

Collage
Spring 89



Middle Tennessee State University

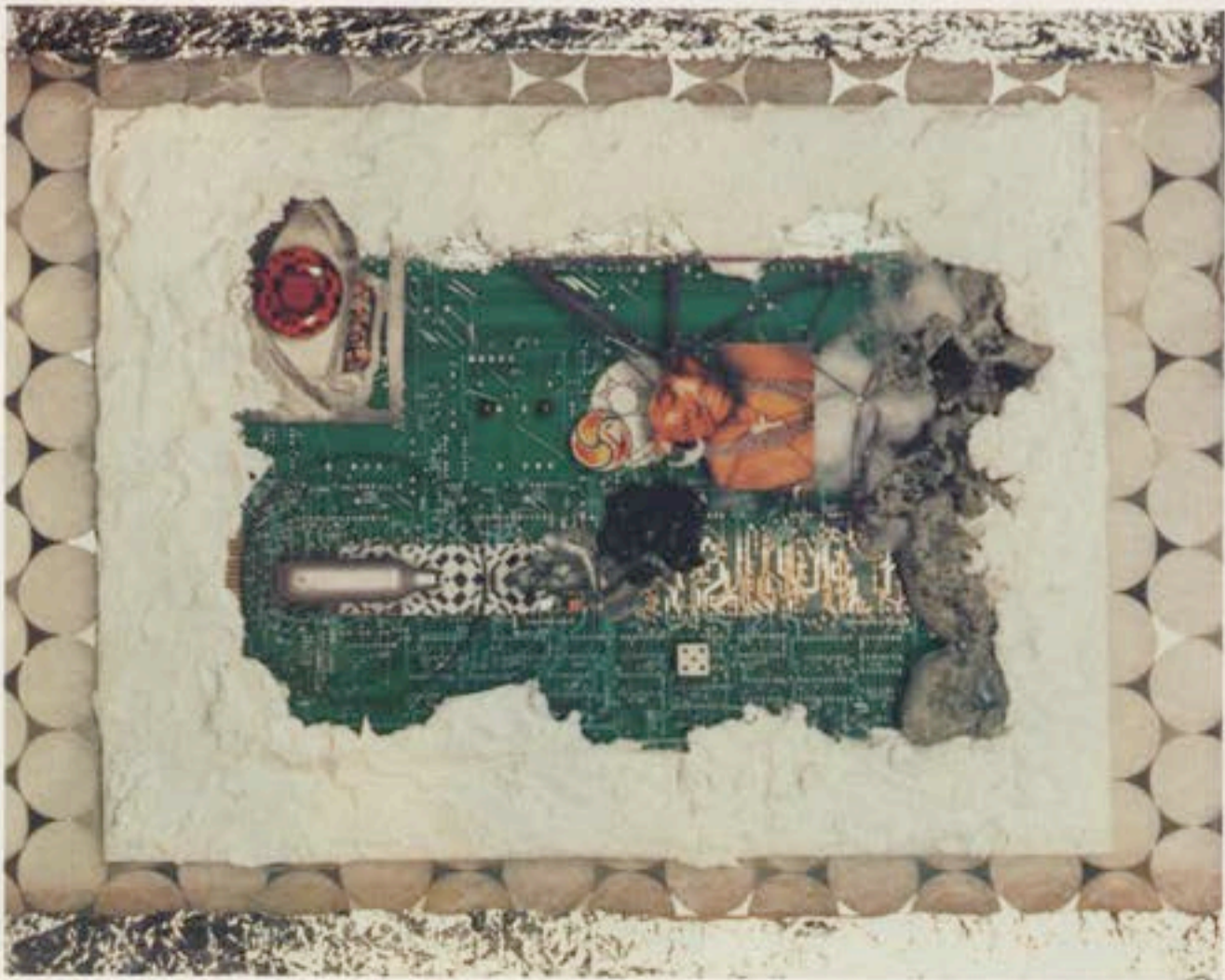
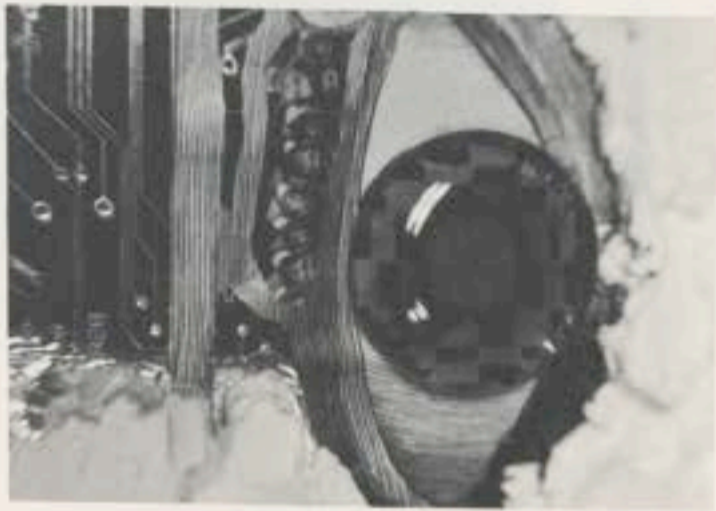
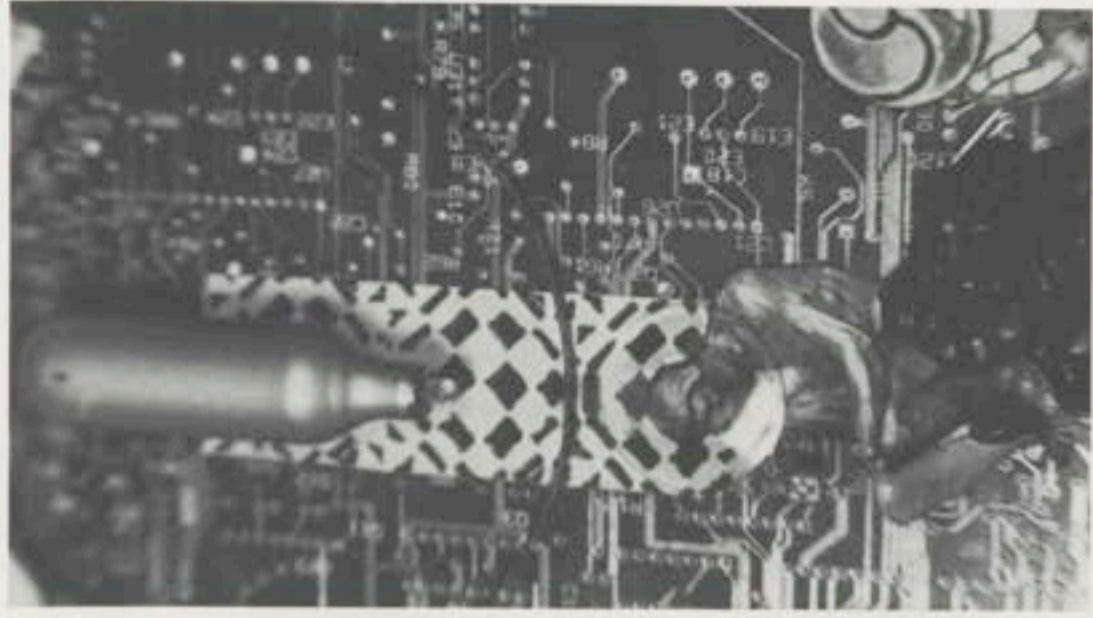
Radiant Beauty



Born Sayaphant



Art



Gene Hale

Indian Summer



Ellen Bateman Berum

Her lips are cracked, Her eyes see strange,
But that's still no reason to be blue.



Stone Alice



Eller. Gatemax Borum.

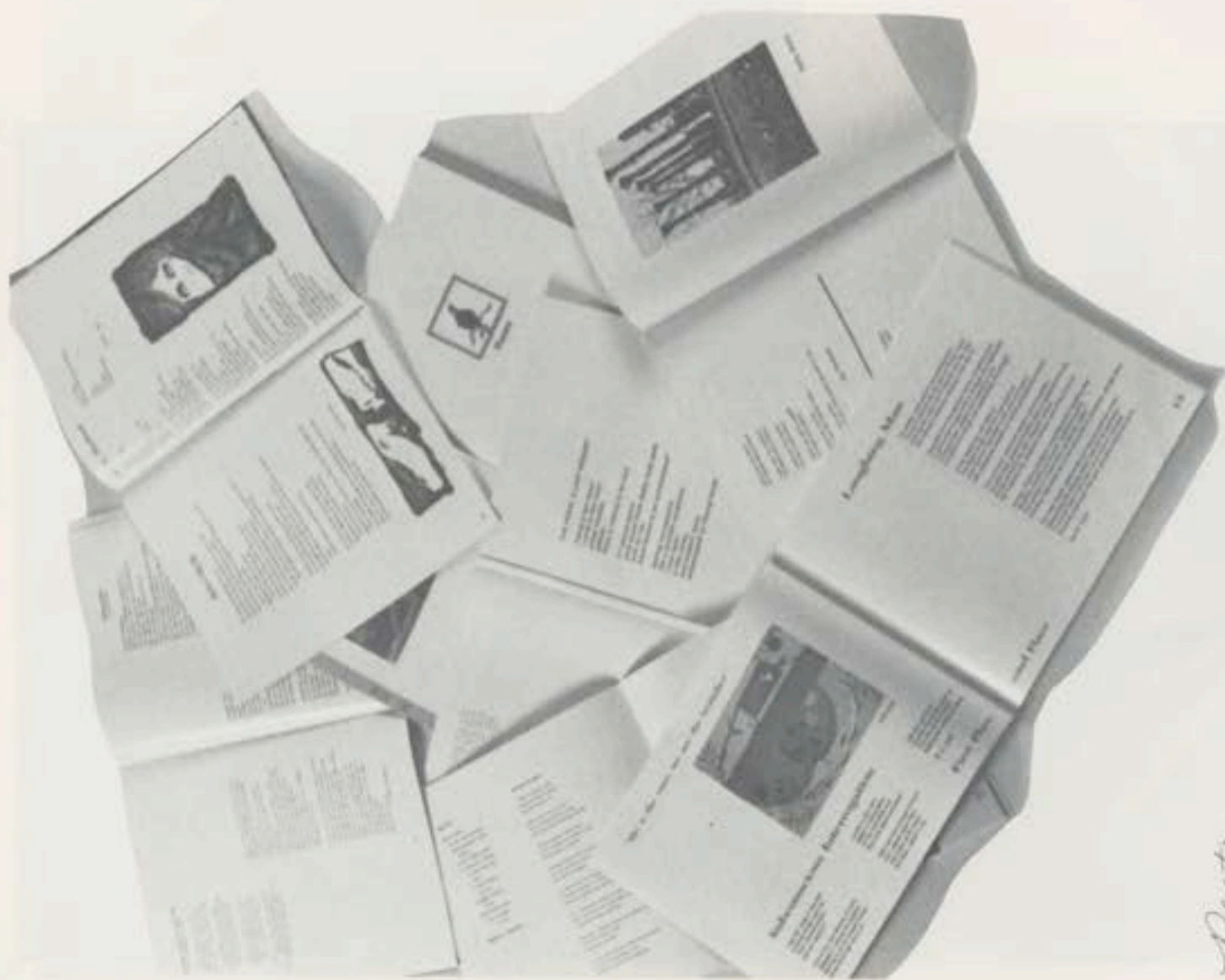
Beneath This World



Michael Russell

Bill Steben

The Clock on the Mantle
Unwound today;
First time in forty years.
Her room was warm from the shimmering sun
When she rose, rather late, it appears.
Venerable silence
She thought, and smiled
And had her coffee alone,
And glanced at his untouched
Supper dishes.
What feculence in his fine home!
Then, as habit,
She went to wake him
Then laughed as she saw what she'd done.
Closed his door,
Called for arrangements,
And made the day's breakfast, for one.



Nature's Blanket

Shane Allison

By the light of the lampshade it falls faintly down,
Shielding the stubbornness of the winter ground.

How did it know

The grass was cold

When it placed its pure blanket down?

Soon, the still wind rises and detours its peaceful flight,
But the grass need not worry or feel fright.

It need not despair

Of the chilling air

For its cover is secure and tight.

Still, nature's cold blanket finds its way

To cover her creations in peace where they lay.

When spring begins

There's life again

And the grass comes out to play.

77 Michelle Day

I can still hear mother
telling the officer the purpose
of a privacy fence in the first place,
while a 4 year old black
boy screamed "bitch" across the yard.
I wasn't home when it happened
but I could feel it when I got out
of the car that night. The neighborhood
kids were next door playing basketball
cutting the air with profanities.
Mother stood inside washing dishes,
windows raised. She could tolerate
no more, picked up the phone
and dialed the officer. The black neighborhood
children cut their eyes at me
for weeks and never spoke to mother.
She tried telling me that in town
it was a river that separated us,
that most black kids couldn't swim
to save their lives.
But I have waded the river's banks
in the heat of August and know its potential
to pull a child across it, wringing from his shirt
any former prejudice.

Feeling Needs in the Garden of Eden
Brian Hampton

When I was younger, I was absolutely sure of what I wanted.
An egg girl.

To be my fragile, giggling possession.

Now I'm sure you know these girls, because they are painted
eggs and you'd remember that.

What I got, after all was said and done, and indeed one
never "gets" these things, was a small rubber ball girl,
suitable for use in life's game of jacks.

This, I'm convinced, is grace, not justice, for a fool on a
hungry sidewalk.



Fiction

Kate Chopin

She got off the train with her teacher's consent in her hand. With her, she had two bags, 842 in cash, and a box of primers and slates, compliments of the Ladies Aid Society of Bethel, Vermont, a society made up almost entirely of her aunts. Despairing of ever finding her a husband, the good ladies had found her a situation in a small, faraway town instead. The supplies were their gift to her. She was their gift to the town.

She was supposed to be met by a Mr. Holbrook, who apparently was unfamiliar with train schedules. As she waited, she was acutely aware that she was the object of much discreet curiosity. "Well," she thought "let 'em look." Not that she was much to look at, though she did have merry, intelligent eyes. Several people politely inquired of her, and she smiled politely in return but no one came forward to usher her off the platform. She was beginning to wonder if she'd gotten off at the wrong stop when a deep, musical voice asked, "Are you, Miz Caroline Dannon?"

"Yes, I am," she said, turning, and found herself looking into the chest of a very tall man. He introduced himself as Will Peters and offered her his hand. It amused him to notice that she was standing on her toes to take it. "Mr. Holbrook sends his apologies and I'm to take you to your house." He scooped up her bags and her box and strode away. Miz Dannon quickly followed.

She found that her home was also the school. There was one big room equipped with tables and chairs. Here she would instruct her 14 regular students as well as an additional 10 who would come whenever they could be spared from farm chores. Off the school room there was a small sitting room and off that, a small bedroom. There was a privy out back.

Will Peters helped her unpack the box and informed her that school was scheduled to begin the next day. "Uh-oh," he said suddenly. "Prepare yourself. Miz Dannon, here comes the spinner brigade." Several ladies were mak-

ing their way to the school, carrying covered baskets. "They've probably come to claim me as one of their own," she joked. Will started. "Not likely," he said and then colored when she smiled at the compliment. "Excuse me, Miss, I'll just slip out the back," and he was gone.

The ladies' disappointment at Will's absence was palpable but they welcomed Caroline enthusiastically—they were relieved that she was so plain. At one time or another, every one of them had set her cap for Will Peters, none of them was completely without hope of snaring him yet and hadn't looked forward to the competition of a pretty school ma'am. They took to Caroline immediately. Caroline had many friends than she could manage until Will Peters came courting.

She never really knew why he came calling but she was glad when he did. Will was full of ideas that he was hungry to share with someone intelligent, and she was intelligent enough not only to be interested but to be helpful. They were comfortable with each other. They were both level-headed and good-natured. If it wasn't love, it was at least good fellowship and they weren't lonely with each other. When Will asked her to marry him, she hesitated only long enough to make sure he wouldn't mind if she continued teaching and then said "yes." She moved out of the school house into Will's hand-some home, and kept her temper in check whenever one of the old maids snubbed her.

She sent to Bethel for the things she'd thought she'd never want again and was inundated with gifts from her jubilant aunts. Will understood the furniture that showed up, and appreciated the pianos but was completely overwhelmed by all the books that arrived as well.

"I love to read," she explained.

"You've read all these books?" he asked incredulously. "Why keep them if you've read them already?"

"They're like old friends. I like to visit them from time to time."

He fingered the leather bindings and leafed through several of the volumes. "Not many prizes."

"No, I'm afraid not."

"Well, don't feel bad about it, darl'. There ain't many but they're fine." He built book cases for the parlor and had to admit that the books made a handsome addition to the room.

"Wouldn't you like to read one, Will?" she asked one evening.

"Well, lovey, I'm not much of a reader. I read the almanacs and the newspaper and sometimes the Bible, but it's slow work for me."

"Would you like me to read to you sometime? Maybe on Sundays, when you can sit back and relax?"

"If you'd like to. That would be fine."

But it wasn't. Caroline was an excellent reader, but Will wasn't one to sit still for long. And he didn't seem to understand fiction. If the story wasn't true, then it must be a lie and he couldn't understand her interest in lies.

"Not lies, Will, works of imagination. It doesn't really matter if these people really existed or if these things really happened. It's more important for the emotions and the actions to ring true than to be true," she explained, but she stopped reading to him. He soon realized that the reading had been important to her, that she'd wanted to share her books with him, and that not being able to share was a small sorrow to her. So one night while she did the dishes, he carried a book into the kitchen and made a concerted effort to become as absorbed in the material as he had seen her become. Finally he closed the book and sadly met her eyes.

"I can't do it, darl'. I like what I can make out of this story, but it's too much work."

"Bless you for trying, Will," she said and kissed his brow. It made him feel that he had failed her in some profound and mysterious way.

They were working in the garden one day when she said, "It's just that you're my dearest friend and the books are my friends, too. You know what it's like when you have two friends that you love and you introduce them, hoping that they'll care for each other the way you care for both of them." Her voice trailed off and for a moment he suspected it was be-

cause she didn't think he understood her.

"Why don't you just tell me the story, then? Might be nice to hear a tale while we work."

She stood straight up. "Any tale in particular?"

"How about that one I was trying to read? David Copperfield."

"I think I could do that. That's one of my favorites." She began at the beginning, adding more and more detail as his interest became more and more apparent. Over the course of the next three days, she unfolded it all before him. One night, as they went to bed, he said, "David must have really loved his mother, don't you think? Because he married a woman who was just like her." Then he paused and said, "You remind me of my mother, darl'."

They worked their way through her library, also reading to refresh her memory, he waiting with impatience for each new tale to begin. New books began to make their way into the home. Caroline taught and read and retold the tales to Will, who worked and listened and built bookcases.

Caroline fainted in the classroom one day and the rumors flew that she was finally pregnant. The doctor told Will that she was not pregnant, she would never be. She was desperately ill and needed to go to Chicago, where surgeons would root out the tumor that was draining her strength. Will wrote to her aunts, asking them to meet her in Chicago and to stay with her until she was able to come home again.

A quiet settled over her as she waited for the day of departure. All the children that they would never have haunted her waking moments and peopled her dreams. He put her on the train with the visceral fear that the Caroline he knew so well was going forever.

The weeks without her were insupportable. He wandered from room to room and couldn't seem to finish any task he began. The house echoed with the sound of his footsteps but ached for the sound of her voice. When she finally came home, he was beside himself with joy. He filled the house with flowers, and scattered the get-well messages from her students

so that they would be wherever she looked.

She didn't seem to notice. He made her comfortable on the settee and placed her with hot tea and recent gossip, but there was a change in her that he could not bear. A quiet distance lay between them. They were separated by the sea of her sorrow.

"You mustn't mind about the children, dear. You're all I ever wanted and you've children enough at the school for anyone," he said to comfort her. Her wan smile was his only answer. "Don't suppose you feel up to telling me a tale, do you?" She shook her head sadly.

"Then I'll have to tell you one. That book you ordered came while you were gone. You know, that one by Wilkie Collins? Well, one night, I was so lonely for you that I thought I would die, and I got to thinking that maybe, if I read that book and imagined it was you telling the story to me, I might make out all right, and it worked. I fairly flew through the darn thing and it did make me feel like I was close to you. I've read a couple of books while you've been gone, and . . . dear? Oh, good Lord, I didn't mean to make you cry! Why are you crying, lovey?" He rushed to her and gathered her up in his arms.

"Oh, Will, you'll never know what this means to me. Such a wonderful homecoming gift," she sobbed.

He held her in a daze of confusion. He patted her shoulder abstractedly as she sobbed. She needs a good cry, poor old girl, he thought, though why she was crying, he was not sure he understood. Such a small thing to have read a book.

Preservation

Keith Sawyer

It was a morning reminiscent of the spring, even though it was only early March. The sun's warm rays touched the air, forcing the biting chill of the night to retreat into places more suited to its color. As the sun climbed higher and higher, signaling the beginning of another day, the entire forest seemed to come alive with activity. In the clearings of the woods, long strands of grass began to sway like metronomes keeping time with the wind as it blew gently back and forth. It was truly, reflected Lyon Mitchell, as he stood on the balcony of his lodge, which overlooked the National Hunting Preserve, a perfect day for the hunt.

Lyon Mitchell was a child of the hunt who had taken up the sport early in his youth, at about the same time that the Olympic Committee had declared hunting an official event. Actually, there was never a time in his life when Mitchell could not remember hunting. He had vague memories of hunting as a child with his father, before the war. After his father's untimely death, Mitchell, who was only twelve years old at the time and, like most young boys, cared for his father deeply, had clung to the one activity with which he could associate his deceased mentor. That was twenty years ago. Now, a world renowned hunter and winner of three consecutive national hunting championships, Mitchell was about to face the most exciting challenge that any hunter could ever dream of undertaking, he had been invited to spend twenty-four hours in the National Hunting Preserve.

To be invited to the Preserve, as it was called among the more proficient hunters, was an honor second only to winning the World Hunting Exhibition, which was held once each year in Kenya, Africa. During the World Hunting Exhibition, in which the twenty best hunters of the year were invited to participate, twenty animals of the same breed were tagged and then released into the Kenya Preserve. The tag which was attached to each animal had a specific serial number. Each hunter was then, in

turn, assigned a serial number corresponding to the number found on one of the animal's tags. It was then each hunter's task to, aided only by binoculars and a weapon, track down, flush out, and kill the animal whose serial number he had been assigned. Of course, it was difficult to distinguish between the animals, as they were all of the same breed, and the use of traps was encouraged so that each hunter might more closely examine the animal's tag, for should one of the hunters carelessly kill any animal other than his own, he disqualified both himself and the hunter whose game he had killed. The disgrace of this disqualification was enough to destroy one's career as a professional hunter forever. Of course, the hunter who first arrived at the entrance of the Kenya preserve, which covered over two hundred square miles — with his designated animal-tag still intact and serial number in no way defaced — was declared the winner and awarded the grand prize.

Hunting at the National Hunting Preserve, located deep in the woods of Minnesota, was similar in most respects, except that only one hunter was allowed on the Preserve at one time, as this much smaller range covered only twenty square miles, which was just enough space to provide a challenge for a single professional hunter. Hunting at the Preserve was by invitation only. In this scaled-down version of the World Exhibition, one animal, chosen at random by the Preserve's officials from their private stock of game, reputed to be one of the best in the world, was released into the preserve six hours before the current hunter was scheduled to arrive. The guest hunter was then given twenty-four hours from his actual time of entry into the Preserve to find his animal, kill it, and return to the front gate of the National Preserve sporting the carcass of his game. If, within twenty-four hours, the hunter had not returned, the entrance to the Preserve was sealed and the professional staff of hunters employed by the Preserve began a search for both the hunter and his animal. Sometimes, although all activity in the Preserve was meticulously monitored, these searches could go on for days.

Thanks to a very peculiar lack of traffic, just a taste of the luck that seemed to evade him wherever he went, Mitchell arrived at the gate of the Preserve at exactly eleven-thirty. This allowed him just enough time to be inspected and still enter the Preserve on schedule. Mitchell disembarked from his shuttle and approached the front gate of the Preserve, where he was met by a stern looking man of about forty-five years of age, dressed in military garb. As a formality, Mitchell showed the man his identification, although Mitchell's name was so well-known that anyone who read the sports section of their local newspaper would most certainly recognize him. He signed two forms, one granting the Preserve immunity from any lawsuits that could result from any accidents that might befall Mitchell during his expedition and one which gave the Preserve the authority to conduct a thorough inspection of Mitchell prior to his entry. If the Preserve should find any illegal weapons upon Mitchell's person, this form would also give the Preserve's officials the authority to prosecute Mitchell to the full extent of the law.

Just as Mitchell was adding his name to the list of the acclaimed, a bell rang and a door to his right opened. From it stepped a man wearing the gold and silver insignia which sported the words "WEAPONS INSPECTOR." The man motioned for Mitchell to follow him into the inspection room, which he did. Mitchell was then instructed to disrobe, and while the Inspector's assistants searched Mitchell's gear and clothes, the Inspector himself searched Mitchell for any concealed illegalities. The only weapons that were not allowed into the Preserve were guns, as they had been outlawed for private use several years earlier. Although all hunters were inspected as a part of the admissions process, the hunter who attempted to smuggle a gun into the Preserve was the exception, not the rule. Very few serious hunters condoned the use of guns, the general consensus was that guns did not provide the game with a sporting chance.

Apparently satisfied that Mitchell was harboring no concealed weapons, the inspector

motioned for Mitchell to hand him the form which he had kept, the one permitting the search of Mitchell's body and equipment. Mitchell complied, and the inspector slapped the form with a large, red stamp which read, "O.K. FOR ENTRY." The inspector then signed the form and motioned to a man seated in a control booth located high above the inspection room, whom Mitchell at first thought he recognized and then attributed the man's familiarity to the excitement precipitated by his anticipation of his day on the Preserve.

Mitchell turned to ask the Inspector a question and was surprised to find himself alone in the inspection room. He tried the door through which he had entered, but it was locked and sealed. Just as he was about to question the validity of the Preserve, an alarm sounded, and Mitchell heard the grunting of several large hounds being drawn. Then, to Mitchell's surprise, the wall facing him began to rise, much like an old-fashioned garage door. Beyond the wall lay a lush green forest unlike anything he had ever seen.

Mitchell stared in awe at the sight before him. There were large, green trees, some almost fifty feet tall. In the distance, he heard a strange sound that he could only imagine was a brook, flowing with the pure water rumored to be found in the Preserve. It was just as beautiful as he had imagined it would be, perhaps even more beautiful than the many books he had read had described it. Quickly, Mitchell gathered his equipment and stepped into the Preserve, with adrenalin coursing through his veins. Mitchell inhaled deeply, and the scents of wet earth, wood, and flowers filled his nostrils. He was amazed. The Preserve already seemed to be in full bloom, yet from what he had read, this part of the country should only now be ending a long, hard winter. It was truly a beautiful sight.

Suddenly, as if to awaken Mitchell from his dreamlike state, the door through which he had entered closed swiftly behind him, and he heard the sound of the large bolts locking him into the preserve. Mitchell noticed a large square area on the back of the large, steel door, which illuminated as he stared at it intently. At once,

he recognized this area as his timer. Immediately below the timer was a red button. Mitchell knew the rules. At the completion of his expedition, he had but to push the button to stop the timer and open the door. If the timer expired before Mitchell returned, the Preserve's staff would immediately begin a search for his body, which could inevitably be found beside a satisfied animal. The timer now read 24:00:00. To start the timer and officially begin his expedition into the preserve, Mitchell must push the red button. He was due to start his hunt at noon. He looked at his watch, which read 11:59:46.

Mitchell stood ready, finger poised on the button, for what seemed like an eternity. He grew more and more anxious as the seconds, signaled by almost inaudible ticks of his watch, quickly turned from future to present to past. Finally, Mitchell's watch read 12:00:00. His trembling finger pressed the red button, and the counter began its backwards progression to zero. With a deep breath, Mitchell stepped into the forest. The hunt was underway.

Mitchell drew his compass and aimed himself due north. His quarry could be anywhere within the Preserve, and north was as good a direction to begin in as any. He walked slowly through the Preserve, not only taking in all of its natural beauty, but looking for signs of his prey. Mitchell walked for over an hour, stopping only once to place a small beacon on the side of a rather large tree. This would aid him later, should he become lost in the expense of the Preserve. Mitchell looked up and saw the grand mountain range looming in the distance. He remarked to himself that he must, if time permitted, climb one of the lower peaks. He had always wanted to climb mountains, and, as few mountains had survived the war, this could be his only chance.

As Mitchell daydreamed about how the Preserve must look from the highest peak in the range, he heard a rustle not more than one hundred yards away from him. He stopped and listened cautiously, not wishing to reveal himself to whatever was causing the disturbance. Slowly, he turned to face the rustling sound

and checked his compass. The sound was coming from the southeast.

Mitchell inched his way through the forest's lush vegetation toward the sound, being careful not to make any noises discernible as those of a hunter's approach. As he walked, he noticed the gurgling sound which he had thought earlier to be that of a brook became louder and louder with each step. Suddenly, the green foliage of the Preserve came to a halt in a clearing filled with tall grass. A gentle breeze was blowing, causing the grass to sway back and forth, producing the rustling that he had heard earlier.

Mitchell was just about to retrace his steps when he noticed something peculiar. One section of the grass, the section closest to the bank of the brook which indeed ran through the clearing, was moving out of time with the wind. Mitchell crouched and removed his binoculars from his pack. He raised them to his eyes and looked carefully at the mistimed section of grass. There, barely discernible in the tall grass, was his animal. It was drinking from the brook.

Mitchell paused for a moment to admire the beauty of this beast, so calm, so unsuspecting. It was a large specimen, measuring almost four feet in length and weighing, Mitchell guessed, close to one hundred and fifty pounds. Its skin was a brownish-white color, and its jet-black fur would most certainly fetch a handsome price at the furriers' market. The Preserve had surely honored Mitchell by allowing him to hunt this animal, which was probably among the finest in their private stock. Of course, the animal's muscular hind legs would make it fast, but a truly smart animal would not have allowed itself to be captured and put into the Preserve in the first place, and Mitchell was confident that his advantage lay in this, his superior intellect.

Mitchell took a moment to glance at his watch. Only four hours had elapsed since the commencement of his hunt. He remembered the record time for the completion of an expedition, which had been set during the second year of the Preserve's operation by a Frenchman, M. Philippe D'Arno, who had managed

to track and kill his game in only eight and one-half hours. If he acted quickly, Mitchell would be able to capture the animal before it could be captured by someone more deserving, by an American, demonstrating to the world once and for all the superiority of the American hunter.

Carefully, Mitchell reached into his pack and removed his crossbow and one sleek, metallic arrow. This special arrow, available only to professional hunters, was made of a special metal alloy which enabled it to fly farther, faster, and more accurately toward its intended target. Carefully, he readied his bow, placing the shaft of his arrow against the already taut string of his weapon, now ready to spring into deadly action. Cautiously, Mitchell crept toward his prey, arrow glistening in the warm afternoon sun. He chuckled to himself, he was within twenty yards of this beast, yet the poor animal did not even sense his presence. How easy this would be. Slowly, the famous hunter raised his weapon toward his target. Suddenly, as he was about to fire, a glint of sunlight from Mitchell's arrow caught the beast square in the face and in a flash of fur, it had disappeared into the dense underbrush which lay just past the clearing.

Mitchell cursed himself, first for his stupidity and secondly for his arrogance. Now, he would have to start over from the beginning. At least this time, he thought, he had one advantage: he had seen the direction of the animal's flight. Mitchell, anxious to make up for lost time, shouldered his crossbow and headed in the direction in which the beast had fled.

Three hours later, Mitchell stood perplexed in the afternoon sun, asking himself where the hell his animal could have gone. He had searched in every conceivable hiding place within a two square mile radius, and yet there was still no sign of his game. Soon, Mitchell thought to himself, night would fall and he would have to waste eight valuable hours while he waited for sunrise. There was no use hunting in the dark.

With a sigh of frustration, Mitchell made his way back to the clearing where he had first spotted his animal. He was thirsty, and the

clearing provided him not only with liquid refreshment but an excellent place to camp. Also, thought Mitchell, with some luck the animal might return to this brook with the hope of quenching its thirst, and if it was indeed foolish enough to attempt this, he would be ready.

It was evening. The twittering of birds had become the chirping of crickets. The sun, glowing ever dimmer, cast an orange glow across Mitchell as he lay his bedroll down under the deep, blue, sky. Mitchell had already built himself a small fire from some wood he had found near the brook, which he was surprised to find burned better than any wood he had ever seen. Mitchell stopped back, admired the fruits of his labor, and smiled. Not only had he managed to set up his camp in less than two hours, he had also managed to set traps along a ten yard perimeter of the place where he had first seen the beast. These traps were very simple, and designed not to hurt the beast should he stumble into one, but simply designed to implant into whatever part of the animal that it touched a small transmitter, about the size of a pinhead. This transmitter, after approximately two hours, would begin to emit a signal which Mitchell could detect with a small receiver which he carried in his pack. Also attached to each trap was a small beacon which would begin to flash, signaling that the trap had been sprung, at about the same time that the small transmitter began to emit its signal which would show the beast's proximity to Mitchell. Of course, if the animal should stumble upon him at some point during the night, Mitchell had his crossbow ready.

It was now dark. Mitchell's only light came from his fire, which cast its golden warmth across Mitchell's body as if to protect him from the chill night air. Far away, the evening's most precious stars sparkled contentedly. Secure in his plans, Mitchell consumed a small part of his food, lay across his bedroll, and began to dream.

The sun, which shined with urgency on Mitchell's eyes, served as a natural alarm loud enough to cause him to bolt up with a start. Mitchell hurriedly checked his watch and dis-

covered that it was only six-thirty. Lasciviously, he had not overslept. With a sigh of relief, Mitchell rose from his bedroll and began to collect his equipment. First, he restored his bedroll to its original position atop his pack. He then doused the wood, which had been reduced mostly to ashes, with water from his canteen. Finally, Mitchell carefully slung his crossbow across his back and headed for the stream, where he had placed several of his traps. It was just as he had suspected — two of his traps were flashing with a white beacon, indicating that they had been sprung. Mitchell removed his tracking device from his pack. He smiled when he saw that it was receiving two signals, each originating from within one foot of the other. According to these transmitters, the animal was moving at the approximate speed of five miles per hour in the direction of south by southeast. Mitchell fumbled for his compass and turned to face the direction in which the tracker indicated the animal was moving. He smiled with delight as he saw that his compass had pointed him toward the mountain range. Hurriedly, Mitchell refilled his canteen and started for the mountains.

As he started off in the direction of his animal, Mitchell planned the rest of his expedition into the Preserve. He had five and one-half hours left. The mountain range was about a one and one-half hour walk from his present location. Allowing one hour to track his animal once he reached the mountains and an additional two and one-half hours to return to the Preserve's entrance, he should arrive exactly on schedule.

Although the range was somewhat difficult, it was no more so than Mitchell had suspected that it would be. With little effort, he scaled the mountainside, all the time watching with satisfaction as the animal's signal grew stronger and stronger. At last, after a climb of some four hundred yards, he reached a small cliff, which measured about ten yards long by five yards wide. It was here that he paused briefly to turn and survey the Preserve from this new perspective. The breathtaking view, which enabled him to see everything for five miles, stunned him

for just long enough to make a permanent impression on his mind. Mitchell would have stood longer, but his concentration was broken by the sound of a low growl. He turned to discover a natural opening in the mountain. It was from the orifice that the sound which he had heard had reverberated. Mitchell looked at both his tracker and his watch. He still had plenty of time. It was only nine o'clock, and the tracker read that the animal lay only some one hundred yards straight ahead.

Obviously, this cave was the animal's lair. Mitchell bestated. He had heard the tales of old, about the hunters who had followed their animals into their lairs with the intention of killing them, only to become hopelessly lost. Some unfortunate men had unexpectedly stumbled into their intended game, and the hunters had rapidly become the hunted.

As Mitchell reflected on several ways to finish out his game, he suddenly remembered that he had brought several flares. One flare strategically placed about every hundred paces should provide him with sufficient lighting and mark his path, so that he might easily return to the cave's opening. As for being unprepared, Mitchell thought as he drew his loaded crossbow, that would not be a problem.

The cave, thought Mitchell, as he stepped inside, smelled rotten, like nothing he had ever smelled, like a mixture of droppings and spoiled fruit. The air was cool and damp, and in the distance, he thought he heard water dripping slowly into a pool. With perhaps just a touch of apprehension, Mitchell began the procession to where his quest would inevitably end, pausing only once every hundred paces or, as often as he remembered, to drop a lighted flare.

The low growl which Mitchell had heard at the entrance of the cave sounded again, this time closer than Mitchell would like to have believed that it was. He checked his tracker, which read that the beast was less than twenty-five yards away. Mitchell raised his crossbow.

After walking for what seemed like an eternity, but could have been no more than fifteen yards, Mitchell came to a fork in the cave. He

stopped and checked his receiver again, which read that the beast still had not moved. According to his tracker, his quarry lay only ten yards or so ahead in the murky darkness of the cave.

A sudden stray thought made Mitchell doubt. What if the head lay just ahead, out of his sight, waiting in ambush in one of the dark alcoves that dotted the cave's interior? No, Mitchell reassured himself, even if the beast was waiting for him, his arrows flew faster than animals could spring, and Mitchell, confident with this new patronization chose the tunnel to the left and entered it.

Mitchell again consulted his receiver. It read that the beast was within five yards from where he stood. Mitchell, his adrenals pumping, quickly raised his lighted flare and surveyed the part of the cave in which he stood. It ended four yards from his position in a wall of what appeared to be granite. Besides himself, there was nothing alive in that cavern, although Mitchell's tracker indicated that the animal should be within his range of vision.

Just as Mitchell was about to decide that his tracker was in need of repair, he again heard the growl which he recognized as that of his supposed prey. The sound was more frightening this time, however, because it was more quiet, yet sounded closer. For a final time, Mitchell read his tracker, and his stomach knotted as he discovered that his device read that the animal was indeed within five yards of Mitchell — five yards to the rear. Cautiously, Mitchell turned to find himself face to face with his prize, which had cunningly hidden itself in one of the dark alcoves just beyond the entrance to the cavern which Mitchell had chosen to search. It was eyeing Mitchell hungrily.

Mitchell's heart raced. Certainly any sudden move would incite the beast to attack, thus ending his expedition and his career. Slowly, the animal crept. Mitchell, its large white teeth gleaming in the dim red light of Mitchell's flare. It would have made a beautiful picture, Mitchell thought, the hunter and the hunted surveying each other before the kill. Mitchell stood stoically, not daring to move, never sure if or when the animal, which clearly had the advantage, would decide to attack. His mind raced, trying and rejecting hundreds of possible answers to his problem. Suddenly, the solution

to his dilemma came to him. A glint of light from his arrow had been enough to frighten the beast from its watering hole; what would the creature do if a flare were suddenly ignited, causing a small popping sound and a sudden burst of white light? Perhaps if he could stun the animal with the bright light which emanated from a newly-ignited flare, he could buy himself enough time to raise his crossbow and fire. Of course, it was a gamble, Mitchell thought, but he knew that he was in no position to hedge his bet.

Slowly, carefully, Mitchell reached into his pocket and fumbled for a flare. His fingers found one, curled around it, and methodically brought it out into the open, into the view of the unwary animal, which continued to circle Mitchell. With his free hand, Mitchell released the safety mechanism of his crossbow and curled one finger around its trigger. He was sure that he would have only one shot at his game before it recovered from its initial shock and turned on him, and he knew that he had better make it count.

Mitchell mustered his strength and, with a quick motion, ignited the flare. The small pop and the bright flash that ensued were enough to cause his prize to blink, momentarily, into the alcove from which it had emerged. Then, with a flash of fury, it sprang at Mitchell. The famous hunter quickly raised his weapon, took aim, and fired. The arrow struck home, plowing itself deep into the animal's breast. The beast let out a howl of pain and dropped in mid-lunge to Mitchell's feet, where it lay panting. Moments later, it died.

Cautiously, Mitchell came forward to examine his specimen. Yes, he reflected, it was truly a beautiful creature. Luckily, his arrow had not damaged the hide — much. He also checked the inside of the right hind leg to make sure that the serial number was intact. It was.

A quick examination of Mitchell's watch revealed that he had but two hours to return to the Preserve's entrance, and this meant that he had to work quickly. First, he removed from his pack a length of rope, with which he tied the front and hind legs of the animal. Mitchell then slung his trophy around his neck and proceeded down the mountainside. Under normal conditions, this load would have been much

too much for him to bear, but the excitement of the hunt had given him an almost supernatural strength. In no time, he had reached the foot of the mountain range and began the long trek back to the Preserve's main entrance. Hurriedly, he passed through the meadows, by the brooks and forests, carefully marking the configurations of each permanently in his memory. Within an hour, he had reached the place where he had camped the night before. He stopped briefly to drink from the brook. The almost sweet water provided him with much needed refreshment for his body, mind, and soul. He then made his way through the clearing, back into the wood where he had begun his quest, past the beacon which he had laid upon the tree and finally to the Preserve's entrance. As Mitchell looked at his timer, he felt the butterflies in his stomach jump. It read 00:13:12. Mitchell smiled. He had completed the hunt with over thirteen minutes to spare. Triumphantly, Mitchell pushed the red button.

The timer stopped, and inside an alarm sounded signaling to the Preserve's staff the return of the famous hunter. The giant bolts slid open, followed by the door, which rose to reveal the staff of the Preserve, welcoming the successful man with cheers and glasses of champagne. Of course, Mitchell paused long enough to have his picture taken with his prize, like the fishermen of long ago had done with their greatest catches. His animal's carcass was then taken to the processing room, where its identification number would be checked and positively identified to ensure that there had been no errors. After his animal cleared processing, Mitchell was free to do with his animal what he would. As Mitchell sat in the guest lounge, he reflected on his several options. Perhaps he would have his trophy's head stuffed and mounted, sell the hide to a tanner to use in the making of rare animal-skinned shoes and coats, and sell the remains to some soy farmers he knew to use as fertilizer for their crops. His options were limitless, and no matter what he did with his animal, Mitchell could be assured that the monetary rewards would be great.

From behind, a voice which Mitchell vaguely recognized called his name. He turned and was delighted to find that the man whom he had

seen the previous day in the control room and dismissed as a stranger was indeed an acquaintance from long ago. During a brief conversation, Mitchell discovered that his old friend was now in charge of the mechanical operation of the Preserve. As a special treat, Mitchell was escorted by his friend into the main control tower of the Preserve, where even the most minute details of the Preserve's environment were meticulously monitored. From this tower, it was decided when the sun should rise, what the birds should sing, in which direction the wind should blow, and what scents the flowers should emit, with as much attention paid to accurate detail as possible. It took a staff of twenty-seven people working around the clock to provide the Preserve with its realism. Mitchell did admit that, had he not known the truth, he would have sworn that he had been in a real forest, and even remarked to his companion how well the wood had burned.

Mitchell and his friend had conversed for a few minutes more when the man controlling the wind inside the Preserve interrupted and asked for some help with his instruments. With a gracious apology and a genuine regret for the brevity of their meeting, Mitchell's friend escorted him back to the Preserve's lounge, where Mitchell continued to sip champagne and wait for the records people to clear his animal.

After about twenty minutes, a loudspeaker announced to Mitchell that his quarry had cleared processing and had been loaded into the shuttle which was waiting to transport Mitchell to his hotel. Gingerly, Mitchell set his crystal champagne glass down upon one of the tables located in the lounge. He then rose and walked to the gate where he had signed in. The same clipboard was shoved into his face by the graff entries officer and Mitchell signed himself out of the Preserve. The exit gate buzzed, and Mitchell proceeded out of the Preserve and into his waiting shuttle, pausing only to take one last look at the domed perfection he was leaving behind.

As he sat patiently in the shuttle, Mitchell turned to examine the carcass of his game, which had been sealed in a plastic bag and strapped into the seat behind him by the Preserve's processing crew. Carefully, he turned

over the small identification tag which the processing crew had attached to his animal. It read:

Serial number: 05578694h-90

Name: Hegura, D.

Crime: Aggravated rape and murder: two counts

Sentence: Preserve

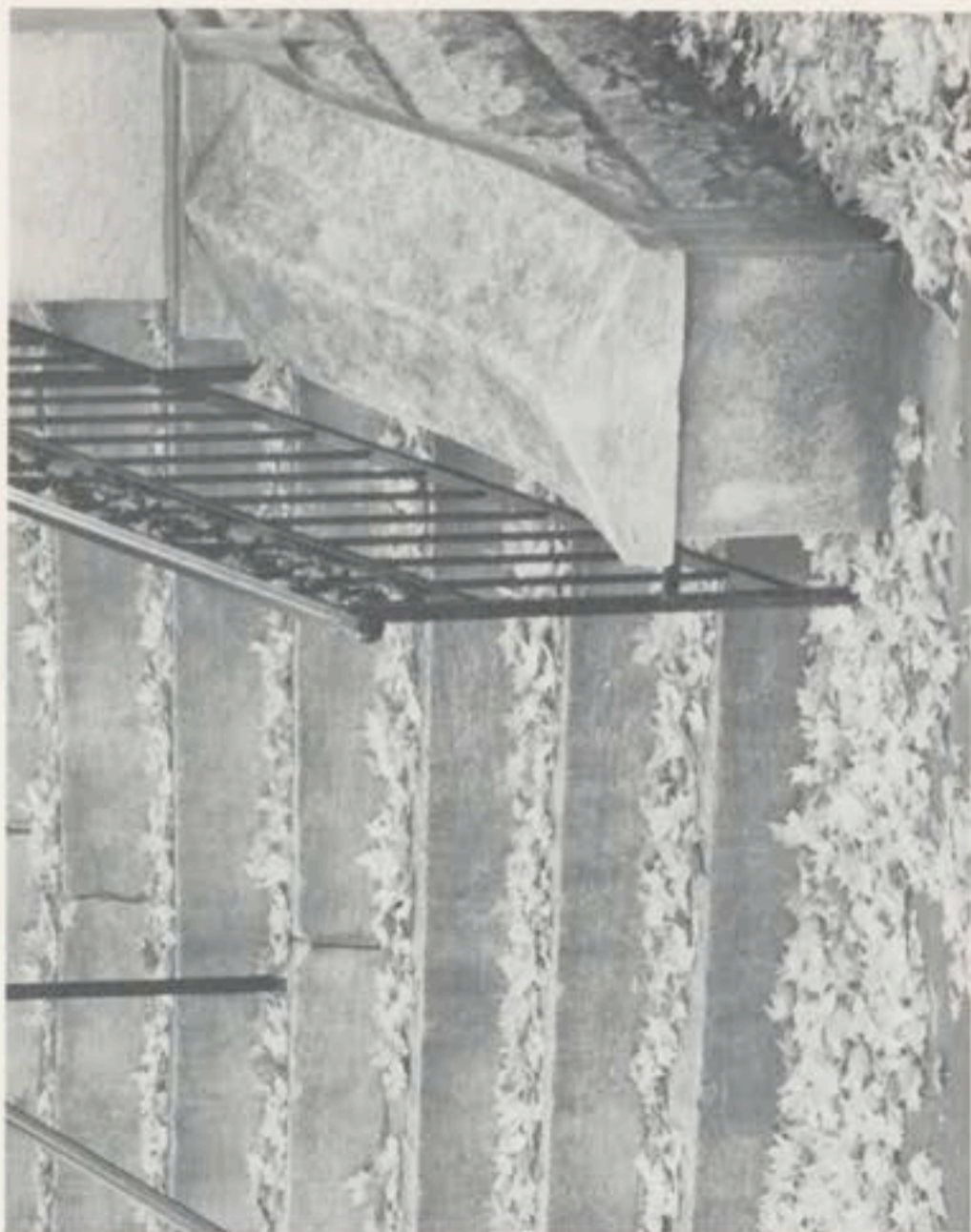
Termination date: 7 March 2023

Mitchell shifted back into his seat, exhausted from the hunt, and smiled. He would sleep on the way back to his hotel, even though it was a short trip. Perhaps he would even dream, dream of the way it must have been when other types of animals walked the earth, before the popularity of hunting had resulted in their extinction. Somehow, he never grew tired of trying to imagine how men could ever have hunted with those four-legged nuisances in the way, but he had never quite been able to ascertain why men had shamelessly hunted the unthinking animals of the past as a demonstration of their prowess. Even the men of the past, even one of those responsible for the destruction of the mountains, would appear reasonable when pitted against something with no ability to think, with only instinct as its guide. Truly, missed Mitchell, these inhuman animals were the ultimate challenge. Of course, his was a biased opinion. He had never known another way.

Mitchell closed his eyes.



Photography



Michael & Johnson



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Bill Eblen