



Diana B. B. 2005

# Point of View

## 1995-1996

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Front detail: **Chas Hinnners** *Aural Paranoia*  
felt tip pen  
(16<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" x 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" )

Back detail: **Kevin White** *Intensity (Drawn in)*  
color pencil  
(11" x 14")

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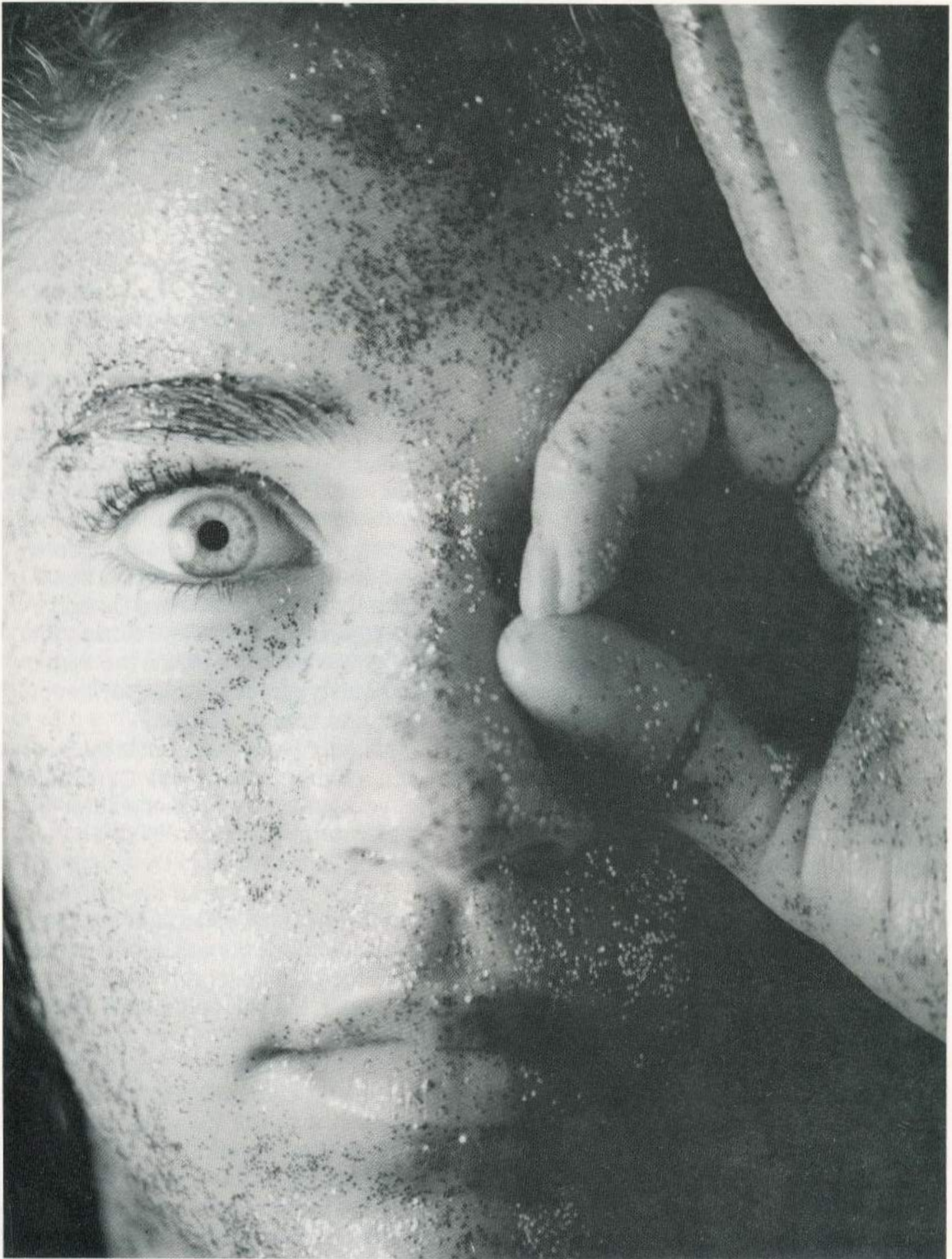
**Winner of the *Point of View* Award \***

**Winner of the Vivian Steward Award \*\***

**Winner of the Ray Mills Award \*\*\***

## Bittersweet

In this dream, you  
are peddling  
on your new  
electric blue  
Schwinn Tricycle Model 2314  
on unincorporated  
Waverly Road—gravel  
bouncing up  
hitting the spokes  
clink clank  
clink clank.  
Your white cotton sundress—  
the one Auntie Cookie bought  
from Sears Outlet  
sways and flirts with your knee.  
Strawberry Blonde pigtails  
dance in the wind—  
just like the red, blue and yellow  
colored plastic ribbons  
suspended from the handlebars.  
June's sunlight radiates off the chrome  
reflecting to your face.  
You giggle when it asks  
"Where you headed?"  
and you whisper...  
"Far away from here."



Gloria Farber  
**Untitled**  
Black & White Photograph  
(7" x 9 1/4")

## Snipe Hunt

"Delbert, you get on outside now, quick, an' wait for me." Elmer's voice was a furious rushing whisper, and his mother began screaming in the background.

"Junior, how many times I got to tell you, boy! Lil' Delbert can't do it hisself! You gotta help him!" Their mother's shrill drunken howl rent the cool autumn dusk. Delbert went out back, the rusty screen door slamming shut behind him. He sat on the stoop behind their trailer home, fists tucked under his chubby chin, elbows on his knees. The sky was darkening shades of gray as night fell, and his cheeks grew rosy with cold. The arguing had gone from yelling to hitting, slaps wringing off his oldest brother like gun shots. Elmer's voice emerged, whining, plaintive.

"He's sorry Ma! I'll help Delbert! Honest! He's sorry!" This was followed by several more flat cracks as his mother hit Elmer, the second oldest, the mediator. Delbert stood up and walked away from the house, his feet crunching over a carpet of dry grass and loose stones. He walked towards the pickup truck that sat perhaps twenty feet from the house. He turned and looked back, the angry voices softened by distance. Warm orange glowed from the windows of the white metal box, and to a deaf man it would have looked like a happy home. The growing shadows hid the bare yard, patchy with weeds; the scraggly tree looked as if it were merely bare.

He stood there for what seemed like a long time, cold because he had forgotten his jacket. Elmer came banging out of the house carrying the tiny beaten parka, wearing his own thin jacket that they had gotten out of the same charity box last Christmas. His eyes were puffy and wet, pink handprints marking his face. His red hair was so short his white scalp showed through, and his ears stuck out. He was unfortunate enough to be

named Elmer Fudd Stokes, a name his mother had decided on a year after his birth, claiming it had come to her in a dream. Much to the disappointment of his classmates, he did not fudge his words delightfully like his namesake.

Junior came out seconds after him, dark eyes full of rage. Blood leaked from his bulbous nose, his torn lips staining his chin. He walked past Delbert and Elmer and went straight for the truck. His leather jacket creaked and moaned with every angry step. The door squeaked loudly as he opened it, and he pulled it shut with a crash. Elmer stuffed the parka into his little brother's arms, grasped him by the shoulders and marched him towards the truck. He opened the door and lifted Delbert in, getting in beside him and closing the door. The truck started on the third try, and with a screech Junior put it into gear and they drove away.

"Jesus Christ, Buzz, what the hell are you, a baby or somethin'? Can't do shit fer yourself; that's fer damn sure."

"Don't call him that, Junior. His name's Delbert."

"I'll call 'em whatever the hell I want, Elmer. And don't you forget it." There was violence in his voice, and Elmer's hand rose to stroke the hand prints on his cheek. Ma slapped, but Junior would punch.

"Yeah, Delbert, what the hell are you, anyway? A crybaby?" Elmer's voice was suddenly scornful, knowing he was on Junior's side. Delbert, who had been holding back his tears since Elmer had thrust him outside, now began to sniffle, the first drops slipping down his cheeks. After a few moments he was crying outright, face wet, nose clogged with phlegm.

"Quit cryin', Buzz. I got an idea. Me'n Elmer are gonna take you on a snipe hunt."

Delbert looked up at Junior through a sparkle of tears, seeing the earnestness on his face. Then he looked over at

Elmer, seeing only puzzlement on his freckled face. Delbert stopped crying, wiped his nose on the sleeve of his parka. Elmer handed him a crusty handkerchief, so Delbert clamped it over his nose and blew, feeling much better.

"Yup, a snipe hunt's just the thing fer brothers on a cold night. Snipe are runnin' this time a year. It's the matin' season."

"Yeah," Elmer said, warming to the idea. "Bet we could get a couple big snipe, if we had someone to catch 'em."

"Mr. Frye would pay eighty-five cents a pound, not includin' the skins. We could probably make ten dollars." Junior looked over at Elmer, tipped him a big wink. "You know anyone who'd wanna make ten dollars with us?"

"I dunno, Junior." Elmer looked at Junior, seeing a double meaning in his brother's stumpy face. Junior was by far the ugliest of the three, with features that looked as if they had been hacked out with a dull hatchet. A rash of pimples studded his skin, and his lank black hair hung in his eyes.

Little Delbert had been watching his two brothers talk, flipping his head back and forth like a lumpy metronome. Now he spoke.

"Me! I wanna make ten dollars. I'd buy Yoo-Hoo an' gumballs an' comic books an' Yoo-Hoo an' a big ice cream. With sprinkles. An' nuts."

"You drink that much Yoo-Hoo and you'll get a bellyache for sure," Elmer said. He still hadn't figured out what Junior was up to, but as long as the joke wasn't on him, he was willing to play along. Elmer was of the opinion it was better to give than receive, especially when it came to someone as malicious as Junior.

"You ain't gonna make ten dollars, I said we're gonna make ten dollars. But you're jist a baby, not big enough to catch no snipe. So I guess you ain't gettin' no Yoo-Hoo and comic books after all, huh? On account of you bein' a baby."

"I'm not no baby, honest! I'm gonna

be nine come March. I drink lotsa milk an' Yoo-Hoo, so I'm real strong."

Delbert puffed out his scrawny chest and tried to think as if he was big, trying to show Junior that he was at least as strong as Elmer.

"I don't know there, Buzz. You reckon you could catch a snipe in a sack an' hold on to it 'til me or Elmer gets there to tie it off?"

"Oh sure, I ain't afraid of no snipe, no sir." Delbert felt confident now that they would let him help. It did not occur to him that he had never seen a snipe, had no idea what one looked like. His head was filled with thoughts of Yoo-Hoo and sweets, an instant cure for a sad little boy.

"Well, here's the deal Buzz," Junior's voice was authoritative, strong. "We gonna go up to Dipper's Ridge. Soon as we find a good spot, me an' Elmer will set you up with a gunny sack and put you in place. Then, me an' him are gonna beat the bushes, drivin' out all them fat snipe. Mind you don't grab no skinny ones. Mr. Frye don't buy no skinny snipe. Gotta have meat on 'em, okay?"

"What do a snipe look like, Junior?"

"Are you gonna ask a bunch of dumb baby questions, Buzz? 'Cause if you are, we could get somebody else to catch them snipe. How could a boy growin' up in Texas not never seen no snipe before? Gosh!"

"Yeah, Delbert. Everybody knows snipe got brown fur. An' teeth. What are you, a dumb baby?"

"Shut up, Elmer. Look, Buzz, all you gotta do is open the sack an' hold it near the ground. When the snipe go runnin' by you just hold the sack so they run into it. You got it?"

"Sure, Junior. Whatever you say. Then we get to buy Yoo-Hoo, right? A whole bottle to me, right? An' a comic book?"

"If'n you catch some good ones, sure, Buzz. A whole bottle for you."

Junior smiled, and so did Delbert. Elmer saw them smiling and smiled too, but he wasn't sure why he was smiling.



All he really knew was that picking on Delbert beat having Ma whip his ass. Delbert snuggled in between his brothers, enjoying their warmth. Elmer's bony frame dug into Delbert's soft flesh, so he snuggled more towards Junior. He could smell Junior; motor oil, sweat, and Juicy Fruit. The truck bounced and crunched down the dirt roads, headed for Dipper's Ridge.

Once they were halfway up the ridge they could see La Grange, the lights of the small town a feeble flicker compared to the starry glittering whorls that filled the sky. Between them and town they could see their house, a tiny whitish- orange blip in the yawning black patch outside of town. As he looked at it Junior could picture their mother passed out on the sofa, worn out from beating him, too drunk to stay awake. He looked down at Delbert, his head clotted with thoughts of revenge. He could not hit his mother, every good son knew that. But that didn't mean he had to be nice to her precious little dumb baby. As this occurred to him his face stretched into a lupine grin which hurt his split lips, exposing bad teeth. Delbert looked up and saw the pale grinning countenance, caked with dried blood. Something instinctual made him afraid of Junior, the way a rabbit is afraid of a fox.

"What's Mr. Frye do with the snipe, Junior?" He hadn't really cared before, but now Delbert wanted to know.

"Well don't you know, Buzz? What you think they make them Shakey's hamburgers out of, anyways? Fried monkey meat?"

"I...I thought they were hamburgs."

"Hamburg ain't nothin' but a fancy name for snipe. Jesus, Buzz. I ain't so sure you can handle this after all. I mean, everybody knows that hamburg's jist a fancy name for snipe. Ain't that right, Elmer?"

"Yup. You're pretty dumb, Delbert, you don't know that. Everybody knows that."

"I knew that, I was just kiddin'. What

you say they look like again?"

"Brown fur, four legs, kinda... squat. Black nose," Junior paused, trying to think what a snipe would look like. "Four paws, teeth... an' a long tail. Like so." He held his hands a foot apart. "You got to watch out for that tail, make sure you get it all in the sack. Mr. Frye only pays if it's a whole snipe. You want a Yoo-Hoo, right, Buzz? Spiderman comic book, maybe?"

"Not no Spiderman. The Punisher." Delbert puffed out his chest again, pretending he was huge like the Punisher.

"I figure we'll park here an' hike a ways. We need to find a real good spot." Junior killed the engine and the brothers tumbled out of the truck. It was raw cold on the slope of the ridge, the pungent air freezing the hairs in their noses. Wispy clouds of breath hung in the air near their mouths. Junior grabbed a burlap sack, still wet from the last rain, out of the back of the truck. He handed it to Delbert with a ritual air, the way a father would give an heirloom to his son. Delbert accepted it somberly, gripping it with fleshy fingers already turning numb from the cold. The rough, half frozen burlap scratched his hands, making him uncomfortable, but he bit the inside of his cheek and tried to ignore it.

The three brothers set off along the ridge, boots thumping on hard ground, the occasional stray leaf getting crushed underfoot. Their breath came quicker now, three little engines chugging along the ridge. Delbert struggled mightily to match his brothers' stride at first, not wanting to fall behind, but he kept tripping on the long clumsy sack he carried. A runner of snot began to slither from one nostril, and, despite several furious assaults by his sleeve, it continued to advance. Finally, he tried to hold the sack and wipe his nose without stopping to do so. He pitched forward, feet and sack hopelessly entangled. He let out a muffled cry of surprise when he hit the ground, then

lay there in a heap, wondering if he was hurt badly enough to warrant crying.

"Shit, Buzz, you okay? Elmer, get that sack off him an' help him up." Junior didn't really care if Buzz had broken his scrawny neck, but he had plans for the evening. Elmer took the sack off his younger brother and pulled him to his feet, brushing stray bits of dead grass off his chest. He saw Delbert's eyes beginning to sparkle with fresh tears, and he knelt in front of him.

"You all right, Delbert? You hurt? You afraid?" Elmer's voice was pitched low, so Junior wouldn't hear. He didn't want anything bad to happen to Delbert, not really, because, if Delbert got hurt, then Ma was sure to whip his ass, whether it was his fault or not.

"My nose keeps runnin'." Delbert's voice was a practiced snivel. Elmer patted his pockets, looking for the bandanna he had let Delbert use earlier.

"Say, you still got my snot rag?" As soon as he asked Delbert sheepishly produced the wadded handkerchief from one coat pocket.

"Jeez, you dummy! Why not use it then?" The slight concern that had been in Elmer's voice earlier was now gone. Little Delbert, as their mother called him, was a dumb baby, sometimes.

"Are you two little boys done wipin' each other's noses? I'd kinda like to get back to town 'fore Mr. Frye closes up. Or maybe you two queer babies want to wipe each other's butts?" Junior was thirty yards ahead of them, standing in a small patch of scrub oak. The trees looked spidery, skeletal, framing pale Junior in a crisscross of shadows. As they neared him the tangled dry undergrowth tore at their legs, snatching their shoe laces, poking their knees. Junior was in the center of the dead copse on the ridge, listening to the silence. As they neared him he shushed them.

"D'ya hear that?" Junior held one finger to his lips, cupping his ear, turning in a slow circle. They came here

often in the summer, to shoot squirrel and crow, or just to escape beatings. Those days the sky was beautiful blue, dappled with craggy cotton clouds. The thicket would be green and dense, red dirt showing through in a few bare patches. The sounds would be overwhelming: birds, bugs, and beasties, all going about their daily forest lives.

Now it was grayish-brown, empty, devoid of life and love. There was no sound save for the wind, cutting its chill swath through stiff branches. Elmer strained his protruding ears, trying to hear what Junior heard. All he could hear was Delbert sucking snot back up his nose and his own beating heart.

"That's snipe, sure 'nuff. You stand here, Buzz. Take that sack an' hold it off the ground like so." Junior tore the sack from his hands and demonstrated, shaking the sack so the mouth fell open.

"What I gotta do again?" The woods seemed spooky and cold to Delbert, and he was not so certain he wanted a Yoo-Hoo as badly as he thought.

"You jist stand here an' hold the sack like this. Me an' Elmer can do the rest. When you see one come runnin', get 'em."

Junior put Delbert into position, gave him a reassuring pat on the back. He grabbed Elmer by the sleeve and tugged him back towards the direction of the truck.

"You jist stay right there, Buzz. Be drinkin' a Yoo-Hoo before you know it." Then he and Elmer disappeared from sight.

Junior headed straight for the truck, Elmer following like a clumsy puppy.

"What's the game, Junior? You gonna let me in on it, or not?"

"The game is I got a bottle a Wild Turkey, dumbass. But Buzz'll jist tell Ma we was drinkin' an' we'd get another lickin'. That what you want?" Elmer solemnly swung his head side to side, chastised by the very thought of a beating.

"Then we leave the pretty boy on the ridge, waitin' fer the snipe. Jeez, what a dumb baby lil' Buzz is. Waitin' to catch some snipe. Hear him, goin' on about Yoo-Hoo an' comic books? Jeez." Junior spit out a dirty little laugh, snide and spiteful. Elmer laughed too, laughed at what a dumb baby Delbert was. Everybody knew there wasn't any such thing as a snipe.

Junior liberated the bourbon from underneath the front seat, climbed in and scooted over so Elmer could sit next to him. It wasn't as cold inside the truck, the wind howling in frustration outside because it could not reach them.

Delbert stood in the decayed woods with his sack, shivering and alone. His nose tingled numbly, his ears felt dead. He could even feel needles of frost stabbing his cheeks and hands. As the wind grew in intensity, silence slid off the ridge with nary a whisper. Trees rattled their bony fingers in the sky, rasping rough flesh against calloused limbs. The night whistled like a banshee keening for the dead, freezing and empty. He thought of his brothers, driving forward the plentiful snipe; then he thought of all the summertime trips he had made to Mr. Frye's store. He saw himself walking under the luminance of those brilliant white fluorescent tubes, blinded by the fierce reflection off the shiny tile floor. He strolled down long, colorful aisles to the cold case in the back of the store. The cases had a soothing, almost magical hum, music to Delbert's ears. He would open the case, hearing that gentle sucking sound, feeling the outrush of refrigerated air, the hum growing louder. Then slowly pulling out a bottle of Yoo-Hoo, another bottle clinking happily to take its place.

The sack hung limply in Delbert's hands as he dreamed, drenched in thoughts of Yoo-Hoo and summertime. He did not notice the wind had abated with a stirring of leaves. He was too engrossed in happier thoughts. He liked

to uncap his Yoo-Hoo outside the store, in the baking heat, the faint hiss under the cap escaping in the muggy air. Tilting the bottle, tapping glass against teeth. Every time he drank Yoo-Hoo he was amazed by the bubbly chocolate flood which bathed his mouth, richly sweet and effervescent. Each swallow was pure pleasure, decadent and exotic. His tongue, the roof of his mouth, and his teeth would ache from the frosty drink, coated with cool chocolaty residue. Delbert felt about Yoo-Hoo the way some people feel about Christ, or sex, or heroin. They were meant to be together, Delbert and Yoo-Hoo.

The sack had slipped to the ground, held limply in one small fist. He wore a faraway smile on his face, mucous dripping from his nose. He was not a terribly imaginative boy, but he had conjured the experience so perfectly in his mind that he was amazed he could think of something that made him feel so good. He didn't even feel the stinging cold, he felt so good. Suddenly, the sack jerked from his grasp and he dove on top of it, struggling to close the top before the snipe could wiggle out.

"Junior! Elmer! Junior! I got one! I got me a snipe! I got me a snipe!" Junior took a big swallow from the bottle, his Adam's apple bobbing convulsively. He gasped, his eyes watering, and handed the bottle to Elmer. Elmer took it, sniffing at the top dubiously. He figured if it smelled like that there was no way it tasted good. Junior saw his hesitancy and scowled.

"You don't wanna drink, hoss, you go right up on that ridge an' sit with queer baby Buzz. I don't want no queer baby sittin' in my truck while I'm drinkin'."

"Ain't your truck, it's Ma's." This slipped out before Elmer could stop it, and he fully expected the violent response he got, flinching before Junior could speak.

"You see her here, queer baby? It's my truck when she ain't around, *Fudd*. You better jist walk home if you don't

want to drink, I guess." He reached out to take the bottle.

"I ain't walkin' home." Elmer took a deep breath and swung the bottle up, swallowing a fiery mouthful. It scalded his throat and burned his stomach. He sputtered and coughed, making a face. "Jeeeesus! Ma drinks that?"

Junior laughed, satisfied now that Elmer had drunk with him, and took the bottle back.

"What'd preacher say, he hear you talkin' like that? Ma would whip you good fer that."

"Yeah, well like you said, Ma ain't here. An' someday..." Elmer stopped, realizing he had almost said it.

"An' someday what?" Elmer looked at the floor. "An' someday what, Elmer?" Junior leaned forward, breathing frosty puffs of bourbon in the icy air.

"I can't tell you. If I tell it won't come true."

"Sure it will. Them kinda things don't count when two brothers is drinkin'. We're brothers, ain't we? Hell yes! And we're drinkin', ain't we?" Junior took a slug from the bottle, wiping away his grimace with the back of his hand. He thrust the bottle at Elmer, who accepted it meekly, taking a small sip.

"I reckon it's all right to tell you, bein' brothers an' all. 'Sides, she beats on you, too, right?"

"Hell yes, she whomps on me! More'n you, fer sure." Junior's eyes gleamed with the excitement of learning Elmer's secret.

"Someday I'm gonna be givin' the whippins. An' we'll just see who screams then. We gonna see who screams then, oh yeah." Elmer's voice had grown soft and deadly as he spoke, his eyes unfocused as he pictured it in his mind.

Junior was stunned by the thought that Elmer, whom he had thought was a sissy and a crybaby, would harbor such violent thoughts towards their mother. Certainly Junior himself had thought about laying into the old hag when she beat him, but he loved her too much for

that. He could still remember who sang to him and cuddled him and dressed him in clean Dr. Dentons for a night's sleep. Elmer could only think of a mother who screamed, stinking of piss and booze, a mother with hard hands and a quick temper.

"Yeah. I guess she deserves a beatin' or two. It's jist that..." Junior squinted, thinking about their mother, the woman who had beat him an hour before. He knew she had lived a tough life, tough as the dry red Texas hardpan their trailer home sat on. She had been young once, and pretty, just as the scabrous ground that made up the front yard has yielded a few sickly weeds. Both were past their prime and going downhill fast, nothing nice to look at. Just as the yard could blame too much sun and too little water, his mother could blame too much booze and too few men.

"It's jist that things were fine 'fore that little snotnose showed up. Didn't hardly get no lickins 'fore then."

"Yeah, yeah, right. That don't mean she gotta hit us, Junior. Havin' a dumb baby like Delbert ain't no excuse. Don't make it right."

"Say we leave the dumb baby on the ridge? Tell Ma we left 'em at the house, went out shinin' for possum. Bet he'd freeze to death afore he made it back." Junior's tone was light, joking, but his eyes were serious. He just needed Elmer's approval.

"Yeah, I reckon he'd freeze, sure." Elmer tried to think of the last beating he got that was not Delbert related. He couldn't think of any.

"Let's leave 'em here." The silence that followed Elmer's agreement grew and festered for a few minutes, growing fat with shared and secret guilt. Junior spoke first.

"I figure we jist sit here awhile, have a few more snorts of Wild Turkey. Then we go home. Ma'll be asleep, so we jist go to bed. Tomorrow we jist say 'Gee, I don't know, Ma, he was here when we went to sleep.' If we hold to that story,

don't change fer nothin', ain't no way we'll get caught." Junior grinned, proud of his quick thinking. Elmer grinned back skeptically, nervous, worrying already.

"Gimme another sip of that." He took the bottle, lifted it halfway to his lips, and stopped.

"What? Somethin' wrong? You don't wanna drink?" Junior was suspicious of Elmer, curious about the look that crossed his face. Like he had seen a ghost.

"Don't you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"Shhhhh. Listen."

The pair sat silent in the truck, listening. Junior was just about to get mad at Elmer, tell him to quit screwing around, when he heard it, carrying faintly through the night, floating in, filtered through the window.

"Junior! Elmer!" It sounded like Delbert, way off in the distance, but getting closer.

"Junior! Elmer!"

How the hell did he find his way back, Junior thought. Usually Delbert got lost going to the bathroom.

"Let's go see what the hell he wants. Maybe we can send him back up there, then go home." Elmer nodded, wondering if deserting Delbert was the same as murdering him. He supposed it wasn't, since it wasn't his fault if the dumb baby couldn't get home before he froze.

He and Junior hopped out of the truck, noticing it was much colder outside. As they approached Delbert they saw he was dragging the sack behind him, carving a path through the dusty ground. When he got closer they saw the sack was twisting and writhing, tossing as if it had been brought to a boil on the inside.

What's he got there, Junior wondered. Coon? Possum? Neither seemed likely to be out in this weather, even less likely to walk right into a gunny sack.

"I got one, I got one, I got one!"

Yoo-Hoo an' ice cream for me, you bet!" Delbert was tired but elated at his triumph, and he couldn't wait to show his brothers what he had caught without their help. He'd show them he wasn't a dumb baby, after all. He swung the sack in front of him, and it began to contort furiously, shifting and slithering on the ground.

"See, it's a..." The sack sprung open, the boys' eyes all flew wide. They saw a glitter of frantically snapping teeth, a flash of brown fur, a glimpse of the wickedly long tail. Ain't no snipe, Junior thought, snipe ain't real, jist made it up to scare the dumb baby...

Evelyn Stokes awoke on the tattered sofa with a hangover. Weak sunlight flitted through the flyspeckled windows and danced on the faded linoleum. She sat up, head fuzzy, tasting her tongue. It was then that she noticed little Delbert standing in the doorway, wearing his parka, dirty burlap sack lying at his feet. He looked as if he had taken a bath in red tempera paint. A rotten smell wafted from the sack.

"What you been doin', Delbert? Been in yer fingerpaints? Why ain't Junior watchin' you? Junior! That lazy snot, I'll whup his ass." Then she noticed the sack was moving.

"What's that, lil' Del? Tell Mommy." Delbert just stood there, his tangled hair clotted and sticky. His mother asked again, sounding irritated. Her ire moved him to speak.

"Been snipe huntin', Ma." His voice was a papery whisper.

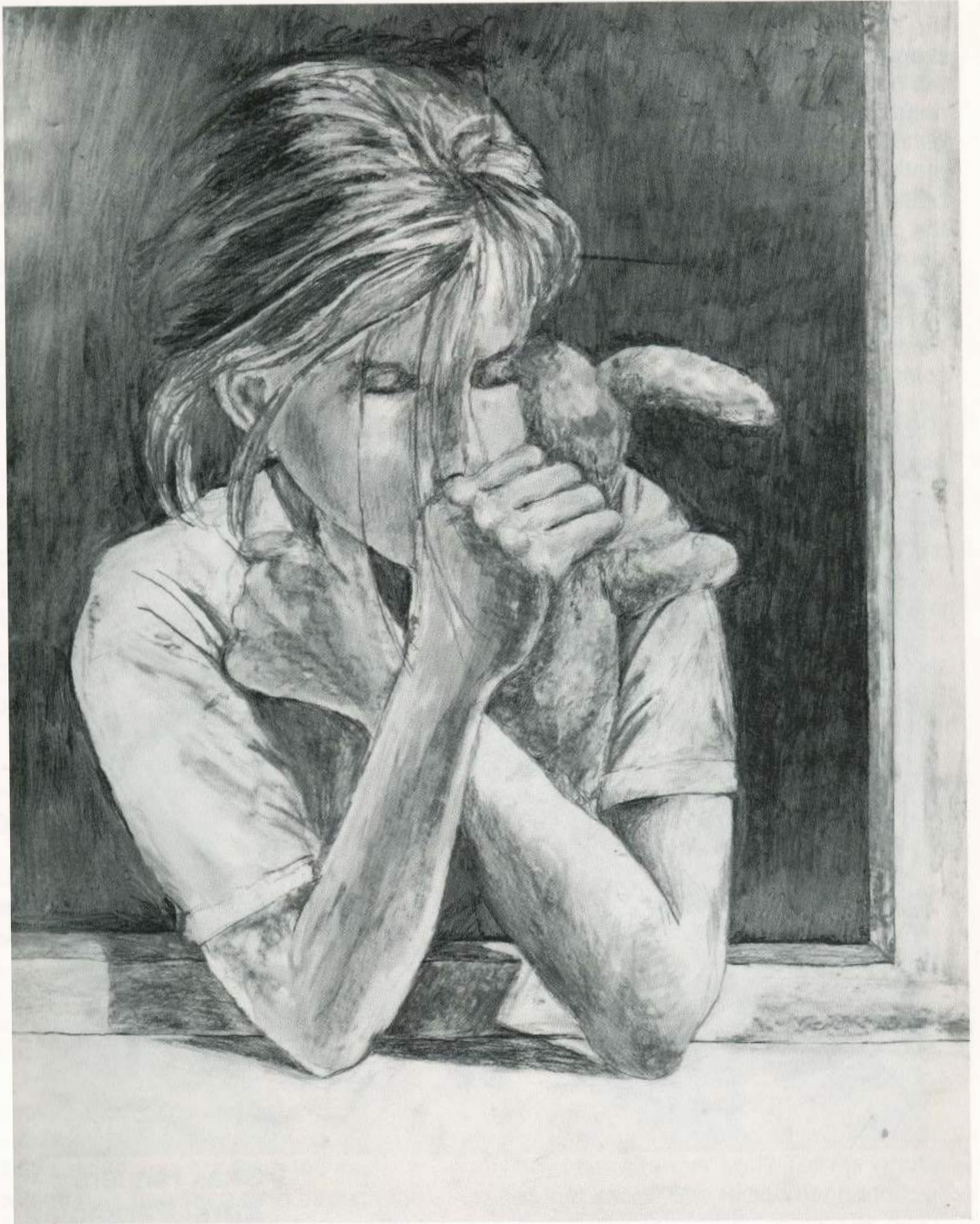
"Ain't no such thing as snipe. Them boys been funnin' you? Tell me what's in that sack." She raised her hand threateningly, stopped when she saw the lack of fear in his eyes. Looking closer, she saw it wasn't paint, but blood. The sack rustled, then opened. She screamed.

Delbert dragged the sack across the tiny kitchenette, opened the fridge door. Yoo-Hoo bottles stood lined on one shelf, silent brown pasteurized soldiers standing guard over old leftovers. He

leftovers. He took one and walked to the sofa, leaving the door open, dragging the sack with him. He rubbed the bottle against his cheek, not minding the red smear it left on the glass. He curled up on the lap of his mother's still warm corpse, holding the bottle close to his ear as he twisted off the cap, smiling at the crack-hiss. He drank deeply, sighing contentedly. He licked his lips, thinking of summertime, Mr. Frye's store, his brothers. And snipe hunts.



Chas Hinners  
**Aural Paranoia**  
Felt Tip Pen  
(16<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" x 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" )



Heidi Russ  
**Untitled**  
Graphite  
(14½" x 18½")

## I'm the Ocean

From any direction, the view was the same. The sky was gray and stretched out in all directions. As the eyes moved down, the gray sky gave way to the green sea. Nothing within miles, John Taylor was alone, stranded in the South Pacific with nothing more than the life-vest secured to his body.

The sea was calm. The cool green waters rippled faintly. Taylor gently bobbed up and down in the pale waters. This was a good thing, though the phrase "the calm before the storm" bounced around his skull many times.

Sharks were also a constant topic on his brain. Three times Taylor could have sworn he had seen a dangerous gray fin slicing through the cool waters. Taylor hated the idea of being eaten by a shark. Hundreds of sharp teeth, knives, tearing and ripping the skin. Blood spilling into the ocean. The lower half of his body being torn from the upper. Staring into the black, dispassionate eyes of the ocean's perfect killing machine.

Maybe it was just the thought of being eaten alive or the feeling of total isolation, but Taylor began to panic. Screaming for help was going to accomplish nothing and he knew it. But he hated the thought of just bobbing up and down in the gentle waters, floating aimlessly, waiting to be rescued. Eventually, he traded screaming for sobbing.

The sky was darker. Night was sliding down across the sky all around him. For five hours, John Taylor had been bobbing up and down in the tranquil waters, all alone. Taylor found it painful to be alone with his thoughts. He thought about his life, his mistakes. It seemed there were so many. They were mostly little things, events that could have been avoided with a little effort. Being careful would have prevented most. What was worse was that they were mistakes which had hurt others. It seemed a shame to die with

so many regrets.

The bright light of the sun woke John Taylor. The sky wasn't gray. As the sun rose over the green horizon, the sky was a tangle of purples and reds and even oranges. Eventually it all blurred and gave way to blue. But the blue didn't last. Clouds rolled in and blue was swallowed by gray.

The sea was awake. Surging waves lifted Taylor up and threw him down. There was no more gentle bobbing. Saltwater splashed in his face as the ocean assaulted him. The sky was dark and he heard a thunderclap in the distance. Drops of rain dove into the green waters all around him. The drops began to fall heavier and Taylor was battered by the droplets. The wind and waves continued to spiral, tossing Taylor about. The sky was split by a bolt of blue lightning. Taylor felt the rage and anger of the ocean and thought, "Funny, I feel the same way."

When he awoke the next morning, Taylor caught more of the sunrise than he had the day before. The event was peaceful. The storm last night had been a rough one, but Taylor was still alive. This was a condition which could not last much longer. Taylor had no food and no drinkable water. He felt his face. His lips were blistered and bleeding. His face, no doubt heavily sunburned, was raw to the touch. And his vision was blurry.

Taylor looked at his forearm. A scar, conveniently shaped like an "s," ran from his wrist to about mid-arm. The details of how it got there were hazy, but not forgotten. His father had been teaching him how to ride a bike. A monumental day in the life of any six-year-old. One would, at least, expect a father to be sober for the event. He wasn't completely tanked; that didn't happen till well-past noon.

One good push was all it took. Taylor remembered pedaling and then hurtling towards the pavement. A broken beer



bottle served to cut the arm severely enough to necessitate stitches and leave a scar. After the fall, his father immediately scooped him up. And after an inordinate amount of apologizing, promptly drove him to the hospital. The cut healed; the memory never did.

The sky wasn't gray. It was more of a blue-white punctuated by the yellow dot of the sun. The ocean was still green, for the most part. Briefly, something brushed Taylor's leg. A large shadow loomed under the water and the theme to "Jaws" rang in his ears. Panic was inevitable. Taylor was positive the heart was never supposed to beat this fast. The shadow circled and was gone.

Hours had passed since Taylor's encounter with God-only-knows. As he floated in the pale water, John Taylor noticed something in the distance. The object was small and bounced sunlight in his direction. He began to swim towards the object. It was a wine bottle. There was a note secured inside.

"A message in a bottle. This doesn't happen in real life," Taylor said to no one in particular. Taylor snapped the wax seal and opened the bottle. He quickly, though carefully, retrieved the message. He read the note, keeping it dry as best as possible. Somewhere in San Diego, Mrs. Jenkin's sixth grade class had written the letter, in hopes that it would reach Hawaii or something. Every student had left a message for whoever was to discover the bottle, if it was discovered at all. It was dated June 1, 1985.

Taylor did some quick figuring in his head. Those kids would probably have graduated high school and been in college by now. High school graduation. That was the last time Taylor had seen the old man. His father had stumbled into the ceremony, an hour late and had obviously begun celebrating early.

"Mean drunk" was always a term which applied to Taylor's father. Because of this fact, there were incidents. There were always incidents. What started with talking always turned

to yelling and what started with shoving always turned to punching. In the end, it was the words which had hurt more; but, they were never taken back. And now Taylor could never take them back. Night tumbled down and John Taylor had nothing to do but sleep.

It wasn't the sunrise which woke John Taylor this morning, but a comforting hum and splashing waves from a ship's propeller. Not more than thirty yards from where he bobbed in the green water, a fishing boat drifted. Through blurred vision, he watched as the men tossed their nets and bustled about their business. Every part of Taylor's body became energized and electric. The thought he could now be rescued ignited his brain. John Taylor began to scream and yell, splashing the water all around him. He watched as the men aboard the craft pinpointed his cries and began to move their boat in his direction.

At first, Taylor didn't realize what that heat in his stomach represented. But when his body began to jerk and the heat became an intense pain, he understood that a shark was clamping down on his torso with its hundreds of teeth. Taylor's cries for help didn't stop, they simply gained a new urgency. Frantically, he hammered the deep gray skin of the shark with his fists; but the razors continued to shred soft, pink flesh. Taylor located the black, uncaring eyes and attempted to gouge at them. The shark's teeth continued to cleave through muscle and sinew. Taylor watched the green waters become tainted with his blood. Now the water was thick and black.

Vision fading in and out, Taylor watched as the fishing vessel pulled up next to him. The pain in his stomach was subsiding, as was all feeling in the lower half of his body. As the shark continued to tear and rip at Taylor's flesh, the fishermen reached in desperation to pull Taylor from the bloody waters; however, their efforts would go unrewarded. And as John

Taylor teetered between this world and the next, he thought that the whole process wasn't nearly as painful as he had imagined.



Kevin White  
**Intensity (Drawn in)**  
Color Pencil  
(11" x 14")

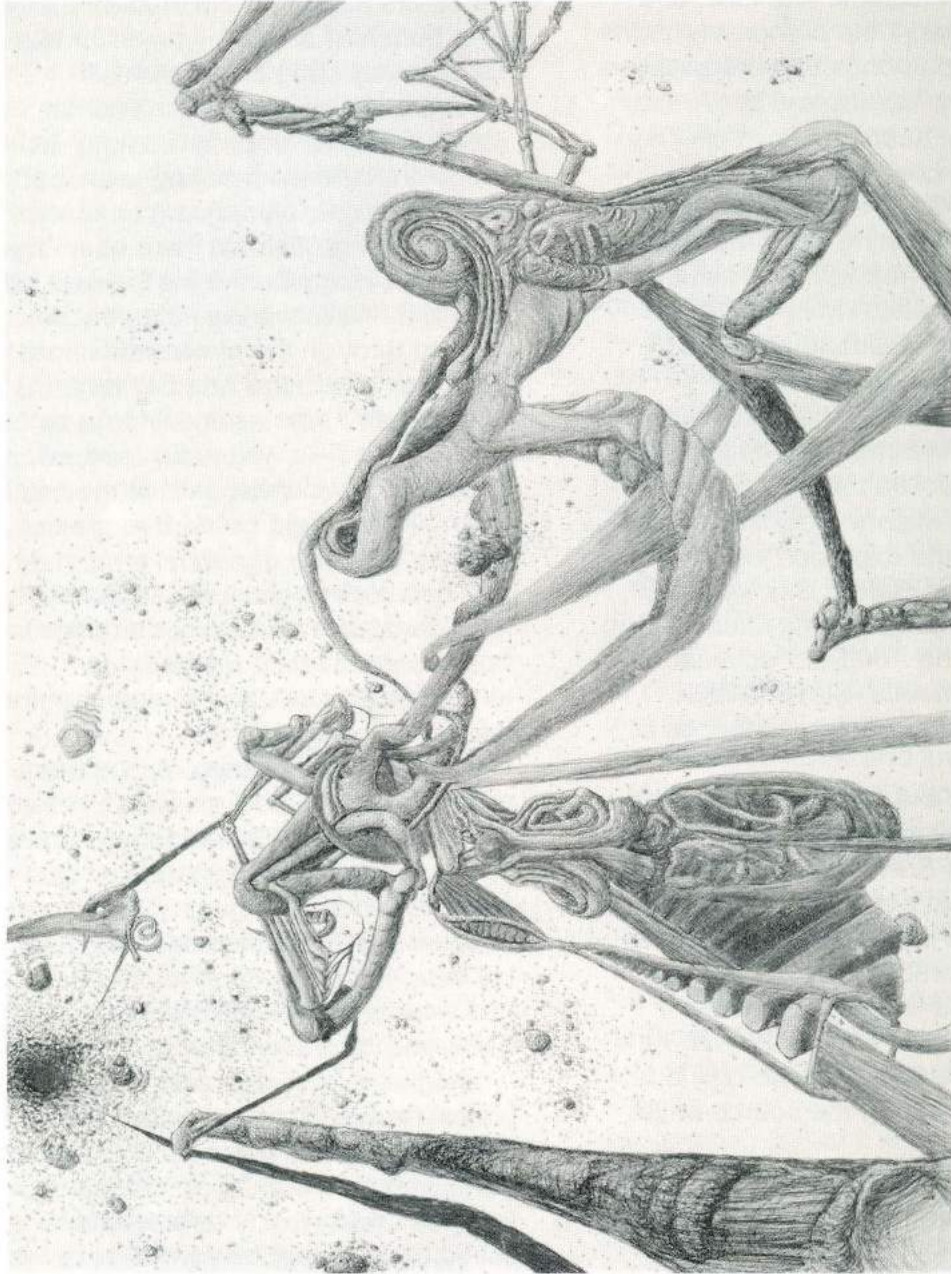
## Autumn Storm by Firelight

A flash of lightning rips across the sky.  
We huddle close beneath the trembling eaves  
As thunder roars a nightmare lullaby,  
And strips the trees outside of summer leaves.

The fire is warm. Its light is warmer still.  
A gentle beacon holding back the dark.  
Yet, in the light of day, we know we will  
Deny the fearful pounding of our hearts.

The ancient wonder once again is near,  
The fury of the storm awakes our past  
When gods and nature both were to be feared,  
And spells of warding were by fire cast.

An autumn storm returns us to that place  
When nature's glory awed the human race.



**Kevin White**  
**Addiction**  
Pen and Color pencil  
(12" x 9")

## Prized Peri (An American Story)

Gifford City has now been depopulated by a gasoline explosion. It was a big news story for about a week or so. It might have been a bigger story, a signal for the commencements of a major world war, if the authorities hadn't acknowledged at once that the gasoline was refined by Texans and not Arabs. One newscast heard in New York City called it "a simple Texas mess."

The official story is that an American truck was transporting this American gasoline on the freeway, and someone threw a lit cigarette. There was this flash. It was an accident, supposedly. The truck, if there really was an American truck; locals have suspicions of a communist bomb; seems to have been right opposite the new Gifford Motel and the Mighty Gifford Chevrolet Center when the explosion went off.

Everybody in Gifford City was killed, including ten men awaiting execution on death row in the Adult Correctional Facility in Huntsville. Steve Mitchell certainly lost a lot of acquaintances all at once.

But most of the structures in Gifford City are still left standing and furnished. Confidentially, Steve has given away information that every one of the television sets in the new Gifford Motel is still fully operable. So are all of the telephones. So is the automatic ice-cream scooper behind the bar. All those sensitive devices were only a few thousand yards from the source of the flash.

So nobody lives in Gifford City, Texas, anymore. About ten thousand people died.

How could Steve and his brother Fran get out of asking this question: 'Does it matter to anyone or anything that all those peoples were struck down so suddenly?' Since all the property is virtually undamaged, has the world lost anything it loved?

Gifford City isn't radioactive. New people could move right in. There is talk

of turning it over to a leper colony who have filed an application with the incumbent Governor of Texas. Word has it that the Governor is planning to turn them flat down. He stated, "...a new bunch of animals wouldn't make for safe adjoining communities."

There is a newly built arts center there. If this supposedly 'communist bomb' that the neighboring townspeople believe it to be, were going to knock over anything, it would have been the Governor Hogg Center for the Arts, (It is rumored that Governor Hogg once strolled through the streets of Gifford City, thus giving the Arts Center an appropriate name), since it looks so frail and exposed—a white stuccoed mobile trailer on four slender stilts in the middle of an old cow field called Evergreen Plains.

It has never been used. The walls of its galleries are bare. What a delightful opportunity it would represent to struggling painters and sculptors of the world.

Texans speak 'Texan, a Southern dialect hitched unto American English which has only a present tense. I have lived in Texas for two years, so I can speak it some.

Steve Mitchell is an Innkeeper now. He bought the new Gifford Motel, a fine structure of the eighties made of glass and chromium steel.

Imagine a language with only a present tense. Steve's headwaiter, Samuel Raws, affectionately known as Sam, who claims to be an octogenarian and has seventy-nine descendants asked Steve about his father.

"Hay is dad?" he said in Texan.

"He is dead," Steve agreed. There could be no argument about that.

"Wat does hay do?" he said.

"He paints," Steve replied.

"I's like him," he said.

This witty conversation rolled on as they prepared the evening's specialty for the Gifford Motel diner.

### **Texas Fresh Brisket in Coconut Cream Bar-B-Que Sauce:**

*Put two cups of grated coconut in cheesecloth over a bowl. Pour a cup of mixed bar-b-que sauce and hot milk over it, and squeeze it dry. Repeat this with two more cups of cold milk. The stuff in the bowl is the sauce. Mix a pound of sliced onions, a teaspoon of salt, a half teaspoon of black pepper, and a teaspoon of crushed pepper. Sauté the mixture in butter until soft but not brown. Add five pounds of fresh brisket and cook them for about ten minutes on each side of the meat with a high flame. Pour the sauce over the brisket, cover the pan, and simmer for fifteen minutes.*

*Uncover the pan and baste the brisket until it is done—and the sauce has become creamy.*

*Serves eight vaguely disgruntled guests.*

Imagine a language with only a present tense. Or imagine Steve Mitchell's father, who was wholly a creature of the past. To all practicality, he spent most of his adult life, except for the past twenty-two years, at a table in a Berlin cafe before World War I. He was forever twenty-five years old or so. He could write beautiful stories and paint lovely pictures. His attitude towards important decisions was thrown to the wind. He was already a lover and a philosopher and a nobleman.

I don't think that he even noticed Gifford City or Huntsville before the explosion. It was as though he were caught up in his own galaxy, with the atmosphere of prewar Berlin inside. He used to speak so inappropriately to Steve's friends and playmates, whenever Steve was foolish enough to bring them home.

At least Steve's brother, Fran, didn't go through what Steve went through when he was in junior high school. Back then, their father used to say "Heil Hitler" to Steve's guests, and they were expected to say "Heil Hitler" back and it was all supposed to be such hearty fun.

"My Gawd," Steve said the other

morning, "—it was bad enough that we were the richest kids in town, and everybody was having such a hard time, and there was all this rusty medieval stuff hanging from the ceilings and walls, as though it were a torture chamber. Couldn't we at least have had a father who didn't say "Heil Hitler," to everyone, including Itsy Karian?"

About how much money the Mitchell's had, even though the Great Depression was going on: Their father sold off all of his Marcus Drug Company stock in the 1920s, so when the ever-active chain fell apart during the Depression, it meant nothing to him. He bought IBM stock, which acted the way he did, as though it didn't even know a depression was going on. And Mrs. Mitchell still had all the bank stock she had inherited from her father. Because of all the prime rich land it had acquired through foreclosures, it was as good as gold. This was dumb luck.

It was a soda fountain counter as much as the Depression that wrecked the dynamic Marcus chain. Pharmacies have no business being in the food business, too. Leave the food business to those who know and love it.

One of Mr. Mitchell's favorite jokes, as Steve and Fran remember, was about the boy that flunked out of pharmacy school. He didn't know how to make a grilled cheese sandwich.

There is still one Marcus Drugstore left in Gifford City. It certainly has nothing to do with Steve or Fran, or with any of their relatives, wherever they may be. The only recognizable explanation is that it is part of a cute, old-fashioned urban renewal scheme put forth by downtown Gifford City. Houston Street in downtown Gifford is bricked and the old iron streetlights are electric.

And there is an old-fashioned pool hall and an old-fashioned saloon and an old-fashioned firehouse and an old-fashioned drugstore with a soda fountain counter. Somebody found an old sign from Marcus Drugstore, and they hung it up again.

They have an old neon sign, which doesn't light up anymore but sings the praises of Castor Oil. Nobody really stocks Castor Oil anymore—it was so horrible tasting! The sign is just a joke. But they have a modern Formica prescription counter, where you can get valiums, barbiturates, Quaaludes and aspirins.

By the time Steve was old enough to bring friends home, Mr. Mitchell had stopped mentioning Hitler to anyone. That much about the present had got through to him, anyway: the subject of Hitler and Germany's new order seemed to make people's blood boil with each passing day, so Mr. Mitchell had better find something else to talk about.

Mr. Mitchell assumed that Steve's playmates were thoroughly familiar with Wagnerian Opera, Goethe's Faust, Cervante's Don Quixote, Greek mythology and legends of King Arthur's Round Table and the plays of Shakespeare and on and on—all of which were no doubt lively subjects in Berlin cafes before World War I.

So Mr. Mitchell might say to a ten-year old daughter of a tool-checker over at John Deere Plow,

"You look at me as though I were Mephistopheles. Is that who you think I am? Huh? Eh?"

Steve's guest was expected to answer.

Or he might say to a son of a garbage collector, offering him a chair, "Do sit in the Siege of Perilous, young man. Or do you dare?"

Almost all of Steve's little friends were children of uneducated parents in humble jobs, since the neighborhood had gone downhill fast, after the elite and rich moved away, with the exception of Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell.

Mr. Mitchell might say to another one, "I am Daedalus! Would you like me to give you wings so you can take flight with me and the other Peri angels? We can join the birds and migrate to South America with them! But we mustn't fly too close to the sun, eh? Eh?"

And the child was expected to answer.

Mr. Mitchell had mixed Greek and Persian mythology. Daedalus certainly had given the golden wings but the 'Peris' were disobedient angels, doing penance until readmitted into Paradise.

On his deathbed at the local medical facility, when Mr. Mitchell was listing all his virtues, he said that at least he had been wonderful with children, that they all found him a lot of fun. 'I understand them.' he announced.

Mr. Mitchell was about to give his most dumbfounding and inappropriate greeting, however not to a child but to a young woman named Muriella Clemente. She was a high school senior, as was Steve's brother—and Fran had invited her to the senior prom. This would have been in the early spring of 1944.

Fran was president of his senior class—because of that deep voice of his. Fran was in the midst of erotic catastrophe, to which he made Steve his privy, although he was younger. Irreconcilable differences had come between his sweetheart, Susan Sweller, and Susan had turned to Joe Pierce, the captain of the baseball team, for consolation. Susan rumored to several classmates of Fran's affection towards his gender.

This left the president of the class without a date for the prom, and at a time when every Texan girl of social importance had been spoken for. Fran made a sociological master move. Fran announced to the Mitchell family at breakfast one morning that he asked a girl who was at the bottom of the social order, whose parents were illiterate and unemployed, who had a brother in prison and a sister in jail, who received very low grades and engaged in no extracurricular events, but who, nonetheless, was one of the prettiest young women anybody had ever seen. Indeed, the 'Yellow Rose of Texas!'

Her family was white, but they were so poor that they lived in the Black section of town. Also, the few boys from

school who had tried to trifle with her, despite her social standing, had spread the word that, no matter what she looked like, she was as cold as a 'Yankee blizzard.'

This was Muriella Clemente.

So she couldn't have had the scant expectation of being invited to the senior prom. But miracles do happen. A new Cinderella is born now and then. One of the wealthiest, most handsome boys in town, and the president of the senior class, nonetheless, asked her to the senior prom.

So a few weeks prior to the prom, Fran gloated how beautiful Muriella Clemente was, and what an impression he was going to land on the class when he appeared with a movie star on his arm. Everyone there was supposed to be the fool for having ignored Muriella for so long.

And Mr. Mitchell heard all this, and nothing would do but that Fran bring Muriella by, on the way to the prom, so that Mr. Mitchell could see for himself if Muriella was as beautiful as Fran said.

Fran and Steve had given up bringing guests home for any reason whatsoever. But in this instance Mr. Mitchell had a means for compelling Fran to introduce Muriella to him. If Fran wouldn't do that, then Fran couldn't use the car that night. He and Muriella would have to ride the bus to the senior prom.

So Fran set out to the other side of town to fetch his prized Muriella. As they drove up the dusty road to the Mitchell's estate, a rather large ranch-house, Mr. Mitchell ran out of the house and onto the porch to greet his visitor.

Mr. Mitchell stepped out from behind a vertical timber, the very one that had mashed his right toes so long ago. He was only a yard or two from Fran, and he held out an apple in his hand. Stunned, Mr. Mitchell glanced a second time to see a very handsome, blonde-haired boy with extremely white teeth smiling up at him. The boy could see Mr. Mitchell through the windshield

of the Chevy. The remainder of the Mitchell family peered through the large windows of the living room to witness Fran's date selection—another boy and not Muriella Clemente. Mr. Mitchell's determination cast aside his confusion and continued with his well thought out and practiced greeting with the foyer of the house as an echoing chamber:

"Let Helen of Troy come forward—to claim this apple, if she dare!"

The boy stayed right where he was. He was petrified. And Fran, having allowed things to go this far, was fool enough to think that maybe his date could get out of the car and accept the apple to move things along—so he and the boy could leave his father's lunacy—even though there was no way the boy could have any idea what was going on.

What did this handsome blonde boy know of Helen of Troy and apples? For that matter, what did Mr. Mitchell know? He had the legend all garbled. Nobody ever gave Helen of Troy an apple—not as a prize, anyway.





Gloria Farber  
**Untitled**  
Black & White Photograph  
(7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" x 9<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" )

## the 5:24

lick my finger, touch the track  
hot...hot...hot...cool  
found one  
between the parallels  
when night decides to join me  
feet stretched out  
crossed on cold, hard steel  
a factory's machine  
the smell of heat in the distance  
with clouds of silver, white,  
gray smoke  
tossing pebbles to the 3rd  
track  
making piles; dividing; separating...  
rocks thrown about  
people transported  
my foot in its rhythmic tapping  
constant movement; anticipation for stronger  
\* \* \* \* \*  
here it comes—the 5:24  
force and speed  
speed and force  
nothing in its path—except  
the pebbles i've thrown  
minute after minute  
i've waited for 10 seconds of power  
...it approaches with dominance  
and courage  
stands up proud  
taunting the bushes and shrubs  
mouth opens/eyes shut  
subconsciously  
face crinkles up like a raisin  
prepared to let go  
it passes with quite a speed  
different somehow when you're four feet away  
dangerously close...and  
about to let go

## Muskellunge Fishing with Kurt Vonnegut

Northern Wisconsin sends me. Now, in the dead of winter, I can recall without the least bit of difficulty the breezy voice of June filtering through tangled limbs of quaking aspens and white pine, over cool still lakes, between knotty-pine taverns, circumventing deep-wood trash dumps that seem perpetually populated by pan-handling black bears, raccoons and skunks. The June breeze chases away pockets of winter's lingering chill but beckons me like a siren, saying: "Come back, Wally Brock. Bring your fishing stuff. And don't forget liquid refreshment."

Almost every year since high school my friend Brian and I take a two-week vacation. We head up to Lake Namekagon, east of Hayward, and fish for muskie.

On the eve of our 1992 trip I was slightly miffed when Brian phoned, saying he had invited a stranger along. The guy's name was Kurt Vonnegut.

An English professor at William Rainey Harper College, which is a two-year institution of higher learning located in the northwest suburbs of Chicago, Brian met Vonnegut at a faculty cocktail party.

"You hardly know this guy," I said. "You met him tonight and tomorrow he's going fishing with us? Oh! Where's your judgment?"

Vonnegut lectured a sold-out crowd of cheering Harper students and left-wing faculty. Brian filled me in on what happened that evening. He said Vonnegut bad-mouthed America. During the time of Vonnegut's speech, George Bush was in the White House and Vonnegut said the country was turning to shit. The U.S. suffered from all sorts of maladies: violence, political chicanery, crooked bureaucrats and rotting infrastructure. And then there was also racial discord in big cities, handguns, a budget deficit and fiduciary malfeasance. He especially knocked the country's education system and

referred to America's students as numskulls and under-educated nincompoops. The college kids and faculty applauded. They cheered. They had never before heard current events reported with such terse eloquence, with such naked candor. And who was to blame for America's moral downward spiral and a decade of appalling greed? Vonnegut asked rhetorically. The blame fell on the shoulders of the current political administration.

Following the lecture, Vonnegut met reporters, campus pundits and suburban intelligentsia at a special reception in the faculty lounge. Teachers from the college had swarmed the author. Brian said his colleagues embarrassed him. They acted like rubes, gawking at a genius. The professors asked Mr. Vonnegut bookish questions and stood uncomfortably close, staring at the author's lips as he spoke. Mr. Vonnegut was bloodshot and drooling. He was distracted, spent, bewildered, bored with the affair. At one point, the author of *Slaughterhouse Five* excused himself from the chitchat and lay down on one of the institution's dingy plastic-vinyl couches.

"Leave me alone," Vonnegut said. "I need to relax for a moment."

He lay there, staring at the ceiling, smoking bent non-filtered cigarettes, scratching his furry-caterpillar eyebrows with his thumbnails, sighing occasionally.

The professors had been waiting for something like this to happen. They knew this guy was eccentric. He ended his lecture abruptly by becoming lost in thought and then wandering from the dais. Students, accustomed to rock concerts, kept on applauding, hoping to lure Vonnegut back onstage. No encore was forthcoming. The crowd started breaking up. The professors gathered at a rally point, exchanged nods and shuffled to the reception like a

centipede.

Now, as Vonnegut lay dozing, the faculty pretended to ignore the supine author, as if famous writers were always resting on the couch in the faculty lounge. Some of the educators took note: this was the behavior of a bona fide intellectual, a true bohemian. He exhibited a total disregard for Midwestern convention. When a writer is tired, he lies down and stretches out. He doesn't give a hoot where he's at. Libations flowed. Waitresses hired by the college were distributing free beer and Champagne. A bartender in the corner mixed drinks. Vonnegut seemed content with nicotine. He just lay there, slightly detached, staring at the ceiling. Smoke exited his mouth as it would a burning building—it fell out and then defied gravity, floating away.

Brian found his friend, Professor Malcolm Esterhazy, sociology 101, milling amid Vonnegut's worshipers. Esterhazy sipped a whiskey-sour. He poked the floating orange slice and perforated ice cubes in his plastic cup with his forefinger and chatted with Brian about our Hayward fishing trip that would start less than 12-hours hence.

"Hayward, Wisconsin!" came a gasping voice. My fishing buddy turned to discover that the owner of the voice belonged to the sleepy, disheveled author. Vonnegut finished resting and managed to sneak up behind him.

"I love that town," Vonnegut said hoarsely. "Great fishing up there. Do you mind if I come along?"

"Ahhh..Er...sure...." Brian said.

He told me he couldn't refuse one of America's greatest living writers.

"I'm an English teacher for Christ's sake!" Brian said.

Vonnegut was staying downtown at the Palmer House. We picked him up at 9:04 a.m. at Wabash and Madison. He was waiting for us under the El tracks. Brian pointed him out.

"That's him?" I said. "He's dressed like a bum. This guy's a mess."

"Shhhh."

Vonnegut was a tall slouching old man. If I didn't know he was a famous author and had merely met him on the street, I'd say he was nothing more than a mope. I mean, here he was standing sleepily on the corner, wearing khaki chinos splattered with paint, an encrusted sweat shirt and a denim jacket with the arms torn off. Worst part of it, he was carrying a fly rod and a damaged creel. And he was without luggage.

"Doesn't he know we're fishing for muskie?" I said.

"Shhhh," Brian said. "Get in the back seat."

We pulled to the curb in front of Vonnegut. Brian was at the helm of his dad's Jeep Wagoneer—a wood-panel boat he mooched for the trip. There was plenty of room in the wagon for tackle boxes, coolers of beer, fishing rods and Styrofoam minnow buckets.

I took a seat directly behind Vonnegut. Vonnegut threw his crappy fishing gear on the seat next to me and slowly took a seat in front. He reminded me of a rusty lawn chair, with creaking joints, that was tough to fold up and put away. Vonnegut stared straight ahead at a double-parked taxi. We waited for him to speak, for some sort of acknowledgment, greeting or commonplace. Finally, Vonnegut said: "What the fuck! Are we going fishing or what?"

Mr. Vonnegut had heavy eyelids, dewlaps, jowls, liver spots and deep wrinkles—the road map of a lazy hound dog. His hair grew wild, like a bush infested with bagworms. His mustache was of the Yosemite Sam variety. He resembled another writer: one Mister Samuel Langhorne Clemens, a.k.a. Mark Twain. Although my impression of Twain from the television show "Family Classics" was that he was a chipper and affable steamboat captain. Vonnegut seemed grim, rundown.

We took I-90 north. Vonnegut was cranky, silent much of the trip and smoked heavily. He used the dying butt of the last cigarette to fire up the next

one. He was the faithful guardian of the eternal ember. A smoker's affectations are usually fused with workaday gestures. Vonnegut's habit seemed to require more attention than the average fellow's. He looked at his cigarette often and used a silver Zippo with fierce concentration.

Outside Madison, Vonnegut told us about an item he had come across in *Midwest Outdoors* about a 50-pound muskie pulled out of the Chippewa Flowage. This enormous catch had two puppies and two ducklings removed from its stomach. Brian was impressed. He smiled and looked back at me.

"Bullshit," I said to Brian, an accomplished lip reader.

Near the Wisconsin Dells, we stopped at a Stuckey's. Here I learned Vonnegut didn't like chicken. He ordered a Stuckey burger and French fries and he didn't finish the fries. Brian paid.

After lunch, the author of *God Bless You, Mrs. Rosewater* asked to switch places with me. He said he wanted to "catch 40 winks," whatever the hell that meant. The back seat of Brian's dad's Jeep Wagoneer could seat four. Vonnegut was so tall, he had to curl up in a semi-fetal position.

At Black River Falls, Vonnegut started snoring. And at Eau Claire, he started farting.

"Hey, Brian," I said. "Your hero stinks."

"Shhh....He might hear you."

We turned off the main highway onto County Route 63, heading northeast on a winding road that snaked back into the dark green flora of Chequamegon National Forest—a dense neighborhood, to be sure. Conifers and deciduous trees stood shoulder-to-shoulder, no species dominating. Trees near lakes and the rivers wandered up and fell stiffly into the water face-first in super-slow motion. If you lived on one of these lakes you could single out a falling tree and it would take up most of your life before it would hit water.

Occasionally, the Namekagon River

would emerge and run parallel to the narrow two-lane road. Without warning the river would veer left and vanish completely into the forest or rush out ahead and plunge under an approaching bridge and veer right and vanish completely into the forest. Around each turn you anticipated the river showing itself.

Our destination was the river's headwater, Lake Namekagon. On a map the lake looks like an ailing hand. Its arthritic fingers clutch the vegetation but can't quite hold on.

I could barely contain my excitement. I couldn't wait to get a line in the water. I couldn't wait to relax in a motor boat and breathe sweet lake air—a blend of pine needles, honeysuckle, loam, just a hint of fish slime. One good whiff of the air hovering over Lake Namekagon will last you all day, adding five minutes to your life, offsetting the effects of smoking a pack of cigarettes. I'm sure we were lengthening Vonnegut's life considerably.

At around 5:30 p.m., we pulled into Hayward. We dined at Whispering Pines Landing Point Cafe and Saloon, which was located across the street from Hayward's National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame, which featured a giant monument erected to honor the noblest, the most aggressive, the most powerful of all freshwater fish: The fearsome muskellunge, or muskie for short. The monument was a 40-foot-long steel muskie painted green, cackling at the sun. Visitors entered through the belly, walked up three stories and appeared in the fish's mouth, behind teeth the size of traffic-hazard cones.

Across the street, where we were, was the Whispering Pines restaurant, which was a large log cabin. Inside was knotty-pine paneling. The walls were decorated with wild game—raccoons crawling onto partial limbs and deer heads mounted on walnut shields. A stuffed black bear greeted you in the lobby. It had a dry, dead stare. It could have used a good dandruff shampoo.

Vonnegut muttered something about "barbaric displays" and "primitive societies."

Above the bar was a muskie that weighed 32-pounds when it was pulled from Lost Lake in 1956. The fish looked like a baseball bat with teeth. An oxidizing brass name plate said this lunker was caught by Noah Shumay.

We ordered bloody steaks and Pabst Blue Ribbon in frosty mugs. Our waitress insisted that Vonnegut extinguish his cigarette before she would serve us.

"Okay, toots," Vonnegut croaked—he had a tidal wave of phlegm bouncing between in tonsils. He threw a burning cigarette butt under the table.

"Would you have a little courtesy?" I said. "Where the hell were you raised, anyway?"

"Don't you know, son, that I'm a grand literary personage. I've reached a level in our society where I can say anything I want."

"So can two-hundred-and-fifty-million other people."

"Not so," Vonnegut said. "Don't be ridiculous. Of course our countrymen can't say anything they want. During the Gulf War, did you hear anyone in America say anything against our troops in Saudi Arabia—that is, I mean, said not on TV or at an organized demonstration, but out loud in a crowded, hostile place like this one? I mean, good God! Look at some of the rednecks in here! If the war were raging now, and somebody—somebody other than myself, because I'm Kurt Vonnegut—but someone such as yourself stood up and hollered, 'Bush is off his rocker! What the hell are we doing in the Middle East?' Why, the diners in here would turn into an angry mob and you'd be lucky to get out of here alive."

"I mean, look who we were fighting," said Vonnegut. "The Iraqis were not the Nazis or the Japanese in World War II. They were a third-rate military power. Of course we kicked their ass. Could there be any other outcome? Why were

we there? To protect Japanese oil interests, perhaps? Let me tell you this, when I saw all those Iraqi soldiers surrendering after we launched our air and ground strikes, I sympathized with them. They were my brothers."

"Mr. Vonnegut was a prisoner of war," Brian said, "captured during the Battle of the Bulge." Then he said to Vonnegut, "Walter, here, was in Saudi Arabia in Operation Desert Storm. He's in the Army Reserves."

"Yeah," I said, "the stupid Army Reserves. Call me Corporal Wally."

"Well, Corporal Wally, did you see much action?" Vonnegut said.

"Of course I didn't," I said. "I was stuck in the middle of the desert at a supply point for six months. Listen, I came here to do some muskie fishing. Lay off the war, the politics and the literary bullshit. Okay?"

"Fair enough," Vonnegut said. "I, too, came for the fishing. You'll hear no more controversial yapping on esoteric subjects from me."

There followed a long awkward silence that lasted a minute. And when I say a minute, I mean the whole sixty-second's worth.

Then Brian spoke. What he said didn't make sense. It was much too deep—a lofty rumination from a college English professor.

"What, may I ask, was a pregnant lady doing vacuuming on Mother's Day?" Brian asked forcefully, pointing at Vonnegut. "She was practically asking for a bullet between the eyes!"

"What are you talking about, Brian?" I said.

"The professor here is quoting the punch line from my book, *Deadeye Dick*," Vonnegut said. He stood up slowly. He was fed up. I believe he was unbalanced. But I was liking him more and more.

"I should have learned never to go fishing with an English professor." Vonnegut said. "I think we should call an end to this charade."

Vonnegut pronounced "charade" with a British accent so it rhymed with "rod"

as in "fishing rod." He used grandiose gestures. He pointed at the ceiling with one hand and with the other grasped the grimy lapel of the sleeveless denim jacket. Fellow diners were staring.

"I'm going to catch the first Greyhound back to Chicago," he said. "And then I'm going to board a plane and fly home to New York. I couldn't bear to have my own shit quoted back at me for two weeks. Parroting lines from a book is a sorry excuse for conversation. I could stomach you, Wally, but I couldn't bear to spend my meals looking at you, professor, with that silly-ass grin plastered to his face."

Now that Vonnegut mentioned it, Brian was smiling for almost the whole ride up here. But Vonnegut had my friend the English teacher all wrong. Vonnegut's presence had an ass-tightening effect. After a few drinks, I was sure Brian would snap out of it. And then we could get down to business—the business of fishing and drinking beer.

"Ta ta," said the Author of *Galapagos*. With that, Vonnegut tipped an invisible hat and strolled out of the restaurant. We watched as he crossed the road and bought a ticket to the Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame. From our window, we could see that Vonnegut bypassed all the exhibits and was now standing in the Muskie's mouth. Judging from how quickly he appeared there, I don't think he even stopped to look at the Louie Spray diorama.

"Hey," I said, "we still have all his shit in the car."

Brian sat there crestfallen. His hero had kicked him in the teeth.

"Cheer up, professor," I said. "I bet they're biting up on Lake Namekagon."

"Wally, go talk to him," Brian said. "He likes you. I think he's senile. We've got to get him back to Chicago. We can't leave him here. I don't think he has any money."

I could see that Brian was not only worried about Vonnegut, but about his own future. What would happen if the

author of *Breakfast of Champions* wandered onto the county road and was run over by a lumber truck? What sordid things would Vonnegut's posthumous biographer have to say about Brian? Would fellow English professors hold Brian culpable if the author of *Palm Sunday* expired in north woods? Would he be considered literature's Yoko Ono?

"What are you worrying about?" I said. "He's a grown man. He can handle himself. He had enough dough to get into the museum."

"You can afford to be cavalier about this situation, Wally," Brian said. "I can't afford to be flip."

"Flip?"

"Do you know who this is?" Brian said earnestly. "This is one of America's most beloved novelists!"

"Big deal," I said. "It's not like he's famous. It's not like he's David Hasselhof."

But I had a sense of what Brian was getting at. I didn't have his professional and social life. Except for Brian, my fishing buddy, all my other friends were functional illiterates. The owner of the warehouse where I worked, I bet, had never heard of Kurt Vonnegut. He's an arcane personage.

"Okay," I said. "I'll talk to him. But we're not driving him back to Chicago. That's more than an eight-hour trip. I'll see if he wants to go fishing with us. If not, we'll put him on a bus. We'll tell the bus driver to keep an eye on him because the old guy's senile."

I ran across the road and paid \$5 to get into the museum. I spent 15 minutes looking for the author of *Jailbird*. No soap. I stopped at the bait-casting display. I was looking at some pretty nifty reels.

"Did you find him?" asked Brian who was now at my side. He was impatient and couldn't sit there in the tavern.

"Nope. I even checked in the mouth of the big fish. He's not here."

I drove the rest of the way to the cabin. Brian sulked. He stared out the passenger window at the

green-blue-blur of trees.

Our destination was Adelsheim—a back-wood fishing resort that was built in the late 1950s by German immigrant Horst Rangl. Horst was presently dead. The place was run by his overweight daughters Heidi and Gretchen—two severe ladies who hated fishermen and northern Wisconsin. We checked in and rented a motor boat. The boat was a must—not only for fishing but as a means of getting to the cabin, for it sat on a small rocky island in the cove. We always booked the island when it was available. The cabin lacked electricity and plumbing. But it had a fireplace and plenty of cordwood and an outhouse. And the whole spread was spotless. Germans must be the world's cleanest people. Firewood was stacked symmetrically at the cabin's door. I wasn't sure if I should burn the wood or make furniture out of it. The best part of the cabin was a 50-foot sassafras tree near the dock. The sap smelled like root beer. I thought this was remarkable. Each time I passed it, I pulled a leaf and whiffed the bead of moisture that collected at the break until the fragrance diminished. The last time I was here, I stuffed sassafras twigs and leaves into my luggage.

We trolled out to the cabin, tied up the boat, pulled leaves off the sassafras tree, unloaded our gear, sat down on the lumpy couch in the cabin, cracked a few beers and looked at each other. The scent of rain blew in through open windows. But there wasn't a cloud and total darkness wouldn't come for more than an hour.

Brian's enthusiasm is infectious. When the Brian Bandwagon was in town, it was tough to keep from jumping on it. But his moody gullies were also infectious. Suicide was an option at this point.

"Mortenson's?" I asked.

"Mortenson's." Brian nodded.

Across the lake is a foundering dock. It's Mortenson's' dock. A pebble trail leads up a hill to a chocolate-brown shack. "Mortenson's" is spelled out in

clean, white letters on the side of the shack. Floating Rappalas, Mepps spinner baits, pickled perch, ice cream, cold beer, mixed drinks, beef jerky, fishing rods, tackle boxes, live bait are all on sale here. The merchandise is at your elbows, hanging from the ceiling, sticking out of umbrella stands, whipping you across the shins and smacking you in the head as you stroll through the joint. It was a lake-side watering hole, a fisherman's oasis. Here you can take a break, sit at the bar and ask the ubiquitous patrons where the fish are biting and on what bait they are partial. Callie Mortenson, the owner, remembers us.

Every time we enter her establishment we recite the "Pabst Blue Ribbon Credo" before we take our first sip of beer. The "Credo" is posted on the wall above the hard liquor, next to jars of beef jerky. While we recite, Callie laughs. And when we sit down, she says: "You two assholes are back again!"

So we knew what was awaiting us at Mortenson's. It is the one thing that is a constant in our lives. We revved up the Evinrude outboard, disrupting the calm lake. We followed the shoreline, somewhat.

It felt great to be back. This was the way God intended a man to live, in an outboard on Lake Namekagon. We entered Mortenson's smiling and friendly. There was a convivial logger, vaguely familiar, sitting at the bar, shaking up a cup of dice, hoping to win free drinks. He wore blue-collar shirt and pants and a John Deere hat. There was enough hair growing out of his thumbs to make a small toupee. If he had lived in Chicago, I'm sure that a loved-one would have convinced him to have electrolysis done on his digits. The people up here seem to ignore minor physical imperfections. Moles, skin tags, skin discolorations, missing teeth, even goiters, are ignored. I took the seat next to him. He nodded and smiled. Then he thumped the bar with his hairy knuckles, leaned over and



shouted at a back-room door.

"Yo! Kurt! You got customers!"

Vonnegut ambled out with an apron tied around his chest, granny fashion. A dingy bar towel was draped over a shoulder.

He looked at us soberly with watery red eyes.

"What'll you fellows have?" Vonnegut said. "What's your poison?"

"Mr. Vonnegut!" Brian belched.

"Shush," Vonnegut leaned forward and whispered. "Keep it down. I don't want anyone here to know that I'm world-famous. I thumbed a ride out this way and stopped in here to wet my whistle. Old lady Mortenson thought I was a vagrant. She's taking pity on me by letting me tend bar. I'm getting \$5 an hour plus tips. The hour-and-a-half I've worked here has been very pleasant.

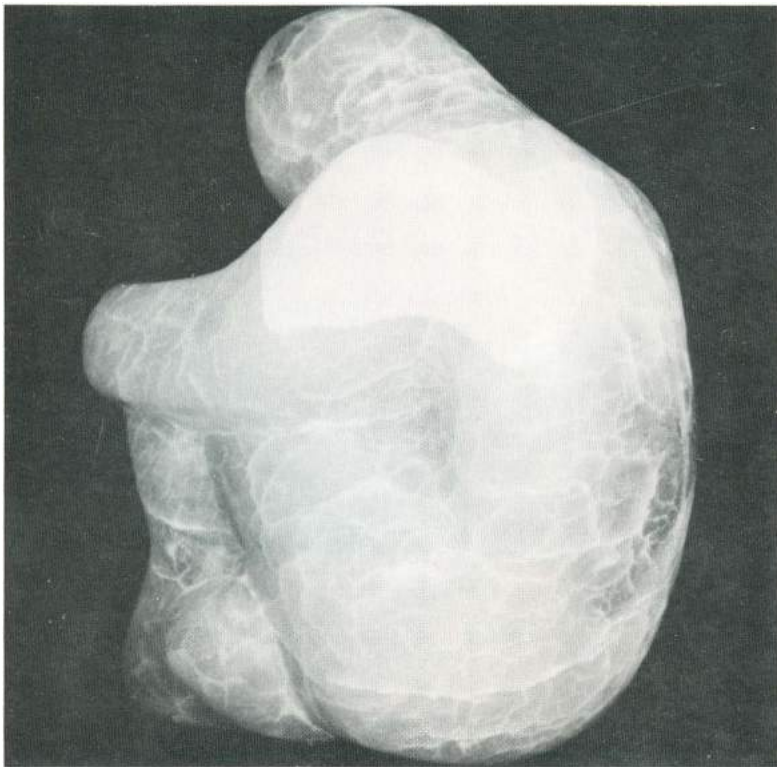
"Do me a favor, professor," Vonnegut said. "When you return to that teaching position at that provincial college, don't tell any of the academics or the press where I am at. I want a little peace. I want to become another J.D. Salinger. I don't need a heard of rubbernecks thundering up here to have a look at the freak-author-turned-bartender."

"Where did you learn how to be a tend bar?" I asked.

"While researching my book *Jailbird* I attended a College of Mixology in Manhattan" he said. "Consequently, it was in Manhattan where I learned how to mix a Manhattan. Enough of this trifling. What'll you have?"

That's where we left the author of *Bluebeard*, in northern Wisconsin. According to Brian, the academic world doesn't have a clue as to Vonnegut's whereabouts. He hasn't been seen in New York for years. I'm one of the few fellows who knows his whereabouts. He still works at Mortenson's.

Brian told me recently that he is breaking his silence. He is preparing a paper on the subject, which he said is to be published in the *Spoon River Review*.



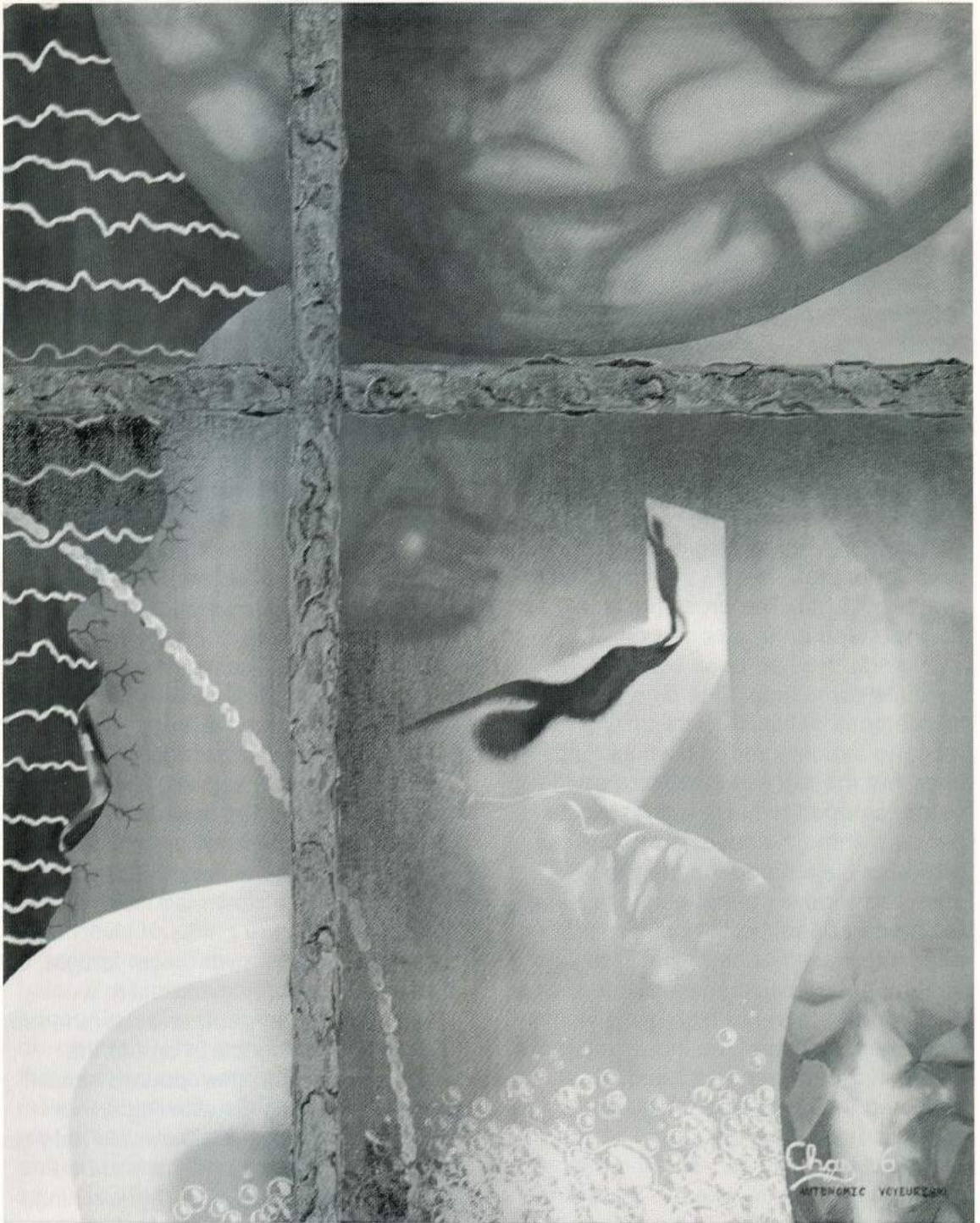
Heidi Russ  
Untitled  
Sculpture (Marble)  
(9" x 10" x 12")

## Track 8

I like his voice.  
The breaks are hard.  
They jerk you back and forth  
They pound at the root  
Bass-knocks my breath out  
like a tickle  
Listen-  
a sweet pleading rolls through  
The solar numbness spirals  
higher  
Twirling upward over the third  
Echoing strange secrets  
This touches a center point in the crown  
The point– echoes madness in my ear  
Ahh– the happy hit it.  
Elation  
Desire

Now drop  
Back down

Deep Breath.



Chas Hinners  
**Autonomic Voyeurism**  
Oil painting  
(16" x 20")

## Boom

He hadn't slept for two nights. Nothing new, there had been times in which he couldn't sleep for weeks. In such nights he would stand in front of his window and watch the street from the fifth floor. He hated the sight of the gloomy trashy sidewalks. He hated living in that rat-infected building. He hated living in that slum neighborhood.

It was murky outside, sort of rainy. He had been trying to sleep, and run away from his thoughts, but not even getting drugged up worked tonight. It was Sunday night; usually on Sunday nights a prostitute would stand by the lamplight in front of where there used to be a liquor store before the Korean owner got shot. The prostitute would always stand on that corner on weekends. He had been watching her for quite some time. One time in which the demons of his life were driving him mad, he almost jumped from the fifth floor, but the sight of the whore on the corner stopped him. He didn't want to put on a show, he never wanted to put on a show. He hated the idea to be seen like a clown, although that's all he felt he had been throughout his life. The prostitute wasn't at her usual spot yet tonight, but he could imagine her pacing back, and forth in her high heels with a cigarette lit between the index and the middle finger of her right hand. He despised the tic-tic of her high heels because it was like the sound of an activated bomb. tic, tic, tic. Something was due to explode, like the blast of the gunshot the night the Korean was shot. He will never forget the anguish he awoke with the sound of it, much less the odor of gunpowder filtering with the cool air into his apartment. He had seen the Korean hours before, when he bought a bottle of Jack Daniels, and a pack of Camels. He heard the grim wail of the sirens coming, and the voices of the crowd getting louder, but he didn't dare to approach the window that night.

He didn't sleep for four nights after the liquor store incident and on the same weekend he saw her down there pacing under the dim illumination as usual. He thought she wouldn't come back but he was wrong. She returned faithfully to her place of work. She stood there at her steady corner of survival. He remembered one time he saw her chatting with the Korean outside the store, she was laughing maliciously loud, like those hyenas he had seen in documentaries at the Discovery Channel. That night a strange car pulled over the curve, and she took off in it. But it wasn't like that all the time. Other times he had seen her wait for hours and hours in despair. He had seen her go home right before dawn downtrodden. She generally walked proud and defiantly when there were other people around, but it was just a facade. He understood that after watching her for so long. It was incredible how she covered the real thing, like her writhed breasts with wonder bra or her sadness with make up. She was a clown, so much in common.

She hadn't shown up yet tonight, but he knew she would come. He went inside the apartment, and searched for a joint of Marihuana in one of the kitchen drawers, then poured himself some Jack Daniels with Pepsi in a paper cup. Perhaps this would help him go to bed. Maybe not. He had been inhaling pot since early that evening, and it only increased his restlessness. He went back to the window. She wasn't there yet. He felt he wanted her. He remembered one time in which she was wearing her golden flashy dress, exposing her belly button. She was delicious to contemplate. He missed her tonight. He felt he knew her throughout. Once she wept softly leaning against the lamplight. She cried like a little girl. One tear of anger rolled down his

cheek, and he felt the urge to run down and hold her, instead he rushed away from the window to his room and laid backwards on his bed with his hands on his temples. He couldn't cry like that anymore.

The tic-tic of the heels brought him back to the present scenario. He heard her come. She was coming, and tonight he wanted her to notice him. He sat in the window pane with his legs flinging towards the abyss. He sighed heavily, and she saw him for the first time. She was wearing a blond wig tonight, cut off jean shorts, and a white cut off T-shirt with a beer brand stamped by the breasts. She smiled faintly to him, and he grinned shyly. She fumbled through her purse and pulled out a pack of Newports. He looked at her intensely. The abhorrent magic of the pot was working in him. She lit a cigarette, and began to pace. He contemplated the street with pain and confusion, everything was spinning around. He let go of his grip, and the abyss soaked him. It wasn't long before he hit the ground. She anxiously ran towards him. He was broken, and wet but still alive, floating on his own blood.

He heard the sound of the damned high heels touching the ground. She lowered herself down and screamed for help. The street was empty. Their eyes encountered and she sobbed desperately. He mumbled something that spurted out with blood. She came closer to him with a look of disgust, and pity in her eyes. He mumbled again, and she heard him clearly this time. He said, "BOOM."



Jennifer Channer  
**Studs**  
Black & White Photograph  
(8" x 10")

## Computer Hell

Computer Hell lives strong where I am at.  
For hours I sit wondering how and stare.  
What do I do with Autoexec.Bat?

At night the mouse will grow into a rat,  
and attack my work without a care.  
Computer Hell lives strong where I am at.

I sit back, my eyes squint and pray that,  
I will beat the system, will it play fair?  
What do I do with Autoexec.Bat?

How do I enter the Internet chat?  
Or perhaps I better not even dare.  
Computer Hell lives strong where I am at.

MacIntosh<sup>®</sup>, Windows, or DOS and all that.  
To my old typewriter they do not compare.  
What do I do with Autoexec.Bat?

Config.Sys this you wretched technocrat,  
just print it out, I say in one last prayer.  
Computer Hell lives strong where I am at.  
What do I do with Autoexec.Bat?



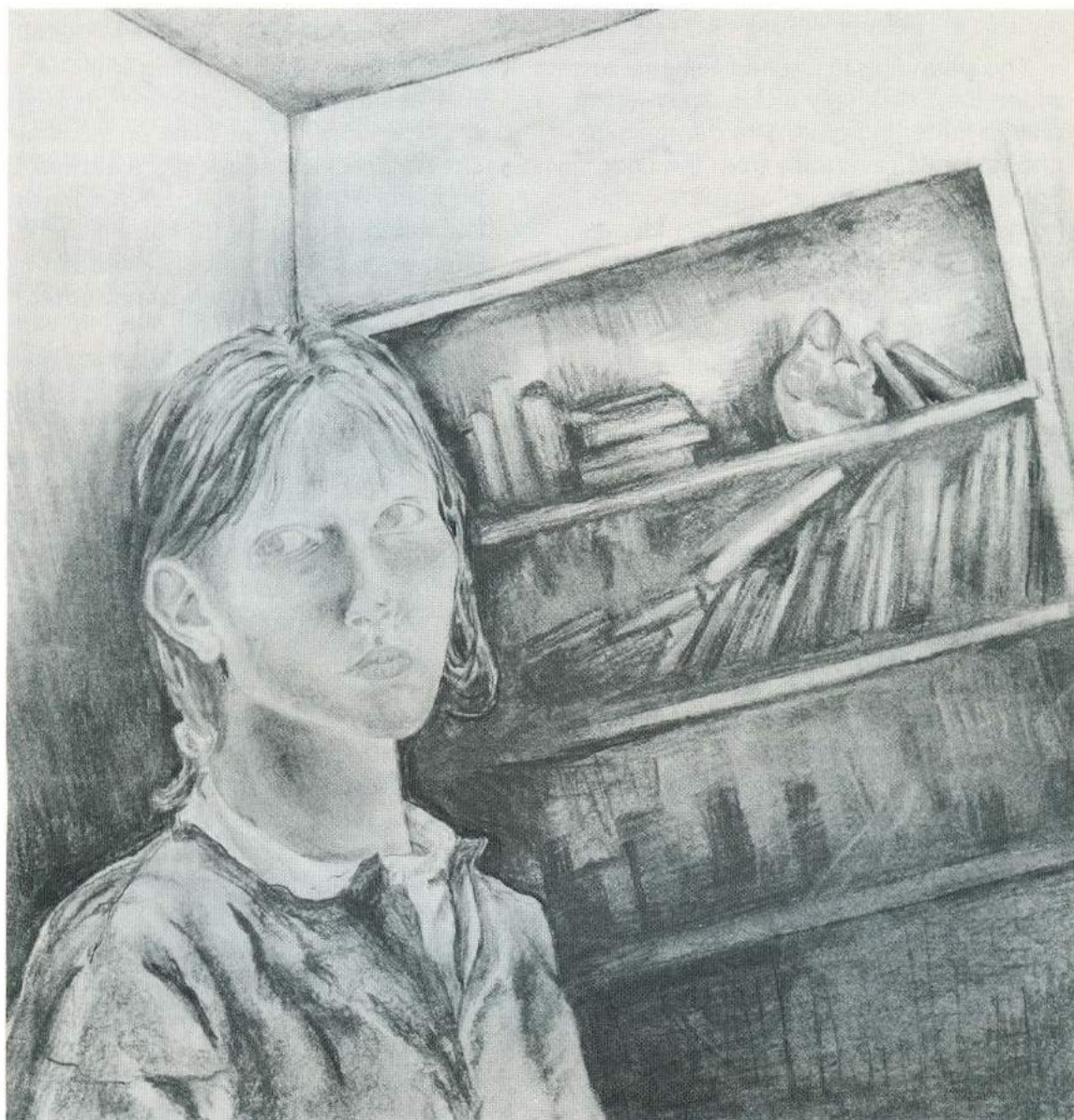
## Clot

I think I'd find the circus more my type.  
With cotton candy love, they curtain call  
Your dance of fame and juice you when you're ripe.  
And why resist a place that nets your fall?

Applauded for contortions, no one quite  
The same; to walk on glass chips, coals just fired;  
Where ostentatious clowns are never trite.  
Through white-lit nights, smeared smiles sweat, frolic-tired.

Be gemmed, bejeweled, be melted, Freaks, today  
Dye day to indigo desire. You bleed  
Your quirks and fuse as one. Once joined, you stay  
And search for doors outside the crowds you lead.

Beware when sifting through warped worlds, you'll find  
Midway, the place which whispers: "Wounded bind."



Heidi Russ  
**Self Portrait**  
Charcoal  
(17" x 18")

## Staring at the Floor

The pounding in my heart seems to widen then suddenly trickle away—stop, only to flutter in again. The demon sits and watches reverently from the floor. For a few moments no whispers come from its lips. I think It enjoys the tense silence—it must. My mouth trembles, but I say nothing. Stonily, motionless, afraid to even twitch, I sit on the edge of a bed. It may be mine, although I pray to God it is not. It seems I am waiting for my heartbeat to begin again or maybe change rhythm. It's hard to remember in this bitter light peering in through the cheap blinds skewed over the window.

Suddenly, as if by accident, I am aware that my naked feet have grown icy on the bare wood floor, and then, as if just in their remembrance, warm once again. I hold my breath unintentionally as the thought of the cooling and warming of my feet continues to pulsate through my mind in a smooth regular meter, replacing the absent, forgotten stride of my blood. I take my eyes from the demon, still patiently resting on the floor, (God it must have been a thousand years...) and an overwhelming shudder to find my lost heartbeat screams throughout my body—freezes me.

Carefully, without exerting any energy or moving too quickly, so as not to shatter my subtle, throbbing paralysis, I let my head turn and gently bend down so I can observe my bony chest. I find my hand, fingers delicately spread over the dull gloss my skin has become, heel covering my right nipple, fingers waiting anxiously just above my sternum, there to meet my gaze. I take a moment, perhaps only a thought within a thought, to remember; retrace my hand's journey from my lap. An image, the silent glide of the fist on my thigh and its ever-present metamorphosis into the sprawling caress on my ribs frames itself perfectly, lucidly into my brain. As it

wavers there a soft, melting whisper liquefies the image over a million years. A single word, "Now.", like an incessant stream's trickle patters into a tranquil pool, the echoes rippling, shifting, rising like a chorus of bells from the grand cathedrals, and in their roar rise ten thousand songs, painting wonderful colors across a starlit sky.

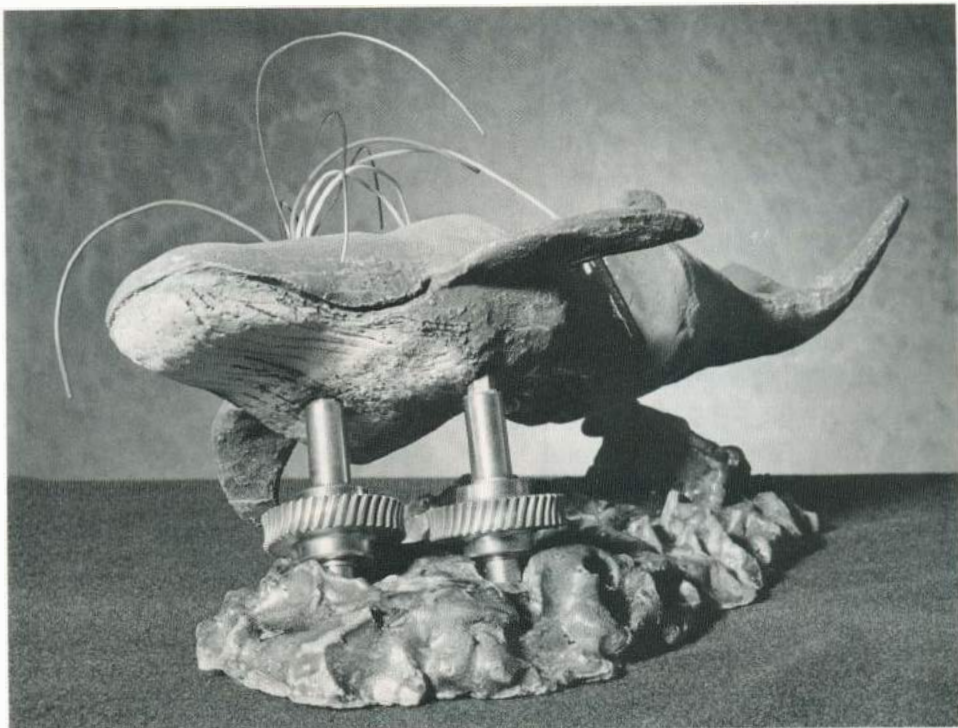
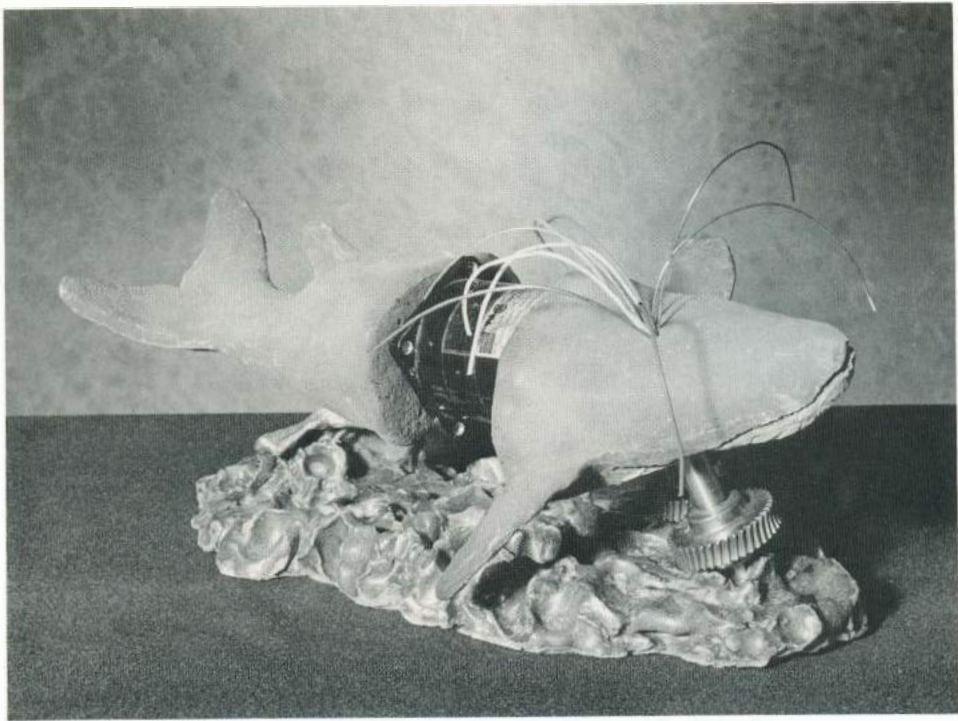
With a great jerk my eyes meet the demon's face as its lips close, rounding out the word still echoing inside me. (I hate you.) A terse but absolutely radiant smile affixes itself to the demon's terrible face, (You're too...) and I want more than anything to kiss its mouth, lick the ecstasy and immortal beauty of its lips, eyes, cheeks, its very being, its savage essence. I delight in the call of its eyes, dance in the promise of everlasting joy, freedom. I stand transfixed as we embrace, only wearily noting the disappearance of the distance between us. My eyes slip shut. All of time and space wash over my body and vanish into cool blackness as our tongues stream like delicate smoke into each others' mouths. Its pale fingers sensuously dig into my neck, tunneling under the skin of my back, drawing my breath in through its arms; while I immesh my own arms into the demon's sides, forcing it upwards, into my now snakelike mouth, my fangs calling for the demon's volcanic blood. Flesh and bone intertwine and fuse. We are one, forever and always, and it seems it could never have been any other way, as we drift into the living music of the demon's promise.

Towering walls of flame seem to lick infinity above eddying gulfs of icy hoar, matching the chaos of the fire with crystalline, sparkling precision. Everywhere hangs the scent of smoldering night sky. Nova stars thunder, symphonies of drums exploding through me like drops of divine rain. I welcome the blazing river into my skin. Hot and cold sear my flesh

as I gasp and shriek in terrorizing delight. I know the temptation of Prometheus as I burn as if for the first time and I want this for all—for all time. There is no distinction between pleasure and pain. This is sunfire, plasmic bliss. The inferno echoes and writhes in every fiber of my being. I am undying, immortal. I am life. I am death. I am everything, all, nothing, everywhere, I am the Devil, and I am God—I am the totality of totalities rushing silently nowhere in every direction.

As slowly as the demon's whisper of "Now." stole into my awareness and became a deafening howl, a million voices and a billion colors and an infinity of its own—just as swiftly, the brilliant inferno I so rapturously immersed myself in, ceases, and I am recalled to the edge of a dank, comfortless bed, by a single thud from beneath my ribs. My eyes flash to my clenched chest. I thought I saw my index and middle fingers fall ever so gently on the new coating of oily, turbid perspiration covering my skin, as if the bulge of my heart caused them to rise. Then I saw them flutter. For sure this time, rapidly, up down, up down, up down, then a long pause, a few sparse beats, nothing, then suddenly a machine-gun flurry, lasting far too long, then again stillness. (Come back!)

I cannot draw my gaze away from my chest (There is something here). I know the demon is watching from the corner, sitting patiently on the floor, unaffected, but there is a scalding pressure to remember something lost in my hand. It is so hard to think in this chilling light from the window. Sadly, calmly, I remember (again and again) that for all the eternity of the demon's intoxicating ecstasy, these seasons in between rage far longer. My heartbeat changes rhythm again, reminding me of some forgotten secret my hand would no longer reveal.



Annette Stormont  
**A Whale of a Motor**  
Sculpture (Ceramic & Metal)

