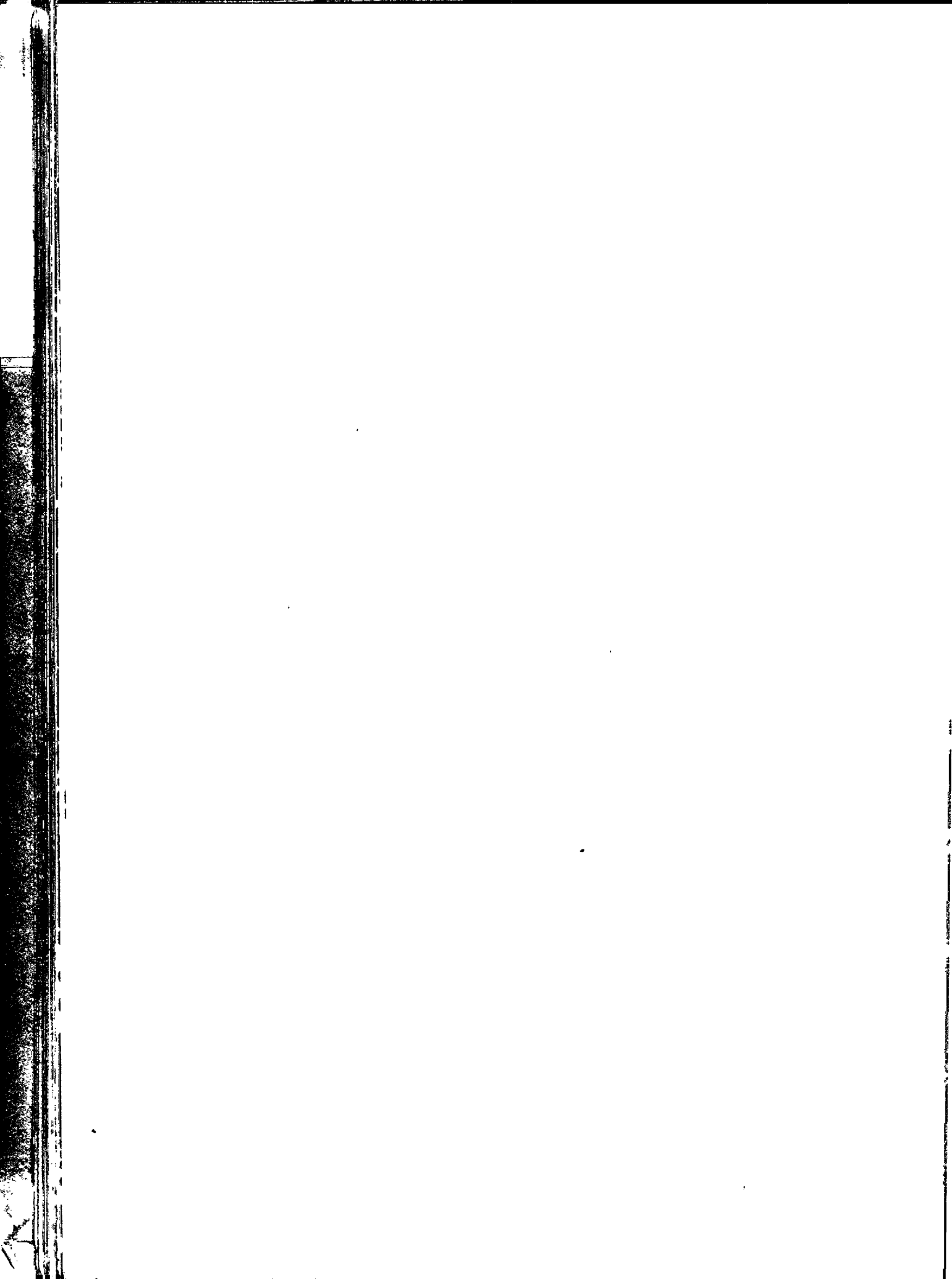
Old Dudley got up and peered over the window ledge. Down in the alley, way six floors down, he could see a cracked flower pot scattered over a spray of dirt and something pink sticking out of a green paper bow. It was down six floors. Smashed down six floors.

Old Dudley looked at the man who was chewing gum and waiting to see the throat pop. "You shouldn't have put it so near the ledge," he murmured. "Why don't you pick it up?"

"Why don't you, pop?"

Old Dudley stared at the man who was where the geranium should have been.

He would. He'd go down and pick it up. He'd put it in his own window and look at it all day if he wanted to. He turned from the window and left the room. He walked slowly down the dog run and got to the steps. The steps



dropped down like a deep wound in the floor. They opened up through a gap like a cavern and went down and down. And he had gone up them a little behind the nigger. And the nigger had pulled him up on his feet and kept his arm in his and gone up the steps with him and said he hunted deer, "old timer," and seen him holding a gun that wasn't there and sitting on the steps like a child. He had shiny tan shoes and he was trying not to laugh and the whole business was laughing. There'd probably be niggers with black flecks in their socks on every step, pulling down their mouths so as not to laugh. The steps dropped down and down. He wouldn't go down and have niggers pattin' him on the back. He went back to the room and the window and looked down at the geranium.

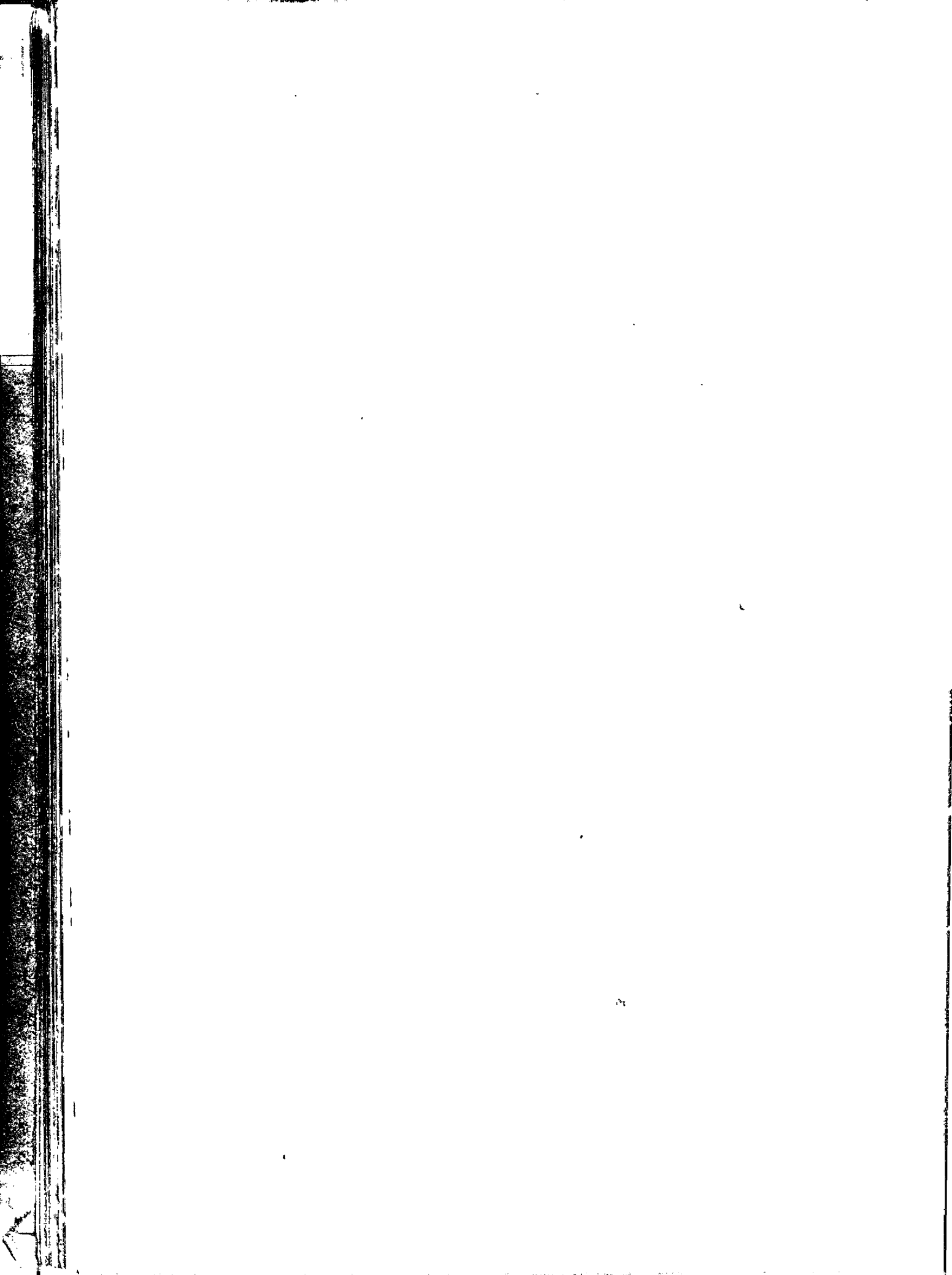
The man was sitting over where it should have been. "I ain't seen you pickin' it up," he said.

Old Dudley stared at the man.

"I seen you before," the man said. "I seen you settin' in that old chair every day, starin' out the window, looking in my apartment. What I do in my apartment is my business, see? I don't like people looking at what I do."

It was at the bottom of the alley with its roots in the air.

"I only tell people once," the man said and left the window.



THE BARBER

It is trying on liberals in Dilton.

After the Democratic White Primary, Rayber changed his barber. Three weeks before it, while he was shaving him, the barber asked, "Who you gonna vote for?"

"Darmon," Rayber said.

"You a nigger-lover?"

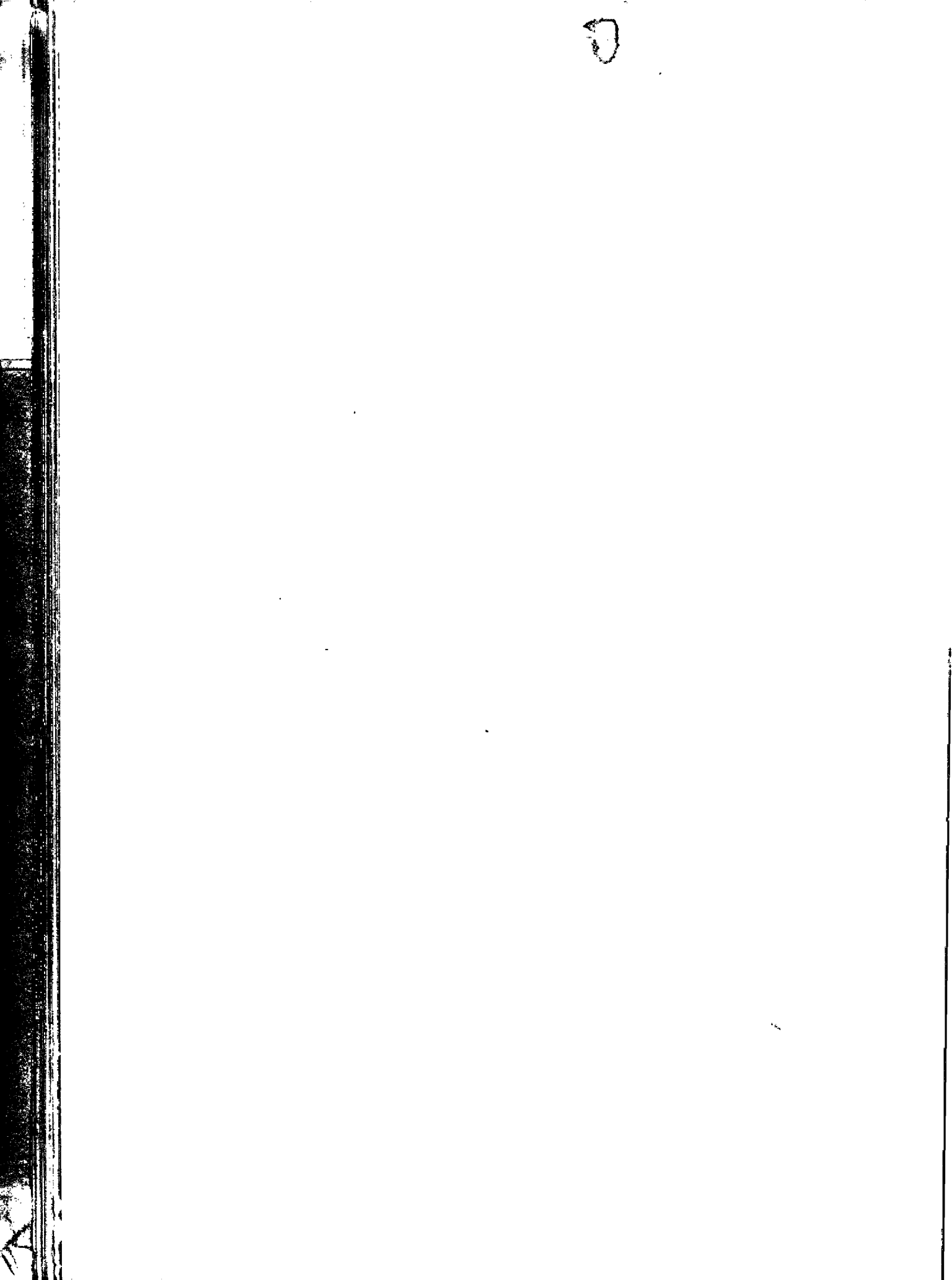
Rayber started in the chair. He had not expected to be approached so brutally. "No," he said. If he had not been taken off balance, he would have said, "I am neither a negro nor a white-lover." He had said that before to Jacobs, the philosophy man, and--to show you how trying it is for liberals in Dilton--Jacobs--a man of his education--had muttered, "That's a poor way to be."

"Why?" Rayber had asked bluntly. He knew he could argue Jacobs down.

Jacobs had said, "Skip it." He had a class. His classes frequently occurred, Rayber noticed, when Rayber was about to get him in an argument.

"I am neither a negro nor a white-lover," Rayber would have said to the barber.

The barber drew a clean path through the lather and then pointed the razor at Rayber. "I'm tellin' you,"

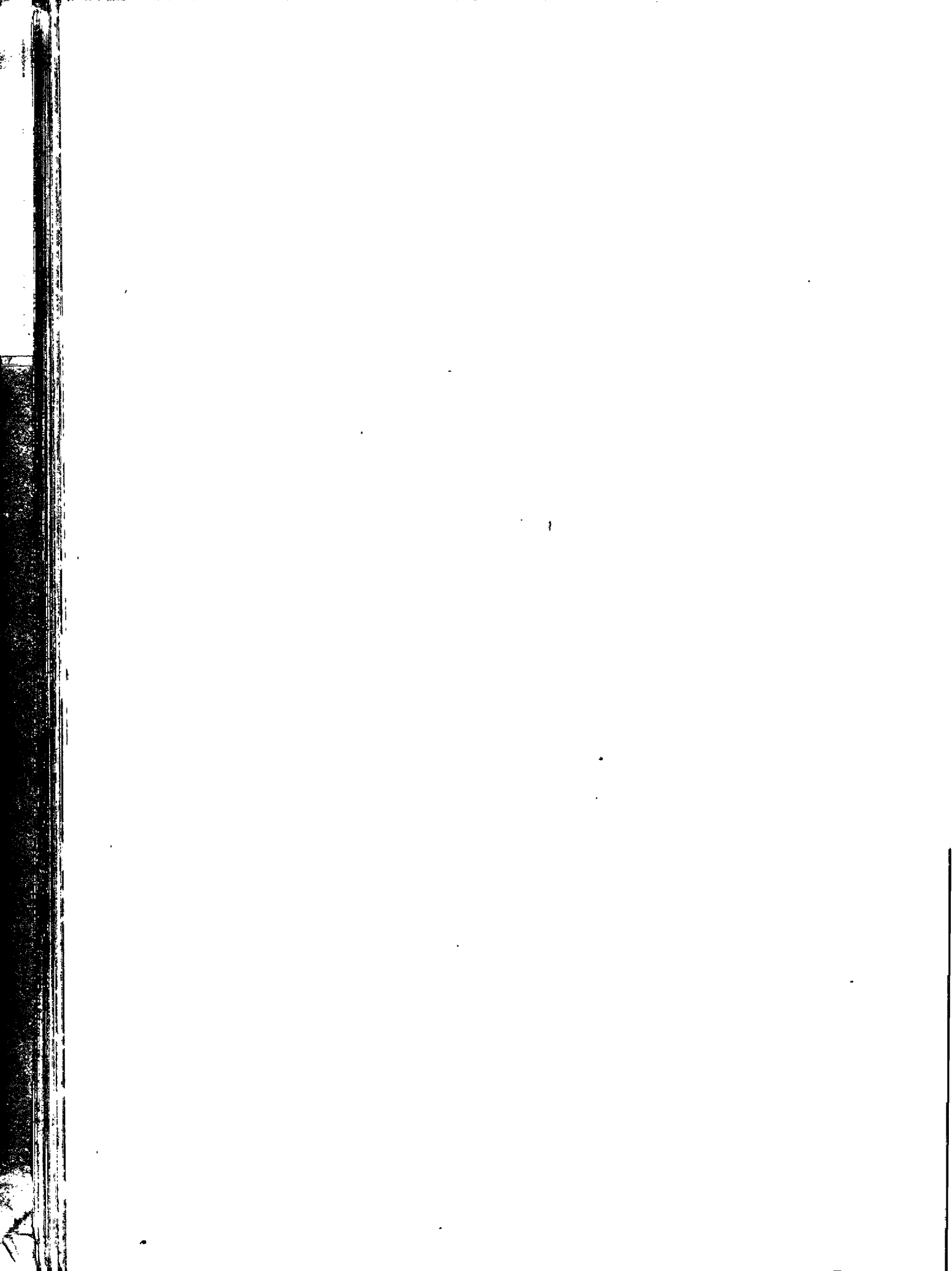


he said, "there ain't but two sides now, white and black. Anybody can see that from this campaign. You know what Hawk said? Said a hunnert and fifty years ago, they was runnin' each other down eatin' each other--throwin' jewel^o rocks at birds--skinnin' horses with their teeth. A nigger come in a white barber shop in Atlanta and says, "Gimme a haircut." They throwed him out but it just goes to show you. Why listen, three black hyenas over in Mulford last month shot a white man and took half of what was in his house and you know where they are now? Settin' in their county jail eatin' like the President of the United States-- they might get dirty in the chain gang; or some damn nigger-lover might come by and be heart-broke to see 'em pickin' rock. Why, lemme tell you this--ain't nothin' gonna be good again until we get rid of them Mother Hubbards and get us a man can put these niggers in their places. Shuh."

"You hear that, George?" he shouted to the colored boy wiping up the floor around the basins.

"Sho do," George said.

It was time for Rayber to say something but nothing appropriate would come. He wanted to say something that George would understand. He was startled that George had been brought into the conversation. He remembered Jacobs telling about lecturing at a negro college for a



week. They couldn't say negro--nigger--colored--black. Jacobs said he had come home every night and shouted, "NIGGER NIGGER NIGGER" out the back window. Rayber wondered what George's leanings were. He was a trim looking boy,

"If a nigger come in my shop with any of that hairout sass, he'd get it cut all right." The barber made a noise between his teeth. "You a Mother Hubbard?" he asked.

"I'm voting for Darmon if that's what you mean," Rayber said.

"You ever heard Hawkson talk?"

"I've had that pleasure," Rayber said.

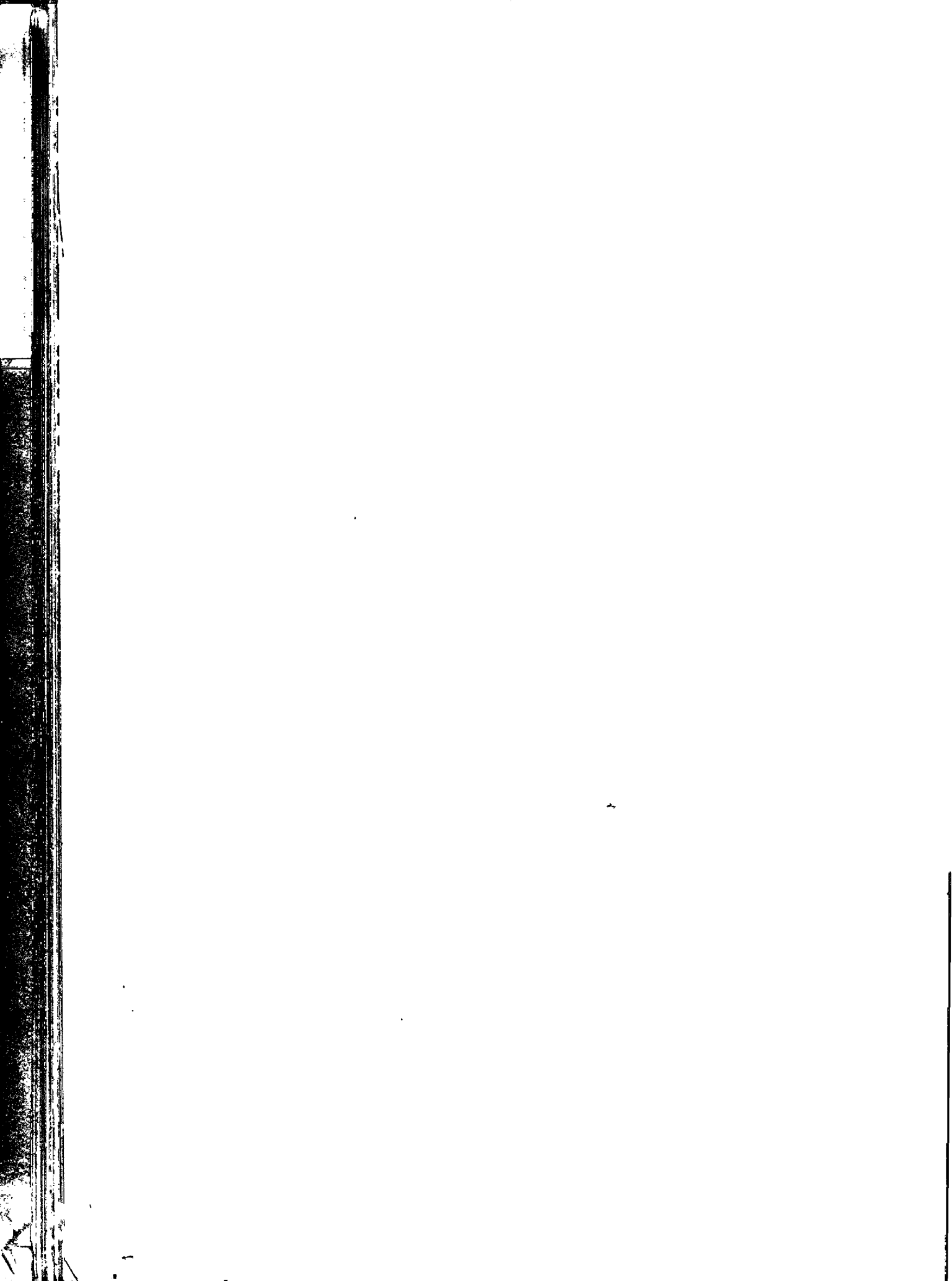
"You heard his last one?"

"No, I understand his remarks don't alter from speech to speech," Rayber said curtly.

"Yeah?" the barber said. "Well, this last speech was a killeroo! Ol' Hawk let them Mother Hubbards have it."

"A good many people," Rayber said, "consider Hawkson a demagog." He wondered if George knew what demagog meant. Should have said, "lying politician."

"Demagog!" The barber slapped his knee and whooped. "That's what Hawk said!" he howled. "Ain't that a shot! 'Folks,' he says, 'them Mother Hubbards says I'm a demagog.' Then he rears back and says sort of soft-like, 'Am I a demagog, you people?' And they yells, 'Naw, Hawk, you



ain't no demagog!' And he comes forward shouting, 'Oh yeah I am, I'm the best damn demagog in this state!' And you should hear them people roar! Whew!"

"Quite a show," Rayber said, "but what is it but a...."

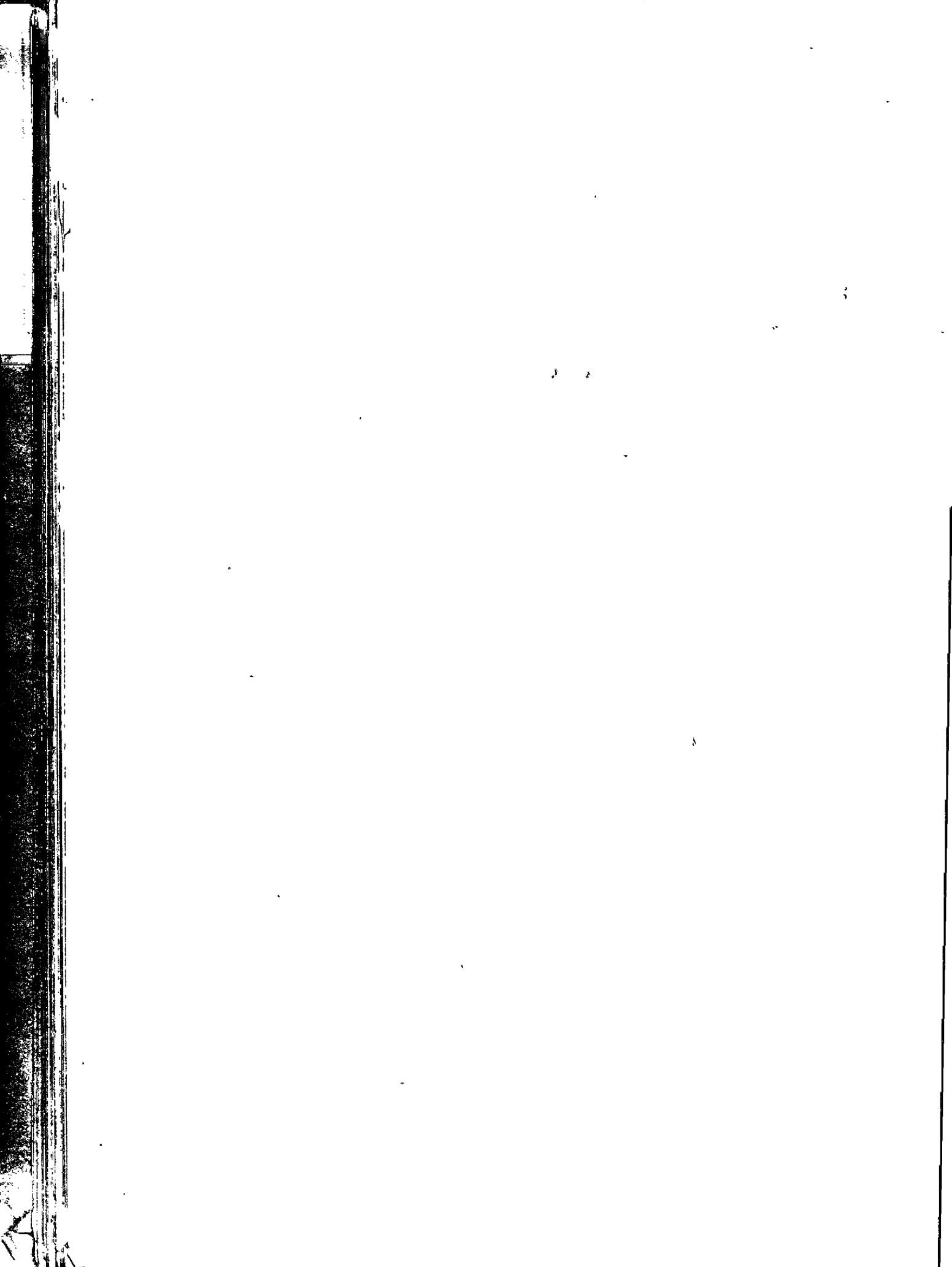
"Mother Hubbard," the barber muttered. "You been taken in by 'em all right. Lemme tell you somethin'...." He reviewed Hawkson's Fourth of July speech. It had been another killeroo, ending with poetry. Who was Darmon? Hawk wanted to know. Yeah, who was Darmon? the crowd had roared. Why, didn't they know? Why, he was Little Boy Blue, blowin' his horn. Yeah. Babies in the meadow and niggers in the corn. Man! Rayber should have heard that one. No Mother Hubbard could have stood up under it.

Rayber thought that if the barber would read a few....

Listen, he didn't have to read nothin'. All he had to do was think. That was the trouble with people these days--they didn't think, they didn't use their horse sense. Why wasn't Rayber thinkin'? Where was his horse sense?

Why am I straining myself? Rayber thought irritably.

"Nossir!" the barber said, "big words don't do nobody no good. They don't take the place of thinkin'."



"Thinking!" Rayber shouted. "You call yourself thinking?"

"Listen," the barber said, "do you know what Hawk told them people at Tilford?" At Tilford Hawk had told them that he liked niggers fine in their place and if they didn't stay in that place, he had a place to put 'em. How about that?"

Rayber wanted to know what that had to do with thinking.

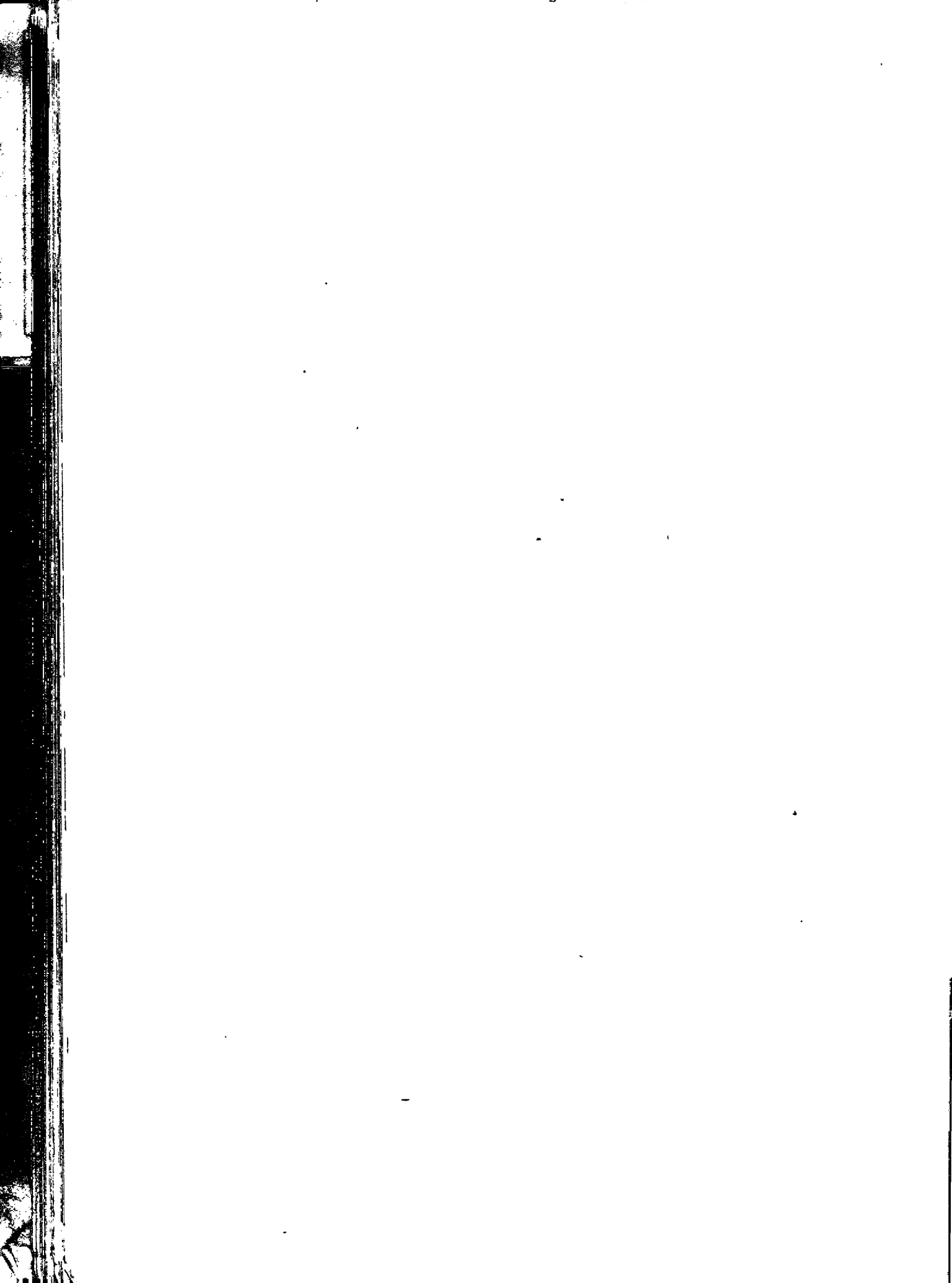
The barber thought it was plain as a pig on a sofa what that had to do with thinking. He thought a good many other things too, which he told Rayber. He said Rayber should have heard the Hawkson speeches at Mullin's Oak, Bedford, and Chickerville.

Rayber settled down in his chair again and reminded the barber that he had come in for a shave.

The barber started back shaving him. He said Rayber should have heard the one at Spartasville. "There wasn't a Mother Hubbard left standin', and all the Boy Blues got their horns broke." Hawk said," he said, "that the time had come when you had to sit on the lid with...."

"I have an appointment," Rayber said. "I'm in a hurry." Why should he stay and listen to that tripe?

As much rot as it was, the whole asinine conversation stuck with him the rest of the day and went through



his mind in persistent detail after he was in bed that night. To his disgust, he found that he was going through it, putting in what he would have said if he'd had an opportunity to prepare himself. He wondered how Jacobs would have handled it. Jacobs had a way about him that made people think he knew more than Rayber thought he knew. It was not a bad trick in his profession. Rayber often amused himself analyzing it. Jacobs would have handled the barber calmly enough. Rayber started through the conversation again, thinking how Jacobs would have done it. He ended doing it himself.

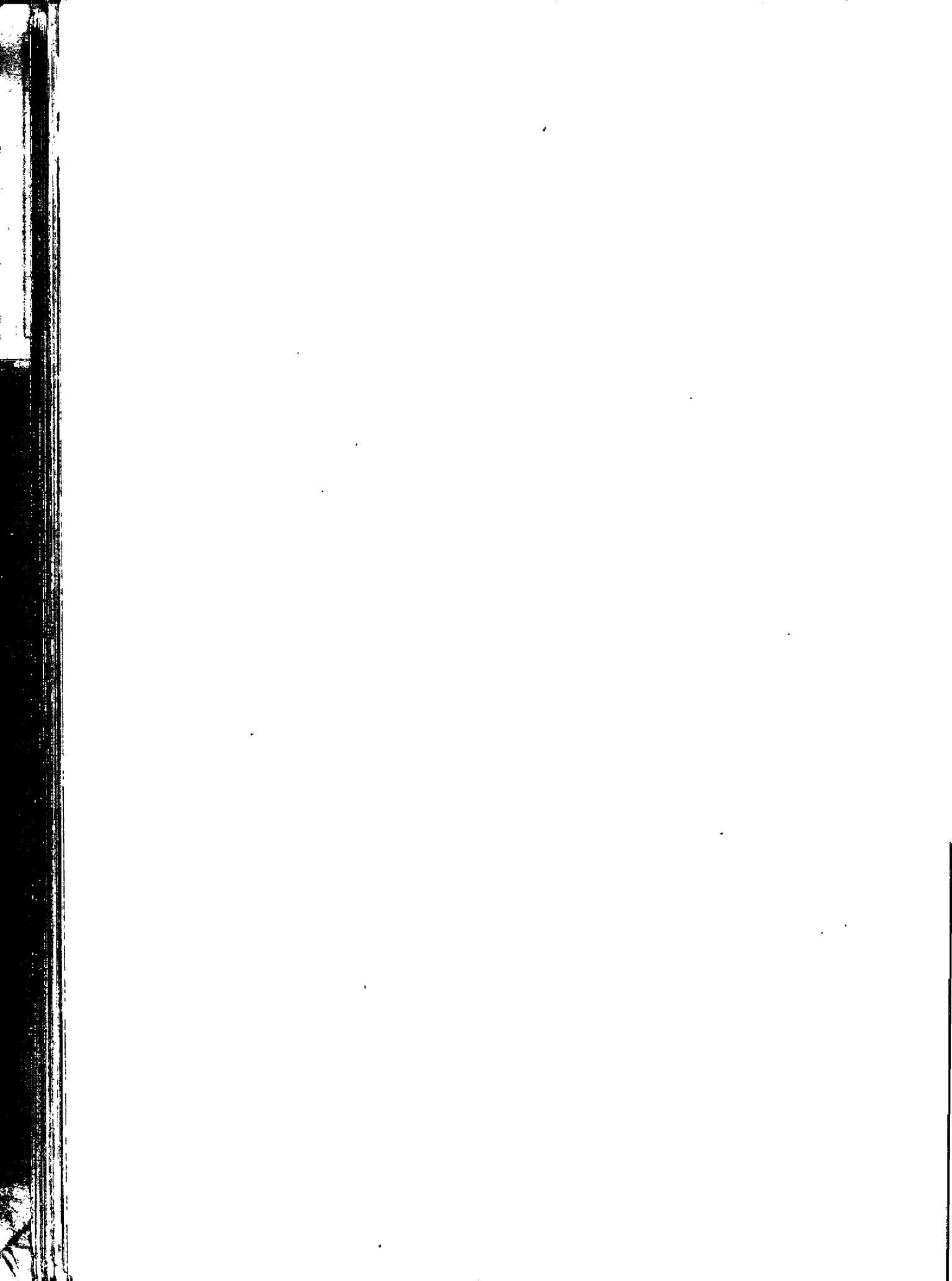
The next time he went to the barber's, he had forgotten about the argument. The barber seemed to have forgotten it too. He disposed of the weather and stopped talking. Rayber was wondering what was going to be for supper. Oh. It was Tuesday. On Tuesday his wife had canned meat. Took canned meat and baked it with cheese-- slice of meat and a slice of cheese--turned out striped-- why do we have to have this stuff every Tuesday?--if you don't like it you don't have to--

"You still a Mother Hubbard?"

Rayber's head jerked. "What?"

"You still for Darmon?"

"Yes," Rayber said and his brain darted to its store of preparations.



"Well, look-a-here, you teachers, you know, looks like, well...." He was confused. Rayber could see that he was not so sure of himself as he'd been the last time. He probably thought he had a new point to stress. "Looks like you fellows would vote for Hawk on account of you know what he said about teachers' salaries. Seems like you would now. Why not? Don't you want more money?"

"More money!" Rayber laughed. "Don't you know that with a rotten governor I'd lose more money than he'd give me?" He realized that he was finally on the barber's level. "Why, he dislikes too many different kinds of people," he said. "He'd cost me twice as much as Darmon."

"So what if he would?" the barber said. "I ain't one to pinch money when it does some good. I'll pay for quality any day."

"That's not what I meant!" Rayber began, "that's not...."

"That raise Hawk's promised don't apply to teachers like him anyway," somebody said from the back of the room. A fat man with an air of executive assurance came over near Rayber. "He's a college teacher, ain't he?"

"Yeah," the barber said, "that's right. He wouldn't get Hawk's raise; but say, he wouldn't get one if Darmon was elected neither."

"Ahh, he'd get something. All the schools are

supporting Darmon. They stand to get their cut--free text books or new desks or something. That's the rules of the game."

"Better schools," Rayber sputtered, "benefit everybody."

"Seems like I been hearin' that a long time," the barber said.

"You see," the man explained, "you can't put nothing over on the schools. That's the way they throw it off--benefits everybody."

"The barber laughed.

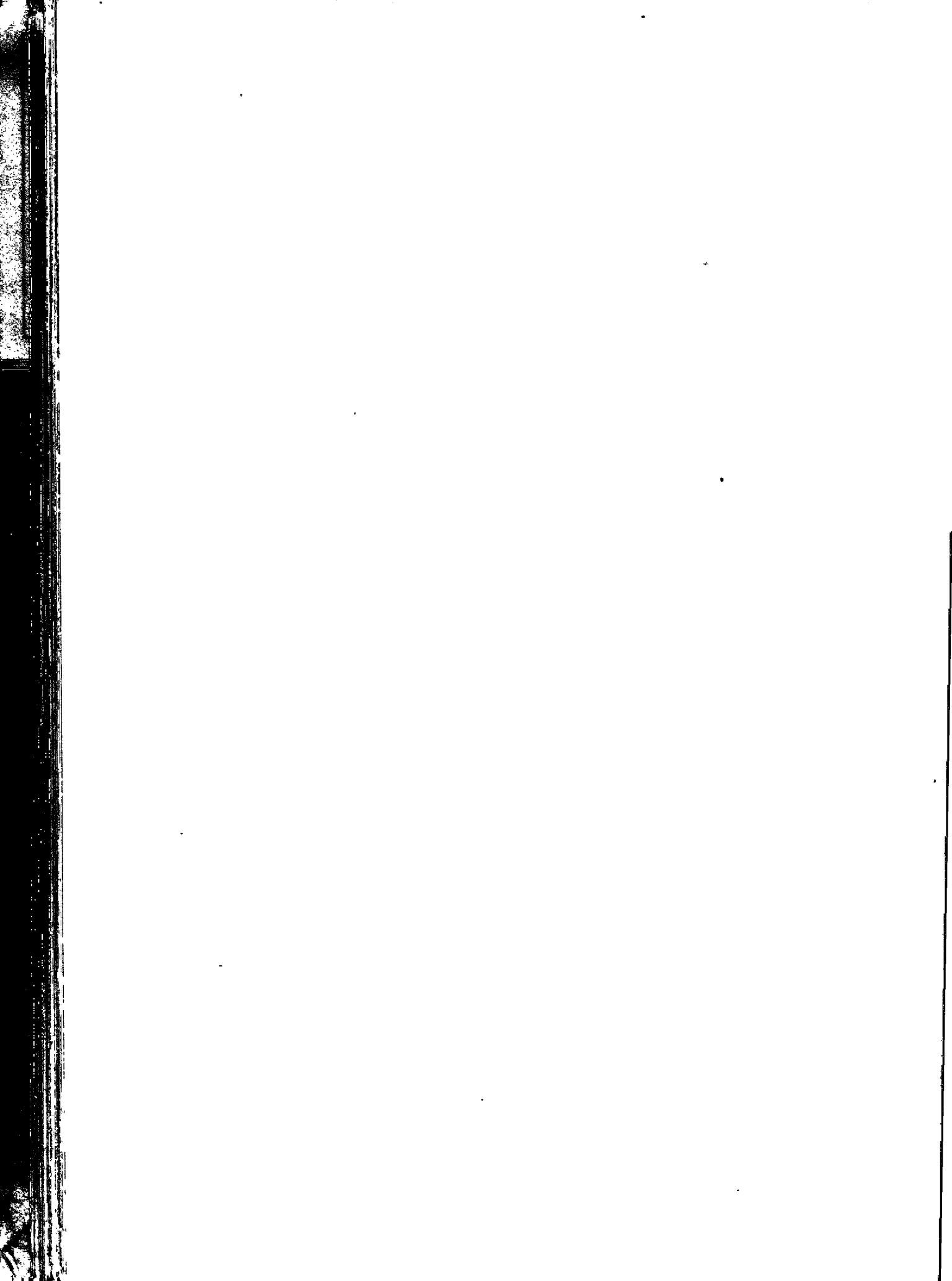
"If you ever thought..." Rayber began.

"Maybe there'd be a new desk at the head of the room for you," the man chortled. "How about that, Joe?" He nudged the barber.

Rayber wanted to lift his foot under the man's chin. "You ever heard about reasoning?" he muttered.

"Listen," the man said, "you can talk all you want. What you don't realize is, we've got an issue here. How'd you like a couple of black faces looking at you from the back of your class room?"

Rayber had a blind moment when he felt as if something that wasn't there was bashing him to the ground. George came in and began washing basins. "Willing to teach any person willing to learn--black or white," Rayber



said. He wondered if George had looked up.

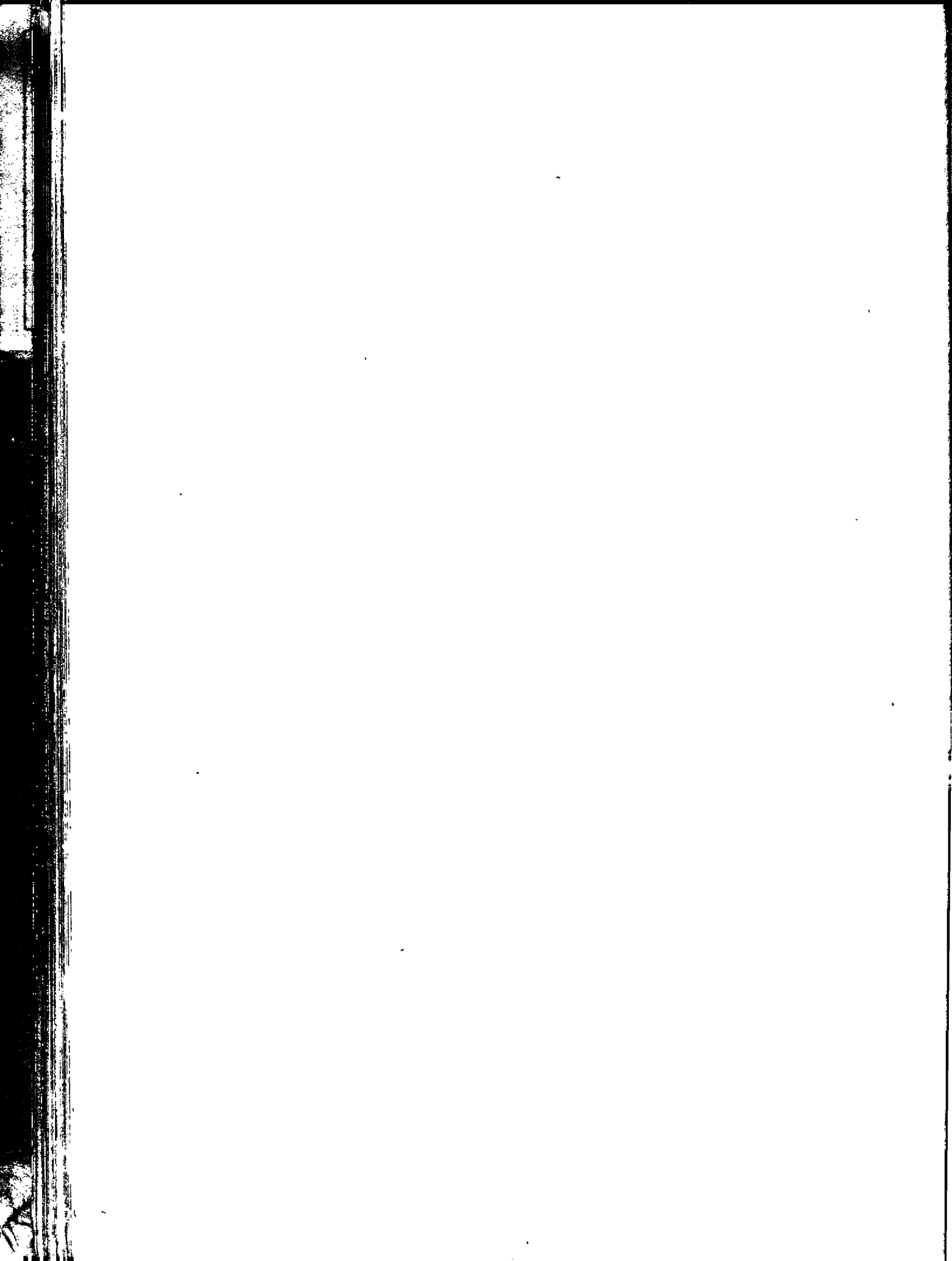
"All right," the barber agreed, "but not mixed up together, huh? How'd you like to go to a white school, George?" he shouted.

"Wouldn't like that," George said. "We needs sommo powders. These here the las' in this box." He dusted them out into the basin.

"Go get some then," the barber said.

"The time has come," the executive went on, "just like Hawkson said, when we got to sit on the lid with both feet and a mule." He went on to review Hawkson's Fourth of July speech.

Rayber would like to have pushed him into the basin. The day was hot and full enough of flies without having to spend it listening to a fat fool. He could see the courthouse square, blue-green cool, through the tinted glass window. He wished to hell the barber would hurry. He fixed his attention on the square outside, feeling himself there where, he could tell from the trees, the air was moving slightly. A group of men sauntered up the courthouse walk. Rayber looked more closely and thought he recognized Jacobs. But Jacobs had a late afternoon class. It was Jacobs, though. Or was it. If it were, who was he talking to? Blakeley? Or was that Blakeley. He squinted. Three colored boys in zoot suits strolled.



by on the sidewalk. One dropped down on the pavement so that only his head was visible to Rayber, and the other two lounged over him, leaning against the barber shop window and making a hole in the view. Why the hell can't they park somewhere else? Rayber thought fiercely. "Hurry up," he said to the barber, "I have an appointment."

"What's your hurry?" the fat man said. "You better stay and stick up for Boy Blue."

"You know you never told us why you're gonna vote for him," the barber chuckled, taking the cloth from around Rayber's neck.

"Yeah," the fat man said, "see can you tell us without sayin', goodgovermint."

"I have an appointment," Rayber said. "I can't stay."

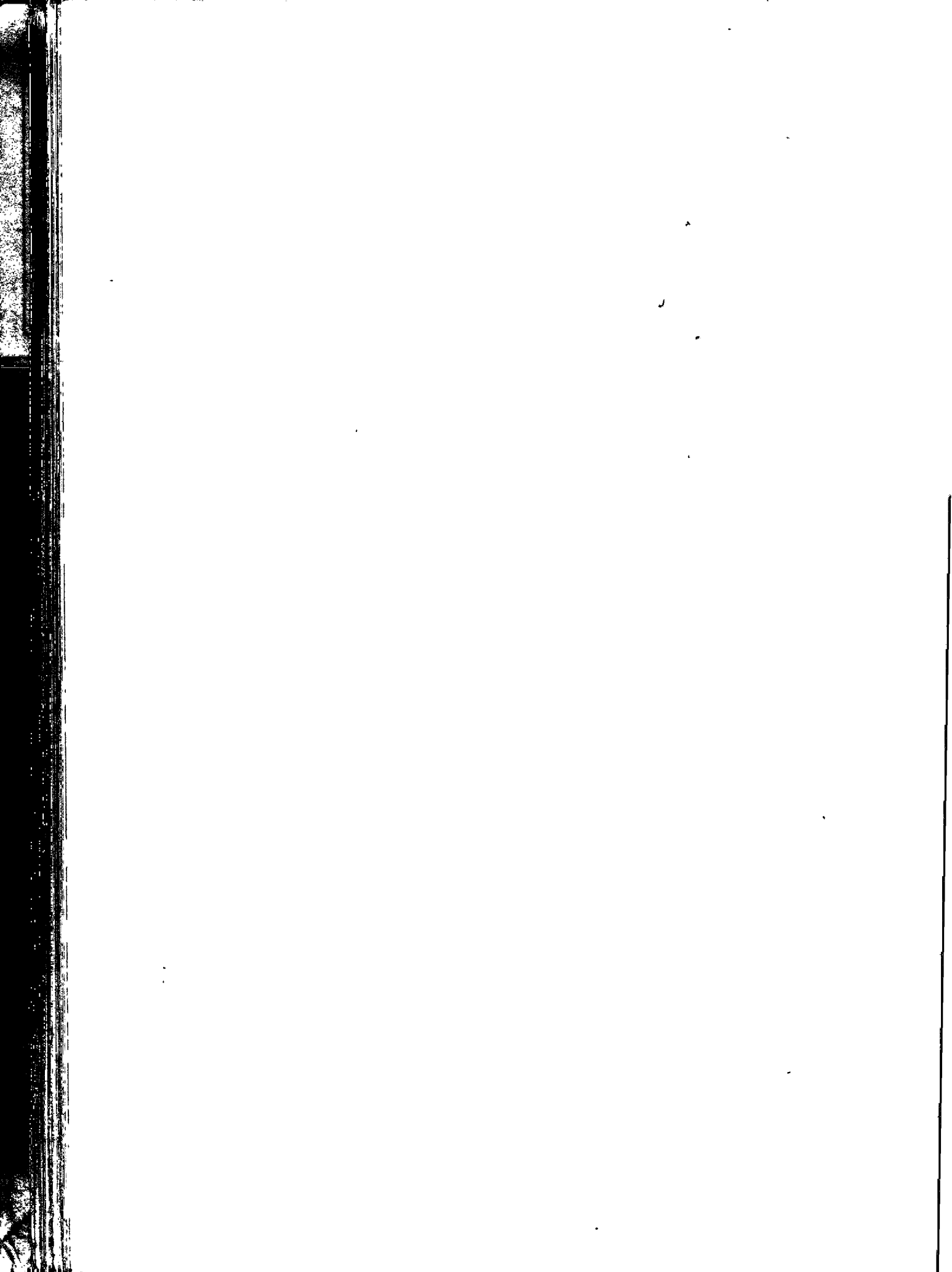
"You just know Darmon is so sorry you won't be able to say a good word for him," the fat man howled.

"Listen," Rayber said, "I'll be back in here next week and I'll give you as many reasons for voting for Darmon as you want--better reasons than you've given me for voting for Hawkson."

"I'd like to see you do that," the barber said. "Because I'm telling you, it can't be done."

"All right, we'll see," Rayber said.

"Remember," the fat man carped, "you ain't gonna



say, goodgovernment."

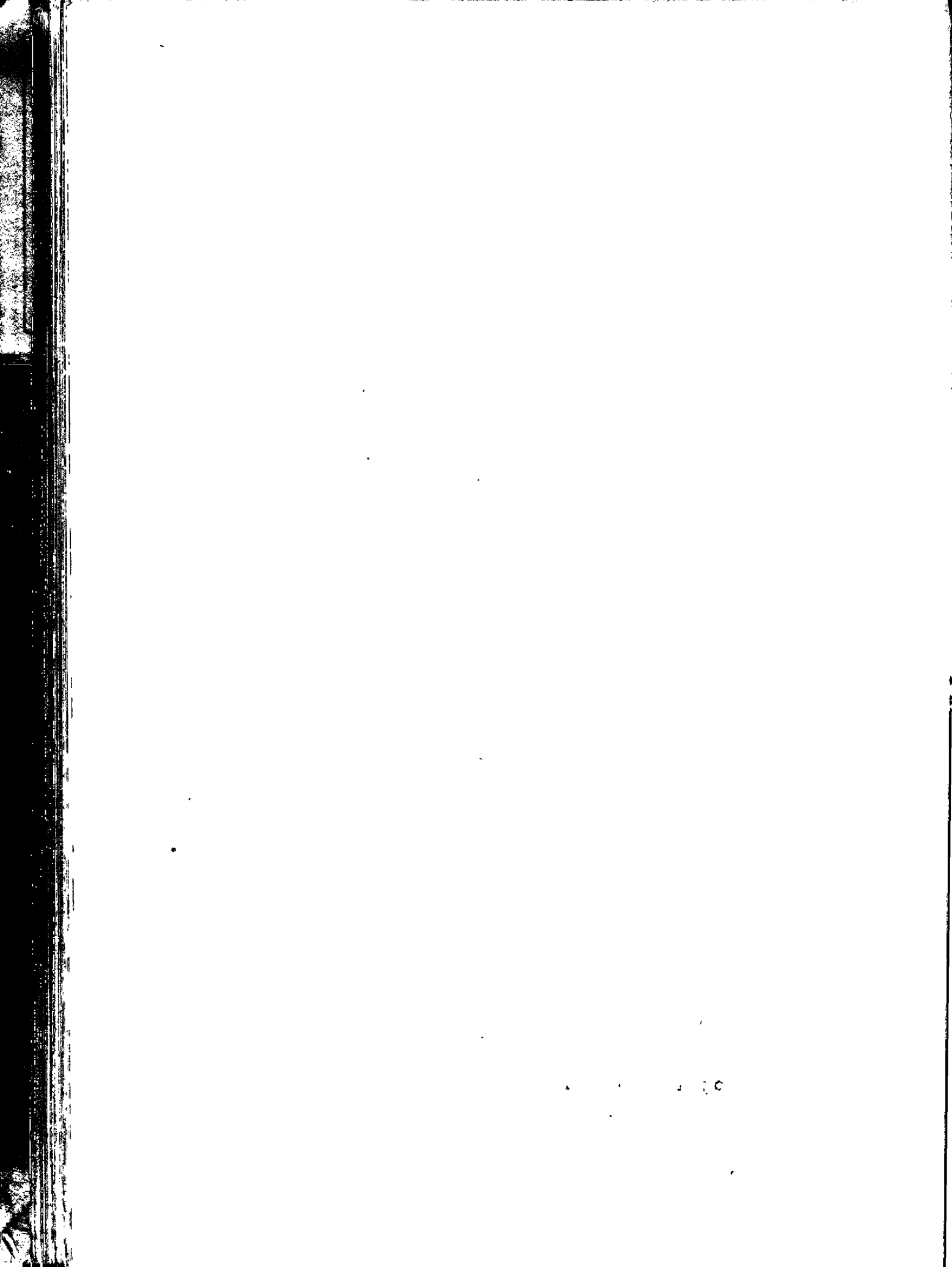
"I won't say anything you can't understand," Rayber muttered and then felt foolish for showing his irritation. The fat man and the barber were grinning. "I'll see you Tuesday," Rayber said and left. He was disgusted with himself for saying he would give them reasons. Reasons would have to be worked out--systematically. He couldn't open his head in a second like they did. He wished to hell he could. He wished to hell "Mother Hubbard" weren't so accurate. He wished to hell Darmon spit tobacco juice. The reasons would have to be worked out--time and trouble. What was the matter with him? Why not work them out? He could make everything in that shop squirm if he put his mind to it.

By the time he got home, he had the beginnings of an outline for an argument. It would be filled in with no waste words, no big words--no easy job, he could see.

He got right to work on it. He worked on it until supper time and had four sentences--all crossed out. He got up once in the middle of the meal to go to his desk and change one. After supper he crossed the correction out.

"What is the matter with you?" his wife wanted to know.

"Not a thing," Rayber said, "not a thing. I just



have to work."

"I'm not stopping you," she said.

When she went out, he kicked the board loose on the bottom of the desk. By eleven o'clock he had one page. The next morning it came easier, and he finished it by noon. He thought it was blunt enough. It began, "For two reasons, men elect other men to power," and it ended, "Men who use ideas without measuring them are walking on wind." He thought the last sentence was pretty effective. He thought the whole thing was effective enough.

In the afternoon he took it around to Jacob's office. Blakeley was there but he left. Rayber read the paper to Jacobs.

"Well," Jacobs said, "so what? What do you call yourself doing?" He had been jotting figures down on a record sheet all the time Rayber was reading.

Rayber wondered if he were busy. "Defending myself against barbers," he said. "You ever tried to argue with a barber?"

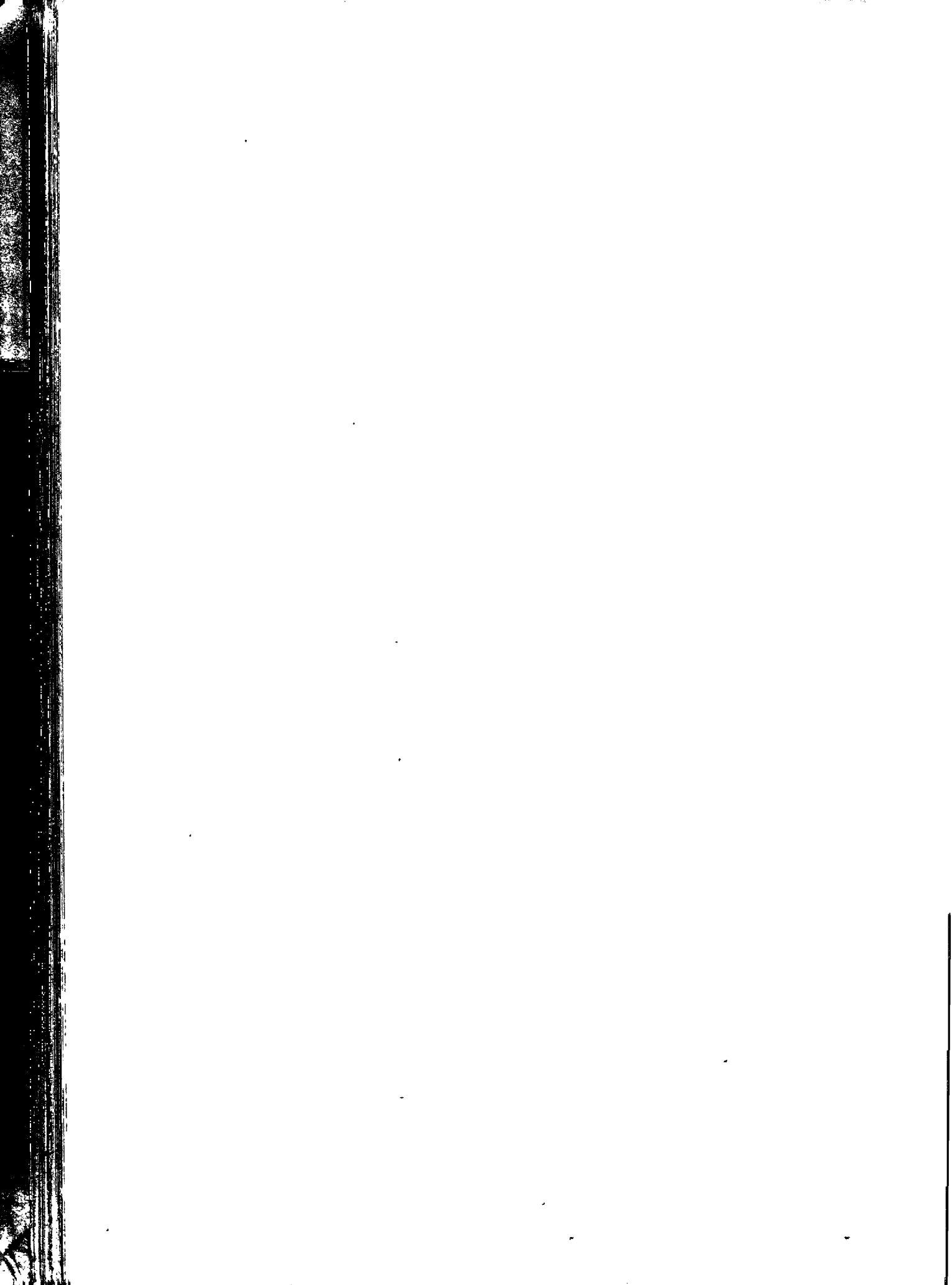
"I never argue," Jacobs said.

"That's because you don't know this kind of ignorance," Rayber explained. "You've never experienced it."

Jacobs snorted. "Oh, yes I have," he said.

"What happened?"

"I never argue."



"But you know you're right," Rayber persisted.

"I never argue."

"Well, I'm going to argue," Rayber said. "I'm going to say the right thing as fast as they can say the wrong. It'll be a question of speed. Understand," he went on, "this is no mission of conversion; I'm defending myself."

"I understand that," Jacobs said. "I hope you're able to do it."

"I've already done it! You read the paper. There it is." Rayber wondered if Jacobs were dense or preoccupied.

"Okay, then leave it there. Don't spoil your complexion arguing with barbers."

"It's got to be done," Rayber said.

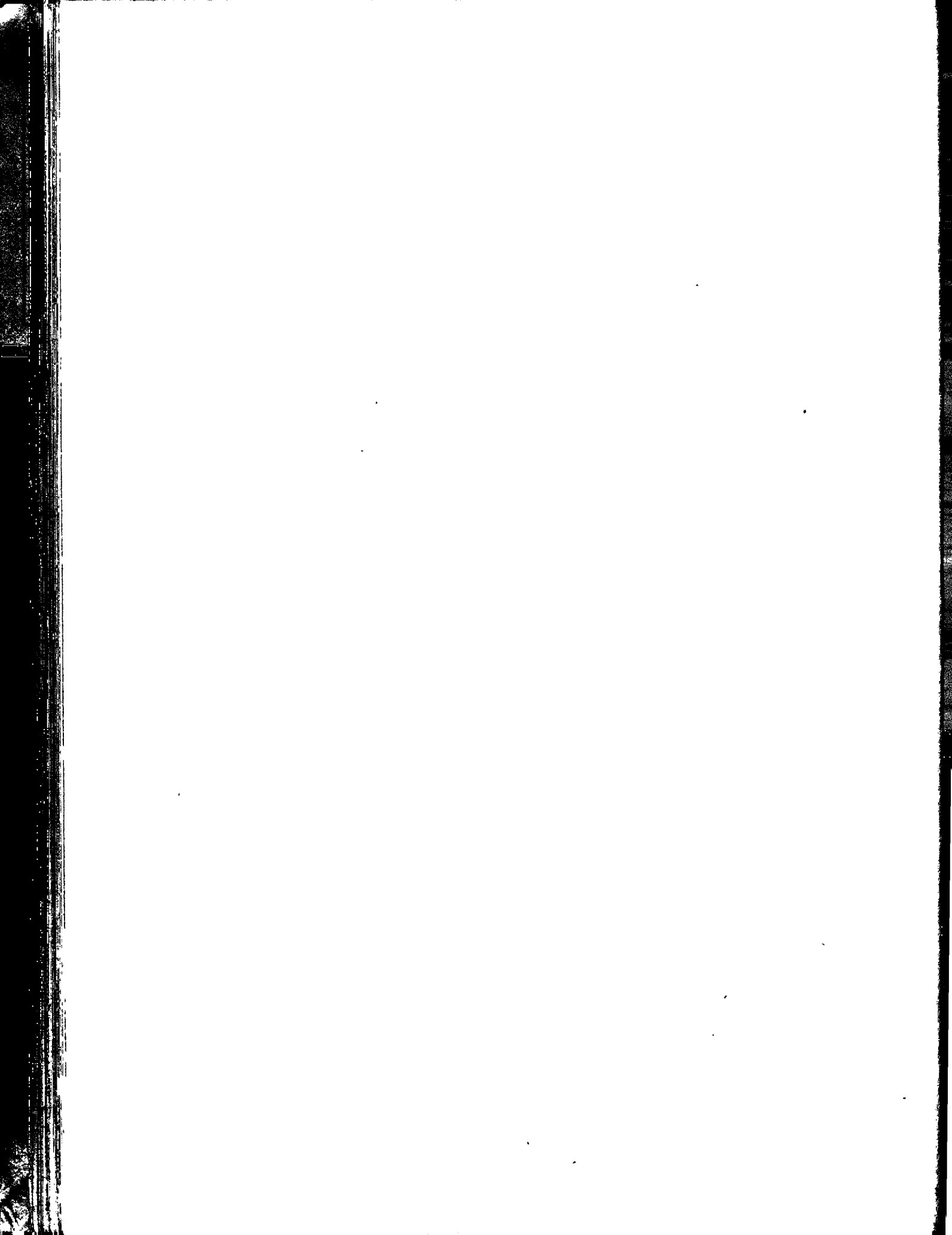
Jacobs shrugged.

Rayber had counted on discussing it with him at length. "Well, I'll see you," he said.

"Okay," Jacobs said.

Rayber wondered why he had ever read the paper to him in the first place.

Before he left for the barber's Tuesday afternoon, Rayber was nervous and he thought that by way of practice, he'd try the paper out on his wife. He didn't know but what she was for Hawkson herself. Whenever he mentioned the election, she made it a point to say, "Just because you teach doesn't mean you know everything." Did he ever



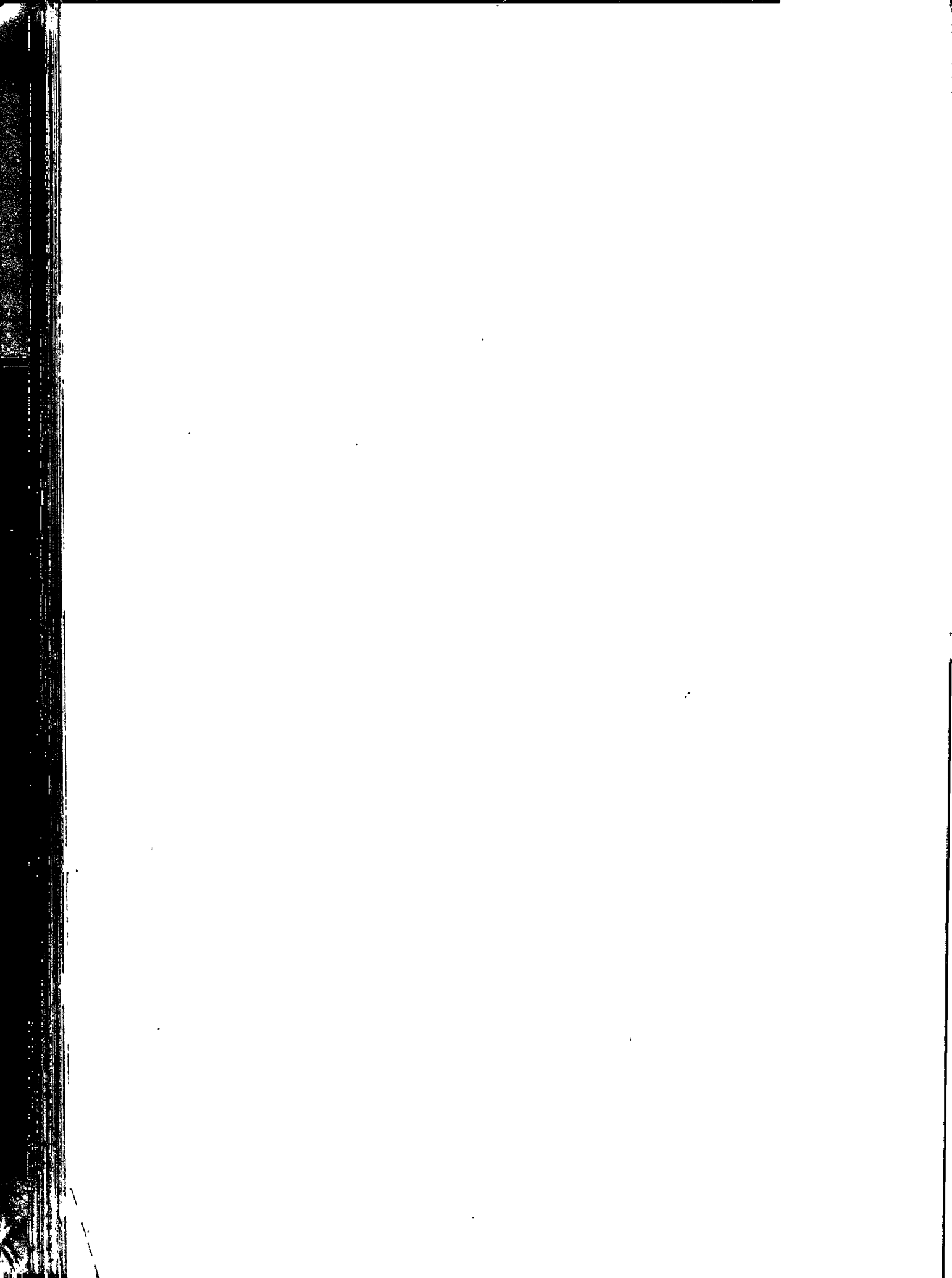
say he knew anything at all? Maybe he wouldn't call her. But he wanted to hear how the thing was actually going to sound said casually. It wasn't long; wouldn't take up much of her time. She would probably dislike being called. Still, she might possibly be affected by what he said. Possibly. He called her.

She said all right, but he'd just have to wait until she got through what she was doing; it looked like every time she got her hands in something, she had to leave and go do something else.

He said he didn't have all day to wait--it was only forty-five minutes until the shop closed--and would she please hurry up?

She came in wiping her hands and said all right; all right, she was there, wasn't she? Go ahead.

He began saying it very easily and casually, looking over her head. The sound of his voice playing over the words was not bad. He wondered if it were the words themselves or his tones that made them sound the way they did. He paused in the middle of a sentence and glanced at his wife to see if her face would give him any clue. Her head was turned slightly toward the table by her chair where an open magazine was lying. As he paused, she got up. "That was very nice." she said and went back to the kitchen. Rayber left for the barber's.



He walked slowly, thinking what he was going to say in the shop and now and then stopping to look absently at a store window. Block's Feed Company had a display of automatic chicken-killers--"So Timid Persons Can Kill Their Own Fowl" the sign over them read. Rayber wondered if many timid persons used them. As he neared the barber's, he could see obliquely through the door the man with the executive assurance was sitting in the corner reading a newspaper. Rayber went in and hung up his hat.

"Howdy," the barber said; "ain't this the hottest day in the year, though!"

"It's hot enough," Rayber said.

"Hunting season soon be over," the barber commented.

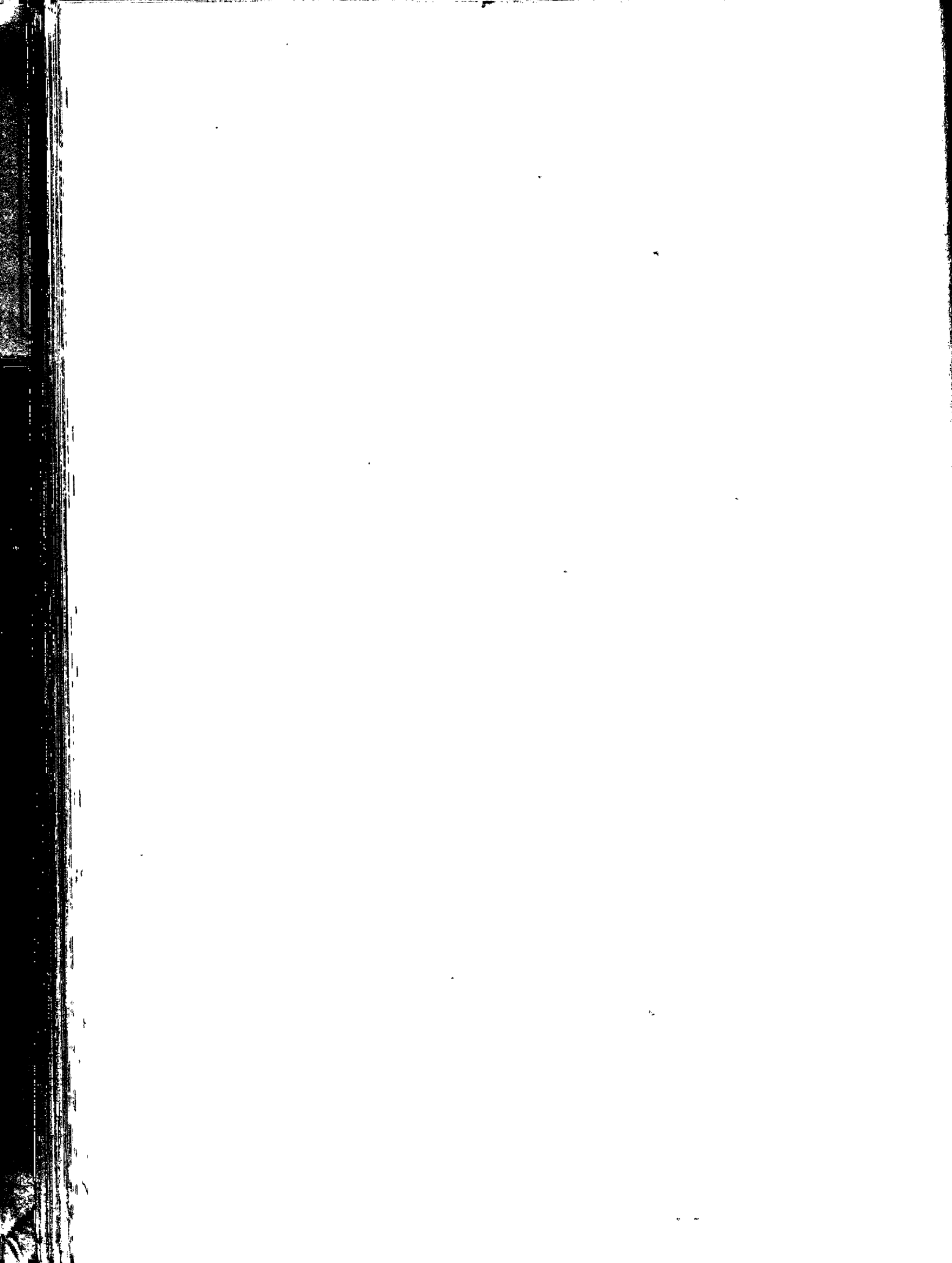
All right, Rayber wanted to say, let's get this thing going. He thought he would work into his argument from their remarks. The fat man hadn't noticed him.

"You should have seen the covy this dog of mine flushed the other day," the barber went on as Rayber got in the chair. "The birds spread once and we got four and they spread again and we got two. That ain't bad."

"Never hunted quail," Rayber said hoarsely.

"There ain't nothing like taking a nigger and a hound dog and a gun and going after quail," the barber said. "You missed a lot out of life if you ain't had that."

Rayber cleared his throat and the barber went on



working. The fat man in the corner turned a page. What do they think I came in here for? Rayber thought. They couldn't have forgotten. He waited, hearing the noises flies make and the mumble of the men talking in the back. The fat man turned another page. Rayber could hear George's broom slowly stroking the floor somewhere in the shop, then stop, then scrape, then.... "You er, still a Hawkson man?" Rayber asked the barber.

"Yeah!" the barber laughed. "Yeah! You know I had forgot. You was gonna tell us why you are voting for Darmon. Hey Racy!" he yelled to the fat man, "come over here. We gonna hear why we should vote for Boy Blue."

Roy grunted and turned another page. "Be there when I finish this piece," he mumbled.

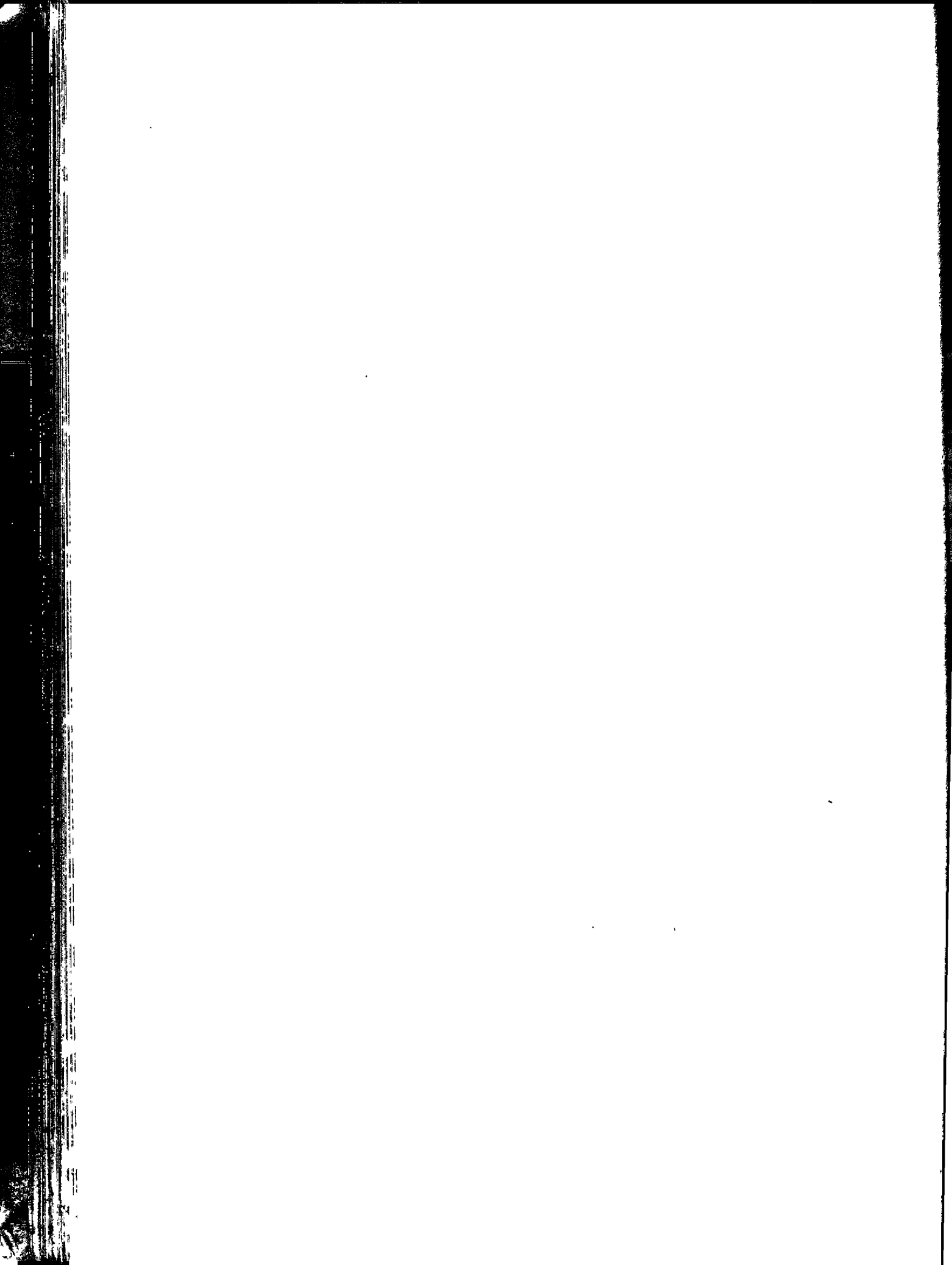
"What you got there, Joe?" one of the men in the back called, "one of them goodgovermint boys?"

"Yeah," the barber said. "He's gonna make a speech."

"I've heard too many of that kind already," the man said.

"You ain't heard one by Rayber," the barber said. "Rayber's all right. He don't know how to vote, but he's all right."

Rayber reddened. Two of the men strolled up. "This is no speech," Rayber said. "I only want to discuss



it with you--sanely."

"Come on over here, Roy," the barber yelled.

"What are you trying to make of this?" Rayber muttered; then he said suddenly, "if you're calling everybody else, why don't you call your boy, George. You afraid to have him listen?"

The barber looked at Rayber for a second without saying anything.

Rayber felt as if he had made himself too much at home.

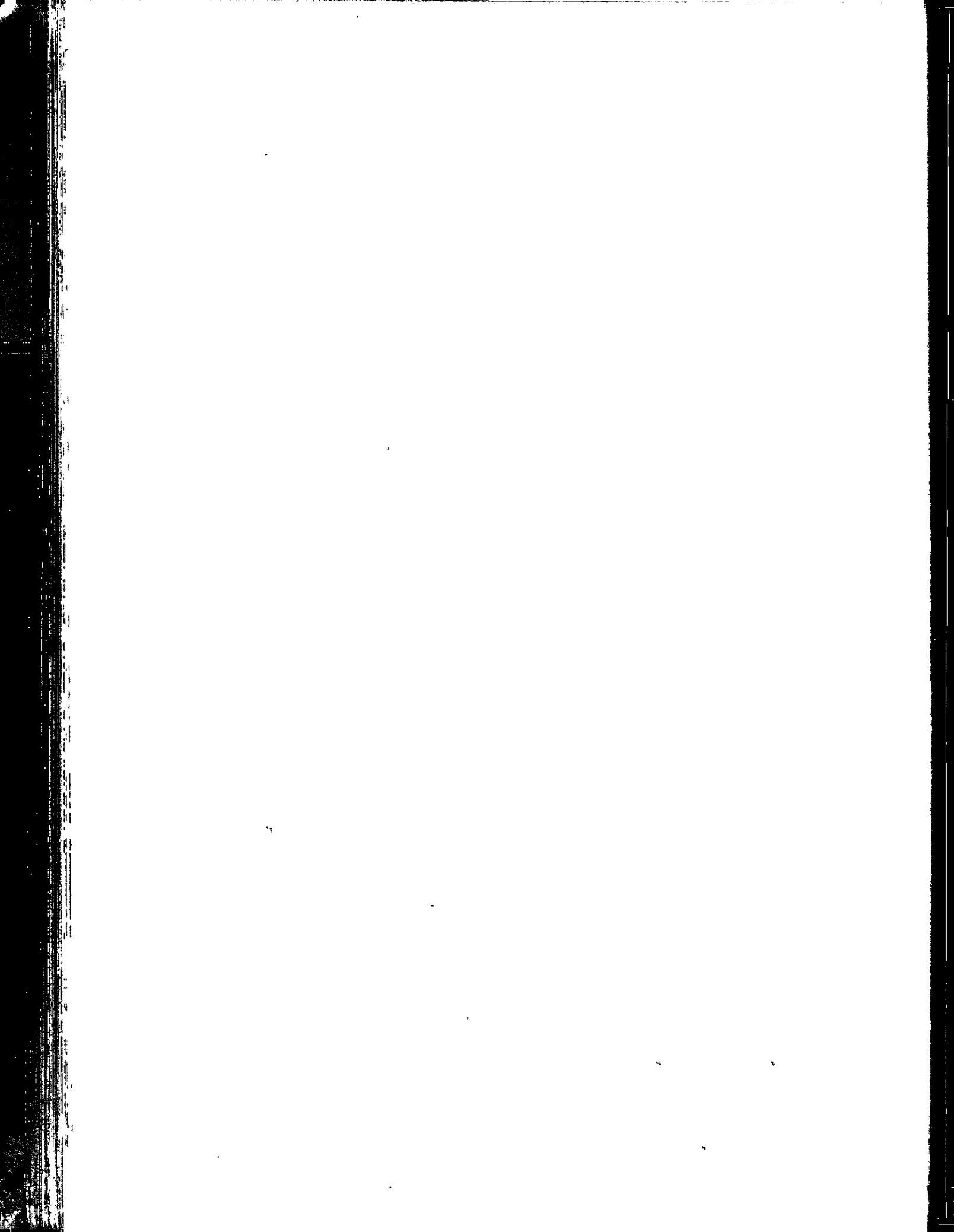
"He can hear," the barber said. "He can hear back where he is."

"I just thought he might be interested," Rayber said.

"He can hear," the barber repeated. "He can hear what he hears and he can hear two times that much. He can hear what you don't say as well as what you do."

Roy came over folding his newspaper. "Howdy boy," he said, putting his hand on Rayber's head, "let's get on with this speech."

Rayber felt as if he were fighting his way out of a net. They were over him with their red faces grinning. He heard the words drag out--"Well, the way I see it, men elect...." He felt them pull out of his mouth like freight cars, jangling, backing up on each other, grating to a



halt, sliding, clinching back, jarring, and then suddenly stopping as roughly as they had begun. It was over. Rayber was jarred that it was over so soon. For a second-- as if they were expecting him to go on--no one said anything.

Then, "How many yawl gonna vote for Boy Blue!" the barber yelled.

Some of the men turned around and snickered. One doubled over.

"Me," Roy said. "I'm gonna run right down there now so I'll be first to vote for Boy Blue tomorrow morning."

"Listen!" Rayber shouted, "I'm not trying...."

"George," the barber yelled, "you heard that speech?"

"Yessir," George said.

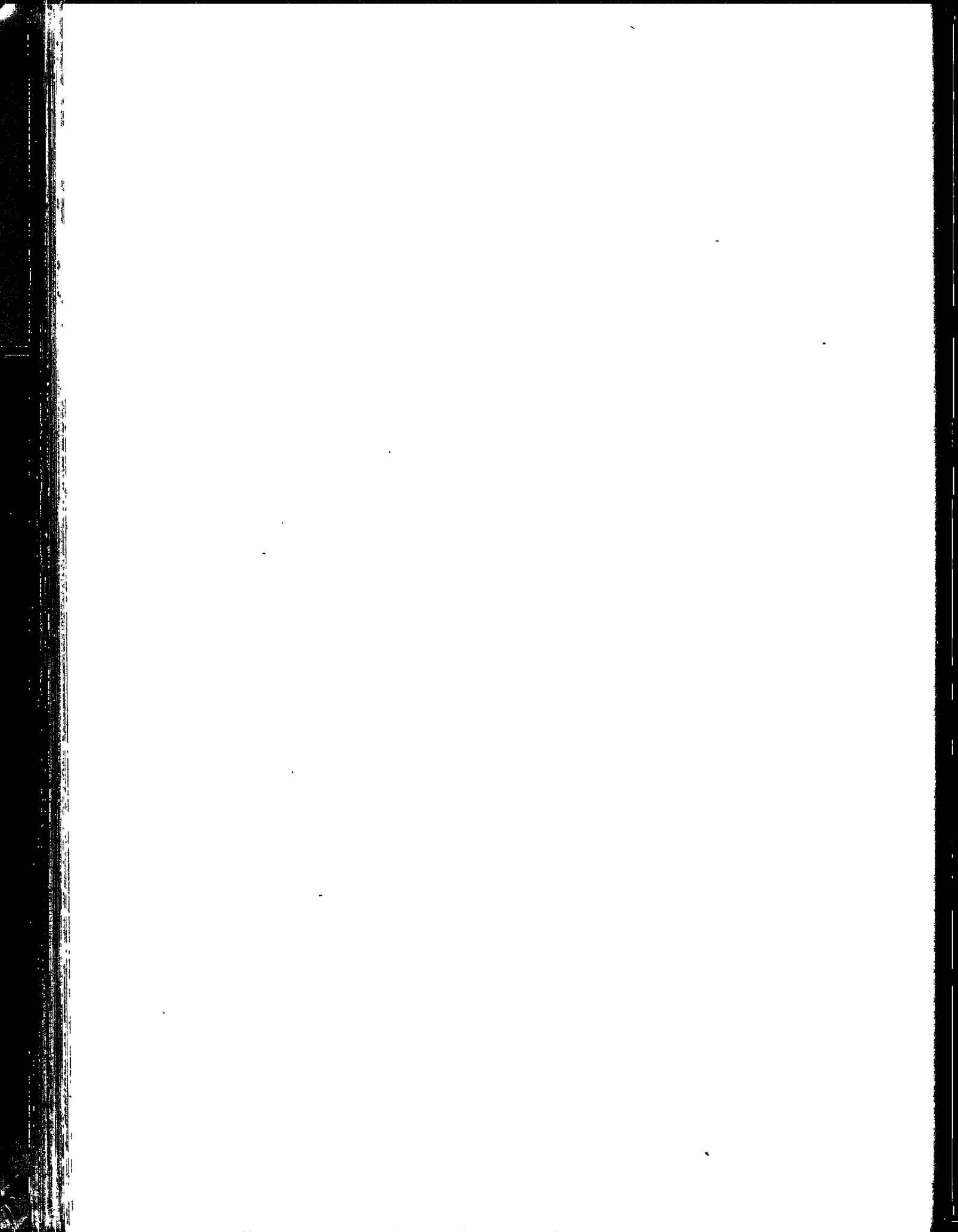
"Who you gonna vote for, George?"

"I'm not trying to...." Rayber yelled.

"I don't know is they gonna let me vote," George said. "Do, I gonna vote for Mr. Hawkson."

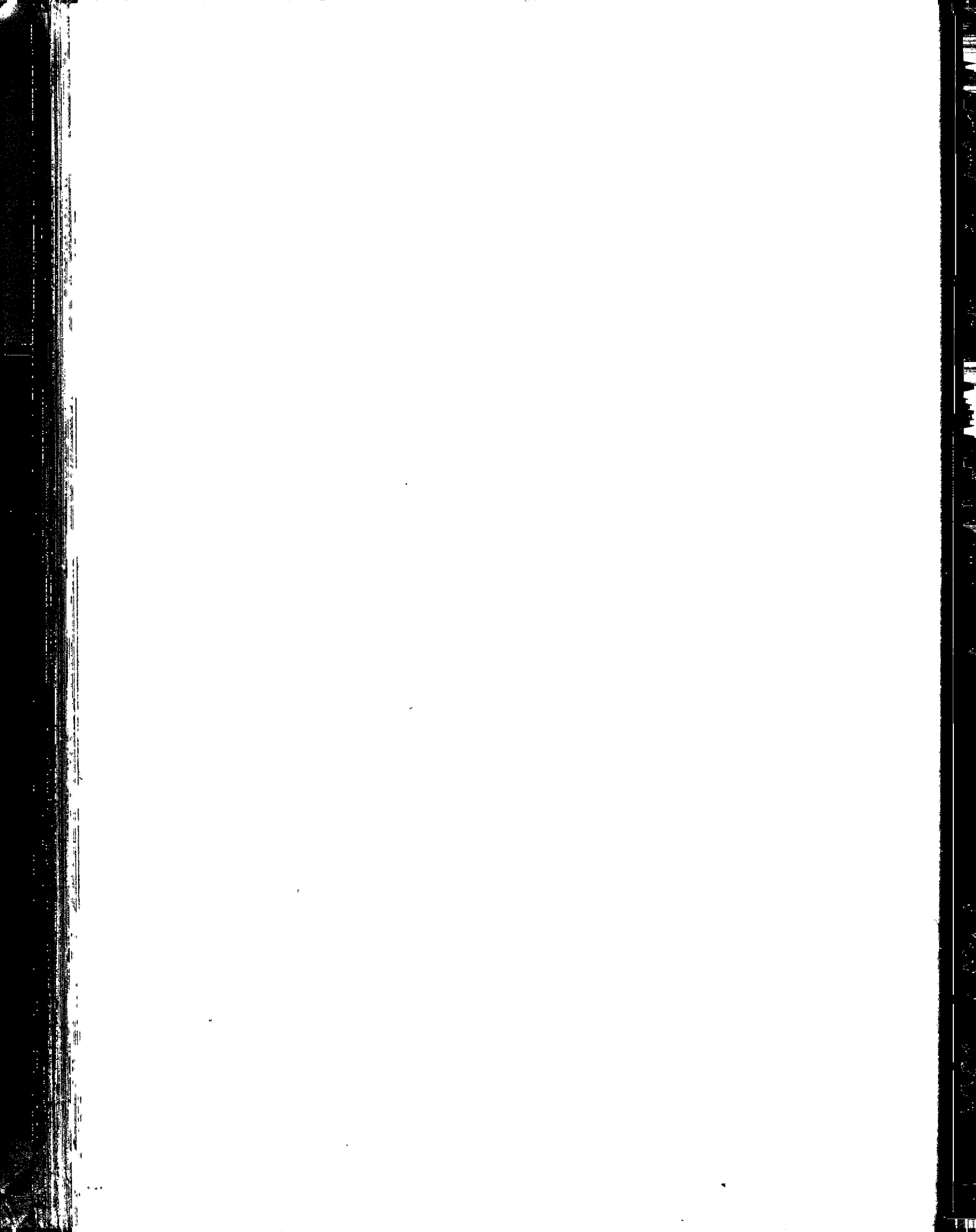
"Listen!" Rayber yelled, "do you think I'm trying to change your fat minds? What do you think I am?" He jerked the barber around by the shoulder. "Do you think I'd tamper with your damn fool ignorance?"

The barber shook Rayber's grip off his shoulder.



"Don't get excited," he said, "we all thought it was a fine speech. That's what I been saying all along--you got to think, you got to...." He lurched backward when Rayber hit him, and landed sitting on the foot rest of the next chair. "Thought it was fine," he finished, looking steadily at Rayber's white, half-lathered face glaring down at him. "It's what I been saying all along."

The blood began pounding up Rayber's neck just under his skin. He turned and pushed quickly through the men around him to the door. Outside, the sun was suspending everything in a pool of heat and before he had turned the first corner, almost running, lather began to drip inside his collar and down the barber's bib, dangling to his knees.



WILDCAT

Old Gabriel shuffled across the room waving his stick slowly sideways in front of him.

"Who that?" he whispered appearing in the doorway.

"I smells fo' niggers."

Their soft, minor-toned laughter rose above the frog's hum and blended into voices.

"Cain't you do no bettern that, Gabe?"

"Is you goin' with us, Granpaw?"

"You oughter be able to smell good enough to git our names."

Old Gabriel moved out on the porch a little way.

"That Matthew an' George an' Willie Myrick. An' who that other?"

"This Boon Williams, Granpaw."

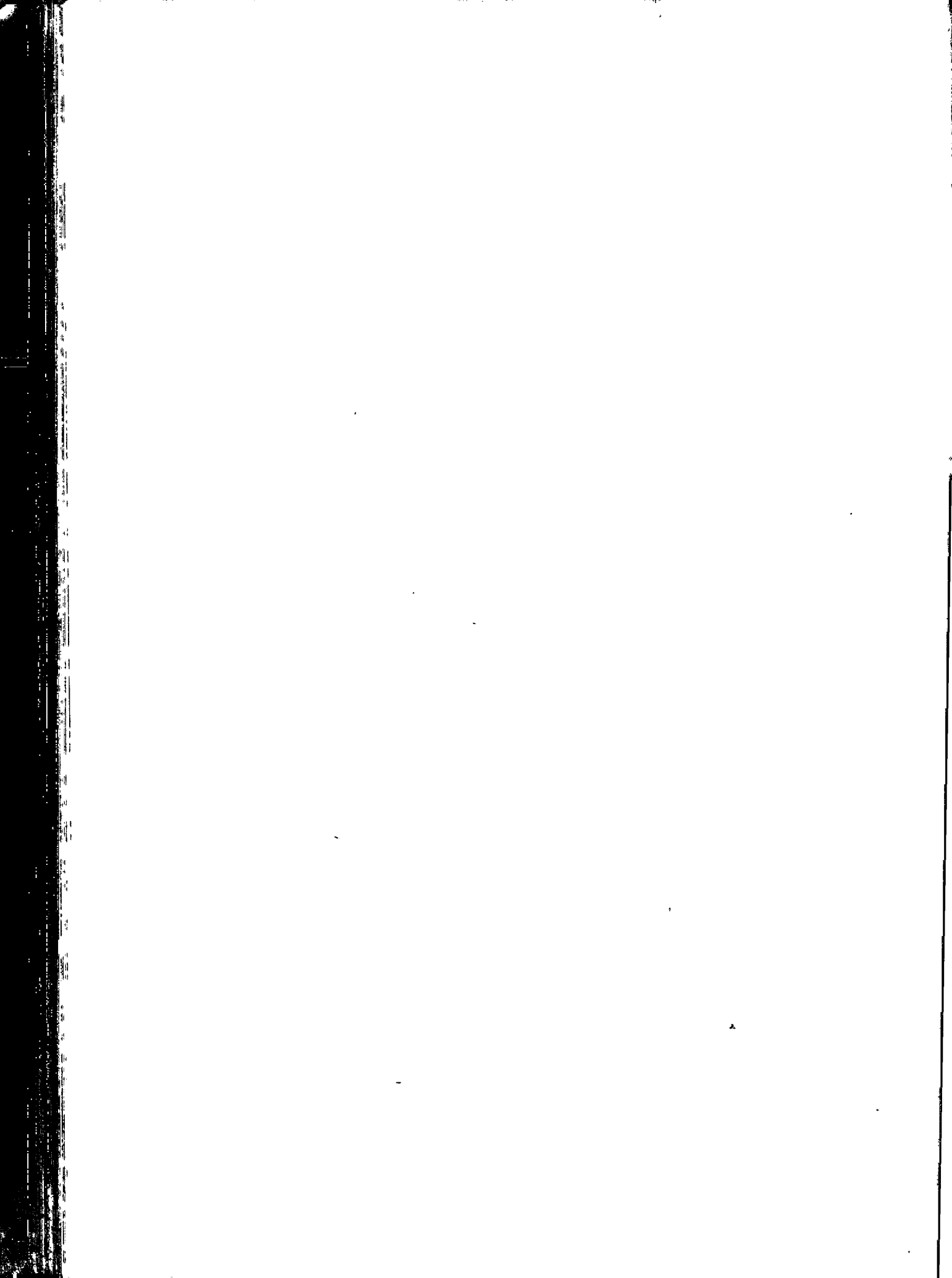
Gabriel felt for the edge of the porch with his stick. "What yawl doin'? Set down a spell."

"We waitin' on Mose an' Luke."

"We goin' huntin' that cat."

"What yawl huntin' him with?" old Gabriel muttered.

"Yawl ain't got nothin' fit to kill a wildcat with." He sat down on the edge of the porch and hung his feet over the side. "I done tol' Mose an' Luke that."



"How many wildcats you killed, Gabrul?" Their voices, rising to him through the darkness, were full of gentle mockery.

"When I was a boy, there was a cat once," Gabriel started. "It come 'round here huntin' blood. Come in through the winder of a cabin one night an' sprung in bed with a nigger an' tore that nigger's throat open befo' he could holler good."

"This cat in the woods, Granpaw. It jus' come out to git cows. Jupe Williams seen it when he gone through to the sawmill."

"What he done about it?"

"Started runnin'." Their laughter broke over the night sounds again. "He thought it was after him."

"It was," old Gabriel murmured.

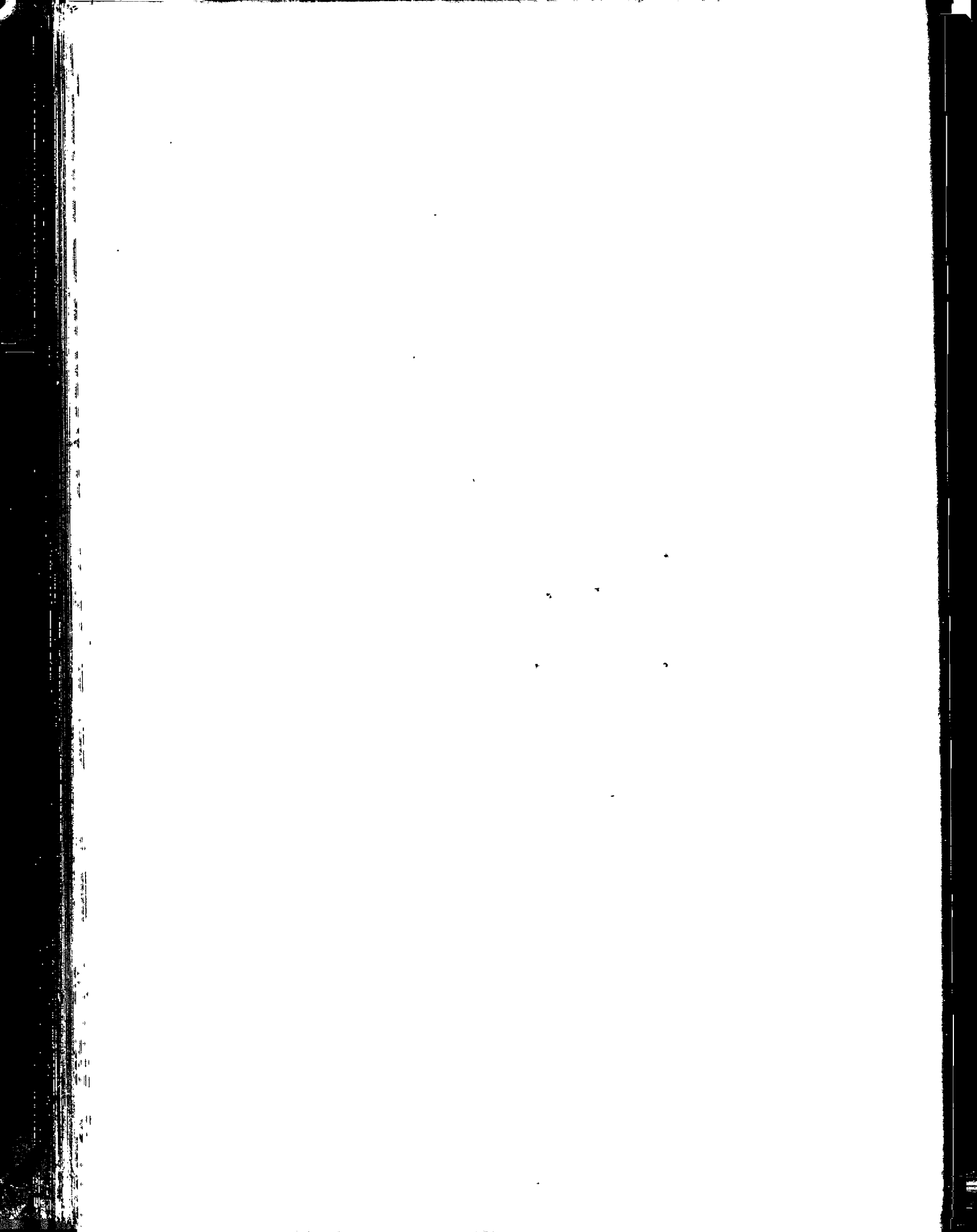
"It after cows."

Gabriel sniffed. "It comin' out the woods for mo' than cows. It gonna git itsself some folkes blood. You watch. An' yawl goin' off huntin' it ain't gonna do no good. It goin' huntin' itsself. I been smellin' it."

"How you know that it you smellin'?"

"Ain't no mistakin' a wildcat. Ain't been one 'round here since I was a boy. Why don't yawl set a spell?" he added.

"You ain't afraid to stay here by yosef, is you,



Granpaw?"

Old Gabriel stiffened. He felt for the post to pull himself up on. "Ef you waitin' on Mose an' Luke," he said, "you better git goin'. They started over to yawl's place an hour ago."

II

"Come in here, I say! Come in here right now!"

The blind boy sat alone on the steps, staring ahead. "All the men gone?" he called.

"All gone but ol' Hezuh. Come in."

He hated to go in--among the women.

"I smells it," he said.

"You come in here, Gabriel."

He went in and walked to where the window was. The women were muttering at him.

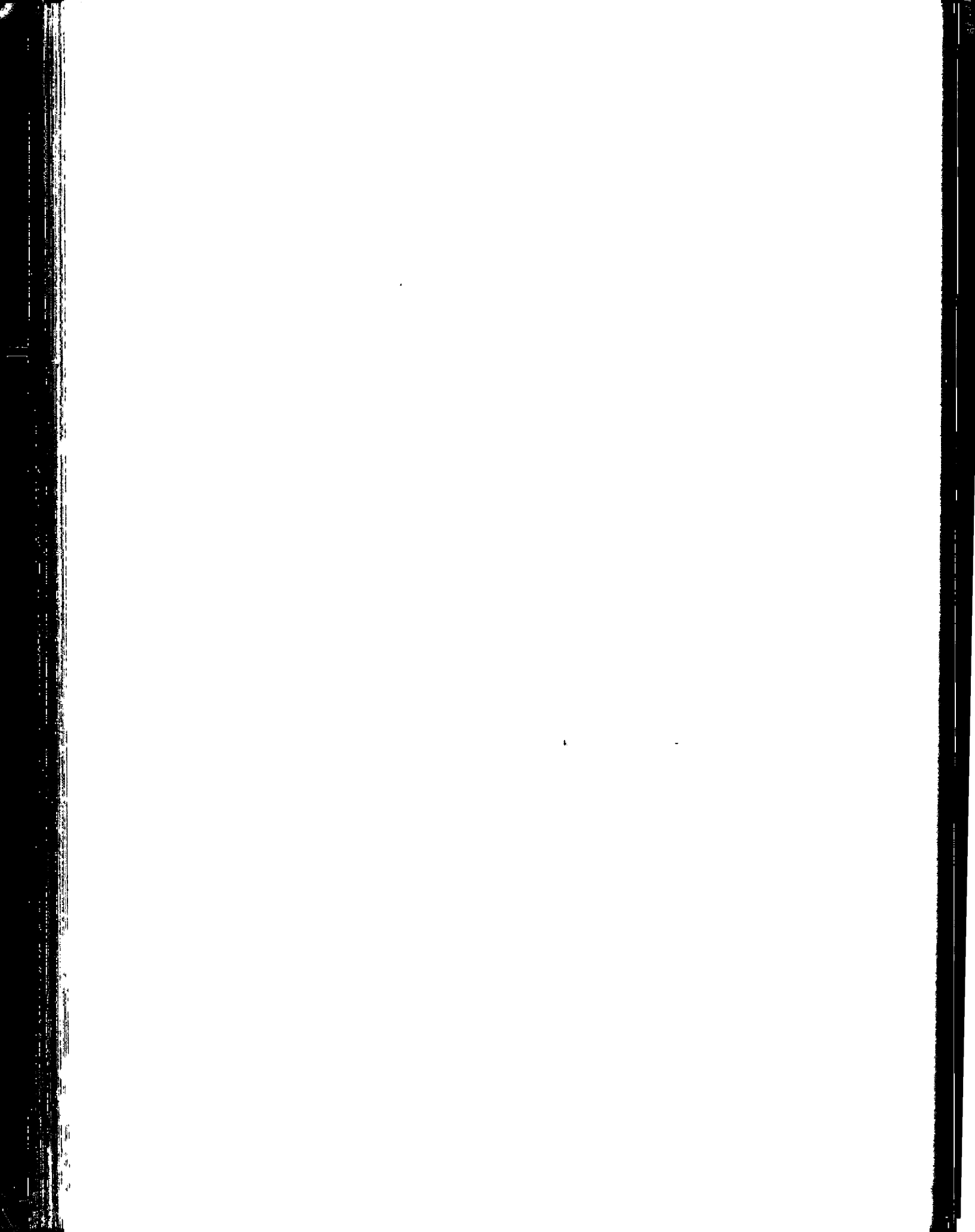
"You stay in here, boy."

"You be 'tractin' that cat right in this room, settin' out there."

No air was coming through the window, and he scratched at the shutter latch to open it.

"Don't open that winder, boy. Us don't want no wildcat jumpin' in here."

"I could er gone wit 'em," he said sullenly. "I could er smelled it out. I ain't afraid." Shut up wit these women like he one too.



"Reba say she kin smell it herself."

He heard the old woman groan in the corner. "They ain't gonna do no good out huntin' it," she whined. "It here. It right around here. Ef it jump in this room it gonna git me fust, then it gonna git that boy, then it gonna git...."

"Hush yo' mouth, Reba," he heard his mother say.

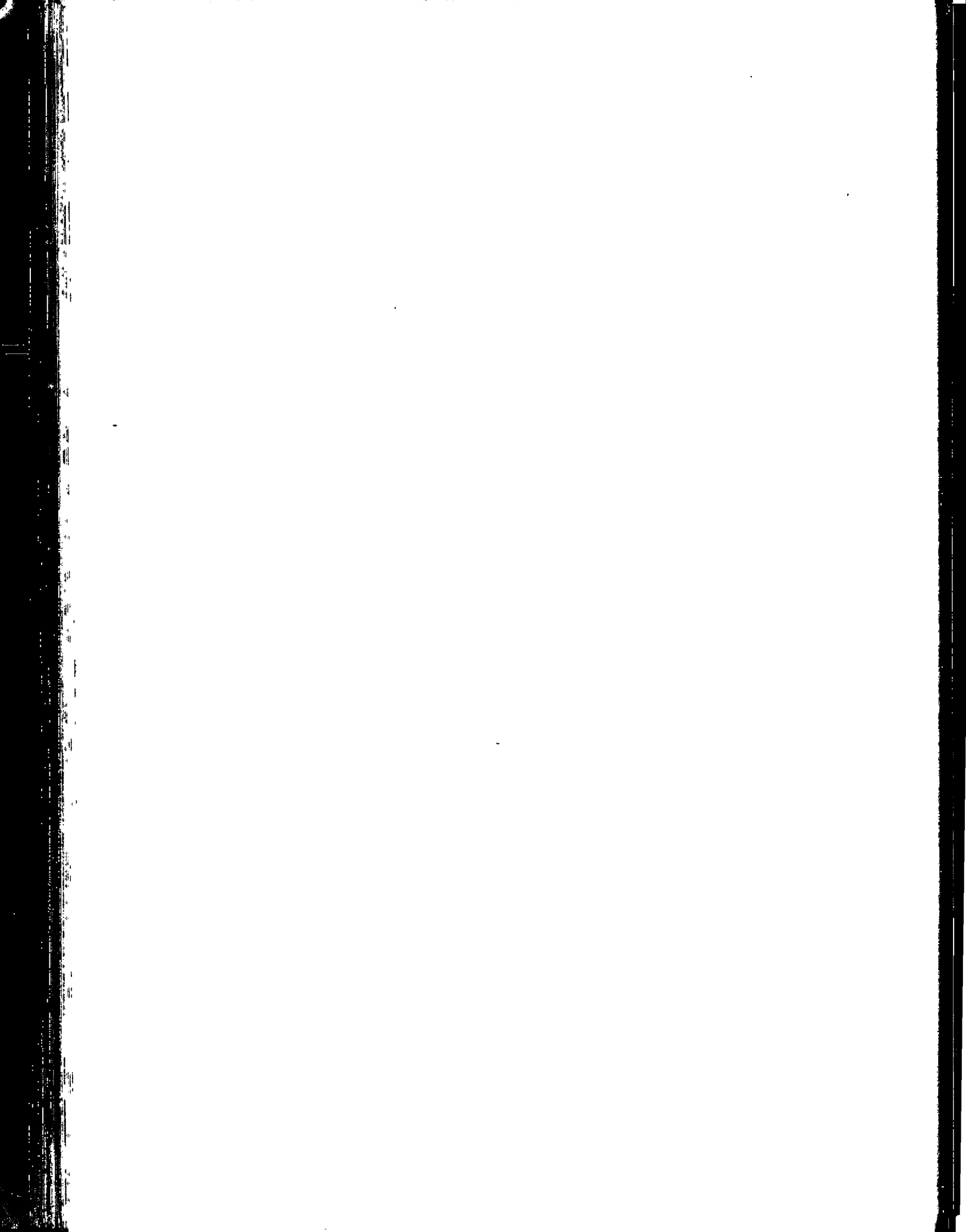
"I look after my boy."

He could look after hissef. He warn't afraid. He could smell it--him an' Reba could. It'd jump on them fust; fust Reba an' then him. It was the shape of a reg'lar cat only bigger, his mother said. An' where you felt the sharp points on a house cat's foot, you felt big knife-claws in a wildcat's, an' knife teeth, too; an' it breathed heat an' spit wet lime. Gabriel could feel its claws in his shoulders and its teeth in his throat. But he wouldn't let 'em stay there. He'd lock his arms 'round its body an' feel up for its neck an' jerk its head back an' go down wit it on the floor until its claws dropped away from his shoulders. Beat, Beat, beat its head, beat, beat beat...

"Who wit ol' Hezuh?" one of the women asked.

"Jus' Nancy."

"Oughter be somebody else down there," his mother said softly.



Reba moaned. "Anybody go out gonna git sprung on befo' they gits there. It around here, I say. It gittin' closer an' closer. It gonna git me sho."

He could smell it strong.

"How it gonna git in here? Yawl jus' frettin' for nothin'."

That was Thin Minnie. Nothin' could git her. She'd had a spell on her since when she was small--put there by a conjer woman.

"It come in easy ef it wanter," Reba snorted. "It tear up that cat-hole an' come through."

"We could be down to Nancy's by then," Minnie sniffed.

"Yawl could," the old woman muttered.

Him an' her couldn't, he knew. But he'd stay an' fight it. You see that blin' boy there? He the one kill the wildcat!

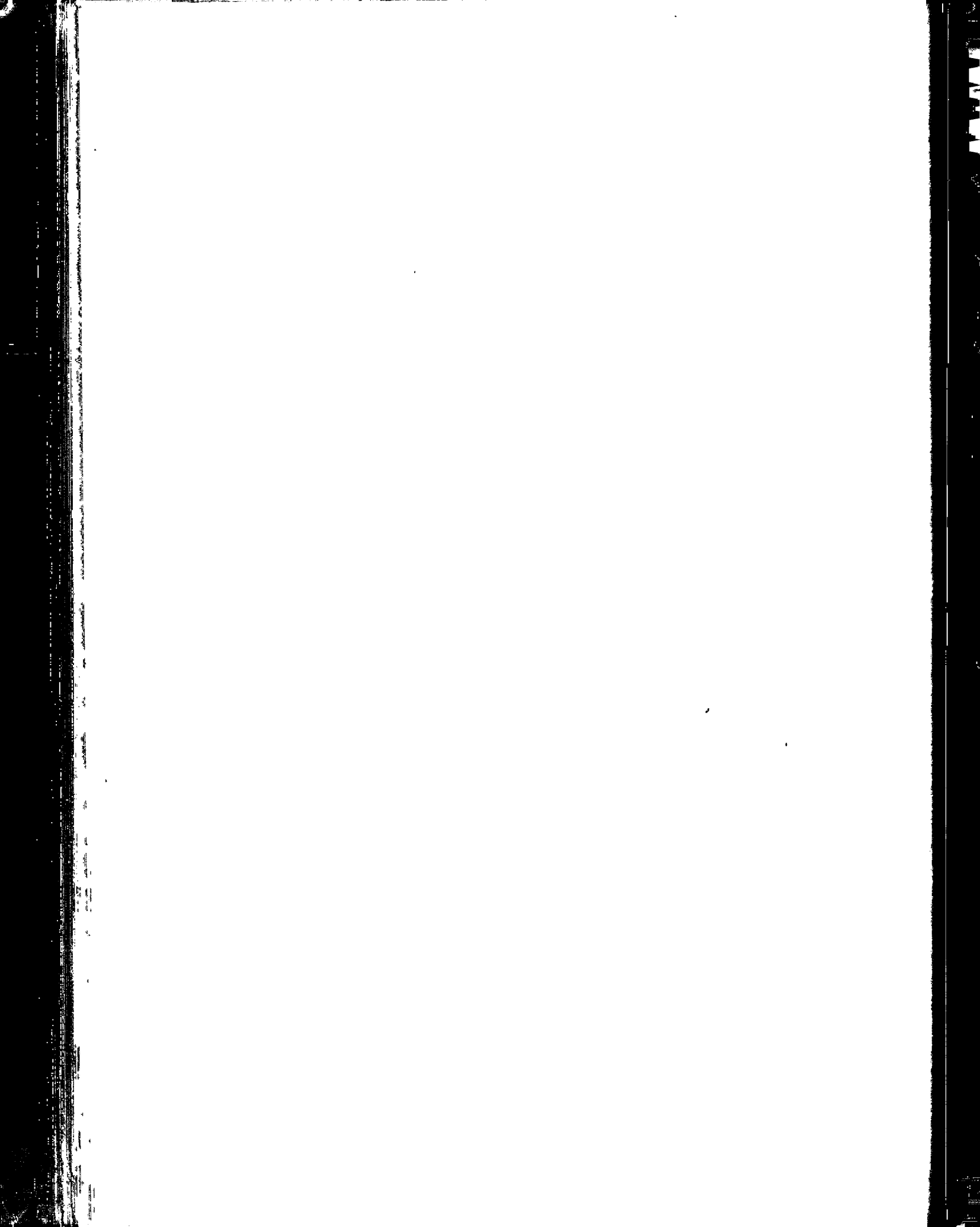
Reba started groaning.

"Hush that!" his mother ordered.

The groaning turned into singing--low in her throat.

Lord, Lord,
Gonna see yo' pilgrim today.
Lord, Lord,
Gonna see yo'..."

"Hush!" his mother hissed. "What that I hear?"



Gabriel leaned forward in the silence; stiff, ready.

It was a thump, thump and maybe a snarl, away, muffled, and then a shriek, far away, then louder and louder, closer and closer, over the edge of the hill into the yard and up on the porch. The cabin was shaking with the weight of a body against the door. There was the feel of a rush inside the room and the scream was let in. Nancy!

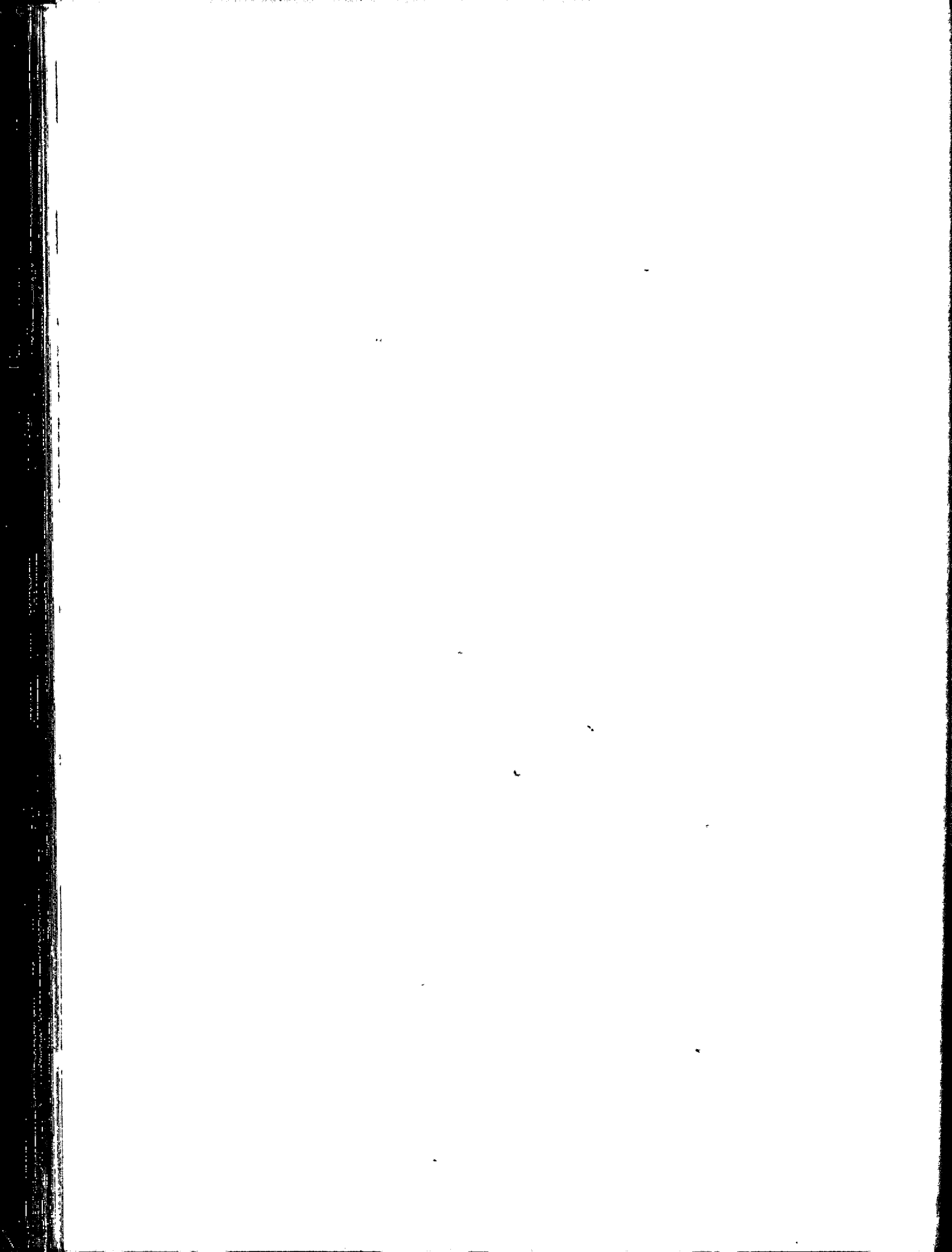
"It got him!" she screamed. "Got him, sprung in through the winder, got him in the throat. Hezuh," she wailed, "ol' Hezuh."

Later in the night the men returned, carrying a rabbit and two squirrels.

III

Old Gabriel crept back through the darkness to his bed. He could sit in the chair a while or he could lie down. He eased down in the bed and pushed his nose into the feel and smell of the quilt. They won't no use to do that. He could smell the other jus' the same. He had been smellin' it, been smellin' it ever since they started talkin' about it. There it was one evenin'--different from all the smells around, different from niggers' and cows' an' ground smells. Wildcat. Tull Williams seen it jump on a bull.

Gabriel sat up suddenly. It was nearer. He got out the bed and pushed to the door. He had bolted that one; the other must be open. A breeze was coming in and



he walked in it until he felt the night air full in his face. This one was open. He slammed it shut and pushed the bolt in. What was the use to do that? Ef the cat aimed on comin' in, it could git there. He went back to the chair and sat down. It come in east ef it wanta. There were little draughts all around him. By the door there was a hole the hound could git under; that cat could gnaw it through an' be in befo' he got out. Maybe ef he sat by the back do', he could git away quicker. He got up and dragged his chair after him across the room. The smell was near. Maybe he'd count. He could count to a thousand. Won't no nigger for five miles could count that fur. He started counting.

Mose an' Luke wouldn't be back for six hours yet. Tomorrow night they wouldn't go; but the cat was gonna git him tonight. Lemme go wit you boys an' smell him out for you. I the onliest one kin smell 'round here.

They'd lose him in the woods, they'd said. Huntin' wildcats won't no business for him.

I ain't afraid er no wildcat er no woods neither. Lemme go wit you boys, lemme go.

Ain't no reason to be 'fraid to stay here by yosef, they'd laughed. Ain't nothin' gonna git you. We take you up the road to Mattie's ef you scaird.

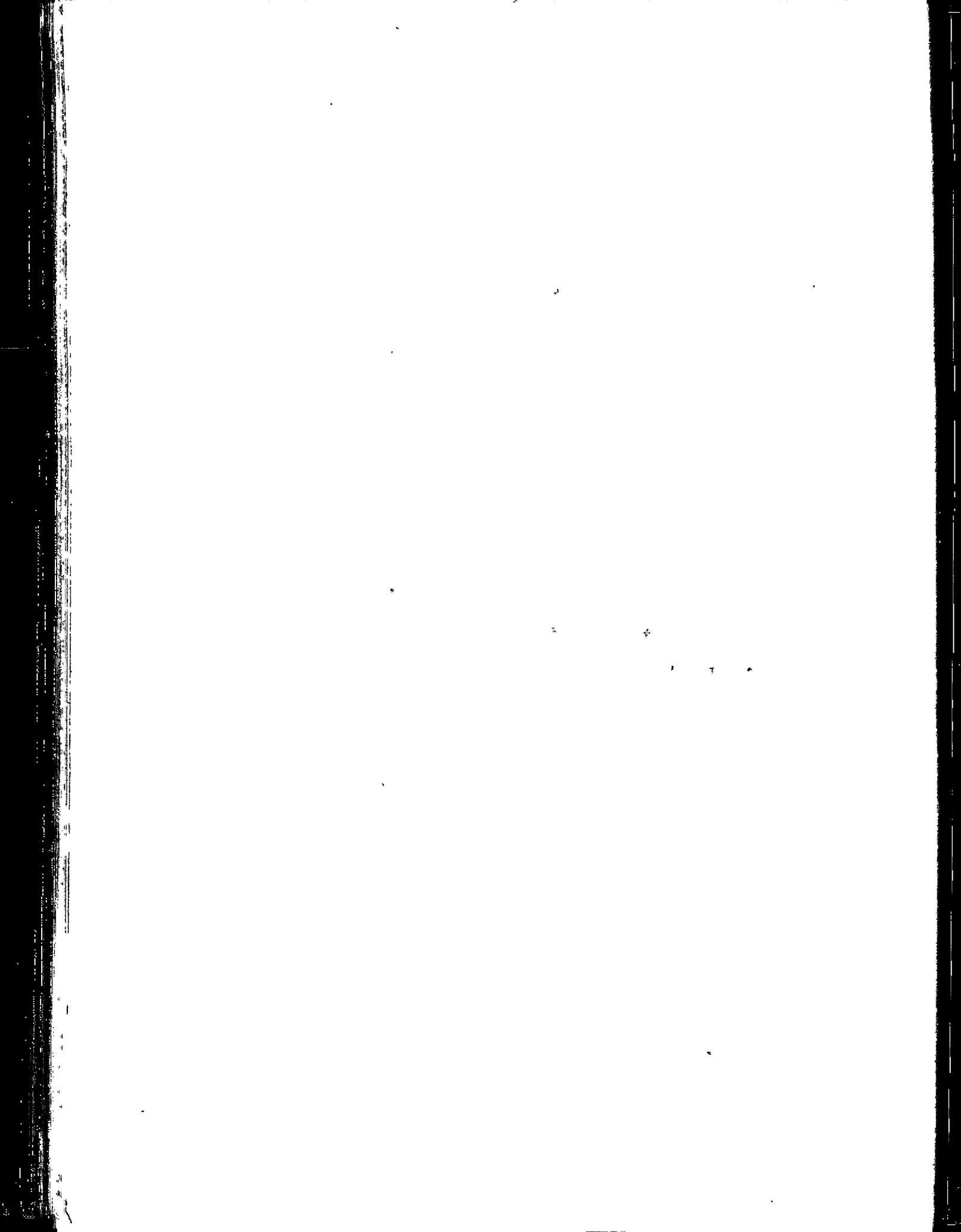
Mattie's! Take him to Mattie's! Settin' wit

the women.. What yawl think I is? I ain't afraid er no wildcat. But it comin', boys; an' it ain't gonna be in no woods--it gonna be here. Yawl wastin' yo' time in the woods. Stay here an' you ketch it.

He suppose to be countin'. Where he lef' off at? Five hunnert an' five, five hunnert an' six...Mattie's! What they think he is? Five hunnert an' two, five hunnert an'....

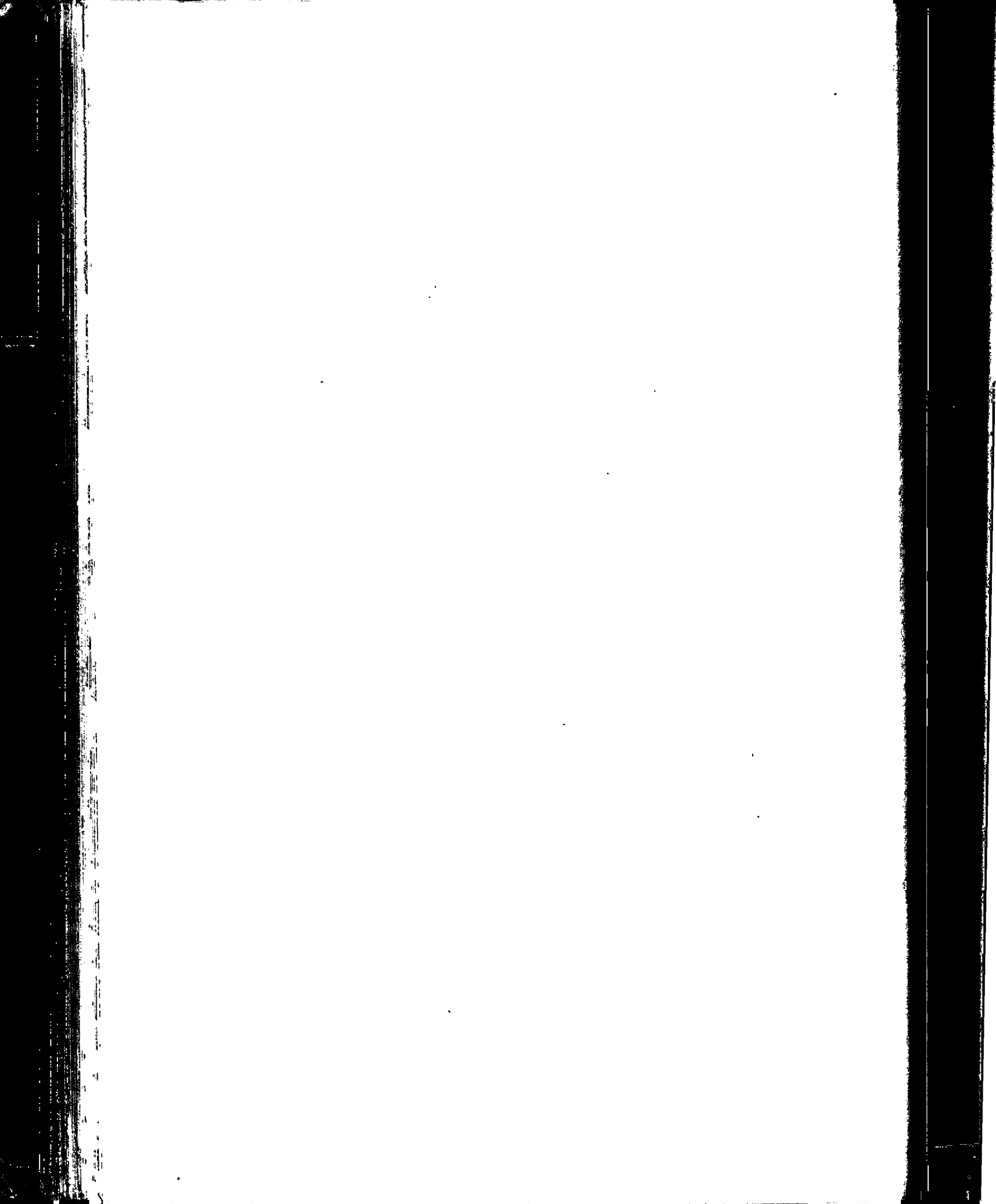
He sat stiff in the chair with his hands gripped tight to the stick across his knees. It won't gonna git him like he was a woman. His shirt was stuck wet to him, making him smell higher. The men had come back later in the night with a rabbit and two squirrels. He began to remember the other wildcat and he remembered as if he had been in Hezuh's cabin instead of with the women. He wondered was he Hezuh. He was Gabrul. It won't gonna git him like Hezuh. He was gonna hit it. He was gonna pull it off. He was gonna...how he gonna do all that? He hadn't been able to wring a chicken's neck for fo' years. It was gonna git him. Won't nothin' to do but wait. The smell was near. Won't nothin' for old people to do but wait. It was gonna git him tonight. The teeth would be hot an' the claws cold. The claws would sink in soft, an' the teeth would cut sharp an' scrape his bones inside.

Gabriel felt the sweat on himself. It kin smell



me good's I kin smell it, he thought. I settin' here smellin' an' it comin' here smellin'. Two hunnert an' fo'; where he lef' off at? Fo' hunnert an' five....

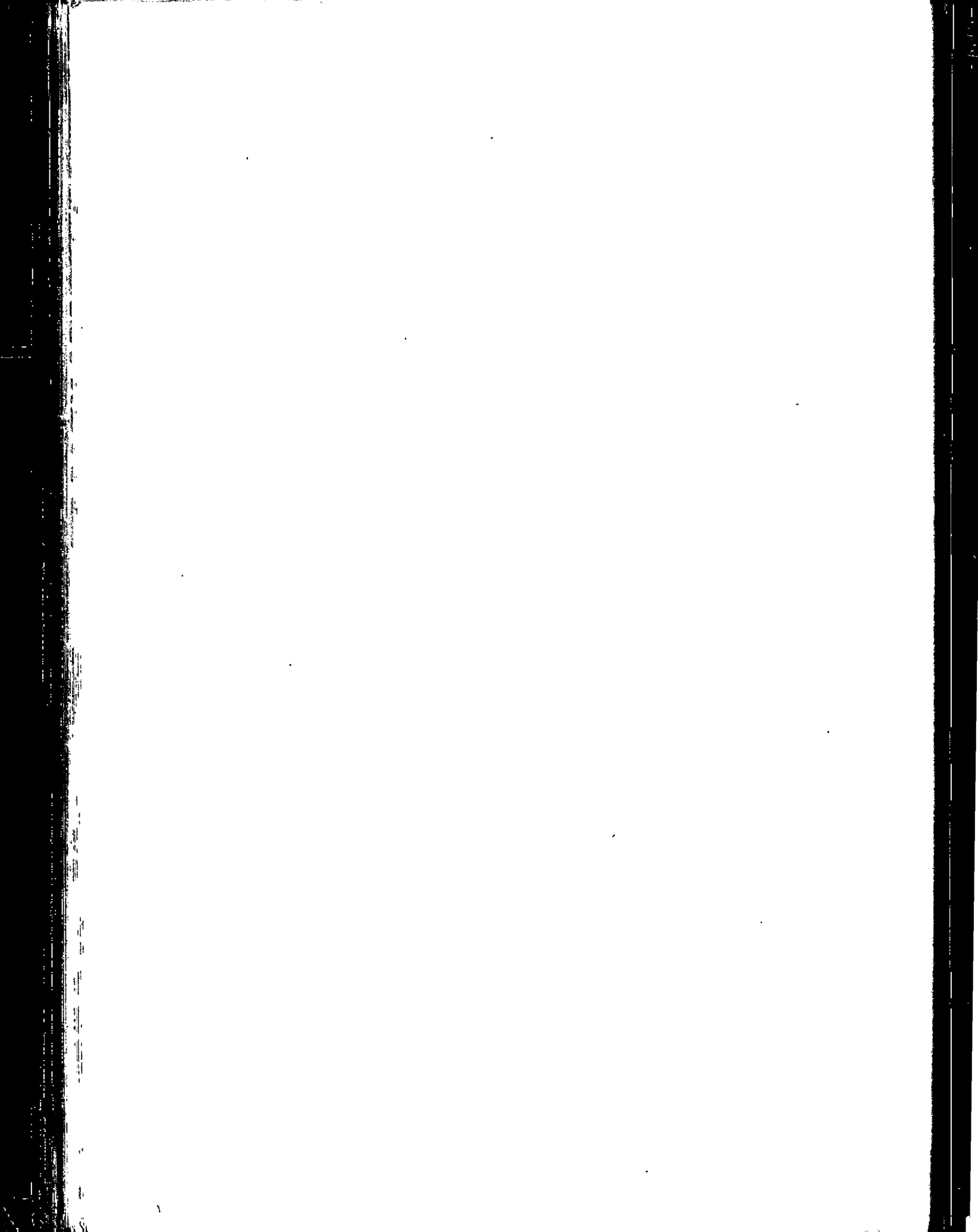
There was a sudden scratching by the chimney. He sat forward, tense, tight-throated. "Come on," he whispered, "I here. I waitin'." He couldn't move. He couldn't make himself move. There was another scratching. It was the pain he didn't want. But he didn't want the waiting either. "I here," he--there was another, just a small noise and then a flutter. Bats. His grip on the stick loosened. He should have known that won't it. It won't no farther than the barn yet. What all his nose? What all him? Won't no nigger for hunnert miles could smell like he could. He heard the scratching again, coming differently, coming from the corner of the house where the cat hole was. Pick..pick..pick. That was a bat. He knowd that was a bat. Pick...pick. "Here I is," he whispered. Won't no bat. He braced his feet to get up. Pick. "Lord waitin' on me," he whispered. "He don't want me with my face tore open. Why don't you go on, Wildcat, why you want me?" He was on his feet now. "Lord don't want me with no wild-cat marks." He was moving toward the cat hole. Across on the river bank the Lord was waiting on him with a troupe of angels and golden vestments for him to put on and when he came, he'd put on the vestments and stand there with the



Lord and the angels, judging life. Won't no nigger for fifty miles fitter to judge than him. Pick. He stopped. He smelled it right outside, nosing the hole. He had to climb onto something! What he going toward it for? He had to get on something high! There was a shelf nailed over the chimney and he turned wildly and fell against a chair and shoved it up to the fire place. He caught hold of the shelf and pulled himself onto the chair and sprang up and backwards and fet the narrow shelf board under him for an instant and then felt it sag and jerked his feet up and felt it crack somewhere from the wall. His stomach flew inside him and stopped hard and the shelf board fell across his feet and the rung of the chair hit against his head and then, after a second of stillness, he heard a low, gasping animal cry wail over two hills and fade past him; then snarls, tearing short, furious, through the pain walls. Gabriel sat stiff on the floor.

"Cow," he breathed finally. "Cow."

Gradually he felt his muscles loosen. It got to her befo' him. It would go on off now, but it would be back tomorrer night. He rose shaking from the chair and stumbled to his bed. The cat had been a half mile away. He won't sharp like he used to be. They shouldn't leave old people by theyselves. He done tole 'em they won't gonna ketch nothin' off in no woods. Tomorrer night it would come back.



Tomorrer night they would stay here an' kill it. Now he want to sleep. He done tole 'em they couldn't get no wildcat in no woods. He the one tole 'em where it gonna be. They'd a listened to him, they'd done had it by now. When he die he want to be sleepin' in a bed; didn't want to be on no floor with a wildcat stuck in his face. Lord waitin'.

When he woke up, the darkness was full of morn-
ing things. He heard Mose and Luke at the stove and
smelled the side meat in the skillet. He reached for his
snuff and filled his lip. "What yawl ketch?" he asked
trenchantly.

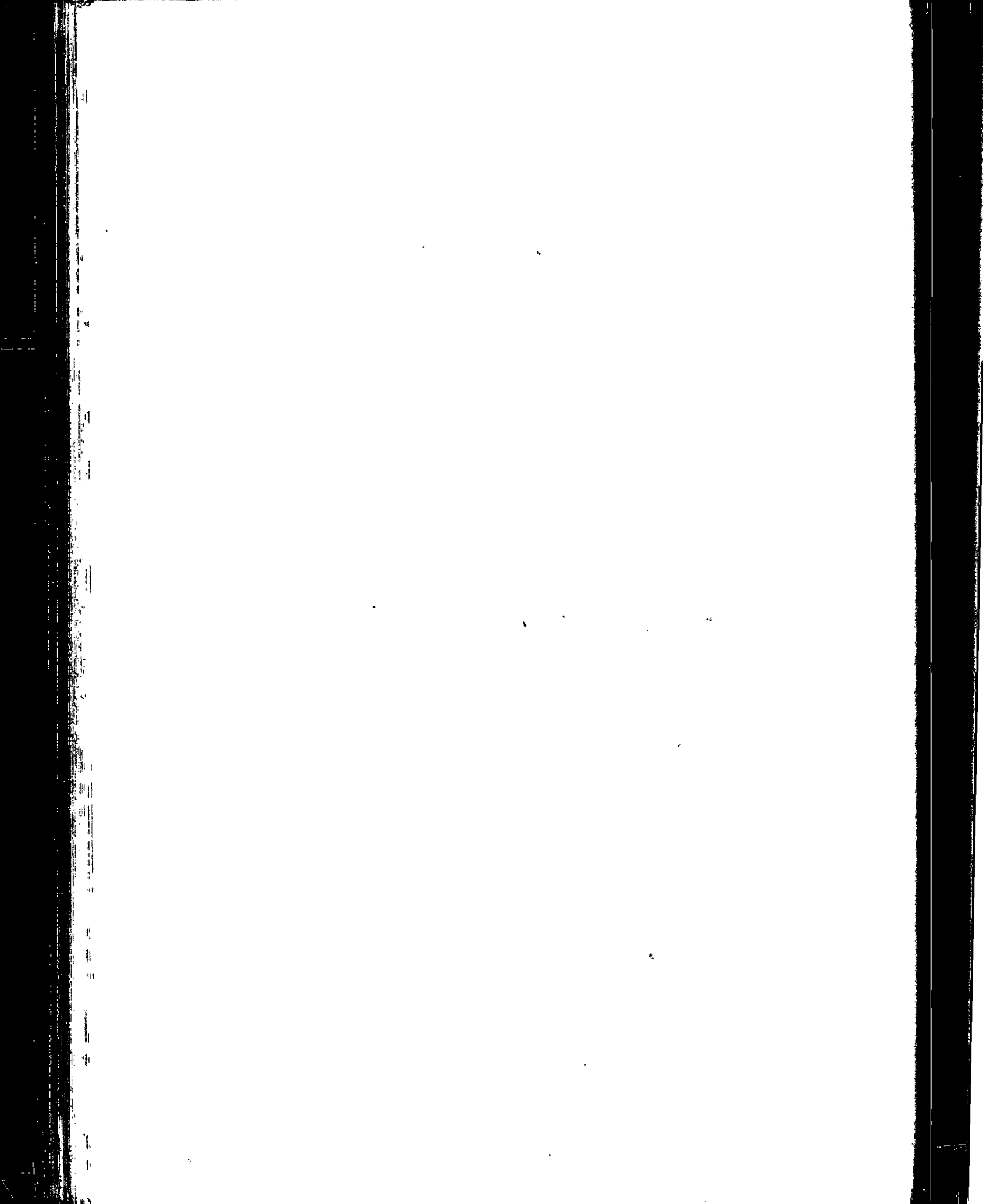
"Ain't caught nothin' las' night." Luke put the
plate in his hands. "Here yo' side meat. How you bust that
shelf?"

"Ain't busted no shelf," old Gabriel muttered.
"Wind to' it down and waked me up in the middle of the night.
It been due to fall. You ain't never built nothin' yet
stayed together."

"We sot a trap," Mose said. "We git that cat
tonight."

"Yawl sho will, boys," Gabriel said. "It'll be
right here tonight. Ain't it done kill a cow a half a mile
from here las' night?"

"That don't mean it comin' this way," Luke said.



"It comin' this way," Gabriel said.

"How many wildcats you killed, Granpaw?"

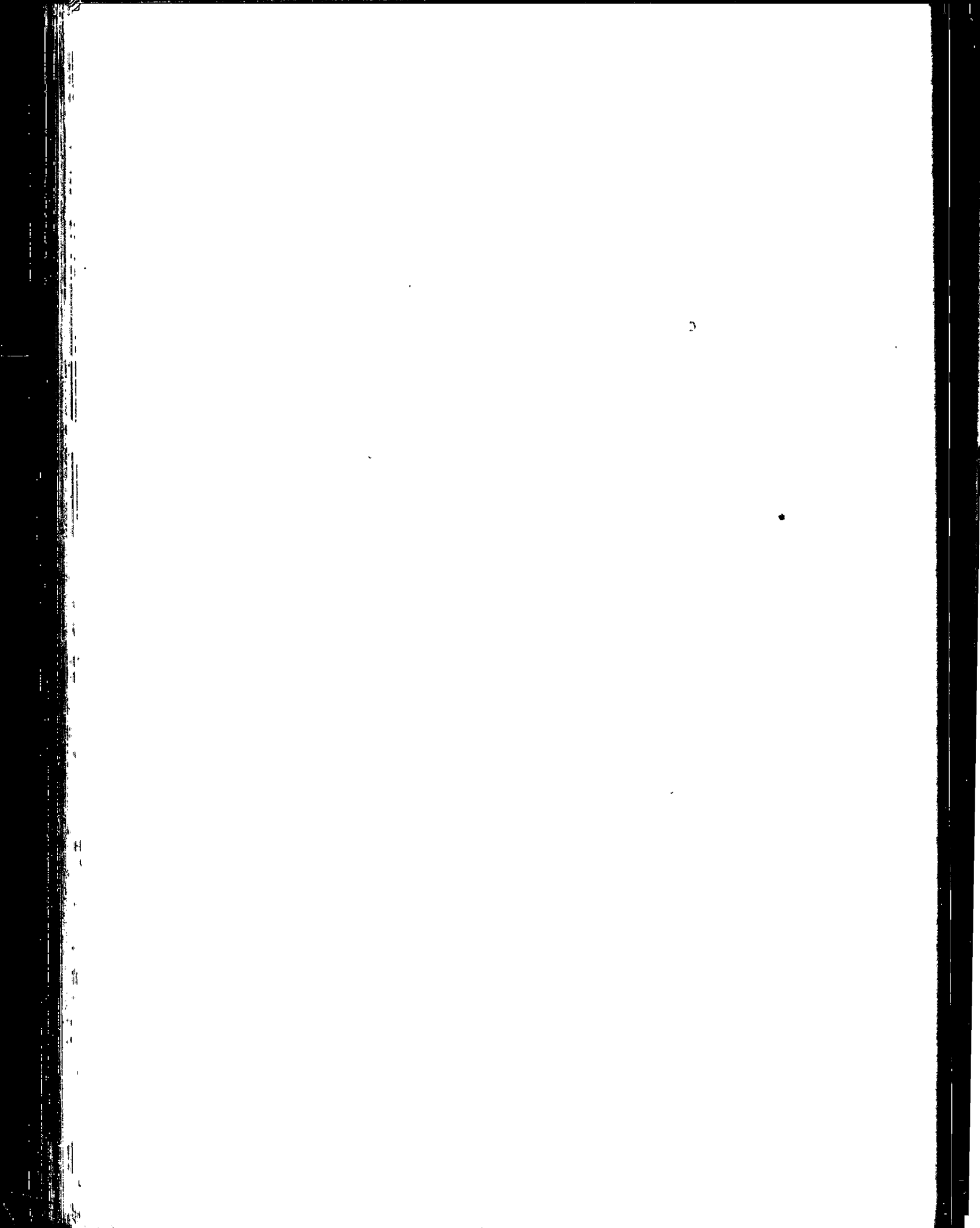
Gabriel stopped; the plate of side meat tremored in his hand. "I knows what I knows, boy."

"We git it soon. We sot a trap over in Ford's Woods. It been around there. We goin' up in a tree over the trap every night an' wait 'til we gits it."

Their forks were scraping back and forth over their tin plates like knife-teeth against stone.

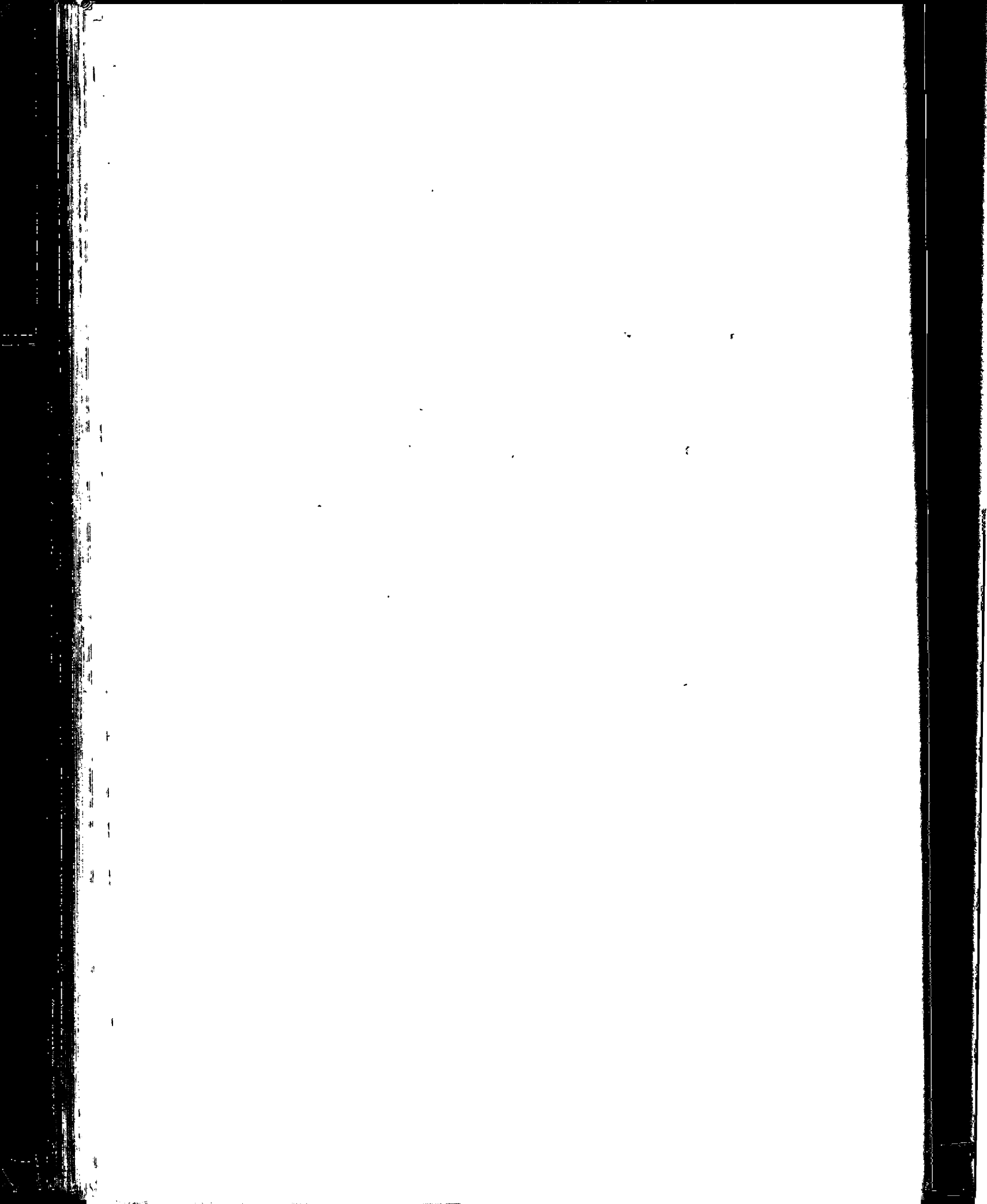
"You wants sommo' side meat, Granpaw?"

Gabriel put his fork down on the quilt. "No, boy," he said, "no mo' side meat." The darkness was hollow around him and through its depth, animal cries wailed and mingled with the beats pounding in his throat.



THE CROP

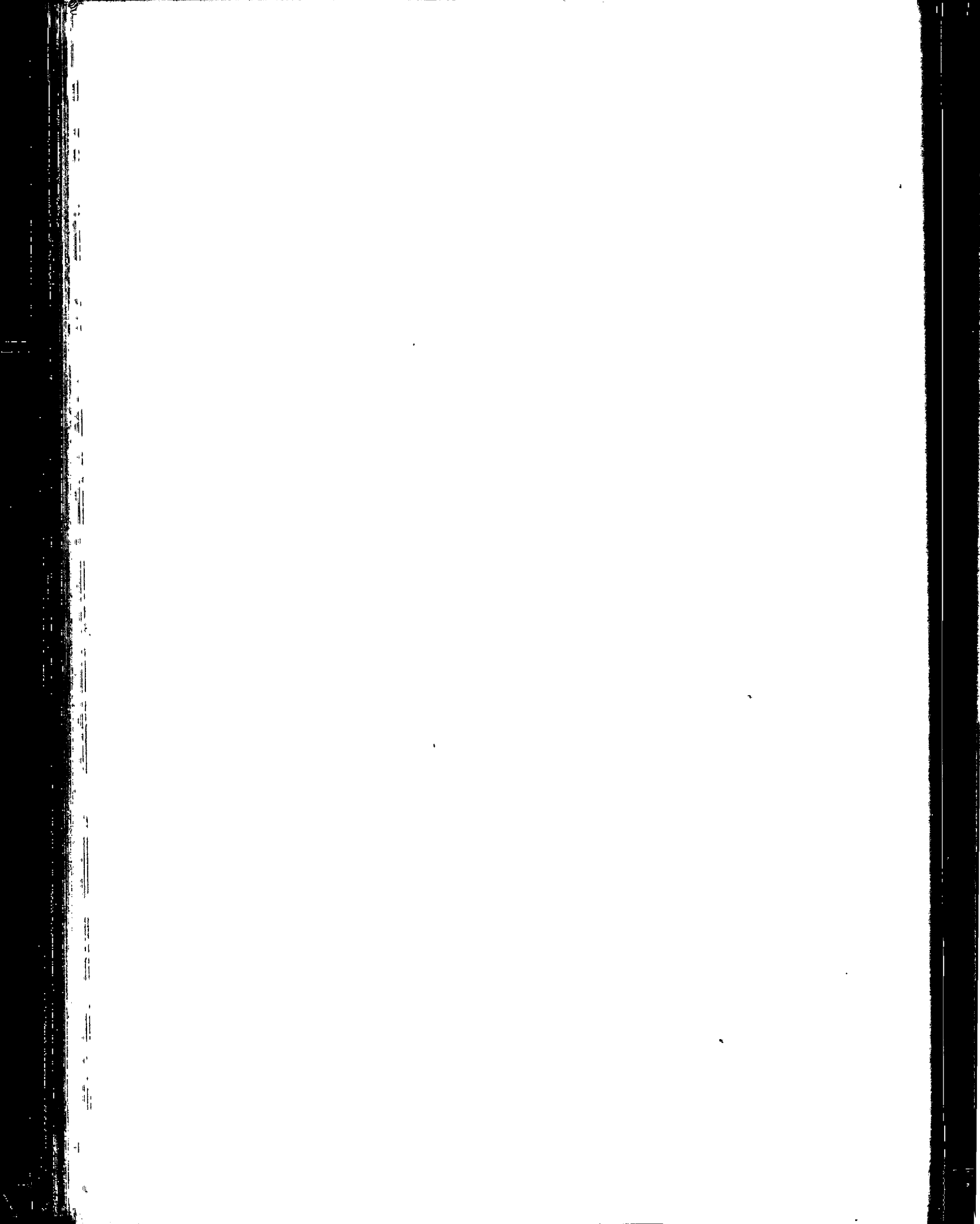
Miss Willerton always crumbed the table. It was her particular household accomplishment and she did it with great thoroughness. Lucia and Bertha did the dishes and Garner went into the parlor and did the Morning Press crossword puzzle. That left Miss Willerton in the dining room by herself and that was all right with Miss Willerton. Whew! Breakfast in that house was always an ordeal. Lucia insisted that they have a regular hour for breakfast just like they did for other meals. Lucia said a regular breakfast made for other regular habits, and with Garner's tendency to upsets, it was imperative that they establish some system in their eating. This way she could also see that he put the Agar-Agar on his Cream-of-Wheat. As if, Miss Willerton thought, after having done it for fifty years, he'd be capable of doing anything else. The breakfast dispute always started with Garner's Cream-of-Wheat and ended with her three spoonfuls of pineapple crush. "You know your acid, Willie," Miss Lucia would always say, "you know your acid;" and then Garner would roll his eyes and make some sickening remark and Bertha would jump and Lucia would look distressed and Miss Willerton would taste the pineapple crush she had already swallowed.



It was a relief to crumb the table. Crumbing the table gave one time to think and if Miss Willerton were going to write a story, she had to think about it first. She could usually think best sitting in front of her typewriter, but this would do for the time being. First, she had to think of a subject to write a story about. There were so many subjects to write stories about that Miss Willerton never could think of one. That was always the hardest part of writing a story she always said. She spent more time thinking of something to write about than she did writing. Sometimes she discarded subject after subject and it usually took her a week or two to decide finally on something. Miss Willerton got out the silver crumber and the crumb-catcher and started stroking the table. I wonder, she mused, if a baker would make a good subject? Foreign bakers were very picturesque, she thought. Aunt Myrtle Filmer had left her four color-tints of French bakers in mushroom-looking hats. They were great tall fellows--blond and....

"Willie!" Miss Lucia screamed, entering the dining room with the salt-cellars. "For heaven's sake, hold the catcher under the crumber or you'll have those crumbs on the rug. I've Bisseled it four times in the last week and I am not going to do it again."

"You have not Bisseled it on account of any crumbs

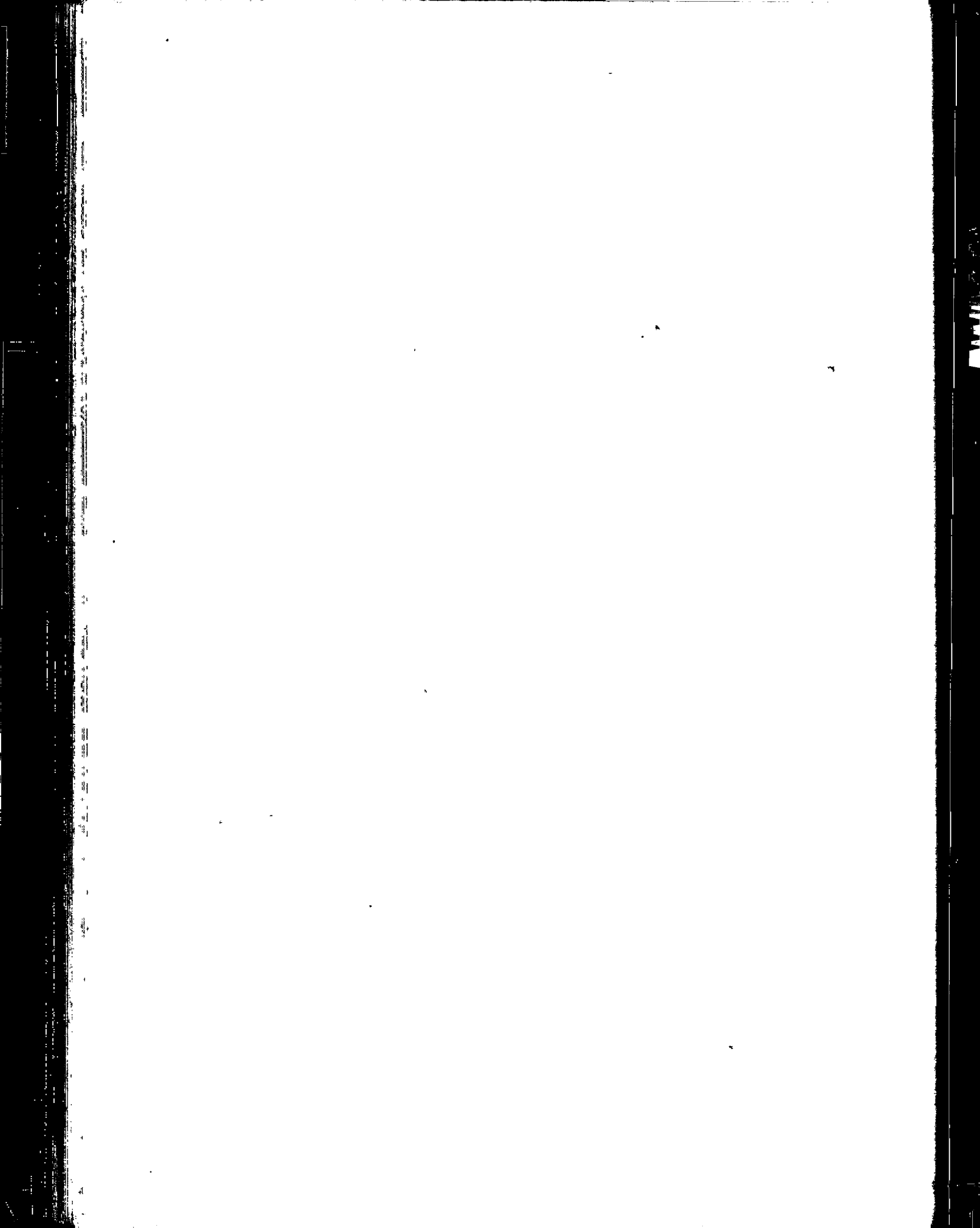


I have spilled," Miss Willerton said tersely. "I always pick up the crumbs I drop," and she added, "I drop relatively few."

"And wash the crumber before you put it up this time," Miss Lucia returned.

Miss Willerton drained the crumbs into her hand and threw them out the window. She took the catcher and crumber to the kitchen and ran them under the cold-water faucet. She dried them and stuck them back in the drawer. That was over. Now she could get to the typewriter. She could stay there until dinner time.

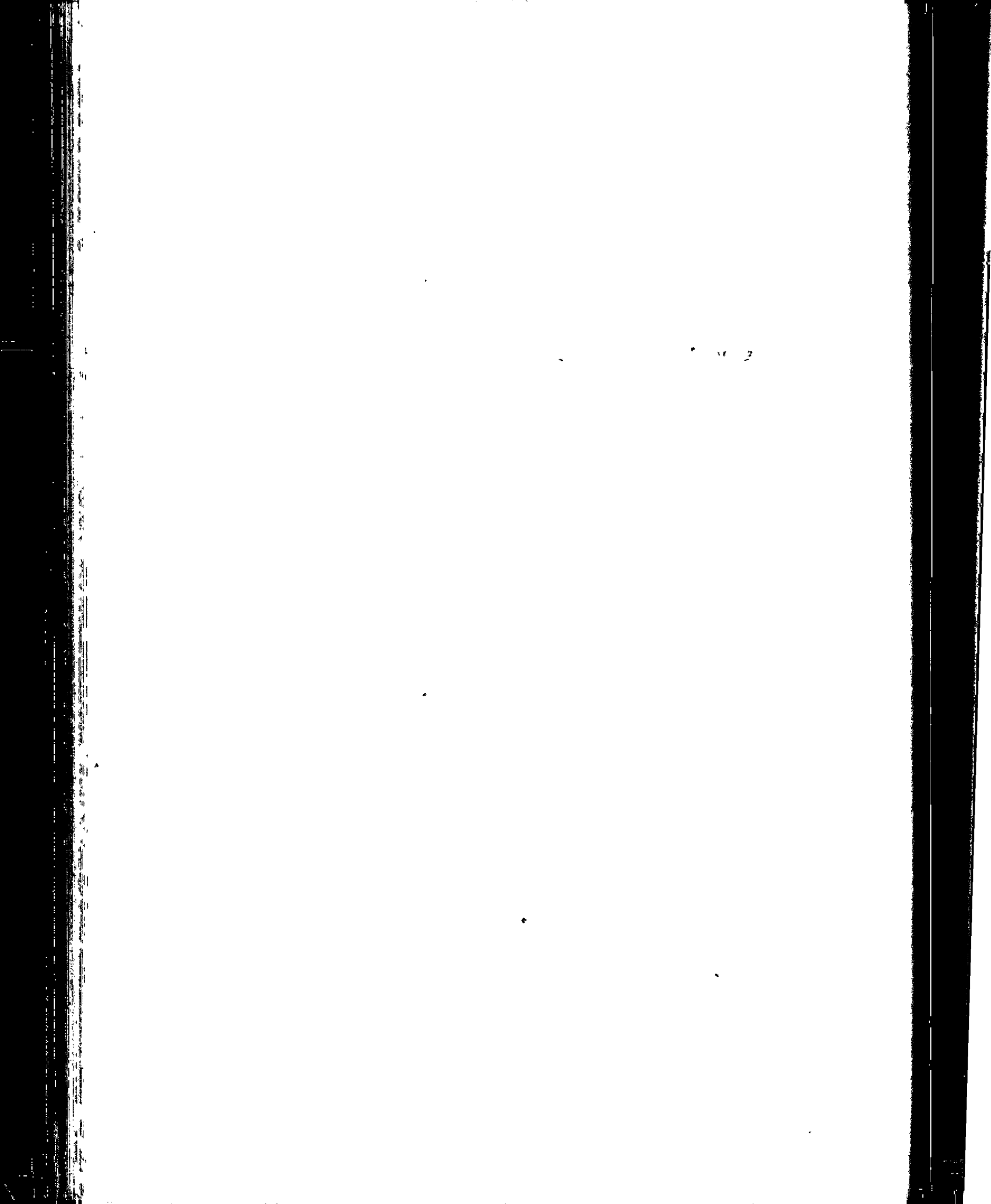
Miss Willerton sat down at her typewriter and let out her breath. Now! What had she been thinking about? Oh. Bakers. Hmmm. Bakers. No, bakers wouldn't do. Hardly colorful enough. No social tension connected with bakers. Miss Willerton sat staring through her typewriter. A S D F G--her eyes wandered over the keys. Hmmm. Teachers? Miss Willerton wondered. No. Heavens no. Teachers always made Miss Willerton feel peculiar. Her teachers at Willowpool Seminary had been all right but they were women. Willowpool Female Seminary, Miss Willerton remembered. She didn't like the phrase, Willowpool Female Seminary--it sounded biological. She always just said she was a graduate of Willowpool. Men teachers made Miss Willerton feel as if she were going to mispronounce something. Teachers



weren't timely anyhow. They weren't even a social problem.

Social problem. Social problem. Hmmm. Sharecroppers! Miss Willerton had never been intimately connected with sharecroppers but, she reflected, they would make as arty a subject as any, and they would give her that air of social concern which was so valuable to have in the circles she was hoping to travel! "I can always capitalize," she muttered, "on the hookworm." It was coming to her now! Certainly! Her fingers plinked excitedly over the keys, never touching them. Then suddenly she began typing at great speed.

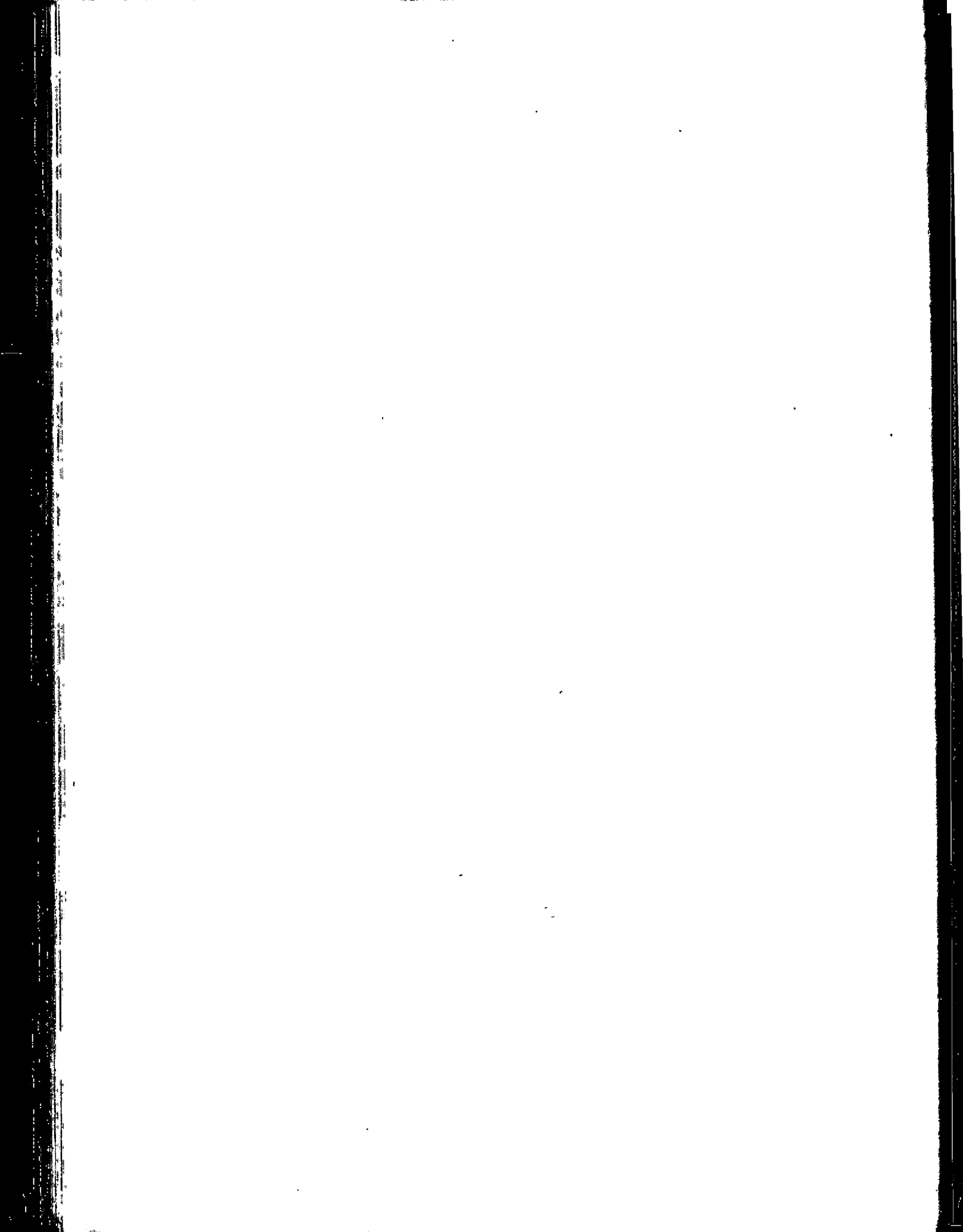
"Lot Motun," the typewriter registered, "called his dog." "Dog" was followed by an abrupt pause. Miss Willerton always did her best work on the first sentence. "First sentences," she always said, "came to her--like a flash! Just like a flash!" she would say and snap her fingers, "like a flash!" And she built her story up from them. "Lot Motun called his dog" had been automatic with Miss Willerton, and reading the sentence over, she decided that not only was "Lot Motun" a good name for a sharecropper, but also that having him call his dog was an excellent thing to have a sharecropper do. "The dog pricked up its ears and slunk over to Lot." Miss Willerton had the sentence down before she realized her error--two "Lots" in one paragraph. That was displeasing to the ear. The typewriter



grated back and Miss Willerton applied three x's to "Lot." Over it she wrote in pencil, "him." Now she was ready to go again. "Lot Motun called his dog. The dog pricked up its ears and slunk over to him." Two dogs, too, Miss Willerton thought. Ummm. But that didn't affect the ears like two "Lots," she decided.

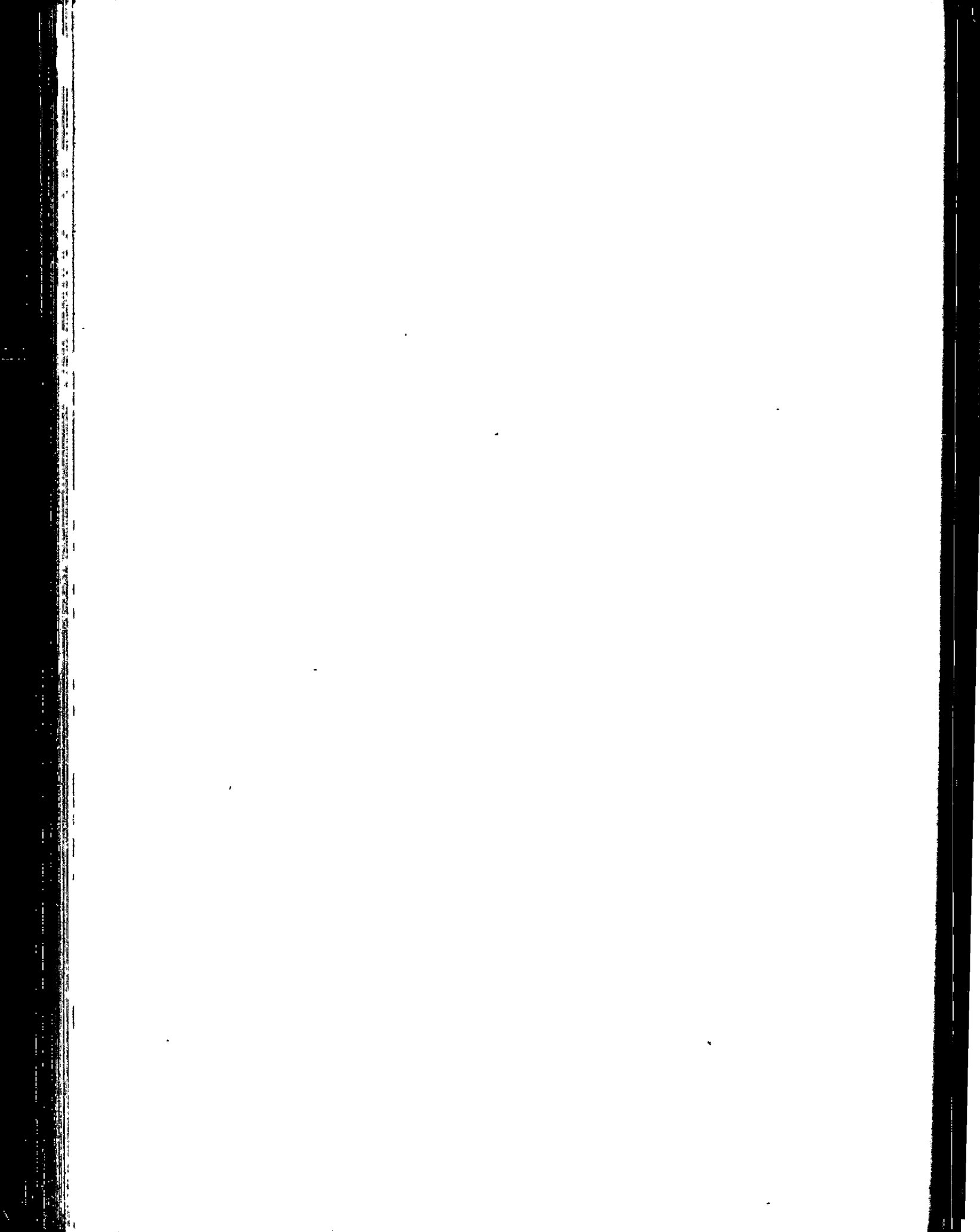
Miss Willerton was a great believer in what she called, "phonetic art." She maintained that the ear was as much a reader as the eye. She liked to express it that way. "The eye forms a picture," she had told a group at the United Daughters of the Colonies, "that can be painted in the abstract, and the success of a literary venture (Miss Willerton liked the phrase, "literary venture") depends on the abstract created in the mind and the tonal quality (Miss Willerton also liked, "tonal quality") registered in the ear." There was something biting and sharp about "Lot Motun called his dog," followed by, "the dog pricked up its ears and slunk over to him," it gave the paragraph just the send-off it needed.

"He pulled the animal's short, scraggy ears and rolled over with it in the mud." Perhaps, Miss Willerton mused, that would be overdoing it. But a sharecropper, she knew, might reasonably be expected to roll over in the mud. Once she had read a novel dealing with that kind of people in which they had done just as bad and, throughout three-



fourths of the narrative, much worse. Lucia found it in cleaning out one of Miss Willerton's bureau drawers and after glancing at a few random pages, took it between thumb and index finger to the furnace and threw it in. "When I was cleaning your bureau out this morning, Willie, I found a book that Garner must have put there for a joke," Miss Lucia told her later. "It was awful, but you know how Garner is. I burned it." And then tittering she added, "I was sure it couldn't be yours." Miss Willerton was sure it could be none others than hers but she hesitated in claiming the distinction. She had ordered it from the publisher because she didn't want to ask for it at the library. It had cost her \$3.75 with the postage and she had not finished the last four chapters. At least, she had got enough from it, though, to be able to say that Lot Motun might reasonably roll over in the mud with his dog. Having him do that would give more point to the hookworm, too, she decided. "Lot Motun called his dog. The dog pricked up its ears and slunk over to him. He pulled the animal's short, scraggy ears and rolled over with it in the mud."

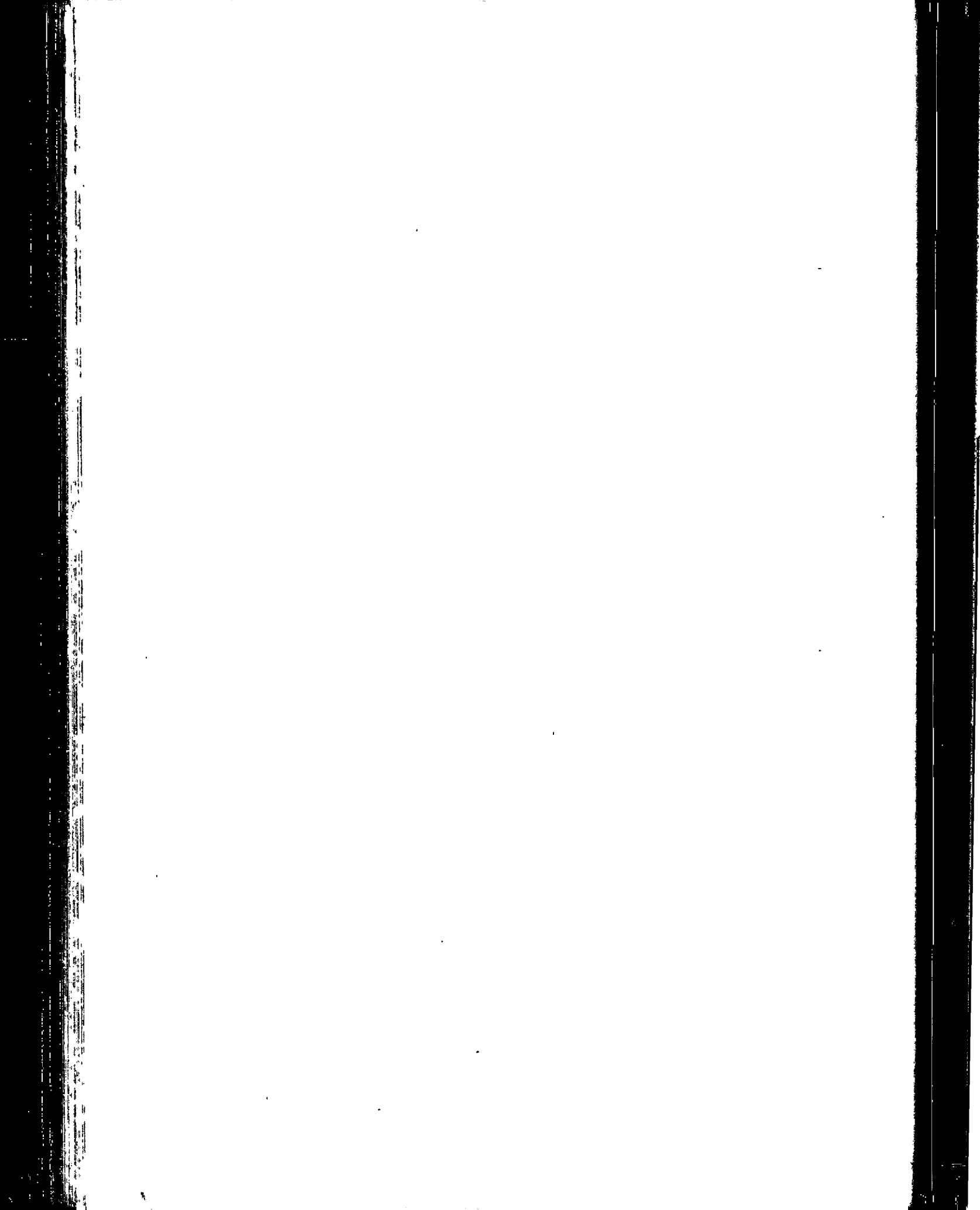
Miss Willerton settled back. That was a good beginning. Now she would plan her action. There had to be a woman, of course. Perhaps Lot could kill her. That type of woman always started trouble. She might even



goad him on to kill her because of her wantonness and then he would be pursued by his conscience maybe.

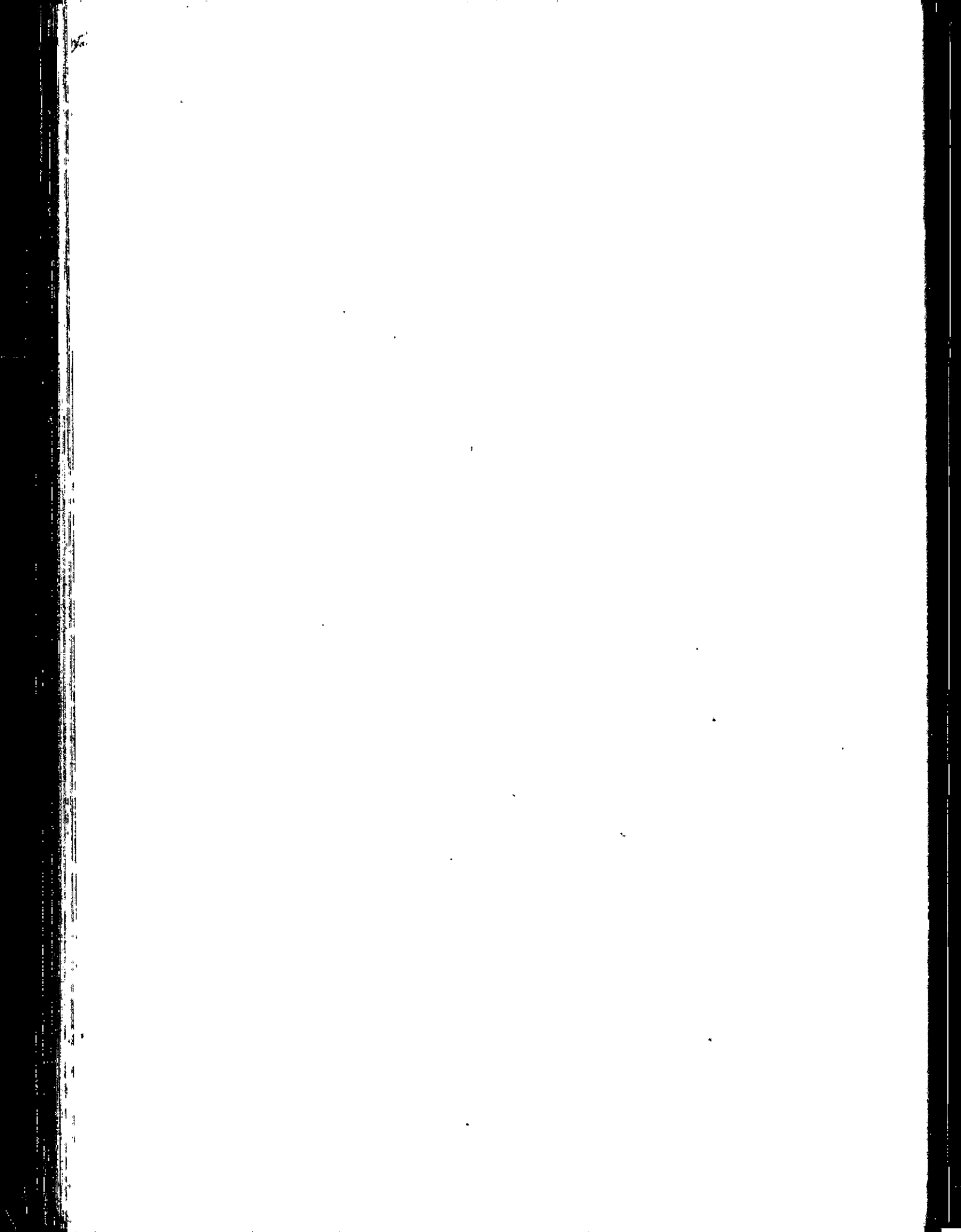
He would have to have principles if that were going to be the case, but it would be fairly easy to give him those. Now how was she going to work that in with all the love interest there'd have to be, she wondered. There would have to be some quite violent, naturalistic scenes, the sadistic sort of thing one read of in connection with that class. It was a problem. However, Miss Willerton enjoyed such problems. She liked to plan passionate scenes best of all but when she came to write them, she always began to feel peculiar and to wonder what the family would say when they read them. Garner would snap his fingers and wink at her at every opportunity; Bertha would think she was terrible; and Lucia would say in that silly voice of hers, "What have you been keeping from us, Willie? What have you been keeping from us?" and titter like she always did. But Miss Willerton couldn't think about that now; she had to plan her characters.

Lot would be tall, stooped, and shaggy but with sad eyes that made him look like a gentleman in spite of his red neck and big fumbling hands. He'd have straight teeth and, to indicate that he had some spirit, red hair. His clothes would hang on him but he'd wear them nonchalantly like they were part of his skin; maybe, she mused,



he'd better not roll over with the dog after all. The woman would be more or less pretty--yellow hair, fat ankles, muddy-colored eyes.

She would get supper for him in the cabin and he'd sit there eating the lumpy grits she hadn't bothered to put salt in and thinking about something big something way off--another cow, a painted house, a clean well, a farm of his own even. The woman would yowl at him for not cutting enough wood for her stove and would whine about the pain in her back. She'd sit and stare at him eating the sour grits and say he didn't have nerve enough to steal food. "You're just a damn beggar!" she'd sneer. Then he'd tell her to keep quiet. "Shut your mouth!" he'd shout, "I've taken all I'm gonna." She'd roll her eyes mocking him and laugh--"I ain't afraid er nothin' that looks like you." Then he'd push his chair behind him and head toward her. She'd snatch a knife off the table--Miss Willerton wondered what kind of a fool the woman was--and back away holding it in front of her. He'd lunge forward but she'd dart from him like a wild horse. Then they'd face each other again--their eyes brimming with hate--and sway back and forth. Miss Willerton could hear the seconds dropping on the tin roof outside. He'd dart at her again but she'd have the knife ready and would plunge it into him in an instant--Miss Willerton could stand it no longer. She



struck the woman a terrific blow on the head from behind. The knife dropped out of her hands and a mist swept her from the room. Miss Willerton turned to Lot. "Let me get you some hot grits," she said. She went over to the stove and got a clean plate of smooth white grits and a piece of butter.

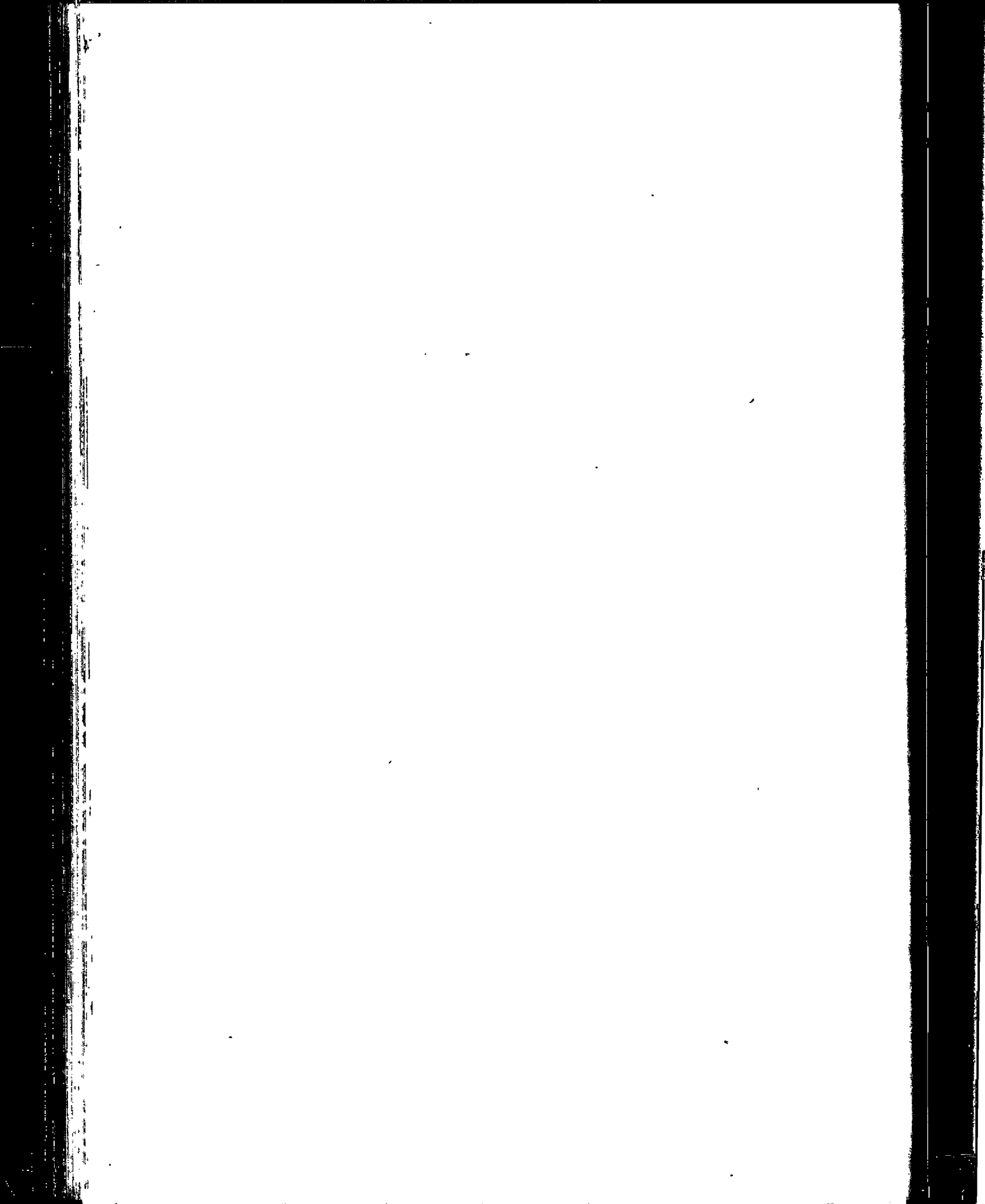
"Gee, thanks," Lot said and smiled at her with his nice teeth. "You always fix 'em just right. You know," he said, "I been thinkin'--we could get out of this tenant farm. We could have a decent place. If we made anything this year over, we could put it in a cow an' start buildin' things up. Think what it would mean, Willie. Just think."

She sat down beside him and put her hand on his shoulder. "We'll do it," she said. "We'll make better than we've made any year and by spring, we should have us that cow."

"You always know how I feel, Willie," he said. "You always have known."

They sat there for a long time thinking of how well they understood each other. "Finish your food," she said finally.

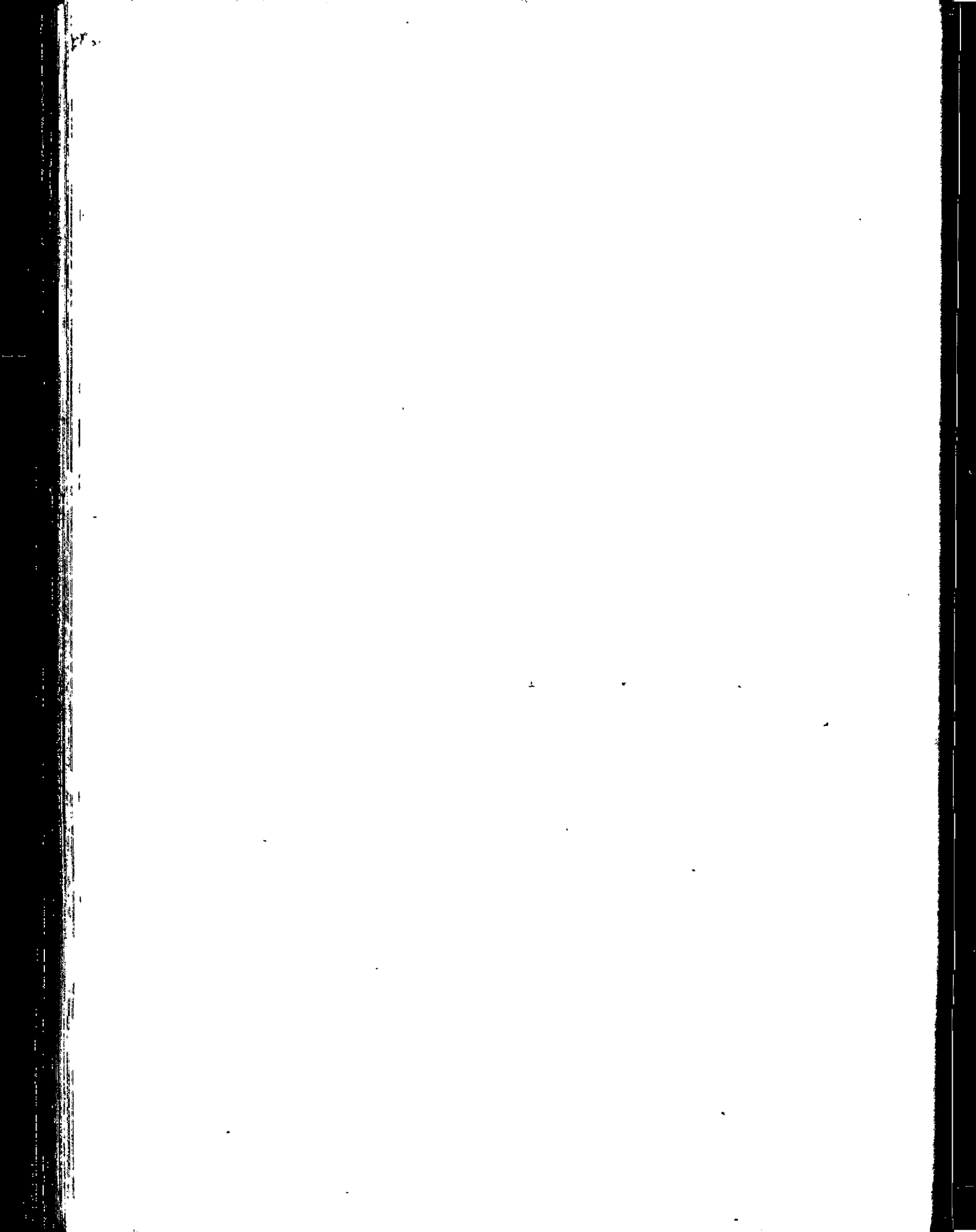
After he had eaten, he helped her take the ashes out the stove and then, in the hot July evening, they walked down the pasture toward the creek and talked about



the place they were going to have some day.

When late March came and the rainy season was almost there, they had accomplished almost more than was believable. For the past month, Lot had been up every morning at five, and Willy an hour earlier to get in all the work they could while the weather was clear. Next week, Lot said, the rain would probably start and if they didn't get the crop in by then, they would lose it--and all they had gained in the past months. They knew what that meant--another year of getting along with no more than they'd had the last. Then too, there'd be a baby next year instead of a cow. Lot had wanted the cow anyway. "Children don't cost all that much to feed," he'd argued, "an' the cow would help feed him," but Willie had been firm--the cow could come later--the child must have a good start. "Maybe," Lot had said finally, "we'll have enough for both," and he had gone out to look at the new-plowed ground as if he could count the harvest from the furrows.

Even with as little as they'd had, it had been a good year. Willie had cleaned the shack, and Lot had fixed the chimney. There was a profusion of petunias by the doorstep and a colony of snap-dragons under the window. It had been a peaceful year. But now they were becoming anxious over the crop. They must gather it before the rain. "We need another week," Lot muttered when he came



in that night. "One more week an' we can do it. Do you feel like gatherin'? It isn't right that you should have to," he sighed, "but I can't hire any help."

"I'm all right," she said, hiding her trembling hands behind her. "I'll gather."

"It's cloudy tonight," Lot said darkly.

The next day they worked until nightfall--worked until they could work no longer and then stumbled back to the cabin and fell into bed.

Willie woke in the night conscious of a pain. It was a soft, green pain with purple lights running through it. She wondered if she were awake. Her head rolled from side to side and there were droning shapes grinding boulders in it.

Lot sat up. "Are you bad off?" he asked trembling.

She raised herself on her elbow and then sank down again. "Get Anna up by the creek," she gasped.

The droning became louder and the shapes grayer. The pain intermingled with them for seconds first, then interminably. It came again and again. The sound of the droning grew more distinct and toward morning, she realized that it was rain. Later she asked hoarsely, "How long has it been raining?"

"Most two days, now," Lot answered.

"Then we lost." Willie looked listlessly out at the dripping trees. "It's over."

"It isn't over," he said softly. "We got a daughter."

"You wanted a son."

"No, I got what I wanted--two Willies instead of one--that's better than a cow, even," he grinned. "What can I do to deserve all I got, Willie?" He bent over and kissed her forehead.

"What can I?" she asked slowly. "And what can I do to help you more?"

"How about your going to the grocery, Willie?"

Miss Willerton shoved Lot away from her. "W-what did you say, Lucia?" she stuttered.

"I said how about your going to the grocery this time? I've been every morning this week and I'm busy now."

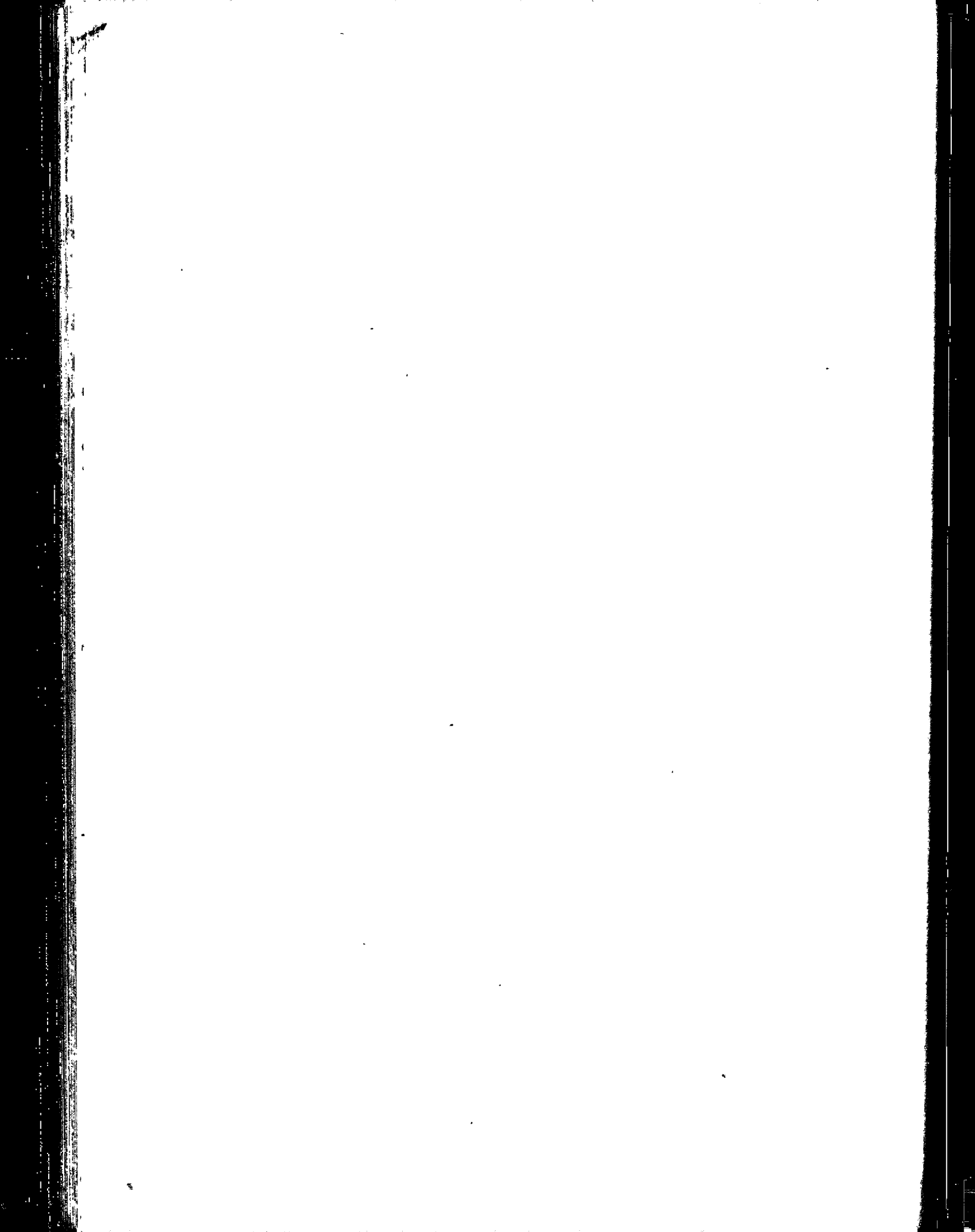
Miss Willerton pushed back from the typewriter.

"Very well," she said sharply. "What do you want there?"

"A dozen eggs and two pounds of tomatoes--ripe tomatoes--and you'd better start doctoring that cold right now. Your eyes are already watering and you're hoarse. There's empirin in the bathroom. Write a check on the house for the groceries. And wear your coat. It's cold."

Miss Willerton rolled her eyes upward. "I am forty-four years old," she announced, "and able to take care of myself."

"And get ripe tomatoes," Miss Lucia returned.



Miss Willerton, her coat buttoned unevenly, tramped up Broad Street and into the Super Market. "What was it now?" she muttered. "Two dozen eggs and a pound of tomatoes, yes." She passed the lines of canned vegetables and the crackers and headed for the box where the eggs were kept. But there were no eggs. "Where are the eggs?" she asked a boy weighing snapbeans.

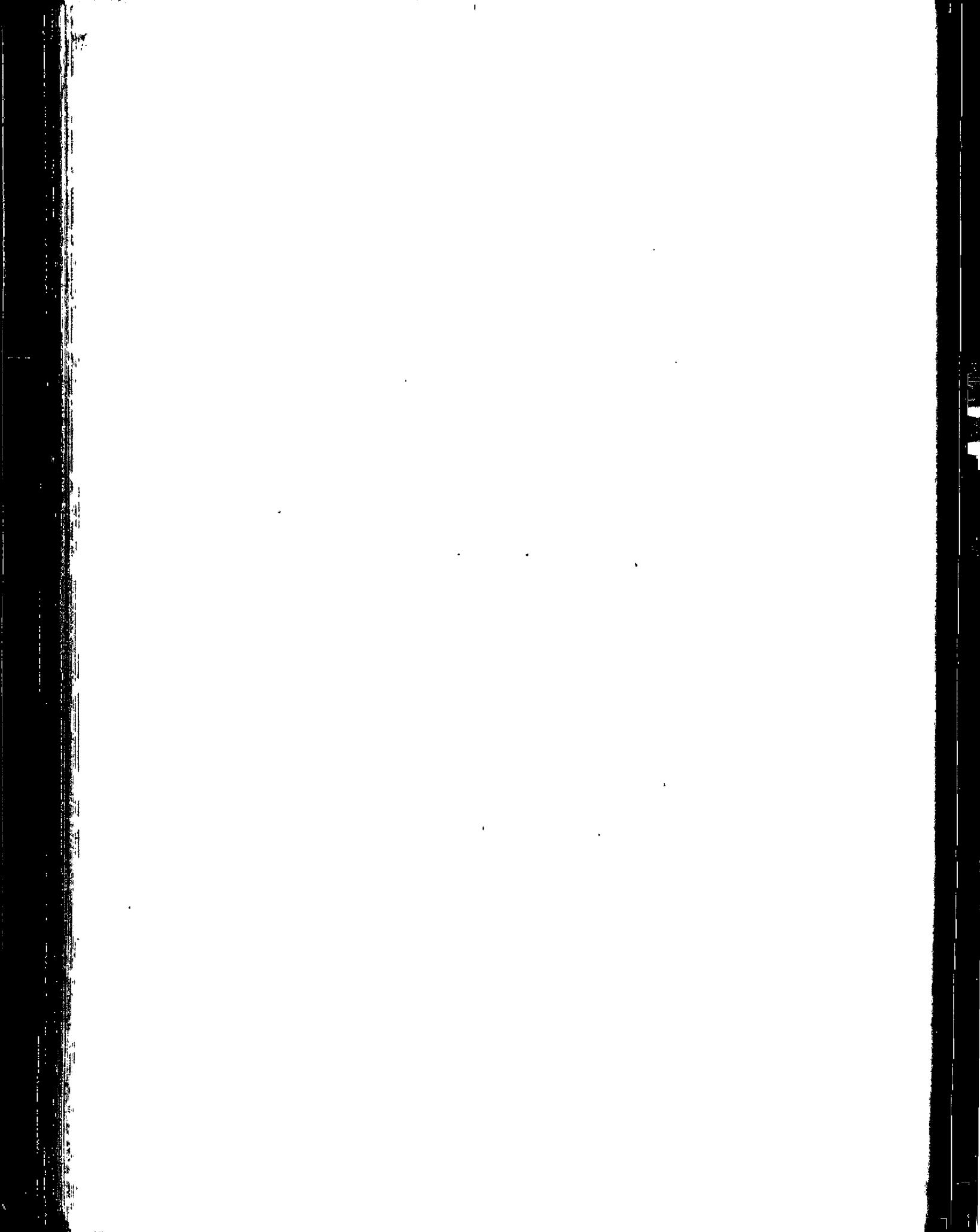
"We ain't got nothin' but pullet eggs," he said fishing up another handful of beans.

"Well where are they and what is the difference?" Miss Willerton demanded.

He threw several beans back into the bin, slouched over to the egg box and handed her a carton. "There ain't no difference really," he said pushing his gum over his front teeth, "a teen-age chicken or somethin', I don't know. You want 'em?"

"Yes, and two pounds of tomatoes. Ripe tomatoes," Miss Willerton added. She did not like to do the shopping. There was no reason those clerks should be so condescending. That boy wouldn't have dwaddled with Lucia. She paid for the eggs and tomatoes and left hurriedly. The place depressed her somehow.

Silly that a grocery should depress one--nothing in it but trifling domestic doings--women buying beans--riding children in those grocery co-carts--higgling about



an eighth of a pound more or less of squash--what did they get out of it? Miss Willerton wondered. Where was there any chance for self-expression, for creation, for art? All around her it was the same--sidewalks full of people scurrying about with their hands full of little packages and their minds full of little packages--that woman there with the child on the leash, pulling him, jerking him, dragging him away from a window with a jack-o-lantern in it; she would probably be pulling and jerking him the rest of her life. And there was another, dropping a shopping bag all over the street, and another wiping a child's nose, and up the street an old woman was coming with three grandchildren jumping all over her, and behind them was a couple walking too close for refinement.

Miss Willerton looked at the couple sharply as they came nearer and passed. The woman was plump with yellow hair and fat ankles and muddy-colored eyes. She had on high-heel pumps and blue anklets, a too-short cotton dress, and a plaid jacket. Her skin was mottled and her neck thrust forward as if she were sticking it out to smell something that was always being drawn away. Her face was set in an inane grin. The man was long and wasted and shaggy. His shoulders were stooped and there were yellow knots along the side of his large, red neck. His hands fumbled stupidly with the girl's as they slumped along, and

once or twice he smiled sickly at her and Miss Willerton could see that he had straight teeth and sad eyes and a rash over his forehead.

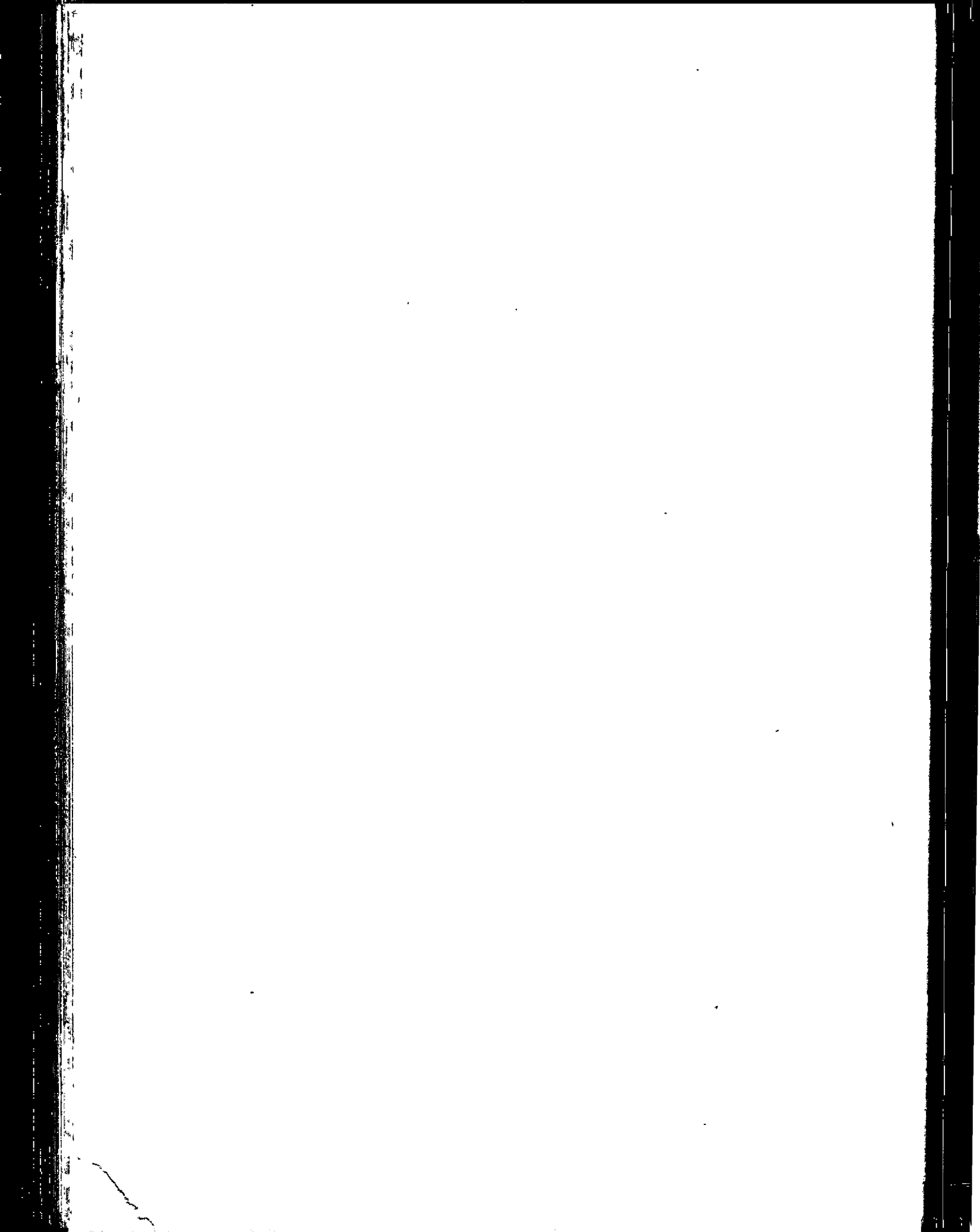
"Ugh," she shuddered.

Miss Willerton laid the graces on the kitchen table and went back to her typewriter. She looked at the paper in it. "Lot Motun called his dog," it read. "The dog pricked up its ears and slunk over to him. He pulled the animal's short, scraggy ears and rolled over with it in the mud."

"That sounds awful!" Miss Willerton muttered.

"It's not a good subject anyway," she decided. She needed something more colorful--more arty. Miss Willerton looked at her typewriter for a long time. Then of a sudden her fist hit the desk in several ecstatic little bounces.

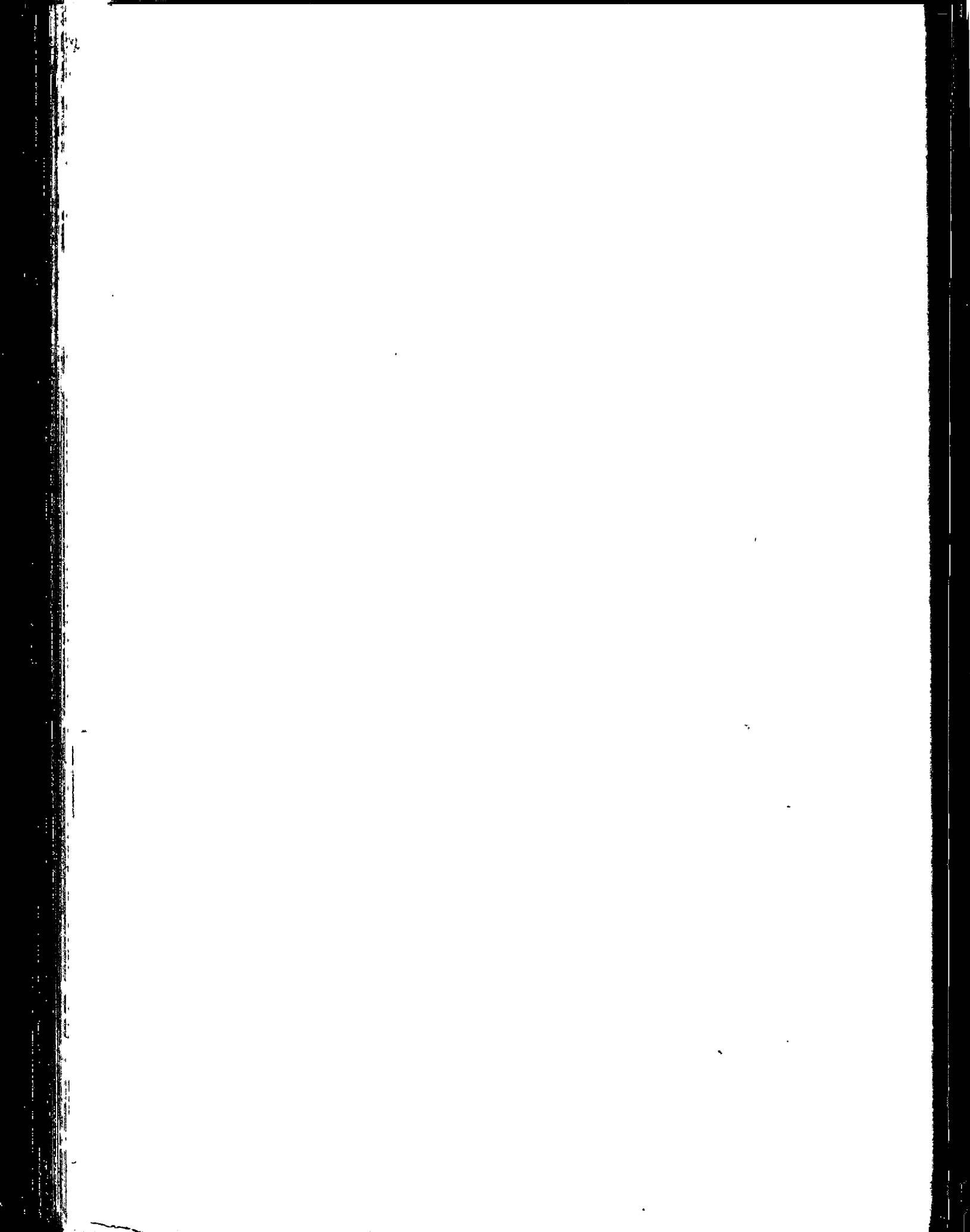
"The Irish!" she squealed, "the Irish!" Miss Willerton had always admired the Irish. Their brogue, she thought, was full of music; and their history--splendid! And the people, she mused, the Irish people! They were full of spirit--red-haired, with broad shoulders and great, drooping mustaches.



THE TURKEY

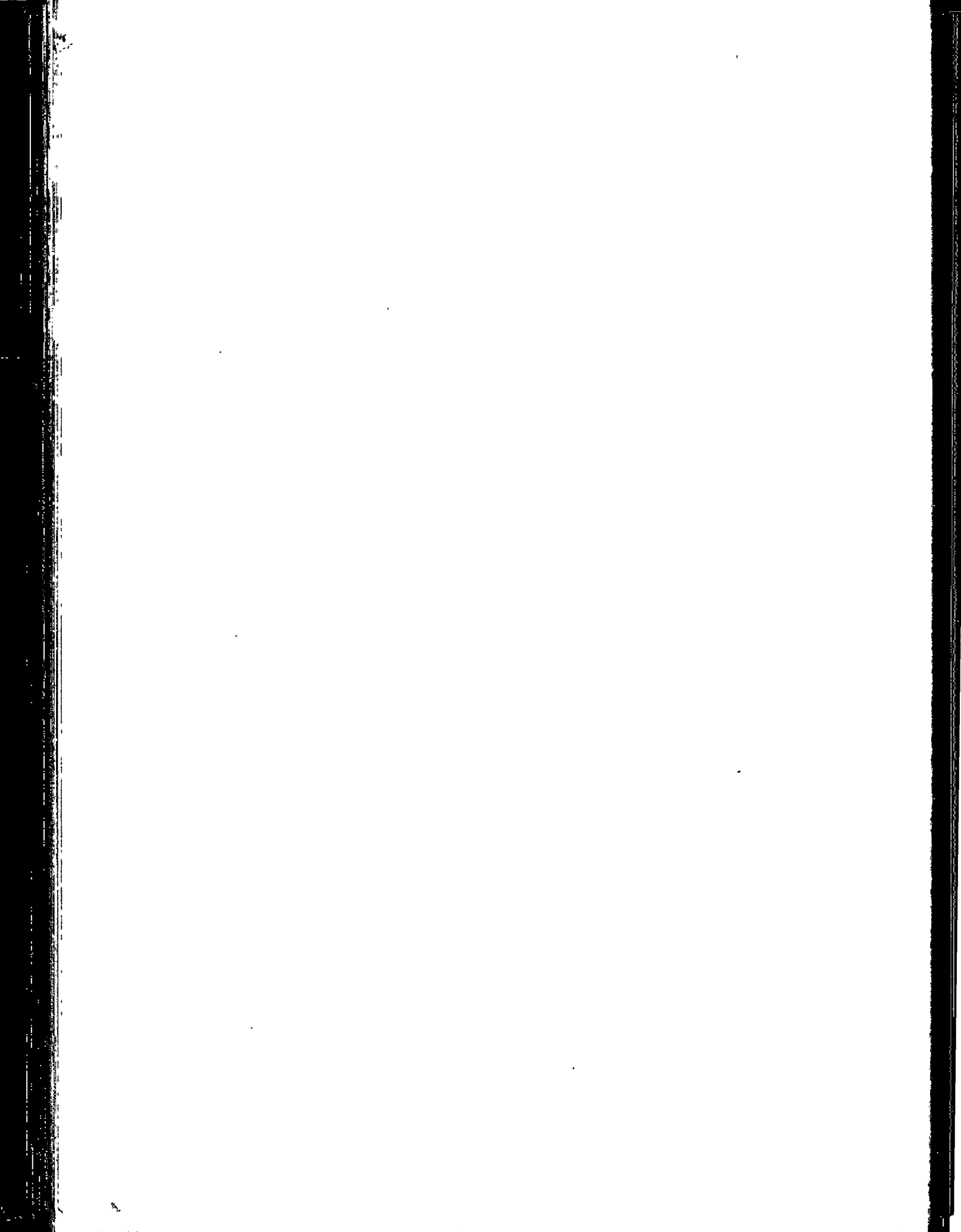
His guns glinted sun steel in the ribs of the tree and, half-aloud through a crack in his mouth, he growled, "All right, Mason, this is as far as you go. The jig's up." The six-shooters in Mason's belt stuck out like waiting rattlers but he flipped them into the air and when they fell at his feet, kicked them behind him like so many dried steer skulls. "You varmit," he muttered, drawing his rope tight around the captured man's ankles, "this is the last rustlin' you'll do." He took three steps backward and leveled one gun to his eye. "Okay," he said with cold, slow precision, "This is...." And then he saw it, just moving slightly through the bushes farther over, a touch of bronze and a rustle and then, through another gap in the leaves, the eye, set in red folds that covered the head and hung down along the neck, trembling slightly. He stood perfectly still and the turkey took another step, then stopped, with one foot lifted, and listened.

If he only had a gun, if he only had a gun! He could level aim and shoot it right where it was. In a second, it would slide through the bushes and be up in a tree before he could tell which direction it had gone in. Without moving his head, he strained his eyes to the ground



to see if there were a stone near, but the ground looked as if it might just have been swept. The turkey moved again. The foot that had been poised half way up went down and the wing dropped over it, spreading so that Ruller could see the long single feathers, pointed at the end. He wondered if he dived into the bush on top of it.... It moved again and the wing came up, again and it went down.

It's limping, he thought quickly. He moved a little nearer, trying to make his motion imperceptible. Suddenly its head pierced out of the bush--he was about ten feet from it--and drew back and then abruptly back into the bush. He began edging nearer with his arms rigid and his fingers ready to clutch. It was lame he could tell. It might not be able to fly. It shot its head out once more and saw him and shuttled back into the bushes and out again on the other side. Its motion was half-lopsided and the left wing was dragging. He was going to get it. He was going to get it if he had to chase it out of the county. He crawled through the brush and saw it about twenty feet away, watching him warily, moving its neck up and down. It stooped and tried to spread its wings and stooped again and went a little way to the side and stooped again, trying to make itself go up; but, he could tell, it couldn't fly. He was going to have it. He was going to have it if he had to run it out of the state. He saw himself going in the



front door with it slung over his shoulder, and them all screaming, "Look at Ruller with that wild turkey! Ruller! where did you get that wild turkey!"

Oh, he had caught it in the woods; he had thought they might like to have him catch them one.

"You crazy bird," he muttered, "you can't fly. I've already got you." He was walking in a wide circle, trying to get behind it. For a second, he almost thought he could go pick it up. It had dropped down and one foot was sprawled, but when he got near enough to pounce, it shot off in a heavy speed that made him start. He tore after it, straight out in the open for a half acre of dead cotton; then it went under a fence and into some woods again and he had to get on his hands and knees to get under the fence but still keep his eye on the turkey but not tear his shirt; and then dash after it again with his head a little dizzy, but faster to catch up with it. If he lost it in the woods, it would be lost for good; it was going for the bushes on the other side. It would go on out in the road. He was going to have it. He saw it dart through a thicket and he headed for the thicket and when he got there it darted out again and in a second disappeared under a hedge. He went through the hedge fast and heard his shirt rip and felt cool streaks on his arms where they were getting scratched. He stopped a second and looked down at his torn

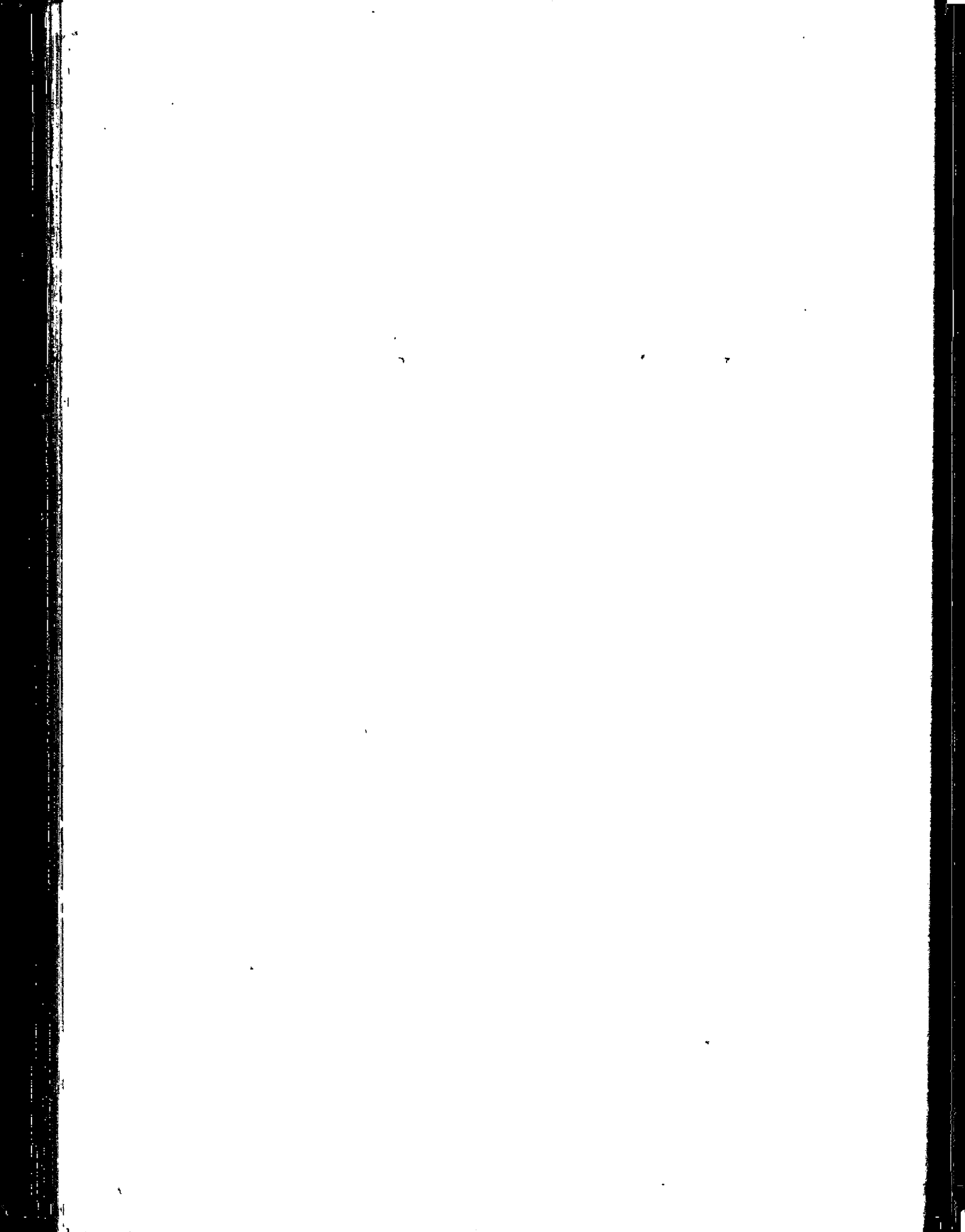
shirt sleeves but the turkey was only a little ahead of him and he could see it go over the edge of the hill and down again into an open space and he darted on. If he came in with the turkey, they wouldn't pay any attention to his shirt. Hane hadn't ever got a turkey. Hane hadn't ever caught anything. He guessed they'd be knocked out when they saw him; he guessed they'd talk about it in bed. That's what they did about him and Hane. Hane didn't know; he never woke up. Ruller woke up every night exactly at the time they started talking. He and Hane slept in one room and their mother and father in the next and the door was left open between and every night Ruller listened. His father would say finally, "How are the boys doing?" and their mother would say, Lord, they were wearing her to a frazzle, Lord, she guessed she shouldn't worry but how could she help worrying about Hane, the way he was now? Hane had always been an unusual boy, she said. She said he would grow up to be an unusual man too; and their father said, yes if he didn't get put in the penitentiary first, and their mother said how could he talk that way? and they argued just like Ruller and Hane and sometimes Ruller couldn't get back to sleep for thinking. He always felt tired when he got through listening but he woke up every night and listened just the same and whenever they started talking about him, he sat up in bed so he could hear better.

Once his father asked why Ruller played by himself so much and his mother said how was she to know? if he wanted to play by himself, she didn't see any reason he shouldn't; and his father said that worried him and she said well, if that was all he had to worry about, he'd do well to stop; someone told her, she said, that they had seen Hane at the Ever-Ready; hadn't they told him he couldn't go there?

His father asked Ruller the next day what he had been doing lately and Ruller said, "playing by himself," and walked off sort of like he had a limp. He guessed his father had looked pretty worried. He guessed he'd think it was something when he came home with the turkey slung over his shoulder. The turkey was heading out into a road and for a gutter along the side of it. It ran along the gutter and Ruller was gaining on it all the time until he fell over a root sticking up and spilled the things out his pockets and had to snatch them up. When he got up, it was out of sight.

"Bill, you take a posse and go down South Canyon; Joe, you cut around by the gorge and head him off," he shouted to his men. "I'll follow him this way." And he dashed off again along the ditch.

The turkey was in the ditch, not thirty feet from him, lying almost on its neck panting, and he was nearly a yard from it before it darted off again. He chased it



straight until the ditch ended and then it went out in the road and slid under a hedge on the other side. He had to stop at the hedge and catch his breath and he could see the turkey on the other side through the leaves, lying on its neck, its whole body moving up and down with the panting. He could see the tip of its tongue going up and down in its opened bill. If he could stick his arm through, he might could get it while it was still too tired to move. He pushed up closer to the hedge and eased his hand through and then gripped it quickly around the turkey's tail. There was no movement from the other side. Maybe the turkey had dropped dead. He put his face close to the leaves to look through. He pushed the twigs aside with one hand but they would not stay. He let go the turkey and pulled his other hand through to hold them. Through the hole he had made, he saw the bird wobbling off drunkenly. He ran back to where the hedge began and got on the other side. He'd get it yet. It needn't think it was so smart, he muttered.

It zigged across the middle of the field and toward the woods again. It couldn't go into the woods! He'd never get it! He dashed behind it, keeping his eyes sharp on it until suddenly something hit his chest and knocked the breath black out of him. He fell back on the ground and forgot the turkey for the cutting in his chest. He lay there for a while with things rocking on either side

of him. Finally he sat up. He was facing the tree he had run into. He rubbed his hands over his face and arms and the long scratches began to sting. He would have taken it in slung over his shoulder and they would have jumped up and yelled, "Good Lord look at Ruller! Ruller! Where did you get that wild turkey!" and his father would have said, "Man! That's a bird if I ever saw one!" He kicked a stone away from his foot. He'd never see the turkey now. He wondered why he had seen it in the first place if he wasn't going to be able to get it.

It was like somebody had played a dirty trick on him.

All that running for nothing. He sat there looking sullenly at his white ankles sticking out of his trouser legs and into his shoes. "Nuts," he muttered. He turned over on his stomach and let his cheek rest right on the ground dirty or not. He had torn his shirt and scratched his arms and got a knot on his forehead--he could feel it rising just a little, it was going to be a big one all right--all for nothing. The ground was cool to his face, but the grit bruised it and he had to turn over. Oh hell, he thought.

"Oh hell," he said cautiously.

Then in a minute he said just, "hell."

Then he said it like Hane said it, pulling the

e-ull out and trying to get the look in his eye that Hane got. Once Hane said, "God!" and his mother stomped after him and said, "I don't want to hear you say that again. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, Thy God, in vain. Do you hear me?" and he guessed that shut Hane up. Ha! He guessed she dressed him off that time.

"God," he said.

He looked studiedly at the ground, making circles in the dust with his finger. "God," he repeated.

"God dammit," he said softly. He could feel his face getting hot and his chest thumping all of a sudden inside. "God dammit to hell," he said almost inaudibly. He looked over his shoulder but no one was there.

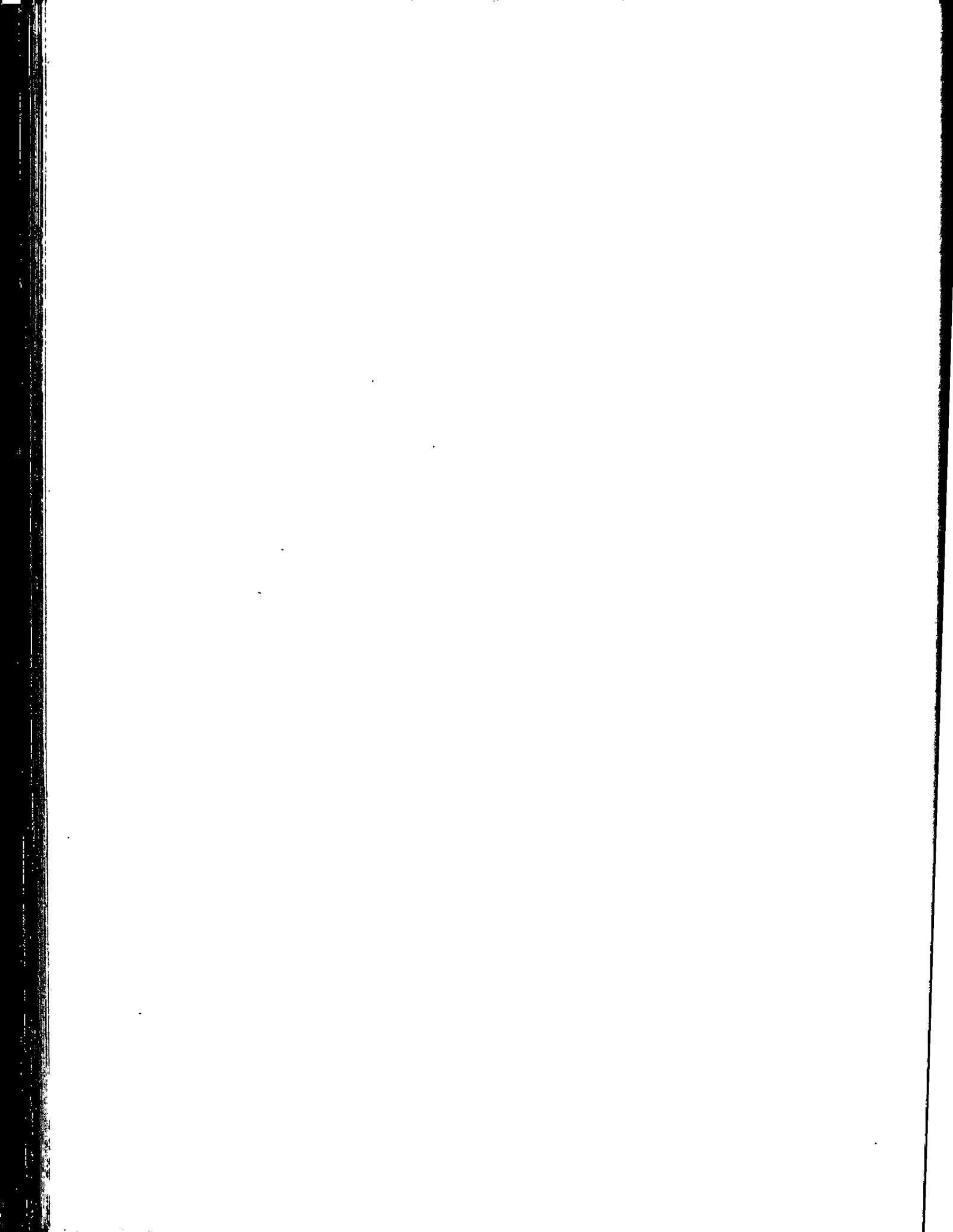
"God dammit to hell, good Lord from Jerusalem," he said. His uncle said, "good Lord from Jerusalem.

"Good Father, good God, sweep the chickens out the yard," he said and began to giggle. His face was very red. He sat up and looked at his white ankles sticking out of his pants legs into his shoes. They looked like they didn't belong to him. He gripped a hand around each ankle and bent his knees up and rested his chin on a knee. "Our Father Who art in heaven, shoot 'em six and roll 'em seven," he said, giggling again. Boy, she'd smack his head in if she could hear him. God dammit, she'd smack his goddam head in. He rolled over in a fit of laughter. God dammit,

she'd dress him off and wring his goddam neck like a goddam chicken. The laughing cut his side and he tried to hold it in but every time he thought of his goddam neck, he shook again. He lay back on the ground, red and weak with laughter, not able not to think of her smacking his goddam head in. He said the words over and over to himself and after a while he stopped laughing. He said them again but the laughing had gone out. He said them again but it wouldn't start back up. All that chasing for nothing, he thought again. He might as well go home. What did he want to be sitting around here for? He felt suddenly like he would if people had been laughing at him. Aw, go to hell, he told them. He got up and kicked his foot sharply into somebody's leg and said, "take that, sucker," and turned into the woods to take the short trail home.

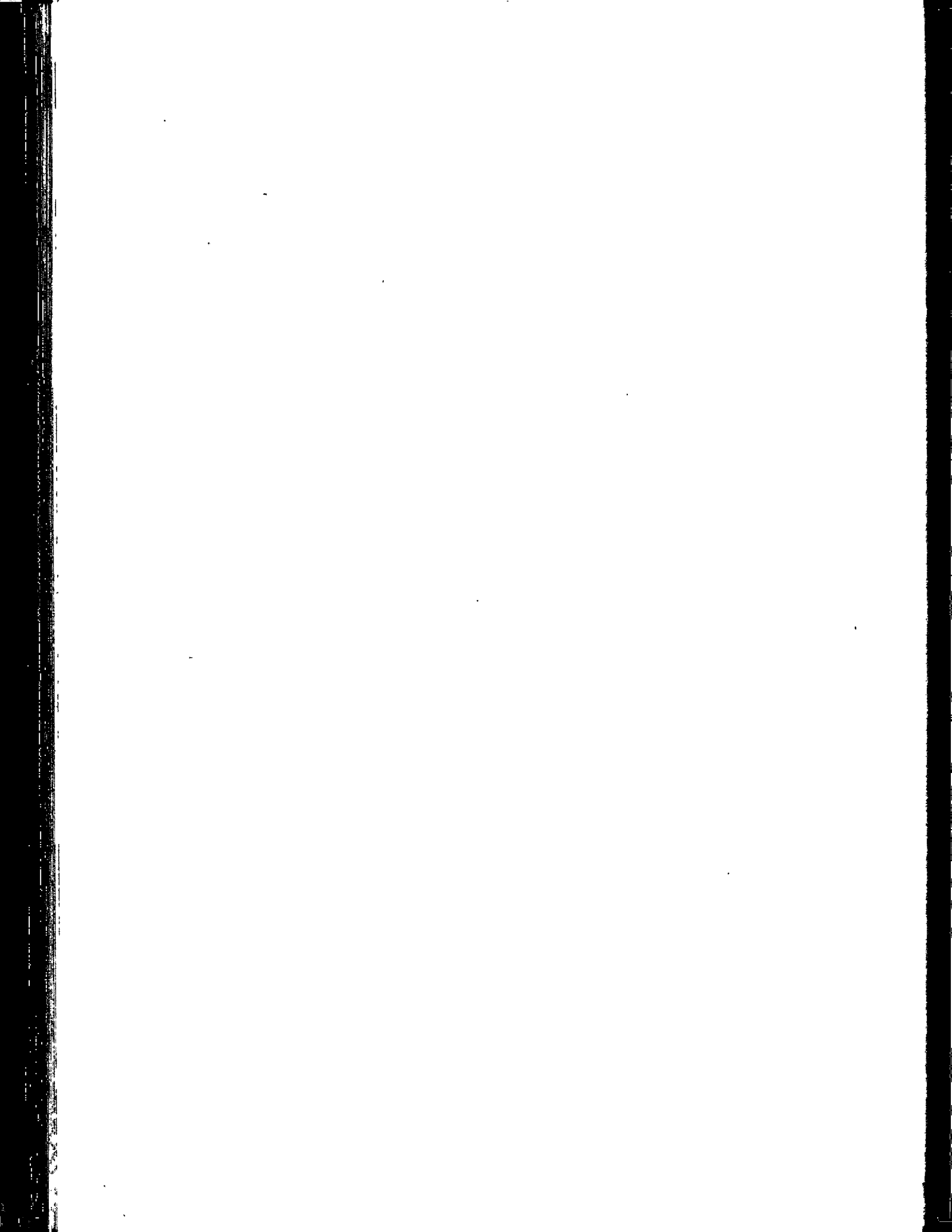
And as soon as he got in the door, they would holler, "How did you tear your clothes and where did you get that knot on your forehead?" He was going to say he fell in a hole. What difference would it make? Yeah, God, what difference would it make?

He almost stopped. He had never heard himself think that tone before. He wondered should he take the thought back. He guessed it was pretty bad; but heck, it was the way he felt. He couldn't help feeling that way. Heck...hell, it was the way he felt. He guessed he



couldn't help that. He walked on a little way, thinking thinking about it. He wondered suddenly if he were going "bad." That's what Hane had done. Hane played pool and smoked cigarets and sneaked in at twelve-thirty and boy he thought he was something. "There's nothing you can do about," their grandmother had told their father, "he's at that age." What age? Ruller wondered. I'm eleven, he thought. That's pretty young. Hane hadn't started until he was fifteen. I guess it's worse in me, he thought. He wondered would he fight it. Their grandmother had talked to Hane and told him the only way to conquer the devil was to fight him--if he didn't, he couldn't be her boy anymore--Ruller sat down on a stump--and she said she'd give him one more chance, did he want it? and he yelled at her, no! and would she leave him alone? and she told him, well, she loved him even if he didn't love her and he was her boy anyway and so was Ruller. Oh no I ain't Ruller thought quickly. Oh no. She's not pinning any of that stuff on me.

Boy, he could shock the pants off her. He could make her teeth fall in her soup. He started giggling. The next time she asked him if he wanted to play a game of Parcheesi, he'd say, hellno, goddammit, didn't she know any good games? Get out her goddam cards and he'd show her a few. He rolled over on the ground, choking with laughter.



"Let's have some booze, kid," he'd say. "Let's get stinky." Boy, he'd knock her out of her socks! He sat on the ground, red and grinning to himself, bursting every now and then into a fresh spasm of giggles. He remembered the minister had said young men were going to the devil by the dozens this day and age; forsaking gentle ways; walking in the tracks of Satan. They would rue the day, he said. There would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Weeping," Ruller muttered. Men didn't weep.

How do you gnash your teeth? he wondered. He grated his jaws together and made an ugly face. He did it several times.

He bet he could steal.

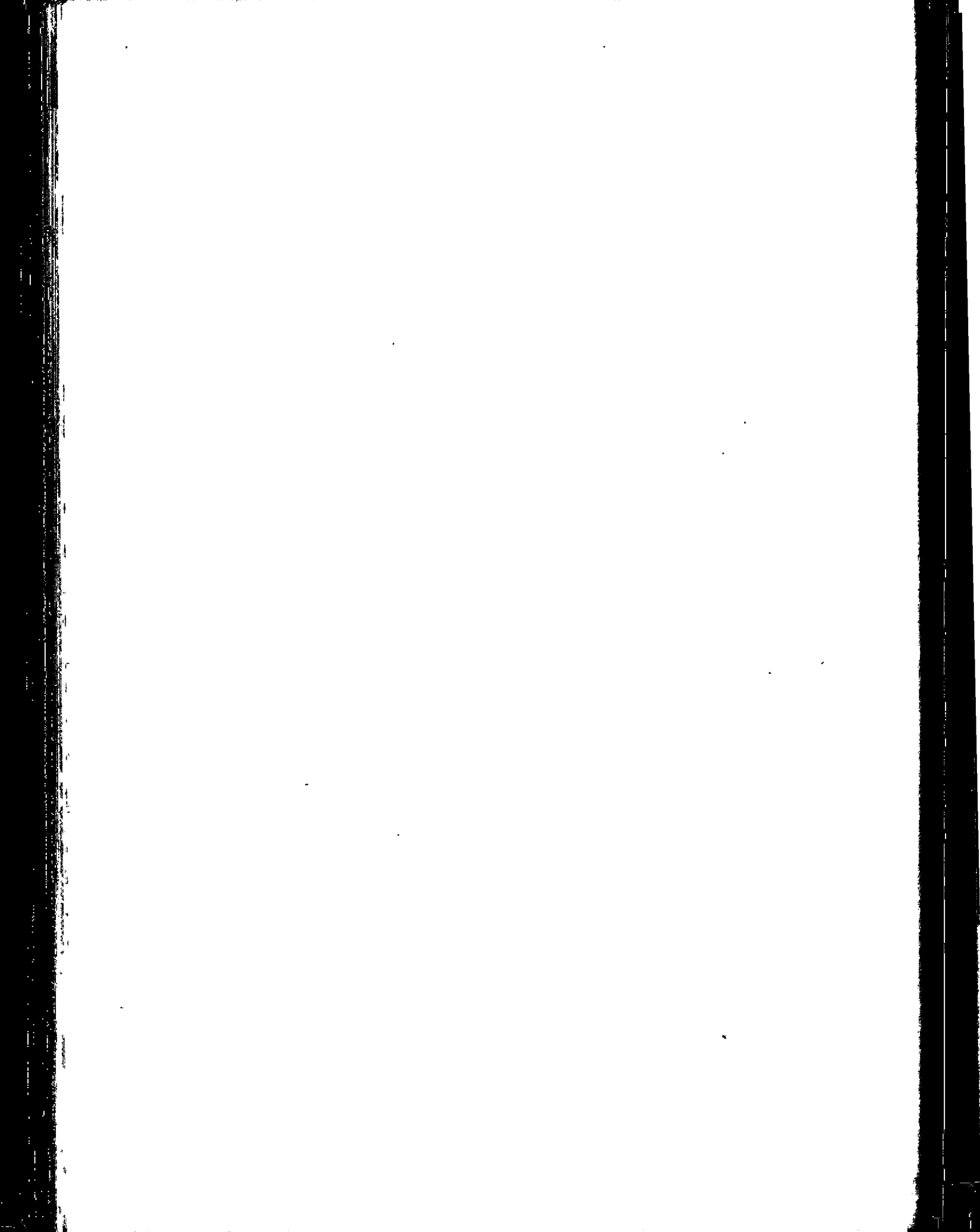
He thought about chasing the turkey for nothing. It was a dirty trick. He bet he could be a jewel thief. They were smart. He bet he could have all Scotland Yard on his tail. Hell.

He got up. God could go around sticking things in your face and making you chase them all afternoon for nothing.

You shouldn't think that way about God though.

But that was the way he felt. If that was the way he felt, could he help it? He looked around quickly as if someone might be hiding in the bushes; then suddenly he started.

It was rolled over at the edge of a thicket--a



pile of ruffled bronze with a red head lying limp along the ground. Ruller stared at it, unable to think; then he leaned forward suspiciously. He wasn't going to touch it. Why was it there now for him to take? He wasn't going to touch it. It could just lie there. The picture of himself walking in the room with it slung over his shoulder came back to him. Look at Ruller with that turkey! Lord look at Ruller! He squatted down beside it and looked without touching it. He wondered what had been wrong with its wing. He lifted it up by the tip and looked under. The feathers were blood-soaked. It had been shot. It must weigh ten pounds, he figured.

Lord, Ruller! It's a huge turkey! He wondered how it would feel slung over his shoulder. Maybe, he considered, he was supposed to take it.

Ruller gets our turkeys for us. Ruller got it in the woods, chased it dead. Yes, he's a very unusual child.

Ruller wondered suddenly if he were an unusual child.

It came down on him in an instant: he was..an.. unusual...child.

He reckoned he was more unusual than Hane.

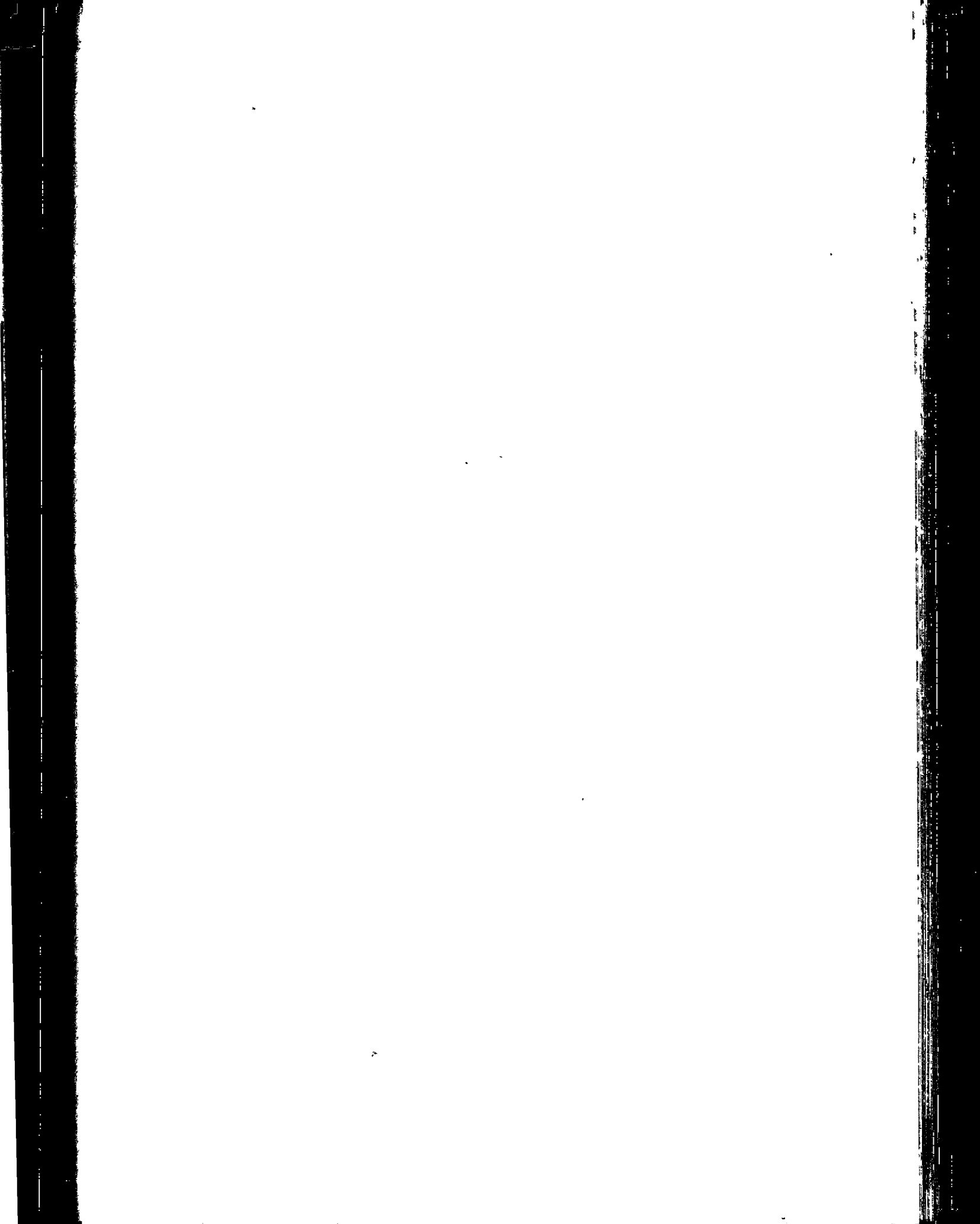
He had to worry more than Hane because he knew more how things were.

Sometimes when he was listening at night, he heard

them arguing like they were going to kill each other; and the next day his father would go out early and his mother would have the blue veins out on her forehead and look like she was expecting a snake to jump from the ceiling any minute. He guessed he was one of the most unusual children ever. Maybe that was why the turkey was there. He rubbed his hand along the neck. Maybe it was to keep him from going bad. Maybe God wanted to keep him from that.

Maybe God had knocked it out right there where he'd see it when he got up.

Maybe God was in the bush now, waiting for him to make up his mind. Ruller blushed. He wondered if God could think he was a very unusual child. He must. He found himself suddenly blushing and grinning and he rubbed his hand over his face quick to make himself stop. If You want me to take it, he said, I'll be glad to. Maybe finding the turkey was a sign. Maybe God wanted him to be a preacher. He thought of Bing Crosby and Spencer Tracy. He might find a place to stay for boys who were going bad. He lifted the turkey up--it was heavy all right--and fitted it over his shoulder. He wished he could see how he looked with it slung over like that. It occurred to him that he might as well go home the long way--through town. He had plenty of time. He started off slowly, shifting the turkey until it fit comfortably over his shoulder. He



remembered the things he had thought before he found the turkey. They were pretty bad, he guessed.

He guessed God had stopped him before it was too late. He should be very thankful. Thank You, he said.

Come on, boys, he said, we will take this turkey back for our dinner. We certainly are much obliged to You, he said to God. This turkey weighs ten pounds. You were mighty generous.

That's okay, God said. And listen, we ought to have a talk about these boys. They're entirely in your hands, see? I'm leaving the job strictly up to you. I have confidence in you, McFarney.

You can trust me, Ruller said. I'll come through with the goods.

He went into town with the turkey over his shoulder. He wanted to do something for God but he didn't know what he could do. If anybody was playing the accordian on the street today, he'd give them his dime. He only had one dime, but he'd give it to them. Maybe he could think of something better, though. He had been going to keep the dime for something. He might could get another one from his grandmother. How about a goddam dime, kid? He pulled his mouth piously out of the grin. He wasn't going to think that way anymore. He couldn't get a dime from her anyway. His mother was going to whip him if he asked

his grandmother for money again. Maybe something would turn up that he could do. If God wanted him to do something, He'd turn something up.

He was getting into the business block and through the corner of his eye he noticed people looking at him. There were eight thousand people in Mulrose County and on Saturday every one of them was in Tilford on the business block. They turned as Ruller passed and looked at him. He glanced at himself reflected in a store window, shifted the turkey slightly, and walked quickly ahead. He heard someone call, but he walked on, pretending he was deaf. It was his mother's friend, Alice Gilhard, and if she wanted him, let her catch up with him.

"Ruller!" she cried, "my goodness, where did you get that turkey?" She came up behind him fast and put her hand on his shoulder. "That's some bird," she said. "You must be a good shot."

"I didn't shoot it," Ruller said coldly. "I captured it. I chased it dead."

"Heavens," she said. "You wouldn't capture me one sometime would you?"

"I might if I ever have time," Ruller said. She thought she was so cute.

Two men came over and whistled at the turkey. They yelled at some other men on the corner to look.

Another of his mother's friends stopped and some country boys who had been sitting on the curb got up and tried to see the turkey without showing they were interested. A man with a hunting suit and gun stopped and looked at Ruller and walked around behind him and looked at the turkey.

"How much do you think it weighs?" a lady asked.

"At least ten pounds," Ruller said.

"How long did you chase it?"

"About an hour," Ruller said.

"The goddam imp," the man in the hunting suit muttered.

"That's really amazing," a lady commented.

"About that long," Ruller said.

"You must be very tired."

"No," Ruller said. "I have to go. I'm in a hurry." He worked his face to look as if he were thinking something out and hurried down the street until he was out of their view. He felt warm all over and nice as if something very fine were going to be or had been. He looked back once and saw that the country boys were following him. He hoped they would come up and ask to look at the turkey. God must be wonderful, he felt suddenly. He wanted to do something for God. He hadn't seen anyone playing the accordian though or selling pencils and he was past the business block. He might see one before he really got

to the streets where people lived at. If he did, he'd give away the dime--even while he knew he couldn't get another one any time soon. He began to wish he would see somebody begging.

Those country kids were still trailing along behind him. He thought he might stop and ask them did they want to see the turkey; but they might just stare at him. They were tenant's children and sometimes tenant's children just stared at you. He might find a home for tenant's children. He thought about going back through town to see if he had passed a beggar without seeing him, but he decided people might think he was showing off with the turkey.

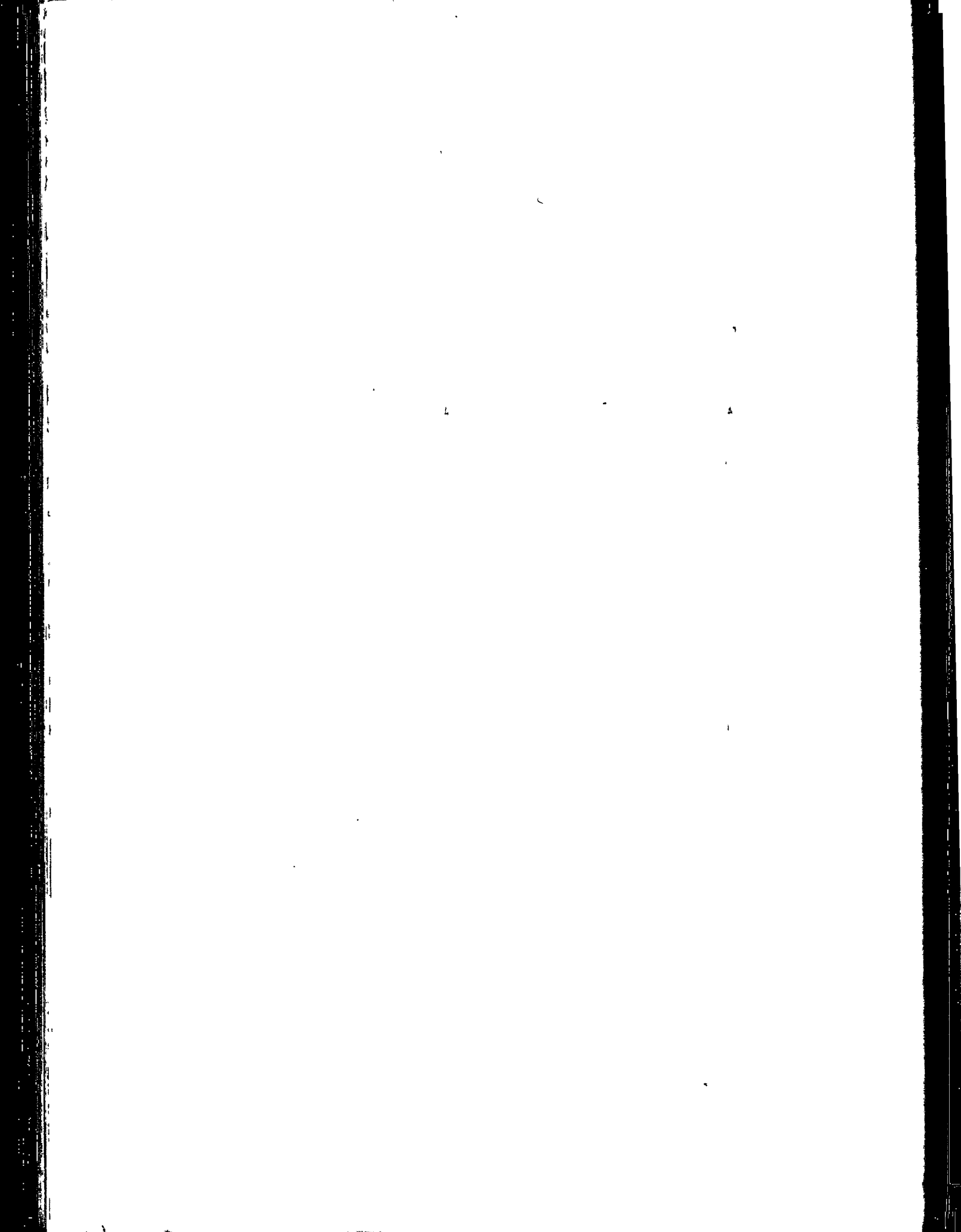
Lord, send me a beggar, he prayed suddenly. Send me one before I get home. He had never thought before of praying on his own, but it was a good idea. God had put the turkey there. He'd send him a beggar. He knew for a fact God would send him one. He was on Hill Street now and there were nothing but houses on Hill Street. It would be strange to find a beggar here. The sidewalks were empty except for a few children and some tricycles. Ruller looked back; the country boys were still following him. He decided to slow down. It might make them catch up with him and it might give a beggar more time to get to him. If one were coming. He wondered if one were coming. If one

came, it would mean God had gone out of His way to get one. It would mean God was really interested. He had a sudden fear one wouldn't come; it was a whole fear quick.

One will come, he told himself. God was interested in him because he was a very unusual child. He went on. The streets were deserted now. He guessed one wouldn't come. Maybe God didn't have confidence in--no, God did. Lord, please send me a beggar! he implored. He squinched his face rigid and strained his muscles in a knot and said, "please! one right now;" and the minute he said it--the minute--Hetty Gilman turned around the corner before him, heading straight to where he was.

He felt almost like he had when he ran into the tree.

She was walking down the street right toward him. It was just like the turkey lying there. It was just as if she had been hiding behind a house until he came by. She was an old woman whom everybody said had more money than anybody in town because she had been begging for twenty years. She sneaked into people's houses and sat until they gave her something. If they didn't, she cursed them. Nevertheless, she was a beggar. Ruller walked faster. He took the dime out of his pocket so it would be ready. His heart was stomping up and down in his chest. He made a noise to see if he could talk. As they neared each other,



he stuck out his hand. "Here!" he shouted. "Here!"

She was a tall, longfaced old woman in an antique black cloak. Her face was the color of a dead chicken's skin. When she saw him, she looked as if she suddenly smelled something bad. He darted at her and thrust the dime into her hand and dashed on without looking back.

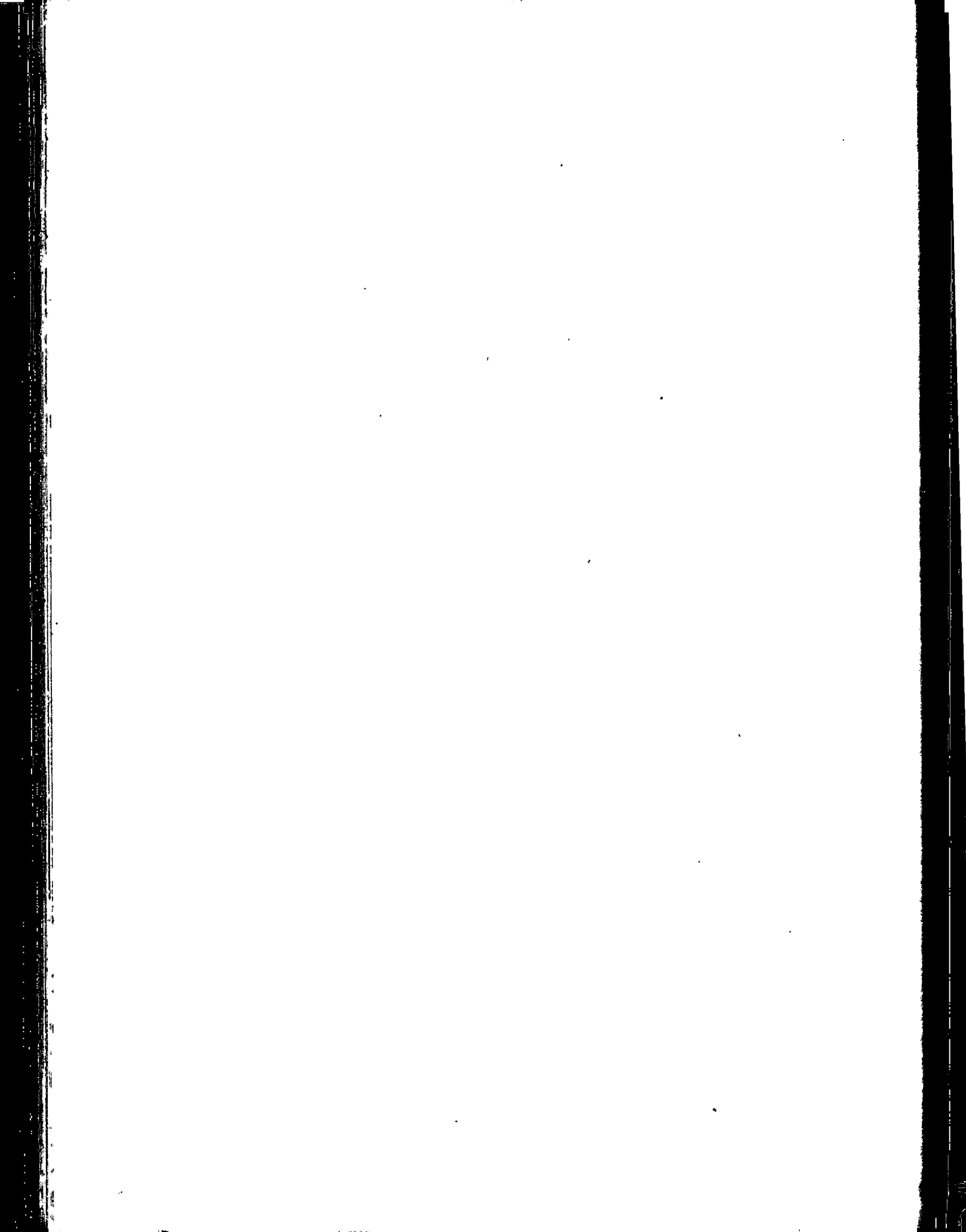
Slowly his heart calmed and he began to feel full of a new feeling--like being happy and embarrassed at the same time. Maybe, he thought, blushing, he would give all his money to her. He felt as if the ground did not need to be under him any longer. He noticed suddenly that the country boys' feet were shuffling just behind him and almost without thinking, he turned and asked graciously, "You all wanta see this turkey?"

They stopped where they were and stared at him. One in front spit. Ruller looked down at it quickly. There was real tobacco juice in it! "Wheered you git that turkey?" the spitter asked.

"I found it in the woods," Ruller said. "I chased it dead. See, it's been shot under the wing." He took the turkey off his shoulder and held it down where they could see. "I think it was shot twice," he went on excitedly, pulling the wing up.

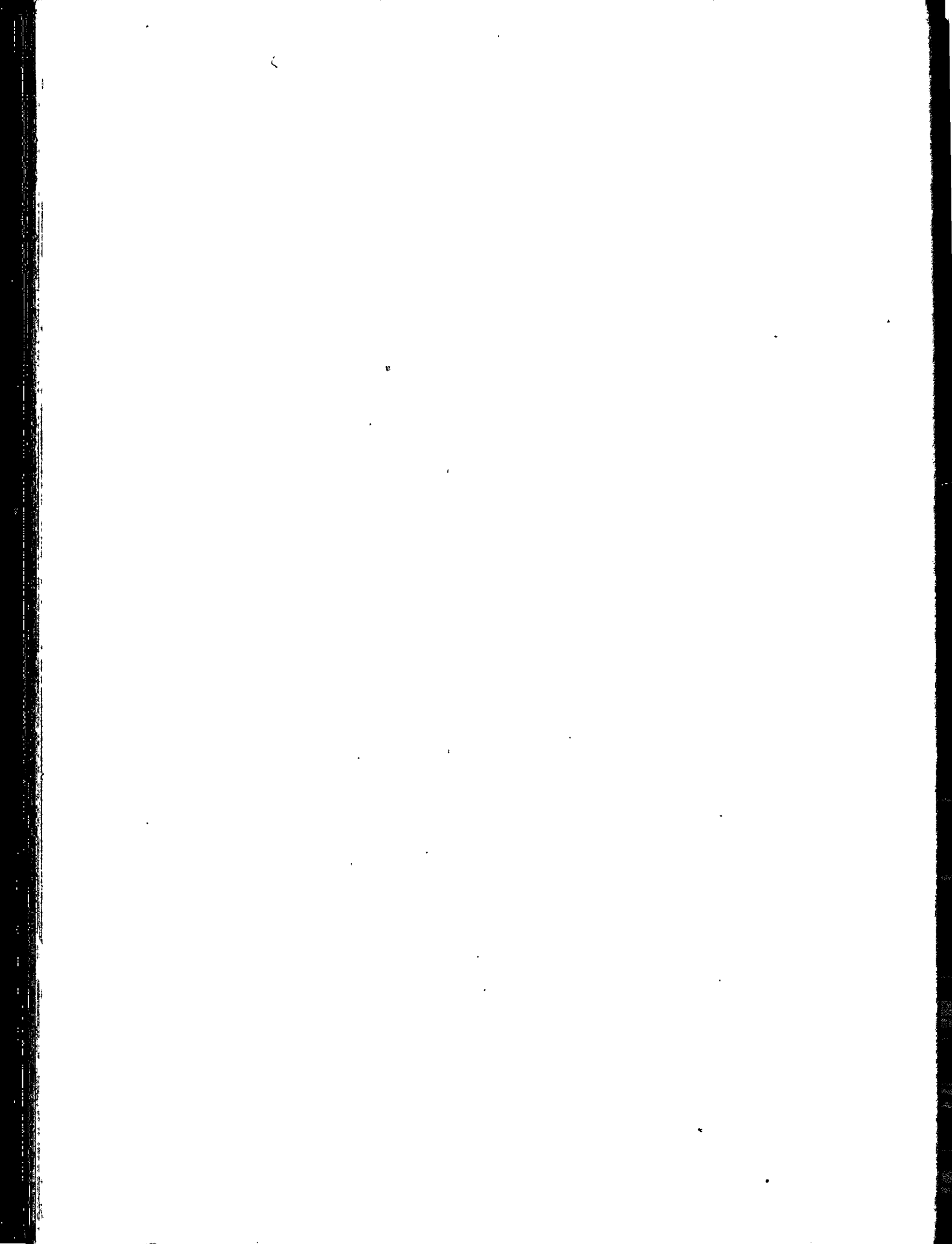
"Lemme see it here," the spitter said.

Ruller handed him the turkey. "You see down there



where the bullet hole is?" he asked. "Well, I think it was shot twice in the same hole, I think it was...." The turkey's head flew in his face as the spitter slung it up in the air and over his own shoulder and turned. The others turned with him and together, they sauntered off in the direction they had come, the turkey sticking stiff out on the spitter's back and its head swinging slowly in a circle as he walked away.

They were in the next block before Ruller moved. Finally, he realized that he could not even see them any longer they were so far away. He turned toward home, almost creeping. He walked four blocks and then suddenly, noticing that it was dark, he began to run. He ran faster and faster, and as he turned up the road to his house, his heart was running as fast as his legs and he was certain that Something Awful was tearing behind him with its arms rigid and its fingers ready to clutch.

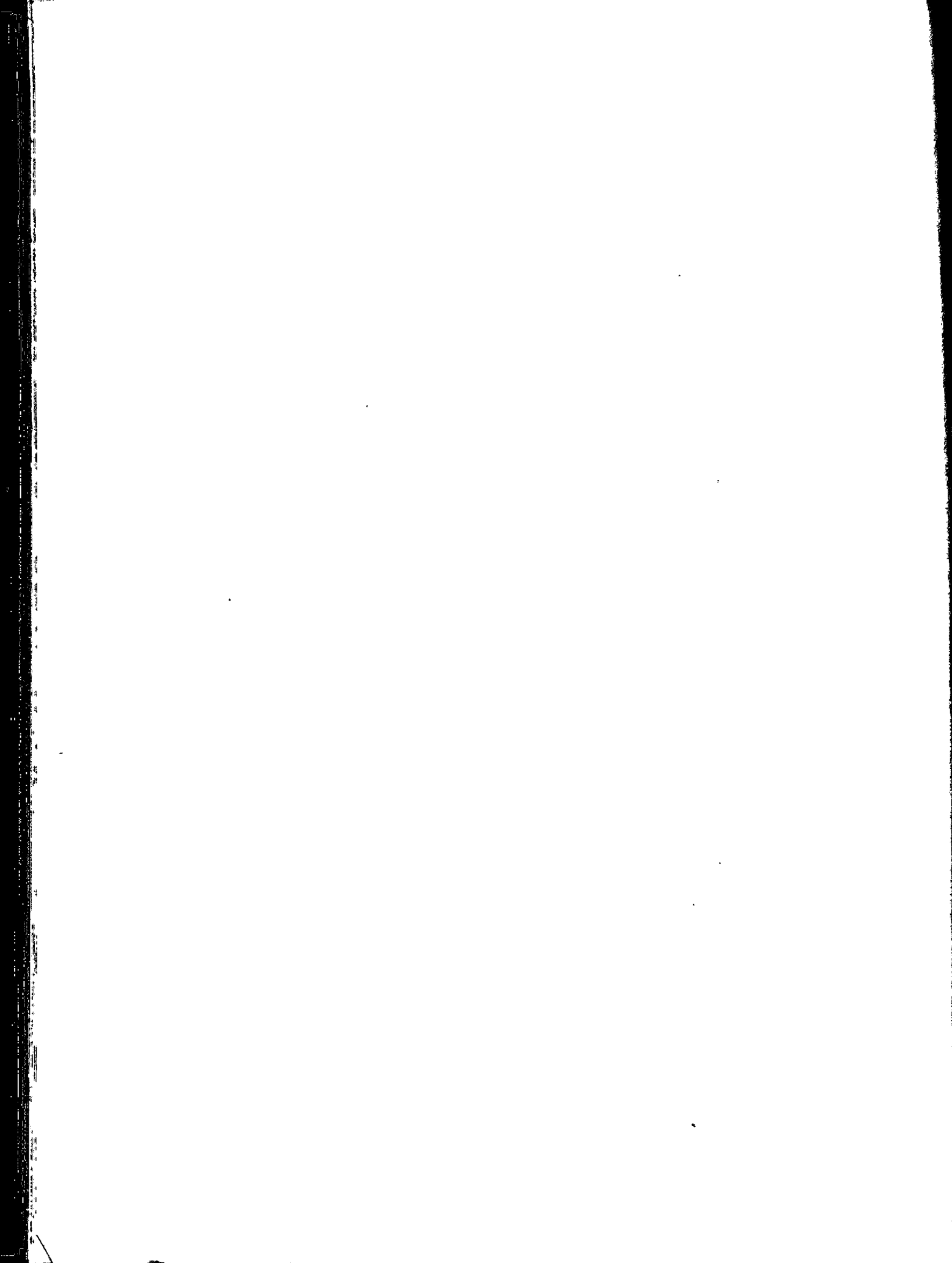


THE TRAIN

Thinking about the porter, he had almost forgotten the berth. He had an upper one. The man in the station had said he could give him a lower and Haze had asked didn't he have no upper ones; the man said sure if that was what he wanted, and gave him an upper one. Leaning back on the seat, Haze had seen how the ceiling was rounded over him. It was in there. They pulled the ceiling down and it was in there, and you climbed up to it on a ladder. He hadn't seen any ladders around; he reckoned they kept them in the closet. The closet was up where you came in. When he first got on the train, he had seen the porter standing in front of the closet, putting on his porter's jacket. Haze had stopped right then--right where he was.

The turn of his head was like and the back of his neck was like and the short reach of his arm. He turned away from the closet and looked at Haze and Haze saw his eyes and they were like; they were the same--same as old Cash's for the first instant, and then different. They turned different while he was looking at them; hardened flat. "Whu..what time do you pull down the beds?" Haze mumbled.

"Long time yet," the porter said, reaching into

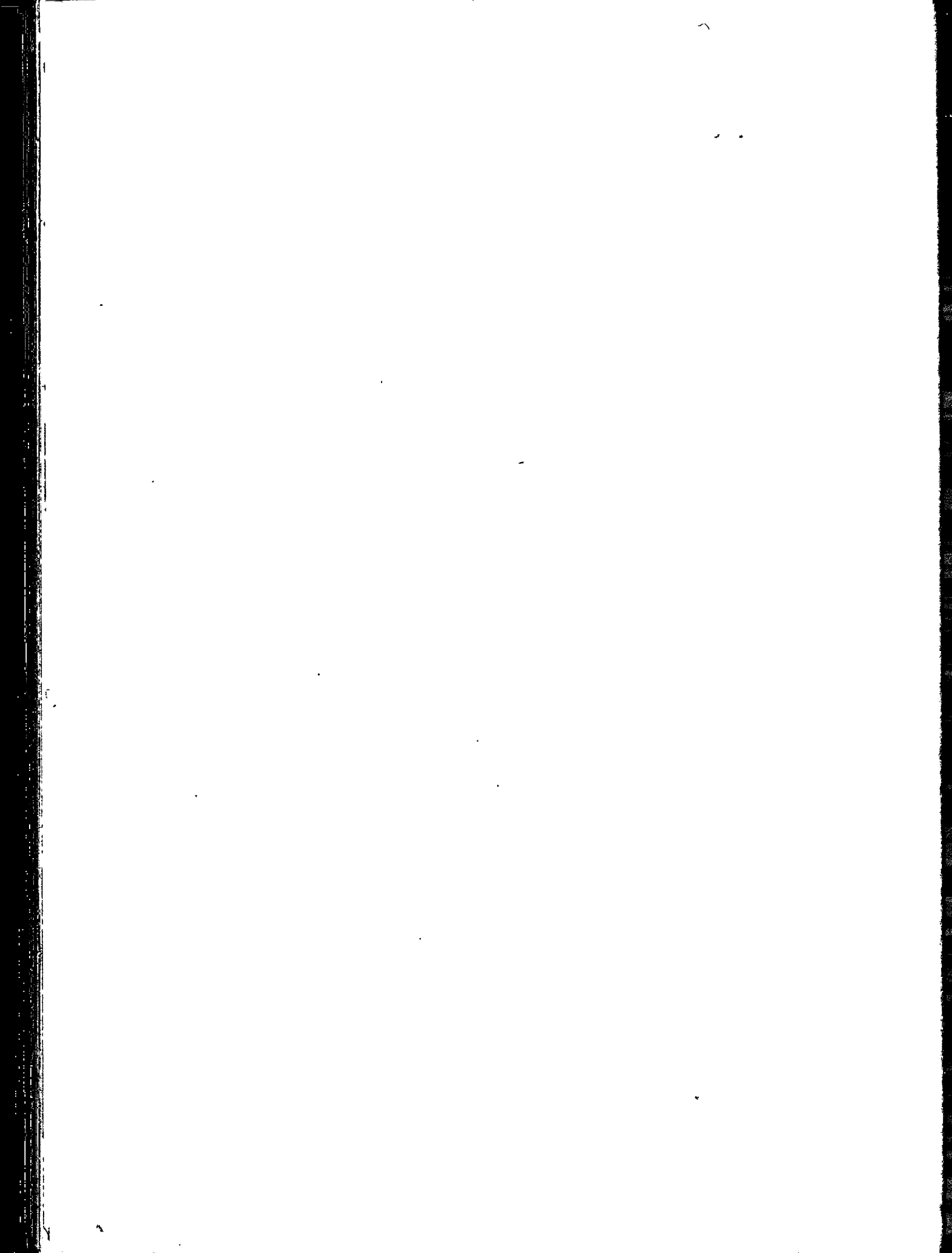


the closet again.

Haze didn't know what else to say to him. He went on to his section.

Now the train was greyflying past instants of trees and quick spaces of field and a motionless sky that sped darkening away in the opposite direction. Haze leaned his head back on the seat and looked out the window, the yellow light of the train lukewarm on him. The porter had passed twice, twice back and twice forward, and the second time forward he had looked sharply at Haze for an instant and passed on without saying anything; Haze had turned and stared after him as he had done the time before. Even his walk was like. All them gulch niggers resembled. They looked like their own kind of nigger--heavy and bald, rock all through. Old Cash in his day had been two hundred pounds heavy--no fat on him--and five feet high with not more than two inches over. Haze wanted to talk to the porter. What would the porter say when he told him: I'm from Eastrod? What would he say?

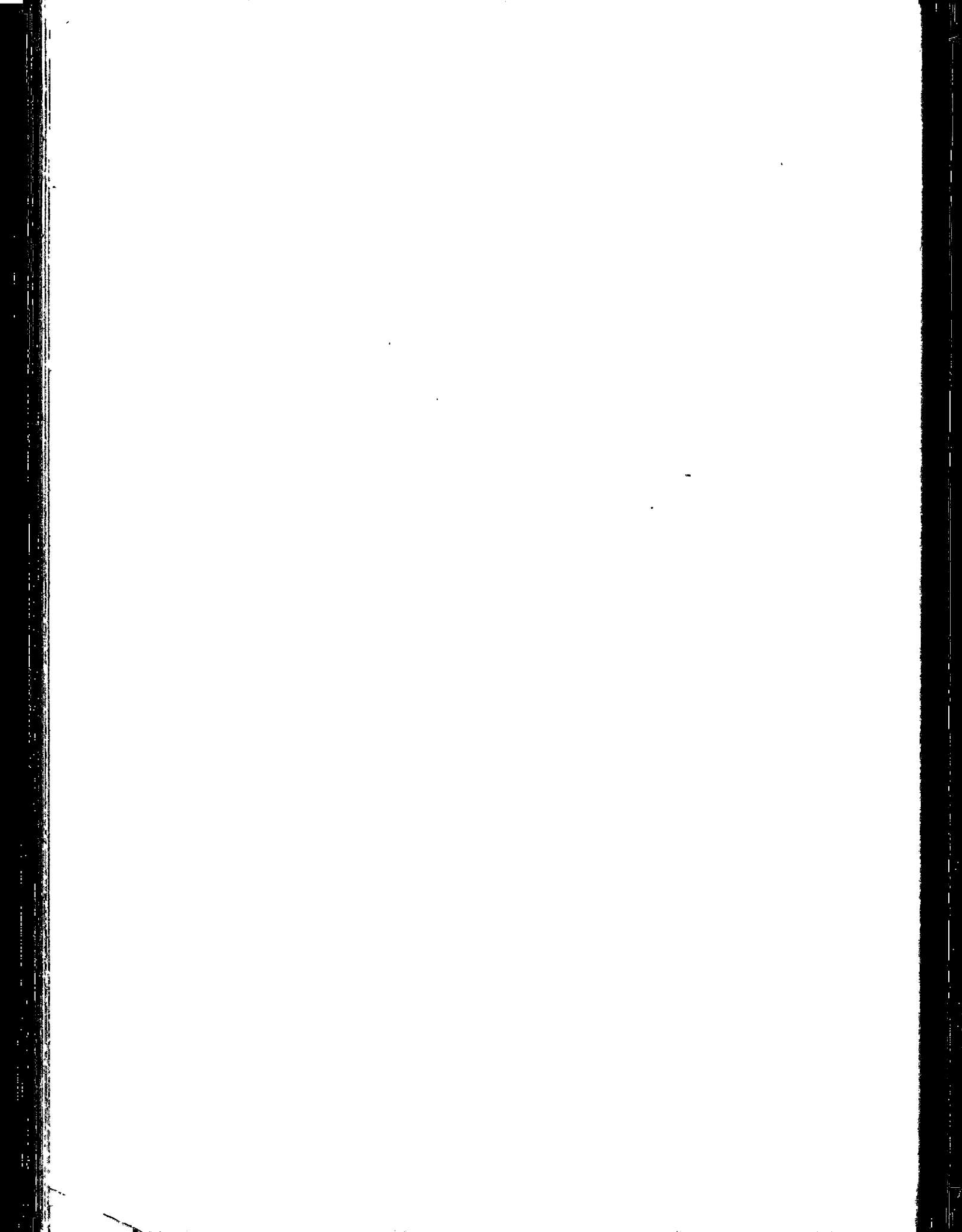
The train had come to Evansville. A lady got on and sat opposite Haze. That meant she would have the berth under him. She said she thought it was going to snow. She said her husband had driven her down to the station and he said if it didn't snow before he got home, he'd be surprised. He had ten miles to go; they lived in the suburbs.



She was going to Florida to visit her daughter. She had never had time to take a trip that far off. The way things happened, one thing right after another, it seemed like time went by so fast you couldn't tell if you were old or young. She looked as if it had been cheating her, going double quick when she was asleep and couldn't watch it. Haze was glad to have someone there talking.

He remembered when he was a little boy, him and his mother and the other children would go into Chattanooga on the Tennessee Railroad. His mother had always started up a conversation with the other people on the train. She was like an old bird dog just unpenned that raced, sniffing up every rock and stick and sucking in the air around everything she stopped at. There wasn't a person she hadn't spoken to by the time they were ready to get off. She remembered them too. Long years after, she would say she wondered where the lady was who was going to Fort West, or she wondered if the man who was selling Bibles had ever got his wife out the hospital. She had a hankering for people-- as if what happened to the ones she talked to happened to her then. She was a Jackson. Annie Lou Jackson.

My mother was a Jackson, Haze said to himself. He had stopped listening to the lady although he was still looking at her and she thought he was listening. My name is Hazel Wickers, he said. I'm nineteen. My mother was



a Jackson. I was raised in Eastrod, Eastrod, Tennessee; he thought about the porter again. He was going to ask the porter. It struck him suddenly that the porter might even be Cash's son. Cash had a son run away. It happened before Haze's time. Even so, the porter would know Eastrod.

Haze glanced out the window at the shapes black-spinning past him. He could shut his eyes and make Eastrod at night out of any of them--he could find the two houses with the road between and the store and the nigger houses and the one barn and the piece of fence that started off into the pasture, grey-white when the moon was on it. He could put the mule face, solid, over the fence and let it hang there, feeling how the night was. He felt it himself. He felt it light-touching around him. He seen his ma coming up the path, wiping her hands on an apron she had taken off, looking like the night change was on her, and then standing in the doorway: "Haaazzzzzeeee, Haaazzzee, come in here. The train said it for him. He wanted to get up and go find the porter."

"Are you going home?" Mrs. Hosen asked him. Her name was Mrs. Wallace Ben Hosen; she had been a Miss Hitchcock before she married.

"Oh!" Haze said, startled--"I get off at, I get off at Taulkinham."

Mrs. Hosen knew some people in Evansville who had

a cousin in Taulkinham--a Mr. Henrys, she thought. Being from Taulkinham Haze might know him. Had he ever heard the....

"Taulkinham ain't where I'm from," Haze muttered. "I don't know nothin' about Taulkinham" He didn't look at Mrs. Hosen. He knew what she was going to ask next and he felt it coming and it came, "Well, where do you live?"

He wanted to get away from her. "It was there," he mumbled, squirming in the seat. Then he said, "I don't rightly know, I was there but...this is just the third time I been at Taulkinham," he said quickly--her face had crawled out and was staring at him--"I ain't been since I went when I was six. I don't know nothin' about it. Once I seen a circus there but not...." He heard a clanking at the end of the car and looked to see where it was coming from. The porter was pulling the walls of the sections farther out. "I got to see the porter a minute," he said and escaped down the aisle. He didn't know what he'd say to the porter. He got to him and he still didn't know what he'd say. "I reckon you're fixing to make them up now," he said.

"That's right," the porter said.

"How long does it take you to make one up?" Haze asked.

"Seven minutes," the porter said.

"I'm from Eastrod," Haze said. "I'm from Eastrod, Tennessee."

"That isn't on this line," the porter said. "You on the wrong train if you counting on going to any such place as that."

"I'm going to Taulkinham," Haze said. "I was raised in Eastrod."

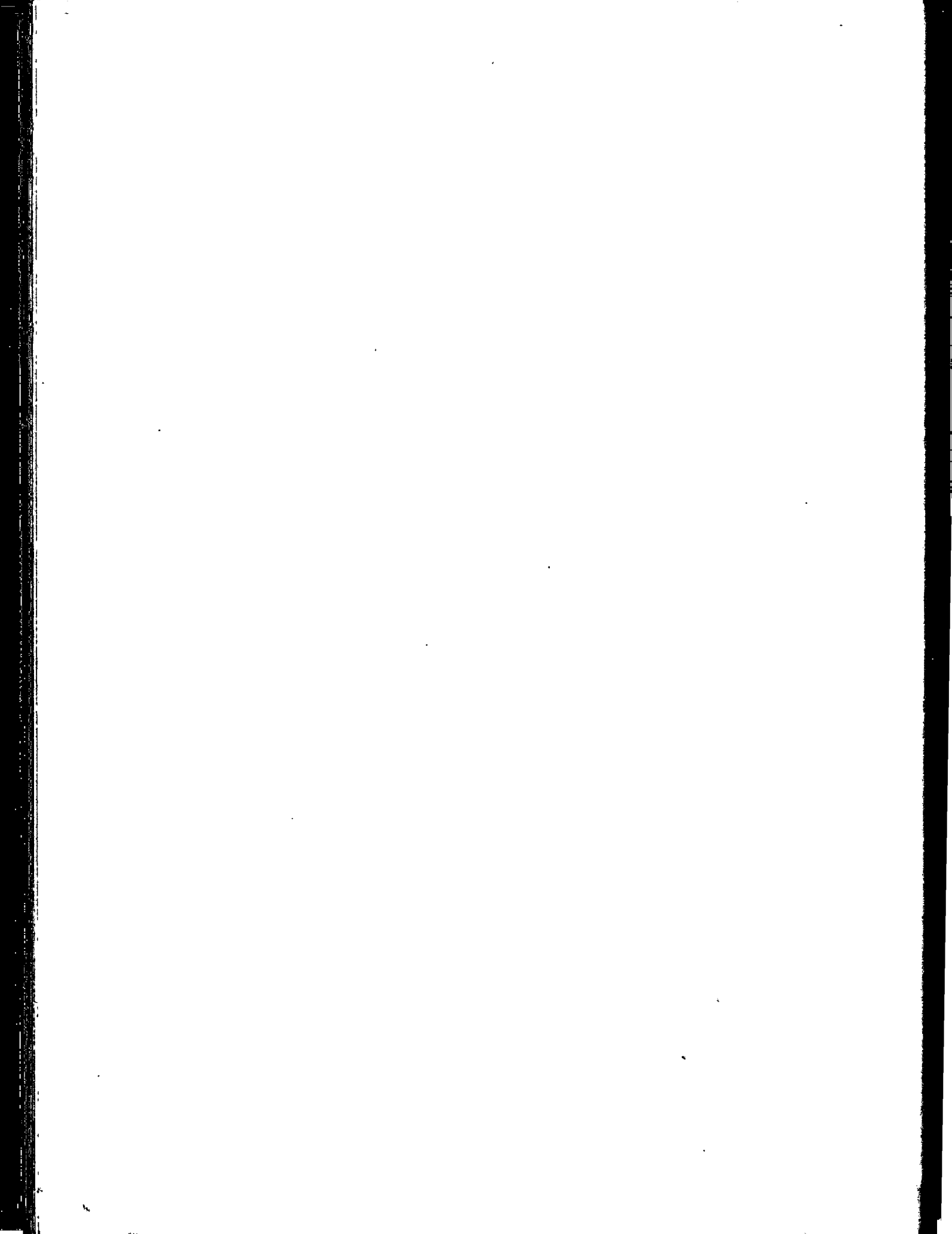
"You want your berth made up now?" the porter asked.

"Huh?" Haze said. "Eastrod, Tennessee; ain't you ever heard of Eastrod?"

The porter wrenched one side of the seat flat. "I'm from Chicago," he said. He jerked the shades down on either window and wrenched the other seat down. Even the back of his neck was like. When he bent over, it came out in three bulges. He was from Chicago. "You standing in the middle of the aisle. Somebody gonna want to get past you," he said, suddenly turning on Haze.

"I reckon I'll go sit down some," Haze said, blushing.

He knew people were staring at him as he went back to his section. Mrs. Hosen was looking out the window. She turned and eyed him suspiciously; then she said it hadn't snowed yet, had it? and relaxed into a stream of talk. She guessed her husband was getting his own supper.



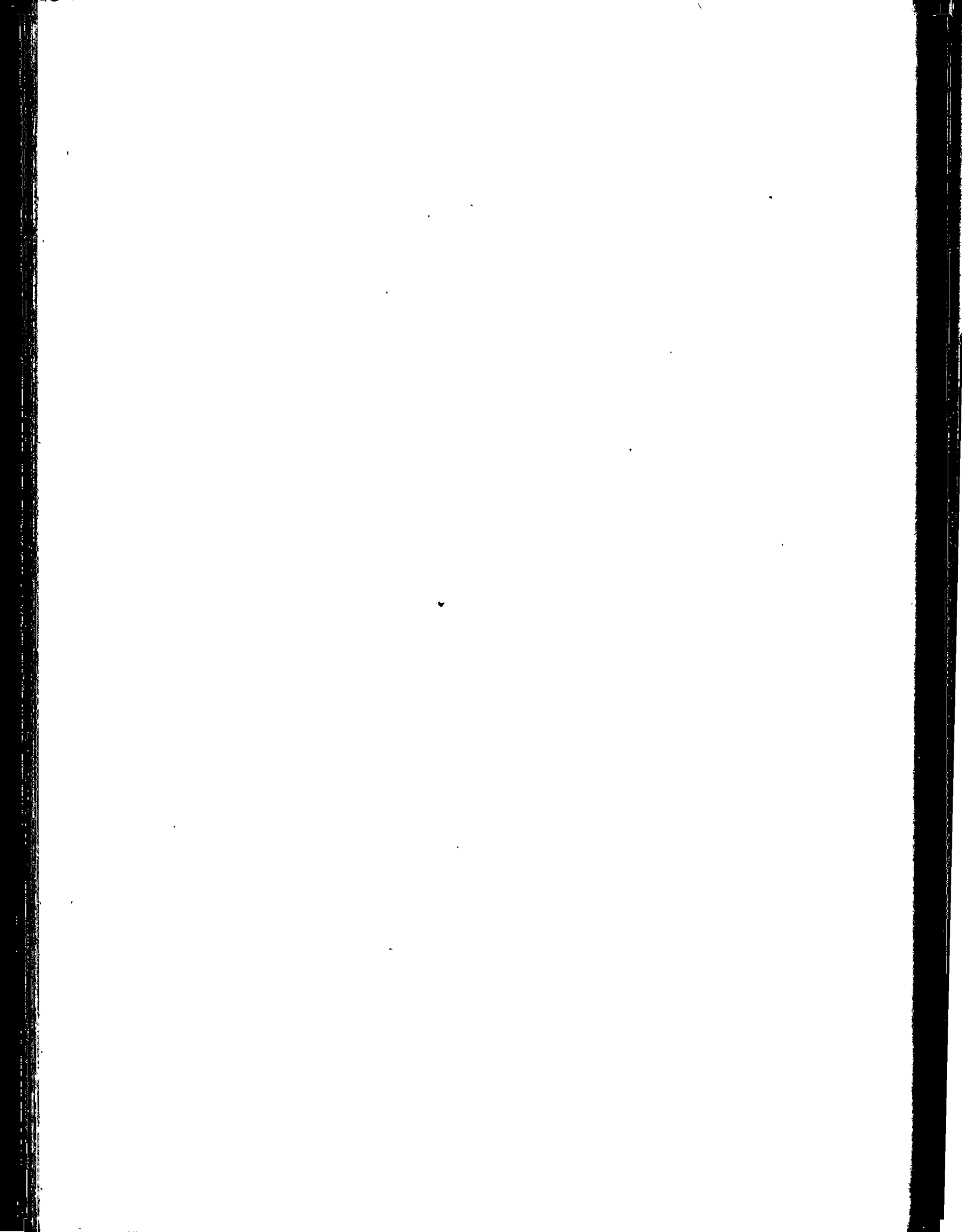
tonight. She was paying a girl to come cook his dinner but he was having to get his own supper. She didn't think that hurt a man once in a while. She thought it did him good. Wallace wasn't lazy but he didn't think what it took to keep going with housework all day. She didn't know how it would feel to be in Florida with somebody waiting on her.

He was from Chicago.

This was her first vacation in five years. Five years ago she had gone to visit her sister in Grand Rapids. Time flies. Her sister had left Grand Rapids and moved to Waterloo. She didn't suppose she'd recognize her sister's children if she saw them now. Her sister wrote they were as big as their father. Things changed fast, she said. Her sister's husband had worked with the city water supply in Grand Rapids--he had a good place--but in Waterloo, he...

"I went back there last time," Haze said. "I wouldn't be getting off at Taulkinham if it was there; it went apart like, you know, it..."

Mrs. Hosen frowned. "You must be thinking of another Grand Rapids," she said. "The Grand Rapids I'm talking about is a large city and it's always where it's always been." She stared at him for a moment and then went on: when they were in Grand Rapids they got along fine, but in Waterloo he suddenly took to liquor. Her sister had to support the house and educate the children. It beat

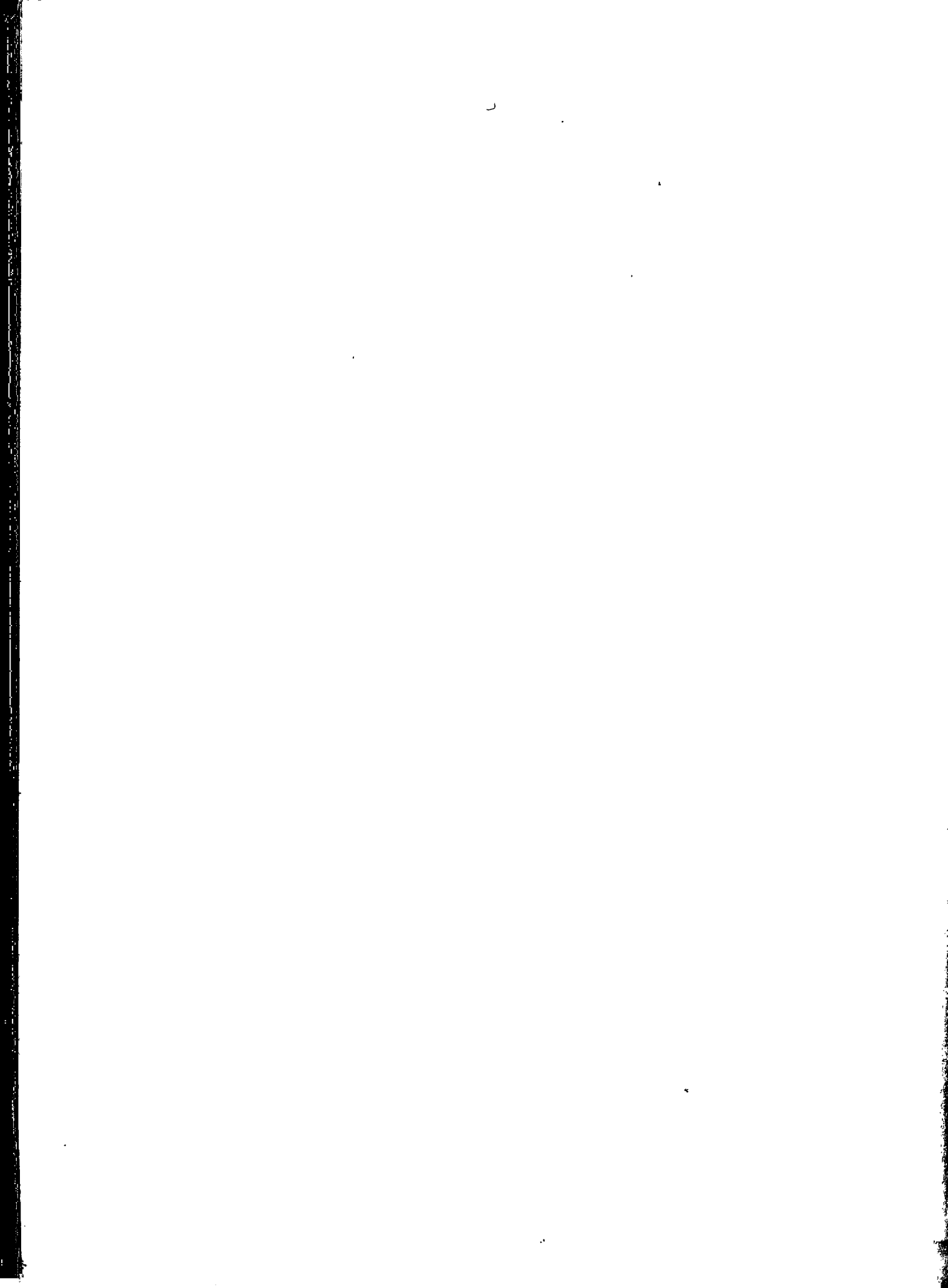


Mrs. Hosen how he could sit there year after year.

Haze's mother had never talked much on the train; she mostly listened. She was a Jackson.

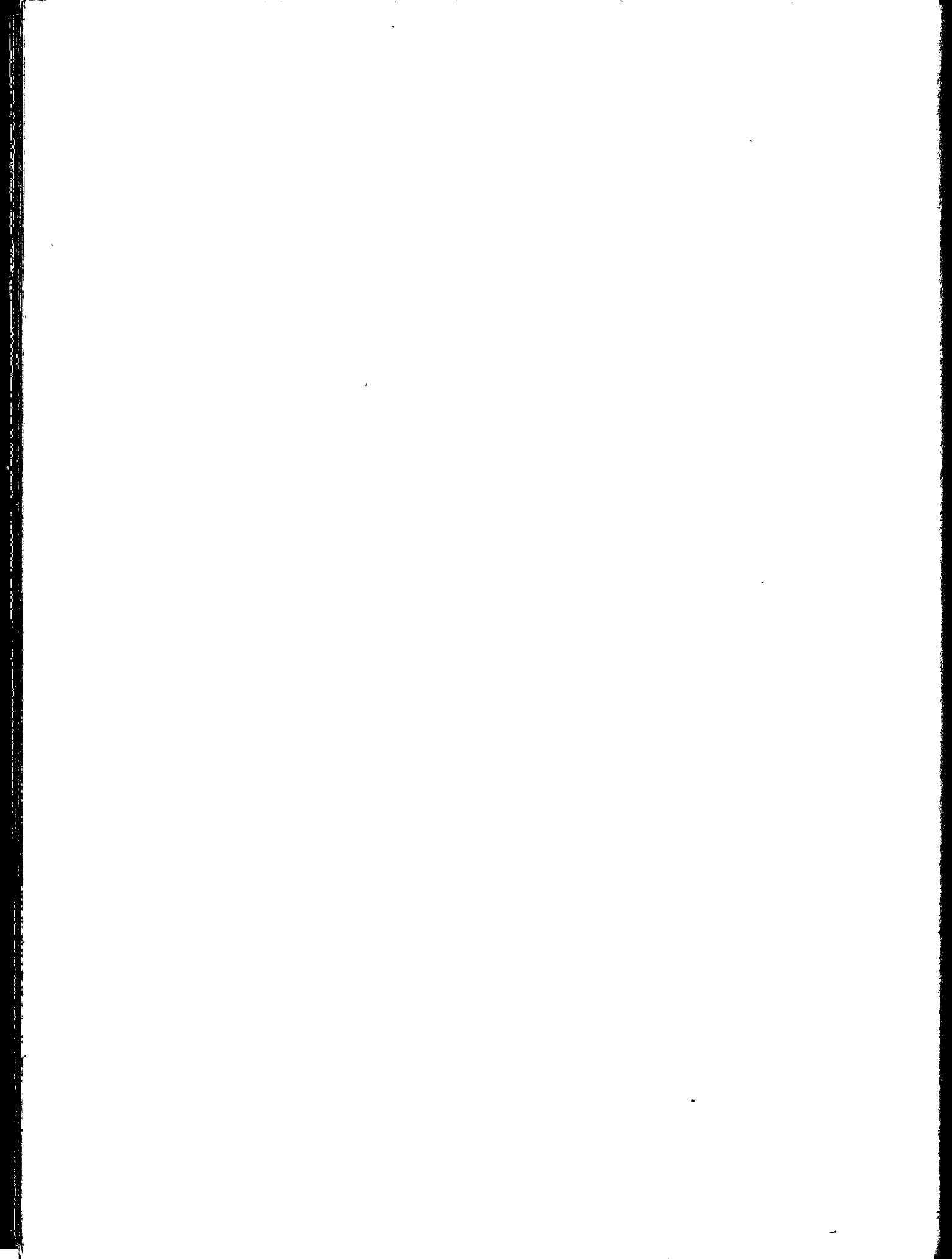
After a while Mrs. Hosen said she was hungry and asked him if he wanted to go into the diner. He did.

The dining car was full and people were waiting to get in it. Haze and Mrs. Hosen stood in line for a half hour, rocking in the narrow passageway and every few minutes flattening themselves against the side to let a trickle of people through. Mrs. Hosen began talking to the lady on the side of her. Haze stared stupidly at the wall. He would never have had the courage to come to the diner by himself; it was fine he had met Mrs. Hosen. If she hadn't been talking, he would have told her intelligently that he had gone there the last time and that the porter was not from there but that he looked near enough like a gulch nigger to be one, near enough like old Cash to be his child. He'd tell her while they were eating. He couldn't see inside the diner from where he was; he wondered what it would be like in there. Like a restaurant, he reckoned. He thought of the berth. By the time they got through eating, the berth would probably be made up and he could get in it. What would his ma say if she seen him having a berth in a train! He bet she never reckoned that would happen. As they got nearer the entrance to the diner he could see



in. It was like a city restaurant! He bet she never reckoned it was like that.

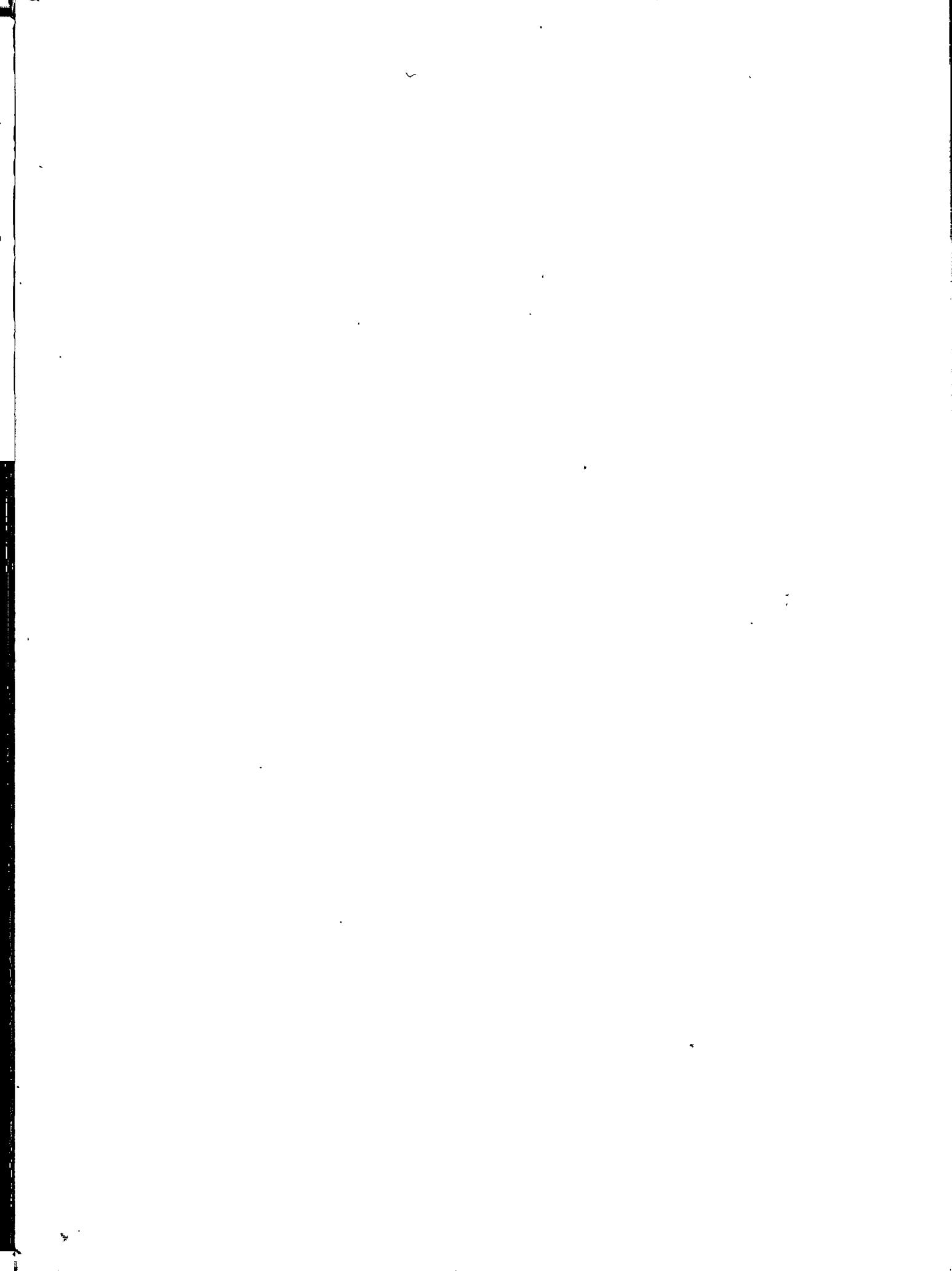
The head man was beckoning to the people at the first of the line every time someone left--sometimes for one person, sometimes for more. He motioned for two people and the line moved up so that Haze and Mrs. Hosen and the lady she was talking to were standing at the end of the diner, looking in. In a minute, two more people left. The man beckoned and Mrs. Hosen and the lady walked in, and Haze followed them. The man stopped Haze and said, "only two," and pushed him back to the doorway. Haze's face went an ugly red. He tried to get behind the next person and then he tried to get through the line to go back to the car he had come from, but there were too many people bunched in the opening. He had to stand there while everyone around looked at him. No one left for a while and he had to stand there. Mrs. Hosen did not look at him again. Finally a lady up at the far end got up and the head man jerked his hand and Haze hesitated and saw the hand jerk again and then lurched up the aisle, falling against two tables on the way and getting his hand wet with somebody's coffee. He didn't look at the people he sat down with. He ordered the first thing on the menu and when it came, ate it without thinking what it might be. The people he was sitting with had finished and, he could tell, were waiting, watching



him eat.

When he got out the diner he was weak and his hands were making small jittery movements by themselves. It seemed a year ago that he had seen the head man beckon to him to sit down. He stopped between two cars and breathed in the cold air to clear his head. It helped. When he got back to his car all the berths were made up and the aisles were dark and sinister, hung in heavy green. He realized again that he had a berth, an upper one, and that he could get in it now. He could lie down and raise the shade just enough to look out from and watch--what he had planned to do--and see how everything went by a train at night. He could look right into the night, moving.

He got his sack and went to the men's room and put on his night clothes. A sign said to get the porter to let you into the upper berths. The porter might be a cousin of some of them gulch niggers, he thought suddenly; he might ask him if he had any cousins around Mastrod, or maybe just in Tennessee. He went down the aisle, looking for him. They might have a little conversation before he got in the berth. The porter was not at that end of the car and he went back to look at the other end. Going around the corner he ran into something heavily pink; it gasped and muttered, "clumsy!" It was Mrs. Hosen in a pink wrapper with her hair in knots around her head. He had forgotten about



her. She was terrifying with her hair slicked back and the knobs like dark toad stools framing her face. She tried to get past him and he tried to let her but they were both moving the same way each time. Her face became purplish except for little white marks over it that didn't heat up. She drew herself stiff and stopped still and said, "What IS the matter with you?" He slipped past her and dashed down the aisle and ran suddenly into the porter so that the porter slipped and he fell on top of him and the porter's face was right under his and it was old Cash Simmons. For a minute he couldn't move off the porter for thinking it was Cash and he breathed, "Cash," and the porter pushed him off and got up and went down the aisle quick and Haze scrambled off the floor and went after him saying he wanted to get in the berth and thinking, this is Cash's kin, and then suddenly, like something thrown at him when he wasn't looking: this is Cash's son run away; and then: he knows about Eastrod and doesn't want it, he doesn't want to talk about it, he doesn't want to talk about Cash.

He stood staring while the porter put the ladder up to the berth and then he started up it, still looking at the porter, seeing Cash there only different, not in the eyes, and half way up the ladder he said, still looking at the porter, "Cash is dead. He got the cholera from a pig." The porter's mouth jerked down and he muttered, looking at

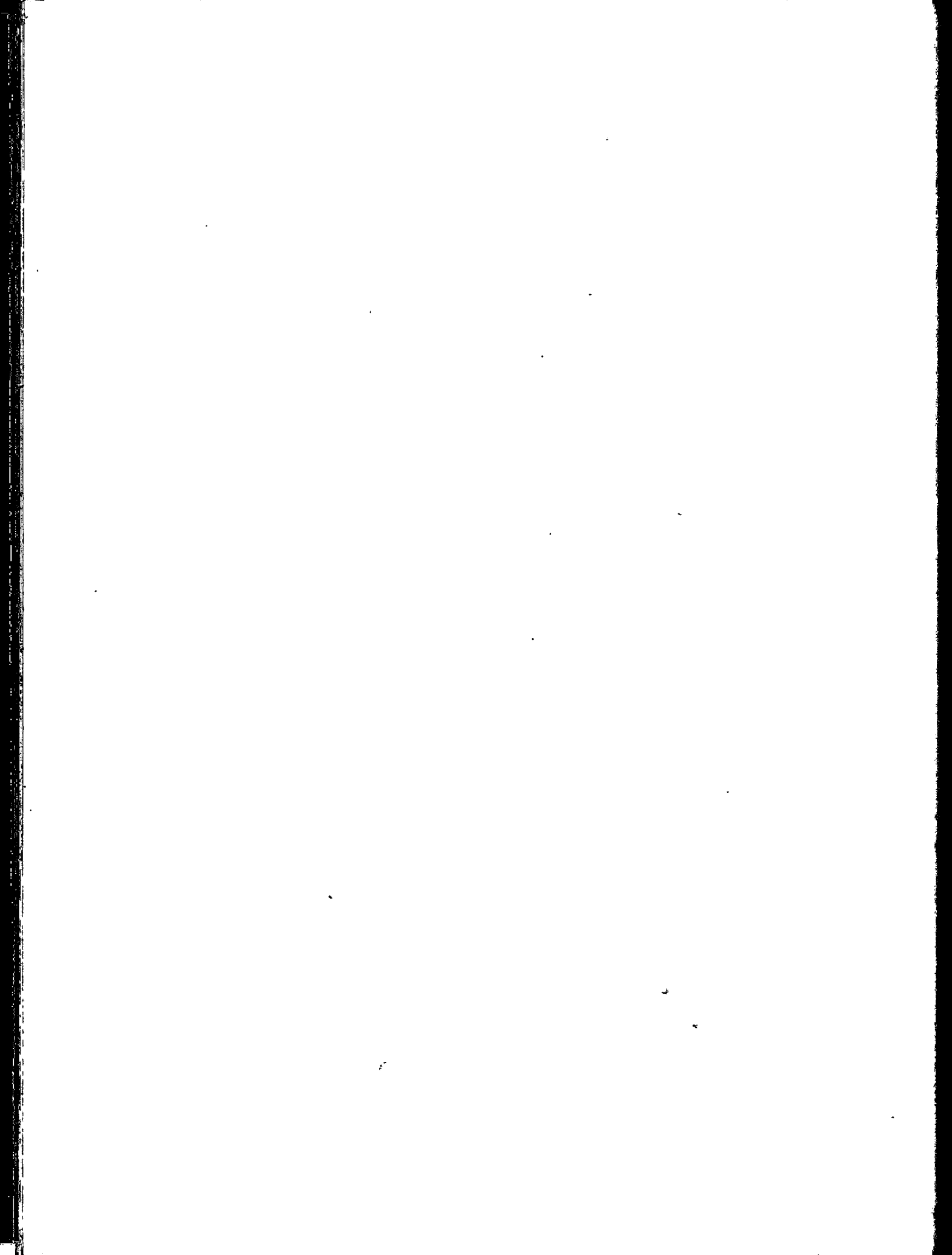
Haze with his eyes thin, "I'm from Chicago. My father was a railroad man," and Haze stared at him and then laughed: a nigger being a railroad "man": and laughed again, and the porter jerked the ladder off suddenly with a wrench of his arm that sent Haze clutching at the blanket into the berth.

He lay on his stomach in the berth, trembling from the way he had got in. Cash's son. From Eastrod. But not wanting Eastrod; hating it. He lay there for a while on his stomach, not moving. It seemed a year since he had fallen over the porter in the aisle.

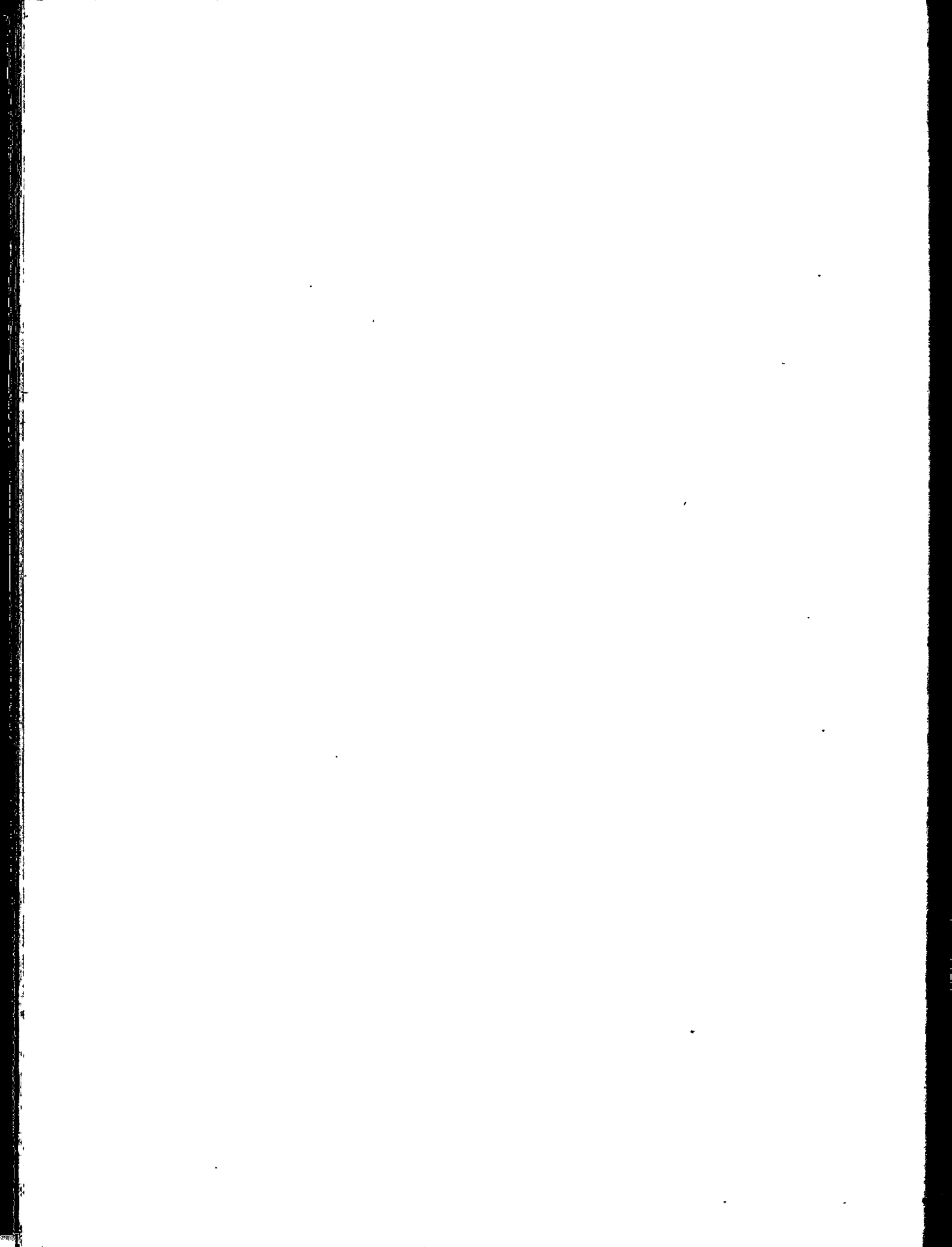
After a while he remembered that he was actually in the berth and he turned and found the light and looked around him. There was no window.

The side wall did not have a window in it. It didn't push up to be a window. There was no window concealed in it. There was a fish net thing stretched across the side wall; but no windows. For a second it flashed through his mind that the porter had done this--given him this berth that there were no windows to and had just a fish net strung the length of--because he hated him. But they must all be like this.

The top of the berth was low and curved over. He lay down. The curved top looked like it was not quite closed; it looked like it was closing. He lay there for a



while not moving. There was something in his throat like a sponge with an egg taste. He had eggs for supper. They were in the sponge in his throat. They were right in his throat. He didn't want to turn over for fear they would move; he wanted the light off; he wanted it dark. He reached up without turning and felt for the button and snapped it and the darkness sank down on him and then faded a little with light from the aisle that came in through the foot of space not closed. He wanted it all dark, he didn't want it diluted. He heard the porter's footsteps coming down the aisle, soft into the rug, coming steadily down, brushing against the green curtains and fading up the other way out of hearing. He was from Eastrod. From Eastrod but he hated it. Cash wouldn't have put any claim on him. He wouldn't have wanted him. He wouldn't have wanted anything that wore a monkey white coat and toted a whiskbroom in his pocket. Cash's clothes had looked like they'd set a while under a rock; and they smelled like nigger. He thought how Cash smelled, but he smelled the train. No more gulch niggers in Eastrod. In Eastrod. Turning in the road, he saw in the dark, half-dark, the store boarded and the barn open with the dark free in it, and the smaller house half carted away, the porch gone and no floor in the hall. He had been supposed to go to his sister's in Taulkinham on his last furlough when he came up from the camp in Georgia but he



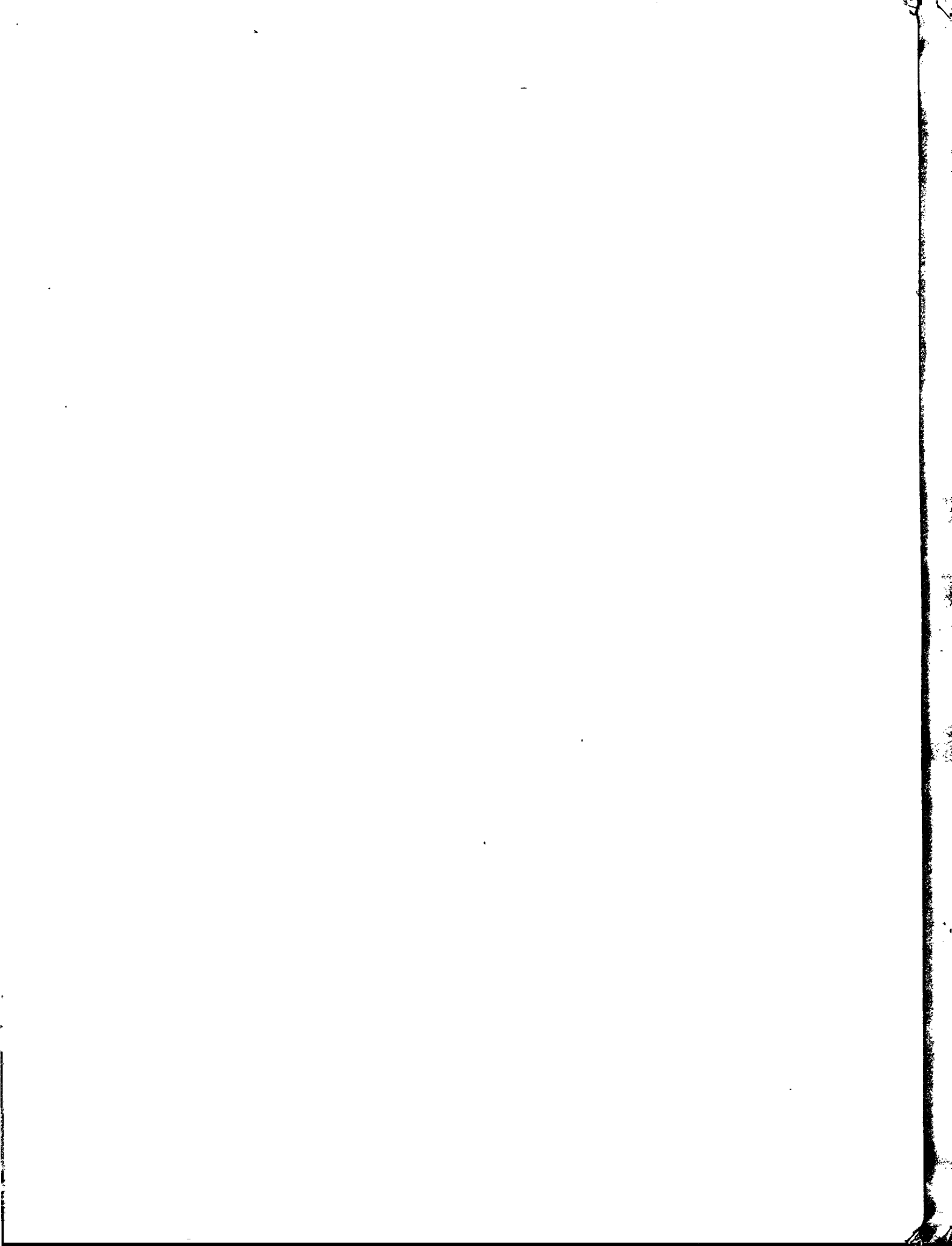
didn't want to go to Taulkinham and he had gone back to Eastrod even though he knew how it was: the two families scattered in towns and even the niggers from up and down the road gone into Memphis and Murfreesboro and other places. He had gone back and slept in the house on the floor in the kitchen and a board had fallen on his head out of the roof and cut his face. He jumped, feeling the board, and the train jolted and unjolted and went again. He went looking through the house to see they hadn't left nothing in it ought to been taken.

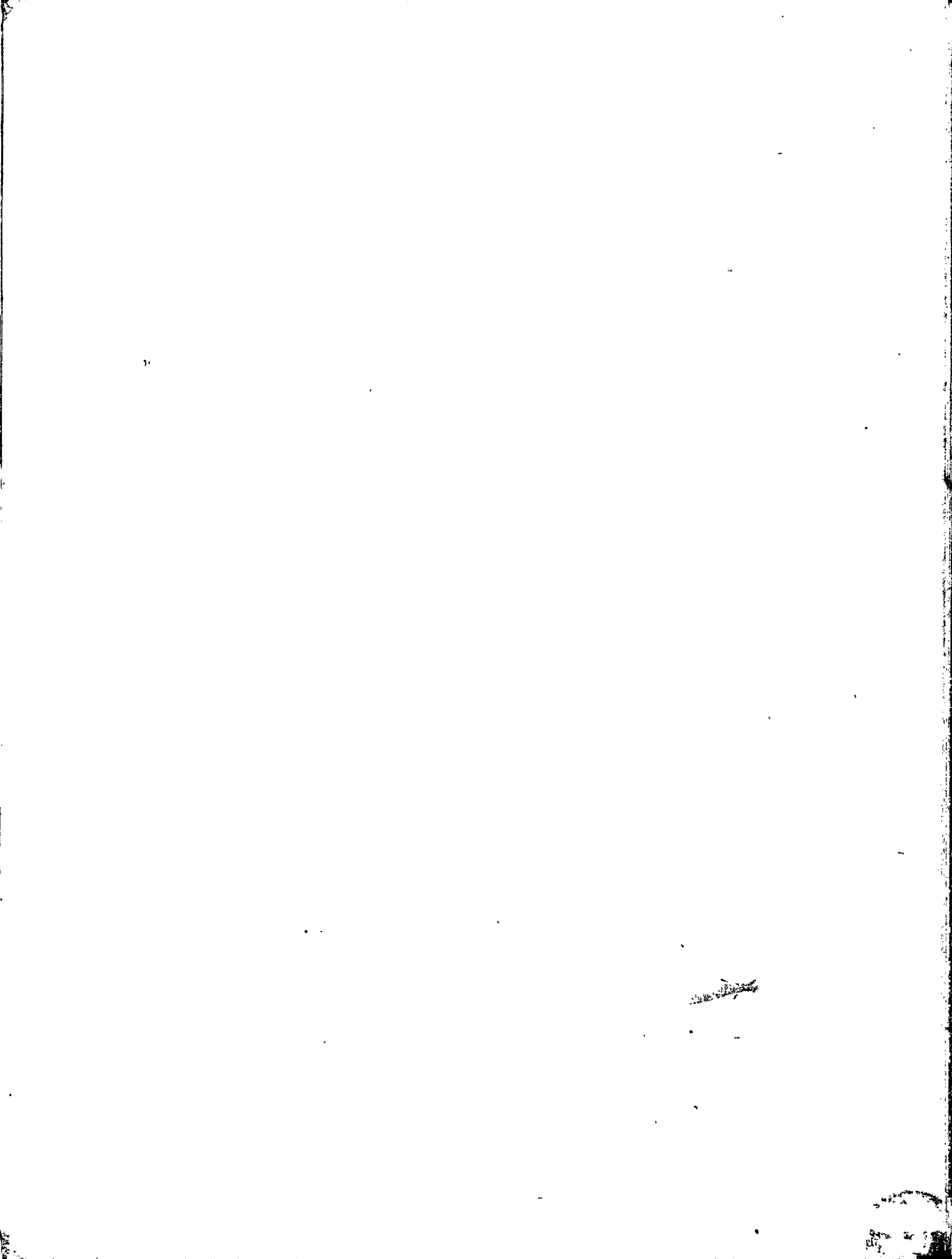
His ma always slept in the kitchen and had her walnut shifferrobe in there. Wasn't another shifferrobe nowhere around. She was a Jackson. She had paid thirty dollars for it and hadn't bought herself nothing else big again. And they had left it. He reckoned they hadn't had room on the truck for it. He opened all the drawers. There were two lengths of wrapping cord in the top one and nothing in the others. He was surprised nobody had come and stolen a shifferrobe like that. He took the wrapping cord and tied the legs through the floor boards and left a piece of paper in each of the drawers: THIS SHIFFERROBE BELONGS TO HAZEL WICKERS. DO NOT STEAL IT OR YOU WILL BE HUNTED DOWN AND KILLED.

She could rest easier knowing it was guarded some. If she come looking any time at night, she would see. He

wondered if she walked at night and came there ever--came with that look on her face, unrested and looking, going up the path and through the barn open all around and stopping in the shadow by the store boarded up, coming on unrested with that look on her face like he had seen through the crack going down. He seen her face through the crack when they were shutting the top on her, seen the shadow that came down over her face and pulled her mouth down like she wasn't satisfied with resting, like she was going to spring up and shove the lid back and fly out like a spirit going to be satisfied: but they shut it on down. She might have been going to fly out of there, she might have been going to spring--he saw her terrible like a huge bat darting from the closing--fly out of there but it was falling dark on top of her, closing down all the time, closing down; from inside he saw it closing, coming closer, closer down and cutting off the light and the room and the trees seen through the window through the crack faster and darker closing down. He opened his eyes and saw it closing down and he sprang up between the crack and wedged his body through it and hung there moving, dizzy, with the dim light of the train slowly showing the rug below, moving, dizzy. He hung there wet and cold and saw the porter at the other end of the car, a white shape in the darkness, standing there, watching him and not moving. The tracks curved

and he fell back sick into the rushing stillness of the train.







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