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Uncle

Margie Snowden North

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INTER-RELATIONSHIPS

UNCLE

by Margie Snowden North

A young man's father
was with that other woman;
his mother was work-worn,
his brothers and sisters hungry,
and despair and rage that had begun
with earlier injustices
cast him down
to the cutting off of the mountain,
and the weeds wrapped tightly about his
head.*

A hammer in his hand
pounded away at the injustice,
brought blood and death
but never solace.
Newspapers said that other woman
was slaughtered as she knelt praying by her
bed
and the jury said, "Guilty as charged."
Prison bars compassed him then,
years of aloneness,
and the cutting off of the mountain
was his dwelling place and
the weeds squeezed tighter.

As children, we saw this man who
occasionally grew violent and who
was also gentle,
whose mind was sometimes here,
sometimes there,
a man uncouth and unloveable,
or laughing and jolly and happy.
We knew (for it was whispered)
that prison bars had held him,
and then the insane asylum,
but we laughed with him sometimes
or scolded him for the picture on his wall
and ate roasted peanuts
with him from the breadpan on the table.
Later we understood that
prison bars and
asylum walls had compassed him more than
once,
but a prison of another kind
had held him first ■

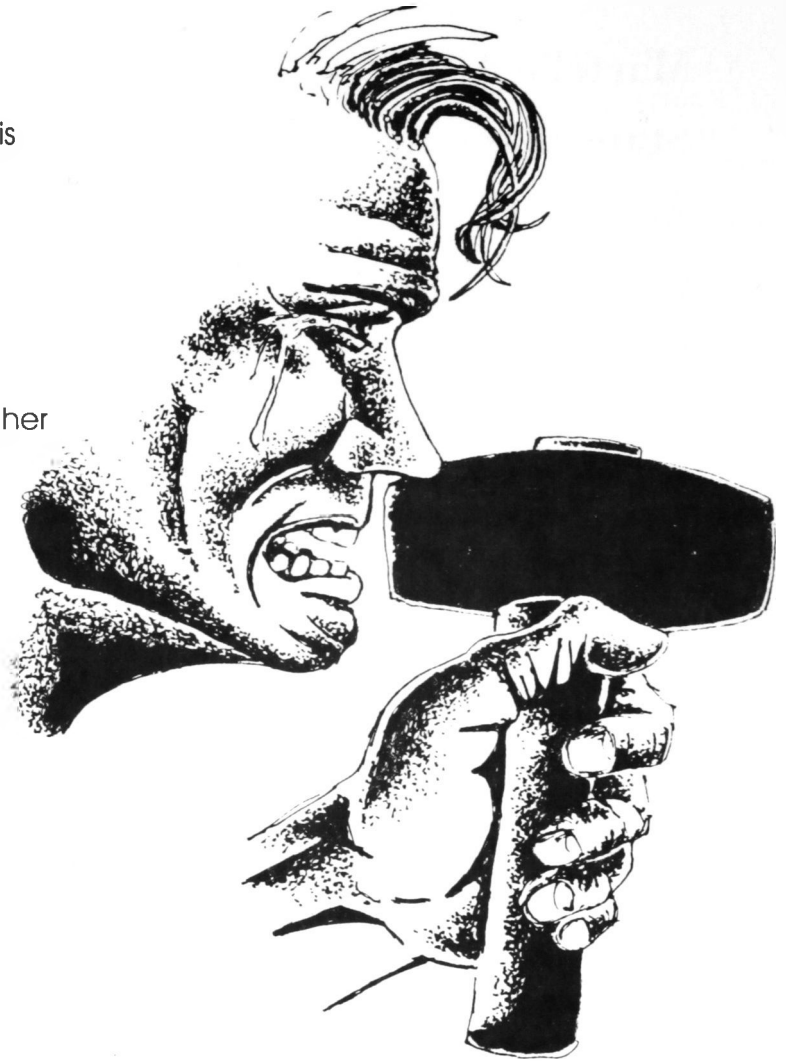


illustration by *Mongo Allen*

*See JONAH 2: 3-6.