The Nineteen Eighties

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I recall that I touched in kindness
his shoulder: and he winced

. . . and then he lifted up his shirt
to show sjambok cuts repeated

across his back, in red-blue welts
that patterned his brown skin

—university was never like this,
but then, I was classified as white.

My student was softly telling me
why his work was late:

they all ran, he said, and security
found him in the dark, and laid in.

“IT happens,” he shrugged, and flinched,
“but it’s been difficult to write.”