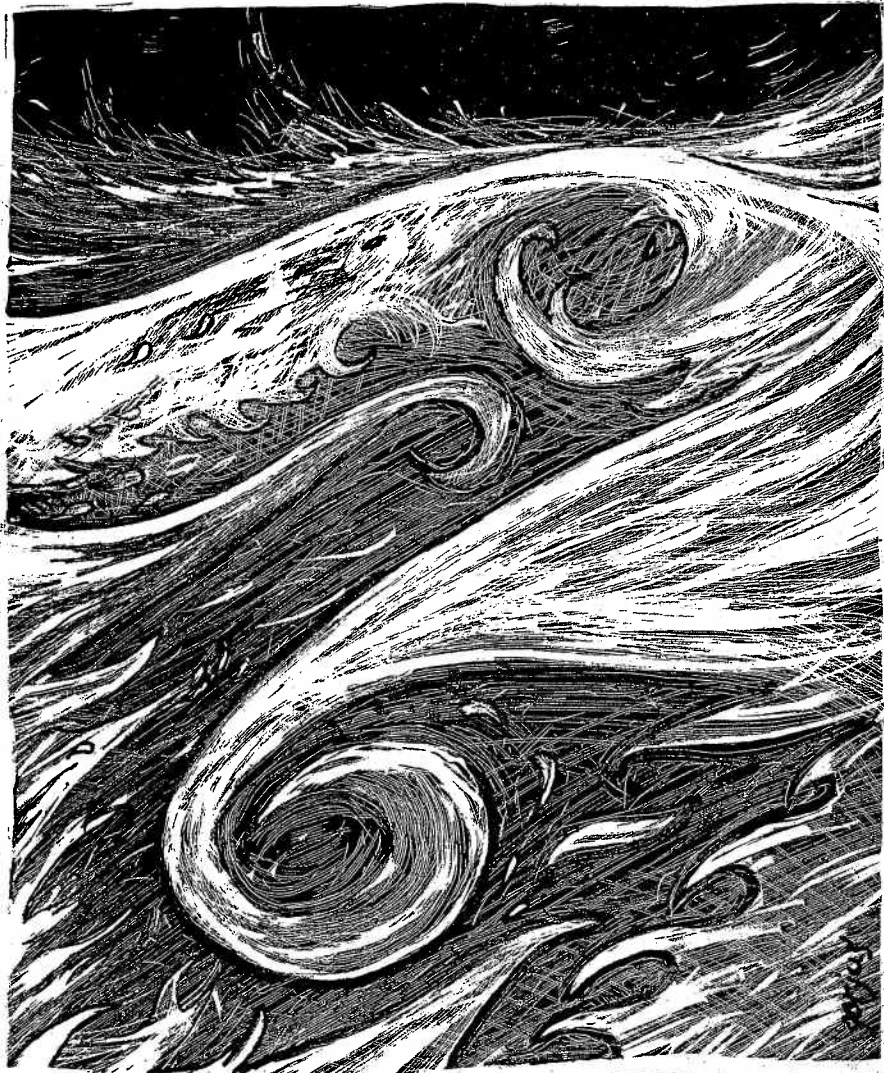


SANDUSKY



REVIEW



# THE RIVER

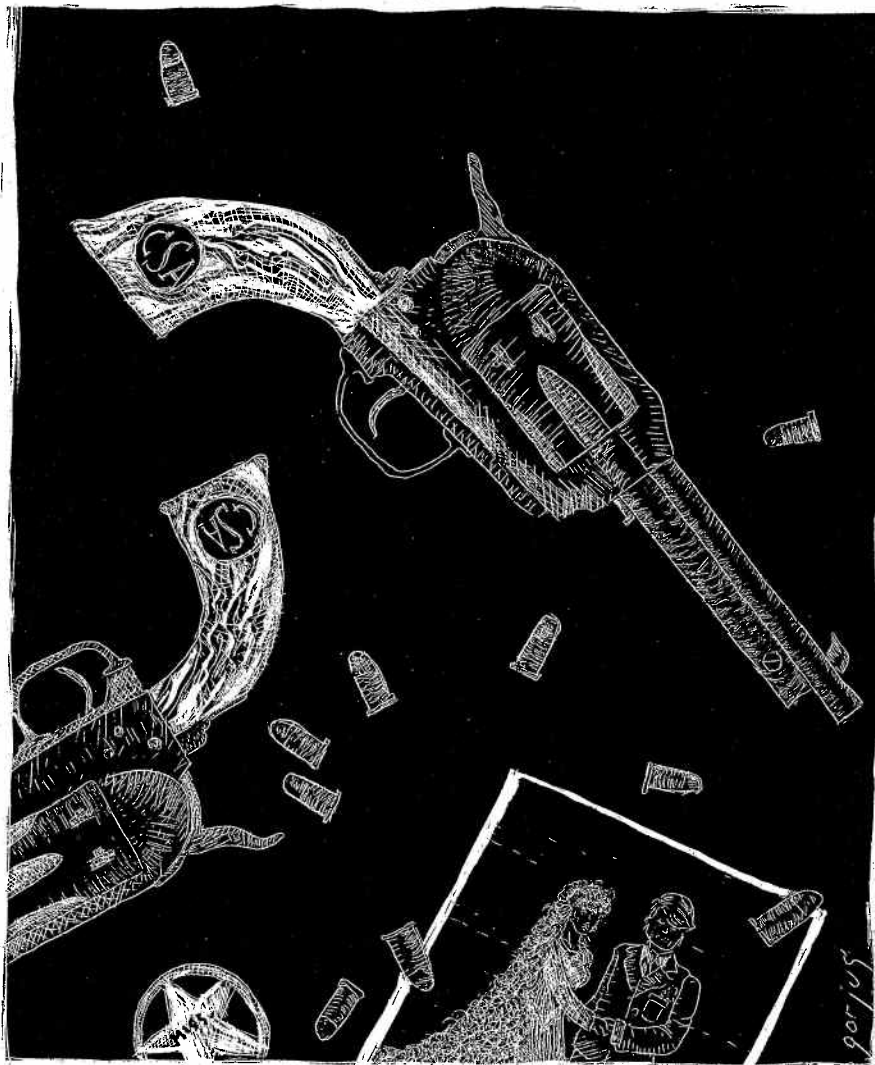
writhed and scraped its way past  
Greenville like some mad, ancient god.

## NOT SINCE

the fall of Vicksburg had a Mississippi town on the River meant so much. In 1935 commerce flowed thicker than ever on the River, dollars and cents shipped in the form of hand-bundled cotton and maize. In the wake of commerce came its cousins, art and luxury. Greenville was teeming with both merchants and mezzo-sopranos, twenty-two thousand souls strong, its streets wandered by white-haired lawyer-poets.

On its Main Street Greenville carried shops of all types, selling silk from Beijing, tea from Darjeeling, and oils and pastels from Paris. Alone in its time, the City had fought back the Klan ten years before, aided by a sheriff of the coldest blood.

And the babies born at King's Daughters Hospital were soaked with the language and prophecy of the River. As they grew older they would feud and fight and weep over their home, never decry, never deny, their poems and books and photographs and children all devoted to its celebration.



**JOHN** Tindime was the sheriff in those days. He wore two elaborate Colts, slung low on his hips & loaded.

# THE SHERIFF

tended to speak only to his emerald-eyed wife and son. The son never talked much; he was like his mother in that regard, both spurned by certain segments of Greenville society, being neither trash nor class. The Sheriff played an important role but it was an elected one, and never does the choice of the citizenry confer that which money or status might grant.

Yet the people of the city spoke of John Tindime in respectful terms, as he understood his role. The right people were never arrested, and the wrong ones were. It was in this quiet understanding that the Sheriff excelled; he knew that it was okay to cuff that cousin, but not this one, as if there was some mark of Cain visible only to him.

Still: *that wife*. A midwife, she was black-haired, coarse and curly, her lineage much discussed in drawing rooms and porches, safe behind mahogany and stretched screens. *A greek of some sort* was the commonly reached conclusion, although *in'din* and *Norlins mullato* and *gipsy* were also tossed around like a baseball after lunch.



IN the summer of 1935  
something evil walked  
the fields of the **DELTA.**

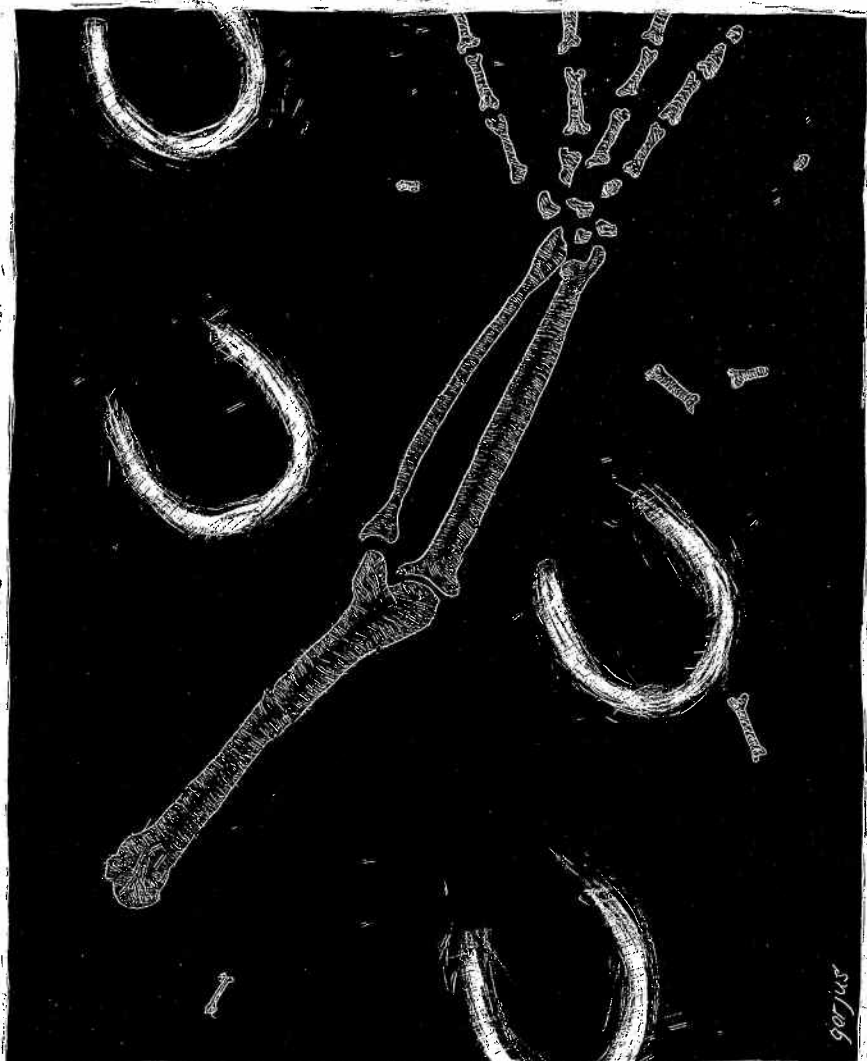
It started simply enough that year: near about every dog in the county went missing. Nobody kicked up too much of a fuss until one of the Dyer's good hunting curs turned up gone, and the constant jangle of the Sheriff's phone twisted his arm to investigate.

It's not enough to say he was pissed. Greenville was good, but it was still wild, and murder and crime could flare up from embers in a flash. People got worse, John thought, when the River was high, and when the moon was full.

Built into people who lived in the Delta was the fear that the River might one day take them all, that it could if'n it wanted, and when it got high like this, licking up around the tops of the levees, it was like a bully hitching up his pants.

The men turned out to guard the levees, stood nervously at the crest to watch for boils, and stockpiled loads of sand and crushed rocks if reinforcement was needed. Songs were sung as this old play was acted: that men could stop the River from doing what it wanted.

So people got scared, and acted the fool, and fists were balled and triggers were pulled and Sheriff Tindime knew why people got crazy during that full moon, all them old gods tossing lightning down from their broken and forgotten palace, and *come on, now, Mister Dyer, looking up after a old mutt is just more than is what I am really supposed to be doing right now. I got seventy-five miles of county along the dang River, and my men are stretched this way and that.*



**THEN** up on the levee  
they found a little  
arm, bones bleached dull, a line  
of prints marching toward town.

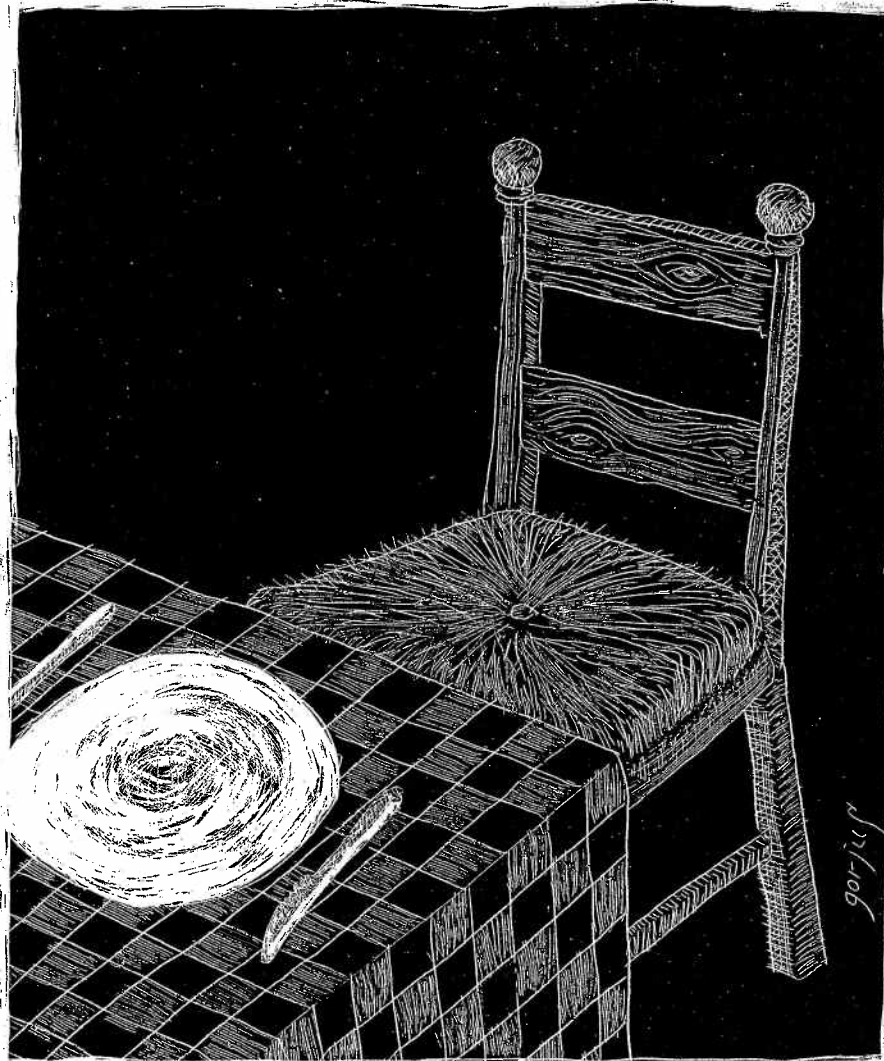
A panic enshrouded Greenville. You could taste it in your mouth, same as if you scooped up a handful of road gravel and rattled it around against your molars, let it slide out your mouth and down your best dress shirt. People shut up their houses, put crosses over the doors, and no child was allowed out past dark.

Churches and saloons alike rang forth with the same complaint—*why us? Why here? Why now?* Many answers were proposed. The Baptists were sure this was simply the end times, the advent of the return of their God to purge the world of his enemies and call his people home; if a few unfortunates got in the way, well, it was God's will.

The Methodists were more gentle: this was a test which they might overcome, through rigorous attention to scripture, and a similarly rigorous attention to good bourbon whiskey.

At Mass and in the Synagogue caution and pragmatism trumped fear. Those faiths were old, and based upon beliefs older still, and had fought devils and their kin for centuries. There were rules and guidelines in place; and so letters were written, calls were made, and names invoked, primordial procedures and regulations carefully executed.

But in the little jooks outside of town and in the shack-boats down by the River folks knew the truth: the Devil walked in the Delta because *somebody done called him.*



**ONE** night the week after  
the bones were found,  
the son of John Tindime didn't come  
for dinner when his mama called.

The parents steeled themselves against the loss, teeth gritted and eyes narrowed. They weren't any faith that anybody in the town would have ever recognized; it was almost Promethean: that man might wreak fire, and through fire control his world, and therefore his destiny, beating back the dark and the fangs with one bright blaze. So instead of prayer there was bullets. For John Tindime was a fighting man, and a man of the law, and he was sure the twin Colts at his side barked truth more often than any preacher ever did.

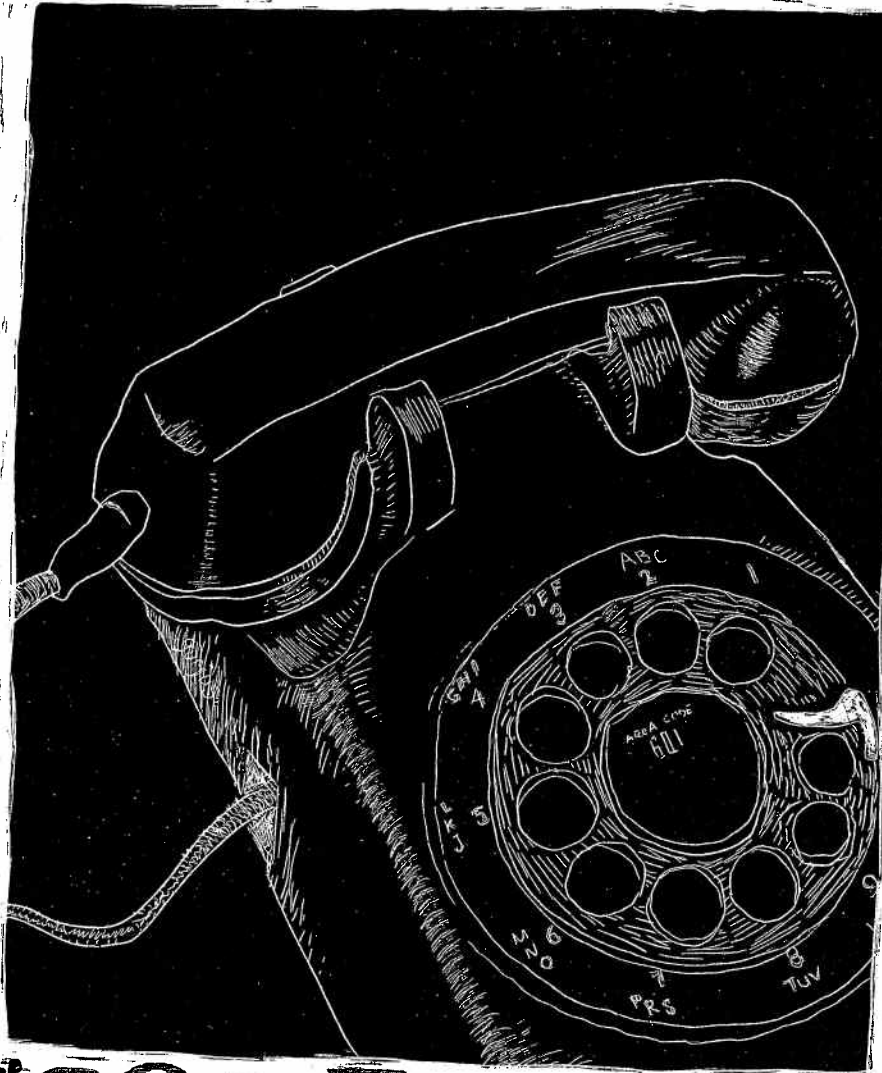
When the emerald-eyed midwife said to her man, *you are going to take care of our boy*, it wasn't so much a question as a declaration. *If you do not bring him back, then you will lose me as well.*

He looked at her and said, *if that thing leaves footprints, then it has feet.*

*If the damned thing has feet, it got legs.*

*And if the Devil got legs*, said John Tindime, *he needs blood to make 'em work*, and he went back to loading his Colts.

Because the sheriff knew that if there was there was blood in that Devil, he could hunt him down and put a forty-five caliber slug in his guts, because what's got hooves and legs and blood can die in the fields of the Delta same as any man.



**“COME** quick,” said the voice on the phone.  
“Johnny, we done caught something, down off Highway 61.”

By the time the Sheriff got down there, the men were circled nervously around an old barn, blocking its great wooden doors, what tools they had ready in their hands, scythes and pitchforks. Some had tears in their eyes.

Through the windows of the barn John Tindime saw a black shape move, mostly shaped like a man, but lurching like a wild horse, beating on the wooden doors. The animals in the barn were bleating and crying like babies, a jittery symphony of dread.

Panic was edging into the assembly, forcing the lawman to crib together what ideas he had: he'd storm the front, guns drawn, and the men were to slam the door back behind him, latching it tight. If he weren't out in sixty seconds, then they were to torch the place.

*Ain't much of a goddamn plan, John*, said a deputy, and the nods and mumbles of those around agreed, the loudest from the farmer what owned the barn.

*Longer we wait, the more chance this thing could get out, snatch somebody else's boy*, the sheriff said. *Y'all want that?* Silence said nobody did. *Still ain't much of a goddamn plan*, the deputy muttered, and the sheriff cracked a grin through dry lips. He shook the hand of the deputy, and whispered in his ear *lie to her as best you can about this*.

*Swar, now, that you'll put the fire to this damn place*, the sheriff yelled at the men, *swar on the name of your families, that you will do as I ask*. As the men swore, the deputy traced the sign over his chest: *in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti*.

Then John Tindime straightened his badge, pulled his Colts from their leather nests, and walked through the door.



**FOR** long seconds the  
sound of bullets  
whined in the air, and then the  
men of Greenville kept their oath.

Nobody saw the sheriff again, and rarely was his wife seen afterwards. A proper burial was had for the father and his boy, but it was brief, and awkward for all who came. Nobody ever waved the wife goodbye, but at some point people began to consider the family a thing of the past.

The best rumors, as always, came from the children, frayed and dipped in truth and distortion. The kids whispered that John Tindime didn't die that day in the fire. Some swore their cousin had seen a man leaving town not longer after, swathed in bandages, a phantom stranger doomed to wander alone. And as time passed, the tales evolved, so in the middle years of America the schools heard tale of a Johnny Tindime marching across the blasted fields of Europe with the *bleu-blanc-et-rouge* on his shoulder, off to fight a different kind of devil.

While thoughts differed as to whether John Tindime was even dead or not, no-one raised objection when the city voted to pay for three stones to be placed on the old Tindime property, fine marble all, showing the hand of God pulling another link from the chain. For all agreed that family had suffered most when the terror had gripped Greenville.

Nobody much is around any more that witnessed the summer of 1935, but on towards the end of those who did, there was another story. People began to say that John Tindime walks the earth still, a charred star burned over his heart, Colts loaded and cocked, hunting his greatest enemy, and swearing that one day he will soak the dirt of the Delta with the blood of the Devil.



**The Sandusky Review**

*GRACIOUSLY PRESENTS:*

# THE GRIEF

OR, A MISSISSIPPI TERROR STORY.

*BEING A QUASI-FICTIONAL FORAY INTO THE  
WILDS OF THE DELTA BY OUR INTREPID REPORTER*

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In Honor of Mrs. Julia Stubbs & E.A.W.  
John Tindime created by Emerson LaSalle

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