ROSEWOOD

Story by GARY MOORE

"I was in it to start with. Me and a fella named Dorsett . . . I said, 'Ed, I ain't goin' to do it. I don't believe in killin' innocent people . . . They were burnin' houses and killin' innocent people — women and children . . . People comin' from as far away as Jacksonville takin' wrappers off brand new guns.'

Rosewood.

"They went to killin' everything — babies and all.
Dogs, cats — everything . . . "

Rosewood.

"He showed that ear to many a person . . . He kept it in a little old pouch . . . It was kind of brown . . . He had two ears . . . He just walked up with a knife and clipped 'em off."

Rosewood.

"I happened to be one of those children those crackers shot at . . . Like we were rabbits, out in that swamp! And us little children! Hunted us like we were rabbits!"

Rosewood.

"The deads was a secret."
"Stacked 'em like railroad ties."
"Let a sleeping dog lie."
"They don't want it told."
"For the next six years, every now and then, somebody would find a skull or something — nigger head or something — all out in the swamp."

Then came New Year's week, 1923.
The black settlement of Rosewood was utterly destroyed.

Sudden and savage, the destruction briefly made a splash in newspapers, not only in Florida but in New York and Chicago. However, published accounts of the dead and descriptions of what took place concealed the real extent and nature of the violence. The newspaper accounts were "doctored," as one participant in the violence now says.

After a week of sensation, the events of January, 1923, seem to have dropped completely from Florida's consciousness, like some unmentionable skeleton in the family closet.

To blacks, the hidden story of Rosewood may seem like only the tip of an iceberg of cultural violence.

To whites, it must remind that upon the Good Old Days there often lay a savage sheen.

Rosewood stands as a symbol of the countless secret deaths and tortures that took place in an era that has slipped from view.

Rosewood.

The people who remember often disagree in their recollections. They agree on this:

Rosewood, Florida, was a village beside the Seaboard Air Line Railroad, at a spot on Section 29 of the map of Levy County. In Rosewood lived between 150 and 200 souls, in 20 to 40 houses. A few of the houses were large, two-story buildings, with fruit groves and shady grape arbors. There were several churches, two of which were fitted out with organs and steeple bells. There was a school, a store, a sugar mill, a turpentine still, and an all-black fraternal lodge hall. All tucked away deep in the swamps.

Today, the spot is marked by vine-covered chimney brick.
MASSACRE

Art by JOE TONELLI

Tales of what happened there are not often told to outsiders, but they still whisper through sparsely-settled Levy County. Varying with the teller's outlook, the event has different names: the Rosewood Riot, the Rosewood Massacre. Or just "Rosewood."

Estimates of the dead range from seven, in the sanitized newspaper accounts of 1923, to 17 or 18 reported by reliable witnesses as having been interred in a single mass grave; to "30 or 40" recalled by a still-living participant in the violence; to "150, maximum," that other witnesses, perhaps exaggerating, tend to agree upon.

For a week, in January, 1923, as witnesses recall and old clippings verify, white men came into Levy County in droves — by train, horseback, in Model-T cars — bent on destroying a town.

New Year's Day opened cold and hard on Monday, Jan. 1, 1923, in a once-thriving but now-deserted deep woods milltown named Sumner, in North Florida. Sumner was three miles down the Seaboard Air Line Railroad from the smaller village of Rosewood.

In Sumner, the icy, swamp-wet morning was shattered by a scream.

Fannie Taylor, a young white woman, sobbed to her indignant neighbors that her small company-owned house in Sumner had suddenly been invaded by an unidentified man. He had knocked her to the floor, she said, had stolen her money and fled out the back door.

She said he was black.

That day a number of white men gathered with Fannie Taylor's husband James, and followed a tracking dog out the Taylors' back door. The dog led them to a nearby railroad track, and thence three miles down the track to the town — black world unto itself — of Rosewood.

And then . . .

The story of what happened next is a maze of conflicting tales, twisting downward into rooms which our prevailing culture endeavors to keep tightly shut.

Rosewood.

Who attacked Fannie Taylor?

Even around this beginning of the violence mysteries swirl.

At least two people are still alive who say they were present at the time. Both say they stood near the house where Fannie Taylor lived, at the moment she said she was attacked.

Both witnesses, having lived through mob violence, are afraid it could happen again, that it could reach out from the past to strike them if they talk about it. Both insist on anonymity. One is black.

One is black.

Call them Ellen Baker and Eugenia Day.

Ellen Baker, the white woman, was an adult in 1923. She has remained a close friend of many of the whites involved. She skirts around the edges of some parts of the story. Her account essentially backs up most of the legends told among whites in Levy County about what happened that morning, though her story seems more accurate about time and place, and is more convincingly detailed than the legends. She says she would prefer not to go into it all. She says many things would be better off forgotten.

Ellen Baker tells it thus:

Fannie Taylor was "very peculiar, kind of," though Ellen Baker liked her. They were neighbors. Fannie was young, had married very young, when she was about 14. She was from a poor but proud family far out in the country. Her husband James was from a venerable, well-respected family of carpenters and shipbuilders at Cedar Key.

With their two small children, James and Fannie Taylor lived in Sumner, in the double row of weathered, four-room houses that were the sawmill "quarters" — rent-free housing for white employees of the Summer & Sons Cypress Company. Beyond the mill stood a separate quarters for blacks.

The white quarters ran along a street paved in true sawmill fashion, with the saw-striped, discarded bark of the cypress tree. Edged with plank boardwalks to foil the summer rains, hemmed by stout picket fences against wayward cows and pigs, shaded by laurel and cedar, the street ran from the bowling mill to the brooding woods. Several doors...
She heard a scream. She threw on her clothes, grabbed up a big revolver she kept in the house, and dashed into the darkened street.

That was her maiden name. She is very proud of the name, with good reason. The Goineses were an enterprise family. They ran turpentine stills. Now gone, replaced by other technologies, turpentine stills were a mainstay of the Old South, since back in colonial days. From the bleeding sap of the long-leaf pine, men distilled not only turpentine, for thinning paint, but also pitch, crucial for sealing wooden ships. The Indians had called it “naval stores.” Another time-vanquished term.

The Goineses came south from the Carolinas around 1860, and they settled at the southwest edge of Rosewood. There they built their thriving stills, employed many workers, as records and many oldtimers agree. And they were black, were the Goines brothers, of Goins Rese. Turpentine, by the iron-
Boiling down the railroad, the men behind the dog, they burst upon the town. The tracking dog turned off the railroad. It made for a single house.

In a rage, whites reflected not upon the deep risk a black man, indeed any stranger, would have taken by breaking into a house in a close-knit white mill quarter. Even Ellen Baker says, "You never heard of anything like that, back then. Everybody kept their doors unlocked."

The blacks from Rosewood, by legend, trauma or solid evidence, were universally convinced that Fannie Taylor was attacked by her secret white boyfriend, who then fled — to Rosewood.

"To Rosewood!” Eugenia Day explodes. There is much more to her story. There is the part about the car, and the man who was dragged behind the car, and the secret Masons, and Aaron, and the shootout. But that must all wait for its proper place.

Eugenia Day and Ellen Baker are not fabrications, fictionalizations or composites. They are real individuals. Black and white. Their truths clash. So did their worlds.

"Kill him! Kill him!"

These, says Marshall Cannon, were among the words shouted by the men who followed the tracking dog from the Taylor house on the morning of January 1. Anger boiled as the men hurried down the tracks behind the dog. The crowd grew. Marshall Cannon was the Summer barber.

Summer, dependent in its entirety upon the five-story Cummer & Sons cypress sawmill, had all amenities. Its hotel sold hot baths, and its barber-shop, with poolroom annexed to its rear, sold hot shaves.

Summer also had a board-floor skating rink. It had been a dance hall, but the mill boss changed that, hoping the skates would tear up the floor, and the dancing, cool Summer down. It was a hot little town — a sawmill boomtown. Hip-pockets hid guns. One black man’s job was driving a wagon full of kerosene, spreading it on mosquito-filled ditches. Malaria was rampant.

Marshall Cannon says he and 10 or 12 other men of Summer gathered at the Taylor house at mid-morning. Soon, somebody brought the tracking dog.

Country people were accustomed to trusting the nose of a good hound; it was a part of their existence. The dog struck trail in the Taylors’ back yard. It whimpered at the fence until somebody carried it around. Then the chase was on.

The dog led them in a tight, expectant loop along a cypress pond near the Taylors’ house. The thick trees were an ideal hiding place; the Taylor house, at the end of the house-row, was uniquely vulnerable. South, the dog passed Ed Dorsett’s store.

Dorsett was Marshall Cannon’s good friend. They were in the crowd together. Later, they would watch the first killing. Then they would leave the mob in disgust. But for now, everyone was behind the dog. The dog reached the railroad, turned northeast along it.

Now the crowd had grown, the men were shouting:

"Kill him! Kill him!"

They knew it was a black man. He had done the unspeakable. Back then, mobs hanged black men for looking at a white woman. For a glance and a wink, black men in North Florida were shot. Some were literally burned at the stake. Some raw nerve went very, very deep. The Summer white men rarely if ever used the polite term of the age — "colored." They used just one term. For them, it was precise — it defined a gloomy matter of species, a biologic mystery. It defined beings unfathomable, mysteriously incomplete. But the beings thus defined were equipped physically like men. There, the monstrous danger. Your women.

"Kill him!"

East the crowd ran. One mile, two miles up the railroad. They passed houses. Three miles. Rosewood.

Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? . . . Thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth . . .

Boiling down the railroad, the men behind the dog, they burst upon the towns. On what comes next no one seems to disagree. Black residents of Rosewood, white members of the mob, all say:

Once fully among the houses — which were painted white or weathered gray, waiting in the cold — the tracking dog turned off the railroad. It made for a single house. Nose down, the dog sped up the steps of the house. The door was opened. The dog went straight in.

And . . . said unto Aaron, what did this people . . .

Continued
Aaron Carrier, nephew of Sarah, cousin of Sylvester. Yes, say the people from Rosewood, those still alive, there really was a fugitive. Someone, they say, really did flee Fannie Taylor's house that day, and come to Rosewood. And the house he came to was Aaron's. And Aaron hid him.

Aaron hid him for a special reason, they say — even though the fugitive was white.

The mob would find Aaron. They would make him pay. But they would not know his secret. He had a hidden life. Here deep in the swamps, there flourished an ancient, ritualistic Brotherhood. Aaron was bound to it. That was why he did it, they say. The whites would never understand.

Was in your house, they demanded. He said nobody.

He had taken the oath, the old black stories say. The secret was in a single building. The building faced the tracks — not a house, but a meeting place. Here, each month, some Rosewood men would gather by night. Special men. If someone died, they would go, and bathe the corpse, dress it, lay it on the cooling board, build the casket. No undertakers lived out in the woods.

Was this the first African sect? These men, Aaron Carrier and others, were Masons.

Aaron thy brother...

The loyal order of freemasonry — Masonic Rites, Masonic Temples, Most Worshipful Grand Lodges — was a special, widespread part of pioneer Florida. Where violence abounded, new settlers men knew who to trust. You could count on Masons. Otter Creek, Cedar Key — lodges were everywhere — much more influential and awesome than today. Weathered, bearded men wore Masonic aprons and held mysterious swords in old pioneer places. They stressed integrity, deep loyalty. Of course they were white.

When in the late 1700s, the king of England had granted rights of Masonic charter to a staunch Caribbean black minister named Prince Hall, white culture fell noipple. Across new America, in Florida since 1850, there arose Masonic Temples with unobtrusive script appended: Masonic Temple, P.H.A. It means, "Prince Hall Affiliation." Code words for "all black." They were segregated Masonic lodges. Like old frontier Masons everywhere, they were dead serious.

Masons first — loyal to the death. Thus came down Rosewood, via Sylvester, the old folks say. Aaron was prominent in the local lodge. He was bright, serious — veteran of World War I, husband of a schoolteacher. "Aaron helped that white man because he was a Mason," in Rosewood they say that the terrified white fugitive knocked on Aaron's door, gave the secret Mason distress sign. And Aaron was bound. Turn fiercely between loyalties — too much believing — destroyed.

To this day, the Florida headquarters of Masons, P.H.A., in Jacksonville, says, "If you are a true Mason, you get recognition whether you are black, white, whatever... (Especially) if you're being accused of a wrong situation."

And to this day, the Florida headquarters of white Masons, in Jacksonville, says white Masons feel no tie or obligations whatsoever to black Masons, ever, at all. Aaron Carrier took his oath dead serious, they say. He hid the man. Unto death true. The whites would never know.

Brother...

Parents were snapping tensely at children: Stay in the yard. Nobody goes out today. Nobody breathes. Everything is different. Even from the dusty yards, the wide-eyed children saw:

What they did to Aaron.

The children watched the white men come in a Model-T car, down the dirt track by the houses, and tie Aaron to the back of the car, and drag Aaron speeding through clouds of dust, three miles back to Sumner.

Many of the white men who did what they did to Rosewood were Masons. Now they were turning quickly on another man.

Father forgive them." She sadly quotes scripture. She says she must not be bitter.

"They know not what they do."

She is Lee Ruth Davis, a retired teacher in Miami. She was a child in Rosewood.

Her maiden name was Bradley. She lived in a two-story house owned by her father John Wesley Bradley, set way back from the railroad track. John Bradley was a log sawyer and professional hunter. The woods were rich, and yielded well. One front bedroom of the Bradley house stayed vacant, reserved for the visiting African Methodist Episcopal minister. Once, some of the Bradley children had to give up their room, too, for the black A.M.E. bishop of the whole state of Florida came to Rosewood. It was the scene of the district convention. A staunch little town. Sundays, the Bradleys did not work, or even play. The big churchbell rang. They worshipped. Sunday at sunset, children were hustled off to bed.

Not far from the Bradley house, is a grove of great oaks, stood a smaller house. Here lived a teamster. Teamsters were special men in the turpentine industry they served. They were bookkeepers of the field. As workers filled barrels with pine sap, teamsters crisscrossed the woods, gathering the barrels, noting in paper tablets each man's harvest. Mornings, some teamsters would wake earlier than the other men, then drive through a turpentine outfitter's "quarters," singing to wake the workers. They held responsibility. One such man was Sam Carter. He owned his wagon. He had raised a family, had a grown son. He lived in the house in the grove of oaks.

Continued
The white mob burst upon him. They demanded to know whom he had carried in his wagon that day, and where the man had been let off. They put a rope around Sam Carter's neck and led him to one of the oaks by his home. A big blackjack oak. They pulled him up. But they did not drop him. You must drop a man, breaking his neck, to kill him by hanging. They did not drop Sam Carter, just choked him, high in the air, to make him talk.

"He's squall and hollow," says Jason McElveen, a white man, now 86, who was in the mob. "And say, I'll tell you! I'll tell you!"

Other things were done to Sam Carter. Several men say he was tied to a stump, and the stump was set on fire. At some point, the mob applied knives. His ears were cut off. His hand was cut off. Many say it was done after he was dead. Some say not. It went on two days.

On Tuesday, January 2, he led them to a spot in the dense, swampy forest called Gulf Hammock, at the south edge of Rosewood. With the rope still around his neck, what was left of Sam Carter said, here, this is where I put him out.

But the men's dogs could get no scent. He must be lying, they said. One man in the crowd, says Marshall Cannon the barber, had been talking loudly about killing. The man had a shotgun. He was drunk. The mob was becoming a holiday for the drags of white society. The drunks, losers, loafers, moonshiners, rowdies, rustabouts, town bullies, brashers, it was their time.

Jason McElveen also succinctly remembers the same man:

"A man said, 'You black son of a bitch, you didn't do that!' And 'bout that time, somethin' went BLAST! And Sam Carter didn't have a face."

Even dead, it was not over for Sam Carter. They took souvenirs. Moonshine-flamed, there was a mood among them. Pocketknives on ears, fingers. They carried him away, seeping blood in their pockets, to pull out in barbershops, and nonchalantly beg. One man, it is said, got Sam Carter's watch. "Let's see what time it is by old Sam Carter," he would say months later, pulling out the watch before the startled eyes of a child. The child would later become a Florida legislator, a power in the state, named Randolph Hodges.

Near the killing, the white men saw a big field. They never stopped to think. It was a baseball diamond. This town had a locally famous team among blacks. Their uniforms were sewn meticulously by Eliza Bradley, sister-in-law of John Bradley. She lived with her family in another two-story house. Way across the baseball diamond, says Lee Ruth Davis, a man was looking out his window, very silently, as they killed Sam Carter. He was sometimes the baseball team's umpire. And this man knew. He knew what was coming.

He was Sylvester Carrier, she says, watching quietly from afar.

Something else about Sam Carter . . .

A black man still living today recalls Sam Carter looked striking — not just his light skin, but the cast of his face. "Like an Indian."

Some whites harrumphed that he was "yaller." In the rain he was pale of skin, like many of the people at Rosewood — deep in the swamps, where you might go to get far away from something.

"He was a get-away artist. Pimp kind," scoffs Jason McElveen.

It's true Sam Carter was something special. He was something you had to go all the way to Washington to become. Something cloaked in secrets. It bound him to Aaron, say the old black stories, and to the phantom white man who brought the doom.

The white mob never knew. Or cared. He was a 32nd degree Mason.

Loggers who braved the swamps and felled giant trees for Cummer & Sons Cypress Company were quartered not in Sumner, where the big mill was, but in Otter Creek — 12 miles up the railroad from Rosewood.

The two Cummer mill towns, Sumner and Otter
Rosewood

Creek, famed for their payday violence, held Rosewood between them.

On Monday, Jan. 1, 1923 — as a white logger named John White, now 81, recalls — logging boss Henry Andrews called his men together in Otter Creek and told them to take the day off. Andrews told them to spend the day keeping their eyes peeled for the black man who was said to have attacked Fannie Taylor that day, over in Sumner: "And if you happen to see him, kill him."

Blacks called Andrews "Cap'n Boota."

"He would challenge you with his feet," says former logger Pompey Glover, a black man. "Not only black, but everybody was scared of him."

One witness says he saw Andrews grab a black man on the street in Otter Creek and strike him with a pistol butt.

Loggers — at times knee-deep in swamp, at times smothered in mosquitoes — worked such long hours that they did not see their homes by daylight except on Sunday. The man who drove them had to be special.

On Thursday night, January 4, the moon was full — almost supernaturally bright. It shone on white frost. Many people remember it. The week had gone shuddering by. Sam Carter was dead. Houses had been searched. White men were beginning to pour in from other counties. Headlines in Tampa, Gainesville, Jacksonville and elsewhere were drawing them: SEARCH FOR NEGRO ASSAULTER. "Virtually every able-bodied man has joined the search." "Mob Searches For Fiend." But still no fugitive.

That night in Otter Creek, a railroad "motorcar" roared. Motorcars were small work-vehicles that ran on train tracks. Cummer cypress had several. On this one, Thursday night, was logging boss Henry Andrews. Shortly, in the brilliant moonlight, armed man from Otter Creek met armed man from Sumner. They met between the two towns — in Rosewood. Whether Andrews, a powerful man, had decreed the expedition, as some say; or whether Andrews was talked into it by friends, as his family would hear, the fact remains — he became a main actor in what followed.

Also soon famous for deeds done that night was Polly Wilkinson. A very heavy, round-girded man, Polly Wilkinson was a Cummer Cypress Company "quarters boss." He kept order among the company houses — the "quarters" — especially in the black quarters.

Also on the Saturday night "jook." Every milltown, they say, had to have a church and a jook. Sumner, unlike several little Rosewood, barely had a church at all. A single building — the general meeting hall — served both Baptists and Methodists. But Sumner, unlike several little Rosewood, did have a roaring jook. Its moonshine, music and loose women kept black millions forgetful of the rigors of the week.

Blacks in their enforcement duties, Polly Wilkinson also ran a small dry goods store. Prim newspaper accounts of the day would call him simply "a merchant of Sumner."

The white men — Andrews, Wilkinson and a number of others — went to Rosewood seeking Sylvester Carrier. Whites say Carrier had challenged them, had sent word that the fugitive was in his house. Blacks say they had challenged Carrier, sent word that they were coming.

"Old negro" whites would call him.

The newspapers would say he was 22.

He remains to this day an enigma.

Those who were children or young adults in Rosewood remember him walking down to the train depot at night to socialize, wearing black coat, black tie, severe black Stetson hat. He had a nickname. They called him "Man."

He was dark, well-built, was Man. When he worked he wore overalls. To socialize, he dressed up. He loved to hunt turkeys, quail, duck, squirrel, opossum, raccoon, deer — the woods were a cathedraled jungle, before its huge trees were felled, and hunting was once a lucrative profession. Men sold the game to passing train conductors, who then resold it in faraway Gainesville. He was quiet, they say, aloof.

One side of him, the whites would never see.

Here speaks the Com-fort-er,
Ten-der-ly say-ing,
Earth has no sor-row,
That hes-e-en can-not heal.

He played the organ in Rosewood's Methodist Church.


His mother, Sarah Carrier, had a piano in her home. The piano had been played by the white women in her house in Sumner. She played the piano for her husband. His mother and his wife played different instruments. Polly Wilkinson, who lived in his mother and father's house with his wife. He and his sisters — Sweety, Beauty — nicknames for Annie and Lillian — they all sang in church. "Oh, Man had such a beautiful voice," sighs a woman who now lives in Pasco County, but who grew up in Rosewood.

From home, he went hunting. At home, he kept his guns. One was special — a 12-gauge pump shotgun whose beneath-the-barrel hoe handle could slam five successive shells into the chamber without reloading. It was like a cannon.

Moonlight bright as day. Bitter cold. The white men were so cold they went to Rosewood, one of their number said, they built a fire, right in the middle of the railroad tracks. Dogs ran out from the Carrier house. By the blazing fire, the white men killed the dogs, shot them, the white man said. Others said they killed just one dog. Sylvester Carrier's house stared at them blankly.

Henry Andrews and Polly Wilkinson, at the head of the crowd, approached the house. One or both of the men gained the porch. Jason McElvane and others who were there say Polly Wilkinson kicked open or knocked down the door. The moonlight roared. From somewhere within the doorway, shotgun blasts exploded. Rapid, automatic shotgun blasts. Polly Wilkinson's face was gone. Both Polly Wilkinson and Henry Andrews lay dead.

Whites say the house was full of black men, all "armed to the teeth." Eugenia Day, who now lives in St. Petersburg, says the house was indeed full — of children who were visiting their grandmother Sarah Carrier for Christmas. Christmas had just passed. Eugenia Day herself was in the house. "There were children runningin and hollerin' everywhere. There were bullets everywhere . . . I got between two mattresses."

The surviving white men surrounded the house. A battle blazed. Buckshot riddled thin walls. Inside the house a grandchild named Ruben was blood-soaked, shot in the eye, half-blinded, still alive. Come Ye Disconsolate. The house was roaring like a cannon. Here Speaks The Comforter. Shotgun pump-handle furiously jumping shells. Tenderly Slaying. White men were at the windows, shooting in. They were falling back.

Blacks say that more whites were killed that night than were ever made public. With at least four wounded, after hours of siege, the whites ran away. Those among the blacks in the house who were left alone then escaped out the back door, past the hogpen, and into the swamp.

Whites came back the next morning. Says Jason McElvane, "There were 260 people there . . . From every place . . . with every conceivable kind of armament." A white man who lived 70 miles away across the state says he remembers seeing relatives grab guns and leave for Rosewood, in the wake of Andrews' and Wilkinson's deaths. The man says they went for "vengeance."

"They had blood in their eyes, and ammunition in their guns, and drink in their bottles," says Jason McElvane. "They said nigger was nigger to them. Didn't make any difference if it was a little one or a big one, long one or a short one."

In the light of day, the Carrier house was quiet. Inside, the white men found Sarah Carrier, Syl-
The white men were enraged. They smashed everything in the house to pieces. They came to Nash Carrie's piano. It brought a special satisfaction. A piano proved what kind of devil's niece this was. It had a piano. Why, it was a joker.
They smashed it to bits. Then they brought kerosene.

"Listen," said little Lee Ruth Davis, at home in another part of Rosewood. "They're toin' the bells. Somebody must be dead." But it was just the white men. They were in the church, ringing the big steeple bell. They were burning houses. They were burning the church. A white storekeeper rushed to Rosewood. He had grown up there, knew all the people. He was horrified. The mob was like a tidal wave. The storekeeper saved the Bible off the church altar as the church burned. He went home, he tried not to think. All the churches were burned. In Rosewood there was one white church. They burned that too.

It was only the beginning.

The men would encircle the houses, set them afire from in front, then try to shoot whoever ran out the back. Reportedly only certain men or certain groups of men did most of the killing. The whole countryside reeled. Newspapers across the state which had first egged-on the search for the "black brute" now back-pedaled in shock, saying there was no reason to go to Rosewood, everything was quiet, there was very little violence.

One Rosewood family was named Gordon. Lexie Gordon, middle-aged, was sick. She told her children to leave, she would stay. When the men came, she, too, tried to run. They killed her. Whether she was shot as she ran, or was caught and thrown screaming back into the burning house is variously reported. Rosewood, hidden sanctuary: "She was a light-skinned nigger," says a white man. "They killed that poor white woman," says a black woman. Lexie Gordon, caught in the middle, trapped in genetic exile, Rosewood. She had long, red hair.

Continued
To whites, the violence was a race war. They gathered their children in central houses. Whole white families put to sea in boats.

The violence at Rosewood.
Living 20 miles up the track, he had heard what was going on that week. He wanted to see.
The motorcar slowed. He saw the row of weathered buildings alongside the tracks. There were many buildings, carrying guns. There was smoke. He got out. His father continued on to Summer.

He told the men, some of whom knew, that he wanted to see. They took him in a Model-T car along the track to a spot perhaps a mile away, in a stand of pines.

"It was a hole...looked like it was dug with shovels. The hole was open. It was filled with corpses. They told him there were 18 of them - corpses of blacks. "I couldn't count 'em...the way they was thrown in there."

They would appear on no one's record. He remembers nothing special about the way the corpses were dressed. The women wore dresses. Some wore coats. It was cold.

He remembers the diapers.
"There were little chillums...suckin' babies...six months old...shot."

The motorcar came back, James W. Turner got in beside his father.
In time, his father would become state senator. James Turner himself would grow up to become Levy County sheriff. He would never forget. Part of him would remain a shocked boy, gazing down into that hole.

One white man who was in the killing would come home to his wife, and bring a present. Over and over, people in Levy County would tell the tale. The wife was pregnant. The husband dropped the present into her pregnant lap. "Here's a pretty for you," he said laughing, according to a man who says he was there. The present on her lap was two severed fingers - a black woman's fingers, middle and index. The wife lay up in her bed, fainting. The fingers fell on the porch. They lay there. When the wife's baby was born, it lacked one hand.

Over and over, the tale has been told.
The baby lived, tenaciously, grew to a man who could hit a baseball harder with one hand, they say, than most men with two. But there was always the reminder. Something monstrous in the swamp. Smoke against the sky. Buried deep in a county's subconscious. It kept rising. It was a very small county. Lives intertwined. The doctor who delivered the baby was James Turner's father.

Carrier was ordered to dig his own grave. The newspapers said he was brought to a graveyard, ordered to stand on the fresh grave of relatives, and shot.
One thing the newspapers did not say: James Carrier was a stroke victim. He walked with great difficulty. He was paralyzed on one side.
He also was a hunter. His son Lonnie survives, remembers James Carrier coming home with a deer strapped to his back, three raccoons in his shot- sack. Once, James Carrier had looked out his front window and seen a deer tangled in a fence. He had killed the deer for meat, but a white man came on a horse and claimed to have wounded the deer down the railroad tracks. The white man said the deer was his. "You're not getting it," said big James Carrier fiercely, holding his gun. The white man never returned. It was a world apart. "My daddy was a mighty man," says the son, his eyes glinting. "My daddy was a mighty man." But then he was paralyzed, and they caught him.
"Gal Baby, I see a train comin.'"  
'Hush, chillie, there ain't no train.'  
They were way out in the swamp. The white men were everywhere, guns, smoke. Little Ruth Davis was always kind of 'psychic.' She predicted things. She was staring at the dense leaves. 'There's a train comin' for us, Gal Baby.' They had wandered off from John Wright's house, where the terrified women and children were. The Wrights were searching for them frantically. Scared children wandered all over, in shock. 'This chillie may be right. Let's go back to Johnny Wright's house.'

Mrs. Wright was crying. Her face was all red. She came running to them. 'Oh, Daddy,' she called to Johnny Wright. 'Have they come?' He was a short man, with a big moustache. He had given ammunition to his black neighbors when the mob came, and then he had told the mob that the blacks had cornered him and stole the ammunition from him. The mob left his house alone. He had gotten word to the railroad: Someone must save the women and children. The governor, C. Hardee, had contacted the mill manager in Seminole: Shall I send troops? No troops, the mill manager is said to have replied, it is under control. He was afraid the thing would grow, erupt, destroy his mill. That same manager, W. H. Fillisbury, is said by a white woman who worked for him to have hidden black women and children in his cook house. "If they'd a known that we were keepin' them negroes there at that house," the women says, "they'd a killed us." "You keep those chillun quiet!" Fillisbury hissed to the frightened mothers he hid. "Don't let 'em cry!" The mob was out there. The white woman who helped him is afraid to this day of other whites discovering her brave act. For her, the mob still threatens. So the rich brothers were big gold watchcases and hobnobbed with the world as train conductors.

Independently wealthy, "K." Byrce was curiously forgetful, sometimes, of distinctions of race. Eugenik. As a boy, he had had a black friend. One day, a white man killed the black friend, left him lying in a ditch. No prosecution of course. "K." Byrce said it clouded his whole life. He and John knew the people at Rosewood, bought goods from them.

The town was on fire. The train was due. This time, the Bryce brothers said, go very slow. Blow the whistle. Call the children from the swamp. They took on a stream of refugees, women crying, babies aboard. Many got on from the Wright house. Some special service, now veiled by years, is apparent in the fondness shown in the old black legends for the Bryce brothers.

The mob, says Jason McMillven, was all up and down the tracks, for miles, "running 'em like rabbits." Beno, meany, shiny ... In Cedar Key a woman saw white men pulling a string, dragging a black man's severed toe. If he holds on ... Whites in Cedar Key were terrified — not of the white mob, but of the 500 blacks who lived in Cedar Key. Rumors said each black had bought a gallon of kerosene. To whites, the violence was "an uprising," "a race war." They gathered their children in central houses. Whole black families put out to sea in boats.

Seven days. Came Sunday. No bells. Ases. It was finished. The last of Rosewood, except for the property of white John Wright, was burned to the ground.

"It just blew over," shrugged a white man in Levy County. No arrest. How to arrest a whole culture? Something huge had reared its head. They wanted it to sleep, sleep. And the people of Rosewood? Whites shrugged. They just disappeared. Went somewhere, one supposes. But don't tell about it. Why, these whites that did that thing, they have families.

"She grieved over my daddy so. Just lay down and died."  
Rosewood.

Haywood Carrier, widower of Sarah Carrier, had been away in a county to the north working a lumber job. He was Sylvester's father. The daughters at the big piano, the son with the severe black suit. The big two-story house. Everything gone. He lasted several years. "They say his mind just went bad. He just grinned, just grinned. He'd pull off his clothes and walk around. He'd be talkin' to his wife and children." Everything gone.

"George Bradley, who had owned the big two-story house behind the depot, was said by whites to have disappeared, until a powerful white man from Cedar Key was riding on the streets of Gainesville one day, and was hailed by someone in a work crew digging a sewer ditch. And the powerful man looked down, and there was the ragged figure of George Bradley.

Aaron Carrier, son of James and Emma, Masonic officer, was dragged three miles behind a car to the Summer jail, but was still alive. That night a white sheriff came and secretly removed him to Bronson, then to Gainesville, saving him from the mob. It seems that he had been junked for at least several months. He moved to a small town near the Atlantic. "He'd talk about bein' a preacher... He kept to himself." Aaron thy brother. He died of a stroke in 1943.

Wade Carrier, son of James and Emma, changed his name, years later became a deputy sheriff in St. Augustine. Myrna Borden (name changed by her request), niece of Ed and Julia Bradley, painfully worked her way through night school. In Tampa, had a daughter who became a Headstart teacher, and an in-law who helped integrate the University of Florida. Lee Ruth Bradley, daughter of John Wesley and Virginia, became a teacher and church worker in Miami. Eugenia Day raised a large and prosperous family, and like an echo of grandmother Sarah Carrier's piano, she still sings in church. Pasco Goins, grandson of Haywood and Sarah Carrier, returned from Pinellas County to Levy County for a tense showdown at the courthouse one day in the 1950s. He had wanted to see the old land deeds. He was told to come back a little later. When he did, a group of white men was waiting. They made it clear he should not come back. Much of the land was sold for taxes. One woman, Ellen King, who lived in Deland, held on to her land in Rosewood until 1952, when a white man finally persuaded her to sell it to him for a nominal sum. Whites, including a former state representative, own all of it now.

One white man who, with relatives, was heavily involved in the violence ran off a Levy County highway in a car while drunk during World War II and killed himself. A large white man said to have black blood in the back died early and unmarried. A white man who claimed to have killed Sylvester Carrier during the shoot-out died later without a friend, perhaps four relatives at his grave. A black grove閉pper was his pallbearer.

The shocked white storekeeper who saved the Bible from the Rosewood church would pass the blackjack oak where they hung Sam Carter, and he would tell his children somberly, "See, the old oak tree died,"

The mill at Summer was touched, four years later, by a tiny spark. Cummer & Sons Cypress Company blazed up in a fire so huge that the heat could be felt at a distance of a quarter mile. Acres and...
Rosewood

acres of stacked lumber, burning, burning. A time of fire. The town of Summer was utterly destroyed.

Fannie Taylor was "very nervous" in later years, was the subject of hearse runs in the black community at another mill town, and eventually died of cancer.

"K." Bryce, the wealthy train conductor credited by both black and white with having saved many women and children at Rosewood, was riding on his large farm a year after Rosewood when his horse spooked. Something was in a ditch. Some frightening animal. They never knew what. He was thrown against a tree and soon died.

Several of the small boys, teen-agers and young men who saw shrieked fingers and eyes in Levy County barbershops, or heard the savage boas in stores, became state representatives, powerful men throughout Florida.

John Wright, white store owner, lived in the ruins of Rosewood till he died, served as undercover emissary to his dispossessed black neighbors who lived in secrecy in distant places, and for a while kept "a pistol on every table."

Many, many changed their names. They must never tell. They were from that town. Don't say the word. It was a crime. The victims must pay. To this day, it renews them. They do not like to talk about it. "Justice?" scoffs the daughter of one. "There is no justice." They live everywhere among us, these people from a crushed world apart.

"When I was young..." Ronald Reagan, who was young in 1925, would say, "America didn't even know it had a racial problem."

They knew.

In seeking them, other things emerged. In asking from town to town for them, other things came out. Near Orlando, 30 black people are said to have been killed in 1920. In Newbury they said, "Oh, do you mean the people who were hung here in 1906?"

There were six of them, four men and two women. In Perry, a man was burned at the stake. In Taylor County and in Chipley, they say, there were "uprisings" and several had to die. It was violence, violence, everywhere violence. It enclosed their lives. Something could not move. Wrong steps everywhere. Not a black could live but did not know personally of someone who died a horrible death.

And the happy and the powerful were delighted to see how much they smiled.

A young black man who called himself Andrew Mulberry turned up in Gainesville in 1923, and worked his way up to mail carrier. He would amuse whites telling about how he had escaped Rosewood, ran for two days, hiding in the woods. "There ain't no dogs fast enough to catch me!" And he would laugh. And they would laugh. "It didn't sound very serious to me," says the white postmaster Andrew Mulberry worked for. Thus thought all the whites in distant towns. Easy to forget. It was serious enough for terrified Andrew Mulberry to have changed his name, as many did. The victims must pay. Probably, his real name was Andrew Monroe. His parents' house was burned to the ground.

"Also dead... Sylvester Carrier, negro."

They say he was in Kentucky, in California, even in Alachua County, hiding, under an assumed name. "Uncle Syl." The hunter, the organist in church, the singer, the man in the severe black Stetson hat, the umpire. "Man." It is reasonably likely, despite the garbled newspaper reports, despite boasting in the mob, that Sylvester Carrier was never killed at Rosewood. Somewhere, many, many years later: an old, old man. Something burning in his eyes.

"He was a man."