CHAPTER 2
–
Louise, We've Got to Go!
or
Elements in a Liberal Education

I was a sophomore in college, home on Spring break, when Edna St. Vincent Millay made the first of her three appearances at TSCW. Louise and I met her and her husband, a pheasant fancier from Connecticut, at the depot and collected their mountain of luggage. At the President's home, Mother greeted them with her customary warmth and led them directly upstairs to the guest quarters. I was following with two suitcases, so I witnessed what happened.

After a cursory inspection of the rooms, Miss Millay turned to Mother and said, "My dear, this simply won't do. I find the place utterly claustrophobic." The touch of crimson in Mother's cheeks told me of the depth of the wound to her FFV rearing, but without hesitation she apologized for the inadequacy of the apartment, especially since it was the best she could offer but that other arrangements would be made to their satisfaction and in the meantime would they try to make themselves as comfortable as possible and would they like any nourishment before her appearance at 8 o'clock.

"Some ice, if you please, and perhaps sandwiches and tea around seven."

After we retreated, Mother's only comment was, "Well, never in my born days!" and instructed me to get busy with Plan B. We knew that a grand new hotel, the Blackstone, had recently opened in Fort Worth, and I called to reserve its most sumptuous suite and to alert them to the celebrity of their guests-to-be. Louise and I would drive them over after her performance. In the meantime, Miss Millay sequestered herself while Louise gave her husband a walking tour of the campus, finding him most amiable.

At the appointed time we walked to the auditorium, which was jammed with a standing room only crowd. Naturally every Tessie

who was ambulatory was there. Dad and Miss Millay walked on stage together, and after his introduction, the house lights were dimmed and she stood alone at the podium, illuminated by a single spotlight.

She wore a black velvet full length gown which accentuated the paleness of her features. Indeed she seemed positively fragile except for blazing piercing eyes that seemed to penetrate every niche and cranny of the vast hall. Without having spoken a word, hers was a mesmerizing presence that pervaded the place; she knew it and we wanted her to sense our obeisance. I said to myself that I wouldn't have missed this for all the football games in the world. And then she began to read. From "The Harp Weaver," from "Fire and Ice," etc, etc, etc.

After each passage she explained the circumstances leading to that particular composition and the message she hoped to convey. The timbre of her voice was clear as crystal with a resonance remarkable for so slight a figure, and her enunciation and modulations were superb. In the midst of one reading, a gentleman in the audience began to cough. She stopped, clutched her gown with her right hand—and stared. The poor fellow did not realize that because of the spotlight, she could not see beyond the proscenium, but he was painfully aware of the fixity of her gaze; a shuffling of feet told of an embarrassed exit.

For forty-five minutes she held her listeners in thrall, and after a short intermission she came back to the podium and turned to her sonnets, especially those—perhaps because of the Tessies present—dealing with the joy and agony of love. My God, how she could write, and how she could read. At the end the applause was rapturous and continued until Dad had to come on stage and beg her to leave explaining that she still had a journey to make that evening. Miss Millay had certainly appeared before more sophisticated audiences, but none would ever receive her more warmly.

After we walked home, she and her husband changed to their traveling clothes, and we gathered in the dining room for a light supper. She was, of course, seated on Dad's right and asked that I be seated on her right, telling Mother with a laugh that she liked being surrounded by the Hubbard men. I don't know what Dad thought of that remark, but it perked me up considerably. Her whole demeanor had changed: she was in high spirits, chatty, even elfin, like a little girl who had just finished successfully her first recital. She smoked a lot while dabbling at her food, but there was no reason to doubt her protestation that she hoped she could return. After coffee, and with

the luggage stowed in the car, she thanked everyone, being particularly solicitous to Mother, who might just have forgiven her. We then went out to our new Hupmobile, with Louise and the husband sitting in back and Miss Millay in front with me.

The night was dressed for the occasion. A huge, luminescent full Texas moon was just clearing the horizon, and it lay directly in our path to Fort Worth, making my headlights redundant. From the rear I could hear the conversation about the travails of raising pheasants, but up front there was silence. She sat very quietly against the car door with the window rolled down, apparently lost in some reverie and moving only to light cigarettes two at a time, one of which she gave to me. Maybe it was the moon. Except for one hill halfway *en route*, the highway traversed a perfectly flat plain, and when we topped that hill, we could suddenly see the lights of Fort Worth sparkling in the distance. She gasped, slid over against me as close as she could get, and grasped my leg just above the knee with both her hands.

"What is that?" she asked, with lips trembling. "What are those lights?"

I was also startled, but only by her propinquity, and I replied in as normal a voice as I could muster, "Why, those are the lights of Fort Worth, our destination, and somewhere among them is your hotel."

Silence. And then, "Jack, wouldn't it be strange that when we get to those lights, Fort Worth isn't there?"

It was not a question I had anticipated, but I replied as convincingly as I could, "Yes, ma'am, it would be strange indeed, but I don't think we have anything to worry about. I've made this trip many times, and Fort Worth has always been there."

And so it was. But for the remainder of the journey, she never budged an inch nor relaxed her grip except to light our cigarettes.

Although it was nearly midnight when we reached the Blackstone, the hotel manager and his staff were there to roll out the red carpet. After the fulsome greetings and with the luggage whisked away, it was clearly time for Louise and me to take our leave. But at the mention of it, Miss Millay turned on me.

"You will not go now," she commanded. "You must come up for a desperate cigarette!"

I looked at Louise, who suggested that at this late hour and after such a long and demanding day, our remaining would be an imposition.

"Nonsense, my dear," replied the great lady, "I have asked you to stay."

Whereupon she led us inside. In the elevator I surreptitiously held Louise's hand, seeking some assurance against a growing sense of unease.

We decamped at the Executive Suite. This was my first experience with hotel accommodations so luxurious and spacious, and I could now understand the discomfiture at the relatively meager digs we had offered. Louise and I were directed to a large sofa while Edna scoured around for glasses and her husband lugged a sizeable portmanteau and laid it flat on the coffee table. Then she undid the straps, flipped it open, and there on top of the clothes was a bottle of White Horse Scotch. Now thanks to my older cousins I had been exposed to home brew and white lightning, but this was another first for me, a genuine bottle of Scotch whisky. She poured out four dollops with no ice, no nothing, and raised her glass. Louise tasted, I swallowed, and only my cigarette dampened the fire in my throat. My eyes began to water and I turned my head to try to avert her gaze, but she just smiled, poured more Scotch in my glass and said, "Now, now, Jack, this lovely stuff is to sip, not gulp. Bring your drink into the bedroom and help me with the suitcases." Not being sure I could, I was happy to stand up and follow her. In my growing confusion, I guess I would have followed her anywhere.

There was indeed a bed, seemingly larger than life—and off the bedroom, a balcony staring straight at that moon. We stood there gazing out on a sleeping Fort Worth that was still in place, and then with a cigarette in one hand and the Scotch in the other, I turned to her, unbelieving. For how long I'm really not sure when she excused herself, telling me not to move, and I was thankful for the balcony rail. I only sensed the soft, gliding rustle of her return, but there she was in that delicate white lacey stuff. Jesus Christ, what to do now? My stomach was churning, my heart throbbing, my throat ablaze, my head a confusion of emotion, Scotch and fear. She put her hands on my shoulders, holding me at arms-length, looked up at me, closed her eyes, and began:

> *What lips my lips have kissed and where and why*
> *I have forgotten, and what arms have lain*
> *Beneath my head til morning . . .*

I could stand it no longer, and like a frightened lamb desperate for its mother, I broke and ran.

Bursting into the sitting room where my sister and the husband were still quietly talking, I blurted, "Louise, we've got to go!" Seeing my distress, she arose immediately, apologizing for such an unseemly departure. The husband—who knew all along what I was up against—was the gentleman to the end, thanking us for our courtesies as he opened the door. In the corridor waiting impatiently for the elevator, I was afraid to look back. But no one followed us.

When we got to the car, Louise took the wheel, found an all-night café for coffee, and drove us home. I told her as best I could what had happened, and at the end she could only say, "What an extraordinary evening! Not that it matters, but who will believe us?" In the depth of my humiliation of the moment, how could I know that it would matter to one pilgrim for a long time to come. Her own words had told me:

Time does not bring relief. You all have lied.
Who said that time would ease me of my pain?
I miss her in the weeping of the rain,
I want her at the shrinking of the tide.
The old snows melt on every mountainside
and last year's leaves are smoke in every lane,
But last year's bitter loving must remain
Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide.

There are a hundred places where I fear
To go, so with her memory they brim.
And entering with relief some quiet place
Where never fell her fact or saw her face,
I say there is no memory of her here –
And so stand stricken, so remembering her.

CHAPTER 18
–
A Cajun Compliment

When in September 1948 I went to New Orleans as an Assistant Professor of Modern British History at Tulane University, one of the first persons to bid me welcome was Jack Stibbs, Associate Professor of English Literature and newly appointed Dean of Students. As an undergraduate at Michigan he had been a member of DKE—as was I from The University of Texas—and he had received his Ph.D. there, with a dissertation dealing with Sir Walter Raleigh as a man of letters. He had also been in the wartime Navy. Given our fraternal and service affiliations and academic interests centered in things British, we became close companions in short order. But the tie that really bound was our love for hunting the duck.

During my years in Washington at the ICC, one of my best friends had been Hallan Huffman, a transportation economist and, incidentally, a DKE from Minnesota, who was a great outdoors man. During the two hunting seasons we were together, we had spent every available weekend shooting ducks and geese at the wild fowl refuge at Matamuskeet off Cape Hatteras in North Carolina; but, given the war, I had not fired a sporting shot since early 1941.

So I was overjoyed to find myself in Louisiana at the lower end of the Mississippi flyway where, within an hour's drive from New Orleans, there began endless stretches of bayous, marsh, swamp, and rice plantations intercised by canals. This was Cajun country, a whole new world for me, inhabited by a hardy, colorful breed of fishermen, trappers, shrimpers and oystermen, bounty hunters living in huts and clapboard shanties usually perched on wood pilings, moving over and through the trackless marshes like water bugs in their hollowed-out wooden canoes called pirogues like poor men's gondoliers, and sharing this watery vastness with alligators, water moccasins, nutria rats, pelicans, ibis, herons, egrets—all denizens of the swamp. And each October this was the destination of millions of water fowl boring south along the Mississippi waterway

to escape the freezing blasts of a Canadian winter: teal, redheads, canvassbacks, sprig, and, above all, the prized mallard piling down into the estuaries and rice fields of this primitive Eden. On a clear day one could hear the whirring of their beating wings and their honks and cackles that sent tingles up one's spine. Opening day would soon be here.

But to operate effectively, indeed, even to survive in this milieu required equipment and a set of skills wholly foreign to me and at which Stibbs was still a novice. But we had at hand an unlikely mentor with exceptional gifts. He was Jerry Capers, Professor of Southern History at Newcomb College, the women's coordinate division of Tulane, the progenitor of the Harvard-Radcliffe, Columbia-Barnard, Brown-Pembroke relationships. Jerry was a prolific scholar of Southern statesmanship in the era of the Civil War and Reconstruction, and students were attracted in droves to his stimulating, if unorthodox pedagogy, Monday through Thursday. But on Friday he disappeared into the marsh regardless of the season, for he was as much at peace in pursuit of the wily bass or crappie as he was in scouting out the feeding grounds of the greenheads. He was the most inelegant looking human being I have ever laid eyes on: short and wiry, seemingly nothing but skin and bones, his hands a mass of calluses from hours of propelling a pirogue through straggly reeds, his face toughened by the relentless rays of the summer sun or the chilled salt sprays in a winter wind under an unruly shock of salt and pepper hair, his teeth stained by the perpetual presence of an ancient briar pipe. It was difficult to imagine him holding a group of scholars at a Southern Historical Society meeting enthralled by a seemingly outlandish new interpretation of Henry Clay or Jefferson Davis. Because on Fridays, arrayed in muddy hip boots, patched dungarees held up by frayed suspenders over a tattered shirt, and a hunting cap torn by endless encounters with the sharp needles of scrub oaks, he was the swamp rat incarnate, the stealthy trapper of nutria, the renegade creeper of decoys. And because he had mastered the Cajun patois, he had never met a stranger in the swamp.

So to find two colleagues in what he deemed a stifling academic environment not only willing but eager to learn the folkways and the arts of survival in his mysterious wonderland was almost more than he could bear, and he adopted us like brothers. First he checked our clothing and especially our foul-weather gear, for it could be miserably cold and wet when the blue northers and rain squalls swept over the fens. Then our boating equipment, such as stout

paddles for the pirogues and an outboard motor and extra petrol can for the rental skiff by which we would traverse the bayous, canals, and patches of open water. Then our hunting gear, such as decoys and plastic cases to keep our shotguns and shells bone dry. Then other odds and ends, such as an ice chest for beer and booze, waterproof plastic containers for matches and food stuffs, a compass and maps of the area,

"Life in the marsh is not simple," he admonished, "and there's no point in being any more miserable than you have to be."

So our hunting kits had taken on considerable substance. Fortunately I had on hand a Volkswagen Camper that I had acquired in Britain while on a research junket the previous semester, and it served perfectly as a storage place and transporter of our equipment. It had taken several days to assemble all this stuff, but when Capers was finally satisfied, he suggested we take a trial run the following weekend, although the opening of the season was still two weeks hence. Since Jack (Stibbs) and I couldn't leave until Saturday, Jerry, not being willing to waste his Friday, gave us directions to the boat landing where we would begin our expedition and said he would meet us there at high noon.

Saturday dawned cool and clear; we loaded the Camper, and after pleas from our anxious wives for sensible behavior, we were off. Our route out of the city took us through the old Chalmette battlefield where in 1812 Jean Lafitte and Andy Jackson had given the British what for, and on eastward for half an hour until we reached Bayou Lafourche and the boat landing where Jerry awaited us. He had already selected a sturdy flat-bottomed skiff for us and tied it alongside his on the rough-planked quay, to which we transferred our gear and hooked on the outboard motor. After parking and locking the Camper, and paying the rental for the boat, we started down the bayou with Jerry in the lead. Along the way we passed several cuts in the bayou that led to various fishing camps, and as we approached the sixth one, we slowed down and glided into the entrance which Jerry had marked for our benefit by tying a Tulane banner to a tall stand of reeds. We then threaded our way down a narrow passage through the toolies to an exit which Jerry had similarly marked, and ahead of us lay a stretch of open water across which lay the beginnings of the marsh proper. We headed due south, and after about half an hour Jerry pointed out the dim outline of what seemed to be a man-made structure rising out of the middle of nowhere.

"That's our landmark," Jerry shouted, and as we got nearer we could distinguish what seemed to be a large, ramshackle house perched atop a set of huge pilings driven down into the water. Attached to the pilings was a floating pier, above which in pyramidal fashion was board planking which formed a porch around the building. The whole thing was a mass of weather beaten gray, although above the entrance was an old sign on which one could barely make out the words, GREEN GABLES. Green Gables, indeed; the whole structure looked like it might collapse at any minute.

After tying up at the pier and stretching our legs, Jerry explained that depending on whether one was going into the marsh or coming out of it, Green Gables was the first or last outpost of civilization. From here on in one traveled by pirogue.

"The place looks like hell to you now, but I'll guarantee that when you're coming out of the swamp and have been paddling that pirogue for three or four hours, it looks like the Waldorf!" In fact, it was a trading post for the human denizens of the marsh, and a welcome stopover for hunters and fishermen bound for the interior. Inside was a bar, a short-order kitchen, and shelves stocked with basic canned goods and a few sundries. Here the trappers would bring their nutria pelts and deal with agents who appeared at given intervals. Here were jerry cans of petrol available, as well as crude wooden lockers for the storage of outboard motors, decoys and surplus gear. It was a welcome way station, and also a unique spot to observe the fascinating types of humanity—Cajuns, blacks, mixed breeds, renegade Anglos—who depended on these trackless waterways for their livelihood and refuge from civilization's norms.

Green Gables was presided over by a stout, fiercely imposing Cajun widow named Genevieve and her three daughters, the youngest and comeliest of which—faint praise—was named Marie. They tended bar, manned the kitchen, served the tables, and for anyone who felt the need and had the wherewithall, they provided other services in the bedrooms upstairs. The place was generally a bedlam of the coarsest language imaginable as they screamed at one another, bullied their customers and made snide remarks about their sexual preferences. They were, in sum, the foulest mouthed, toughest set of whores I have ever listened to or looked at. But meanness was not one of their sins; as one became accustomed to the din, if not the language, there was a note of essential good nature to most of it. And Jerry was their philosopher-king. He looked like a trapper and he could converse at their level in their patois, but he was different from their regular customers: he was citified, he was

cleaner, he smelled better, and he had that mysterious aura of being associated with something called a university. So he was our talisman for acceptance.

It was here under Jerry's careful tutelage that we transshipped our gear from the skiffs to the pirogues. Now a pirogue is a sturdy little craft whose principle utility is its very shallow draft and a sharp keel that can slice through reeds, lily pods and mud flats with remarkable facility; but it is not very forgiving to shift in weight, so the trick is to carefully center the load, sit steady, and not attempt a snap shot or reach out suddenly for a dropped oar. For the neophyte, the going is tense and hard work; but for this outing and our benefit, Jerry chose a relatively easy route over mostly open water, and after an hour or so we paddled into a little estuary that led us to high ground dotted with scrub oak. And there in the middle of nowhere was a trapper's cabin perched up on stilts. The occupant was on his knees on a little landing pier repairing a trap, and he did not spot us immediately as we glided in; but when he did he reached for his shotgun and covered us until he recognized Jerry.

"Can't be too careful these days with these black scalawags jumping my traps."

Jerry had gotten to know the man, Baptiste by name, on his earlier forays down here, and he explained that we were looking for a place to blind up for Opening Day two weeks hence.

"Any birds here yet?"

"Some, a few more every day, mostly greenheads. One cold spell and de be here."

After settling down over a beer, Jerry and Baptiste discussed our strategy. It seems that the estuary cut this high ground into an island, and if we kept going up it for a couple of miles, it emptied into shallow open water.

"Good feeding ground, and plenty of toolies along the shore for your blind, and yore plumb outta sight from this place. But when you come back from the hunt, stop by on yore way in so I'll know I ain't got a pack o worthless scum on my land." With that agreed, off we went, and we found the spot as Baptiste described it.

Heading the pirogues into the mud bank and then pulling them into the reeds, we found enough dry ground with good cover to make our camp about thirty yards off shore. After unloading, Jerry took me out in a pirogue to show me how to set out our decoys, while Stibbs was hacking away at the toolies to give us more cover and a good line of sight. As sunset approached, the wind picked up coming from behind our backs right out over our decoys. We then covered

our pirogues in the reeds, put out our sleeping bags and food and drink, and built a fire with kindling that Baptiste had given us.

It was my first sunset in the marsh, and God, it was beautiful with the crimsoned clouds and the wind kicking up little silver streaks in the water. Suddenly Jerry whispered, "Quiet!" A flight of ten mallards came whistling over us, turned into the wind and flopped down on our decoys. It was pure magic. The night sounds of the marsh were magic, too—the birds on the water cackling among our decoys; the shrill, plaintive cries of the nutria; the rustling of the wind through the toolies. For Stibbs and me it had been a long, tough day, and after a couple of drinks and the sandwiches we had brought with us, we moved our sleeping bags around the dying embers of our campfire, crawled in, and were lost to the world, leaving Jerry alone to contemplate the mysteries of life.

But he had us up an hour before daybreak. The marsh was awakening, too. Apparently more birds had come in during the night, for we could hear the cackles in increasing volume and the slap of stretching wings. We inched our way as close to the water's edge as our cover permitted and waited as the eastern sky began to brighten. And just as the sun peeked above the horizon—whoosh went the beating of the pinions. To the hunter of the duck, there is no sound or sight like the morning flight breaking water and beginning their climb into the skies. There is no thrill to match it.

"Well," observed Jerry, who had greeted the dawn a hundred times like this, "it looks like we've found our spot for Opening Day. Let's just hope someone doesn't beat us to it."

Then, reluctant to leave, we began yesterday's routine in reverse. I was sent out alone to retrieve the decoys, my acid test which I almost flunked I shipped so much water. Next, we cleaned up our little campsite, leaving it much as we had found it, loaded the pirogues and headed back up the estuary, stopping briefly at the trapper's shanty, leaving him a bottle of booze and imploring him to discourage any interlopers. Then back into the open water, setting a north-north-east course until the welcome sight of the Green Gables finally loomed dead ahead. There we parted company with Jerry, who wanted to do some fishing, but he helped us load up our skiff and pointed us due north to the big stand of toolies and the cut into Bayou Lofourche, up which we went to the boat landing and our camper. On the drive in, we stopped at a Cajun bar and grill right on the edge of the Chalmette Battlefield; never have a fresh, hot oyster loaf and a cold stein of Dixie beer tasted so good. Thus we got home dirty, tired—and exhilarated .

It was in this fashion that Stibbs and I opened the duck season for four straight years. Jerry was with us for the first two of them, but then his wife, a kind, gentle lady and a favorite in faculty circles, divorced him on the grounds that he cared more for the marsh than he did for her. After that he became more of a loner than ever, but by this time Stibbs and I had become seasoned veterans who could handle the waterways without him. Our string, however, was broken in 1952 when I left Tulane to join the history faculty at Yale.

At Yale I was in a young professor's heaven: wonderful students, wonderful faculty colleagues, wonderful library; but it was also at Yale during my very first year there that I "fell from grace" by accepting an offer to return to Tulane as Dean of H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College and a promotion to Associate Professor. So in September 1953 I found myself back in the familiar surroundings of New Orleans, and with the opening of duck season only a month away. The first word of welcome came from Stibbs, who was still deaning the students, and the conversation was brief.

"Are you on for October 10?"

"Yes."

He then suggested dinner that evening for he had a wonderful story to relate. So he and Phyllis and Lucy and I went to Manale's for a kind of homecoming and my favorite menu, starting off with a couple of Brown's Martinis, followed by a dozen cold plump oysters, and then finishing up with Crabmeat Verdi and chilled with Chablis, all served by Katherine, the sweetest waitress in town.

His story went like this. Shortly after I had left for Yale, Tulane had appointed a new member to its Board of Trustees, John Doe, a prominent oil man from Lake Charles, whose wife was an active Newcomb alumna. At a Trustees' reception for its new member, Jack had been introduced to the Does by Bea Fields, our Director of Alumni Affairs, a classmate of Mrs. Doe at Newcomb and still good friends who had worked together on many university functions. During the course of the conversation, the subject of duck hunting came up, a topic that no one can speak with more enthusiasm than Dean Stibbs. To which Mr. Doe replied that they enjoyed pretty good shooting in the Lake Charles area and that the good Dean might like to sample it, a suggestion which elicited from Jack, "Sir, I am at your complete disposal." Now it so happened—and this later on from Bea—that Mr. Doe and his partner in the oil business also were rather large in rice and jointly owned a sizeable plantation southeast of Lake Charles in Plaquemines Parish near the little Cajun hamlet of Gueydan. And right in the middle of that plantation stood the

Florence Club, the most storied duck hunting lodge in all of Louisiana, and to which Messrs. Doe and Smith invited twenty guests for each of the six weekends of the hunting season. These were friends, business associates, captains of industry and finance, ranking military officers and government officials—a select and distinguished group; and for those on the permanent short list, an annual affair not to be missed. Well, Mr. Doe had been as good as his word, and Jack was invited for the fifth weekend of the 1952 season. With his face wreathed in smiles and his voice filled with excitement, he described the experience as the most fabulous hunt of his life and one in which he did not disgrace himself at the bar, the dining table, or the duck blind.

So the questions before the house were clear: would Jack's invitation be repeated, and if so, would I be included? The key to that riddle was, of course, Bea Fields, and when we broached the topic to her the next day, she said that she would do her discrete best, adding that she knew that Doe had enjoyed Stibbs' company last year, and that my being the new Dean of Newcomb might intrigue his wife. But before any of this was resolved, I faced my first crisis with a member of my faculty.

The next afternoon Jerry Capers came into my office all smiles and full of kind words about my appointment, and then at some length he expressed his opinion about some of our colleagues and suggestions about how to deal with some of the potential trouble makers. He then came to the point.

"And I have some good news. I am going to be married."

"My friend, how wonderful," I replied with all sincerity, "and who is the lucky lady?" thinking perhaps it was one of his graduate students.

"It's Marie."

"Marie?" I said, trying to think of a Marie that we both knew. And then to my consternation it dawned on me.

"Jerry," I cried, "you surely can't mean Marie of the Green Gables!"

In a low voice he replied, "I do mean that Marie."

I was stunned. I stood up and started to pace the office, a thousand reasons racing through my mind about the absurdity of such a proposal. And then they started to spill out while he sat there without saying a word. It was not the good name of the college that worried me. It was not his reputation that worried me. It was not the scorn of his colleagues. It was not the opprobrium of insulted faculty wives. It was not the loss of confidence of his students. It was Marie.

To bring her into the city was idiocy enough. But to force her into a university milieu was unadulterated lunacy. She wouldn't be able to handle it. She would be miserable, and so would the marriage. Worse than being senseless, it would be cruel. When I finally finished, I just stood there and glared at him, knowing that some of my arguments were answerable.

He just sat there and looked at me, and then with a little smile and a look almost of pity, he said, "Jack, I know that you said all these things as a friend, but I am bound to tell you that you cannot explain the caprice of the heart." With that he left, and we never mentioned the matter again.

The utter sadness and futility of that meeting was one of the most depressing experiences of my life, mitigated only by the novelty and demands of my new position, and by the fact that Jack and I had a fine Opening Day. By this time we had become quite familiar with the marsh and confident of our ability to traverse it, and each year we had gone deeper and deeper into its reaches to build our blinds; but going in and coming out, the Green Gables remained our oasis. I had fallen in love with Yale - but not with New Haven, and I was happy to be back in New Orleans with the divertisements its environs afforded. But Opening Day had merely whetted Stibbs' hopes for the season for he had drunk the milk of Paradise at the Florence Club, and would he ever know its enchantment again? There was thus far the doom of silence from Lake Charles, and he became grumpy and irritable, whereas in my ignorance I was far less concerned. With every mail delivery he would call—and curse, and he drove Bea up the wall with his interrogatories. Finally the tension was broken with the arrival of his invitation, along with mine, for the fifth weekend. Had Stibbs been a true believer, the Lord would have been duly praised.

Now in his element, Jack laid out our program. My camper would be ideal for the outing, for although we had not to worry about such items as shells and decoys, our guns, boots and duffle bags crammed with warm clothing would take up a lot of room. We would leave New Orleans on the Friday morning in time to reach Opelousas for an early lunch at Didi's and her Creole smothered chicken, a masterpiece of that cuisine. Then through Morgan City with its bayous filled with shrimpers and supply boats for the off-shore oil rigs, and on to Abbeville and Jean St. Pierre's for a mid-afternoon snack of crawfish and shrimp loaves, again washed down with that glorious draft Dixie, all of which should tide us over until dinner. Then by a back road due west through the beginning of the

rice country until we reached Gueydan, where we would go due south on a narrow track to our destination, arriving there at about 5:00 p.m. Clearly Jack believed that getting there was half the fun, and that suited me right down to the ground.

So our count down began, and slow, how slowly our target date drew nigh; on the Wednesday night before our Friday departure, Jack insisted that we load the camper just to make sure that everything was in good order. It was the next morning, Thursday, that all hell broke loose. By special messenger there was delivered to me a memorandum from the President's Office addressed to all Deans and Directors announcing an emergency meeting to discuss issues so critical to the future of the University, that attendance would be mandatory. The place—the President's conference room; the time—Friday afternoon at 4:00 p.m., with the possibility of continuation on Saturday.

Within ten minutes an apoplectic Dean Stibbs burst into my office, his face livid and his hands shaking.

"What in the name of common humanity is going on?" he fairly screamed. "What is he doing to us? If we cancel the Florence Club at this late date, we'll never be invited back."

The "he" was Rufus Carrolton Harris, former dean of the law school and now in his tenth year as Tulane's president and one of the most respected academic administrators of his time. One of the reasons the spirit at Tulane was the envy of the land was his willingness and ability to spot promising but untested youngsters within the faculty and appoint them to key administrative posts, among whom were Jack and me. (I have always thought that one reason I had attracted his attention was our shared love for baseball. In those days the New Orleans Pelicans were a farm club of the Pittsburg Pirates, and as often as we could, Mr. Harris and I would take our seats behind third base and second guess managers like Danny Murtaugh.)

"But Jack," I said, "if whatever it is is as important as the President says, we don't have an option."

"The hell we don't," he blurted. With that he grabbed my phone and rang through to the President's administrative assistant, while I listened in on another line.

"Katherine, this is Dean Stibbs. It is imperative that Dean Hubbard and I see Mr. Harris as soon as possible!"

"Why Dean Stibbs, you sound upset," she purred, "I hope there's nothing wrong at home. Mr. Harris has someone with him right now, and then he has a luncheon meeting at the Boston Club, and

this afternoon he is sitting with Mr. Jones and some other Trustees, and tonight he has to speak at an alumni dinner. So I don't see how I can fit you in today. And if this has anything to do with the meeting tomorrow, then I'm afraid nothing can be done about that."

I thought Jack would explode. "Katherine," he pleaded, "this is an emergency. You tell Mr. Harris that if he thinks the university is in trouble, I know that Hubbard and I are!"

"I'll do my best," she concluded, "but I wouldn't count on it." All of which left us twirling in the wind.

In any event, we got the call around 4:30 p.m.; the President had returned sooner than expected and he could give us ten minutes if we came right over. We raced and were ushered right in, to find him pacing the floor and rubbing his hands. Assuming his gravest look, he turned to face us.

"Gentlemen, on the basis of many considerations, this university faces the greatest crisis in my tenure here. What we decide tomorrow may well save us or sink us, and that is why I must have the advice and counsel of everyone on our senior staff. And I especially want the opinions of you two."

Our hearts plummeted, "But Mr. President . . ." Jack almost whispered, but that was as far as he could get, for apparently we were well and truly sunk. We must have looked it, too, for Mr. Harris could no longer contain himself; he opened his office door, which had been ajar, and in came Katherine and Bea, their sides splitting with laughter.

"Knowing how much those invitations meant to you," chuckled the good President, "this was a pretty mean trick, but your girl friends here talked me into it. Obviously you were the only two to receive that memo, which you could have discovered had you spoken to any of your colleagues, but you were so upset that you reacted like Ned in the first reader. Have a good hunt, bring Louise and me a couple of birds, and give my regards to John."

Leaving his office were two grown men who had never felt more sheepish—or elated.

The Florence Club was everything Jack had described. Driving south from Gueydan on the narrow track that was really the top of an enormously long dike, we passed through fields of rice standing two to twelve feet high, dotted by tall stands of toolies, and crossed and criss-crossed by irrigation canals—a vast green sea billowing in the gentle breeze. But the real spectacle was overhead with a sky filled with ducks and geese, diving, rising, circling to a symphony of mating calls. With each mile the cacophony grew until suddenly

there it was, a sunny pleasure dome rising out of a primeval wilderness. The Club proper was a spacious, three storied plantation structure with stately columns supporting wide verandas which encircled the second and third floors. The ground floor contained the reception area, the game room with bar, two billiard and several card tables, and an elegant dining room with three long tables under spotless linen, each of which could accommodate ten people. On the top floors were the guest accommodations and the bath rooms. Behind the main building was a huge kitchen, a cleaning shed, storage facilities, and the living quarters of the household staff and the guides. The south side of the complex bordered on a major canal, and there was a long pier onto which the pirogues were pulled and to which were tied up a dozen swamp buggies, shallow drafted with powerful outboard motors, which could accommodate five people and their gear. But on the other three sides was the most amazing feature of all—a vast cleared marshy area that served as a feeding ground for thousands of duck and geese, a part of the officially designated bird sanctuary which extended for a five mile radius from the main house. To sit on one of the verandas and listen to and watch the comings and goings of these marvelous wild creatures was to gain at least some insight into the wonders of nature.

There was a standard routine at hunting clubs such as this. First came the Happy Hour during which introductions were made and acquaintanceships renewed. Then at 7:00 the black *maitre d'*, who along with the two cooks had been brought down from John's Lake Charles household, announced dinner. It was a sumptuous affair, beginning with Creole gumbo, then crawfish etouffee with red beans and rice, followed by thick filet mignon, jacket potatoes and avocado vinaigrette salad, and topped off by cherry jubilee. The wine flowed as did the conversation. Finally, over coffee and liquors, the great moment arrived: the drawing out of a hat for hunting companions and the assignment of blinds. With this ritual attended to, we repaired to the game room for Boo-Ray, Red Dog, billiards, or whatever. All I wanted was fresh air and to walk off that dinner, so Jack and I took a stroll along the dike. The birds were settling in for the night and their din had subsided, but you could feel their presence and still hear their subdued cackling and the preening of feathers. The wind had freshened and the stars were out in the clear night sky, which did not auger too well for the morning hunt, but it was an enchanting setting and I feared I might be too excited to sleep. On our return we had a nightcap and then, on Jack's advice, turned in, for the cowbells would start their clamor at 0500 hours.

It was a clear, brisk morning as we made our way to the dining room, some of us in better shape than others, for a breakfast of fluffy biscuits with eggs, bacon, duck sausage and grits and that bracing chicory coffee. Then onto the docks, where the boats were numbered according to the blinds, and we met our guide, who had already loaded our shell cases and thermos bottles and secured the trailing pirogue. My partner for the morning was John Mecom, a tall amiable Texan from Houston, large in oil and real estate, whose son had been a classmate of mine at The University of Texas. Once we settled in, the boat took off with a roar up the canal. That season they were using ten blinds, all of which had been artfully located years before, roomy, rock-solid affairs with telephone poles for piling, wonderfully camouflaged, and each facing a pool of open water where the decoys bobbed up and down. Inside there was dry flooring and a shooting bench wide enough for the two occupants to swing their guns freely, while behind was a platform on which the guide stood to work his magic with the duck call, with room underneath to stow the pirogue. Compared to those impromptu blinds we had scratched out of the marsh, this was the Royal Box; and to hunt with a guide was sheer luxury. These tough, weather- beaten, laconic Cajuns had been hand-picked by the game supervisor; they were long-time residents of the area and part of the regular work force for the ricing operation, but they lived for the hunting season when they could make those wild things in the air do their bidding. Crack shots, they only fired in support of a guest who was inept or having hard luck, or both; they hated to see cripples.

Mecom and I managed to knock down three out of the small morning flight in our area, but the rest of the morning was slow going, with a single here and there. The limit in those days was six per day and twelve in possession, and those thousands of birds in the sanctuary did not figure at all in this kind of hunting for they were too wise to leave, and we had to rely on newcomers into the rice paddies. But John and I didn't mind; the morning was gloriously fresh, our blind was in a wildly beautiful spot, and we had time for him to bring me up to date on many of my Houston friends, and I learned that his wife had gone to school at the Texas State College for Women when my father was president. But our guide, Etienne, minded; he would be disgraced if we came in with less than our limit, and he was working his duck call for all he was worth. Suddenly his call increased in frenzy as he touched my cap and pointed. There were two mallards barreling in from above our starboard quarter and seemed headed across our bow for a perfect

passing shot. I got just the right lead and splashed them both into our decoys, and the pat on the shoulder from behind was all the approbation one could ask for. That filled me out and I put away my gun so my companion could have the blind to himself, and within the hour John got his limit too; so going back in were two pleased hunters and one very happy guide.

After lunch we all gathered in the game room for an off-the-record briefing on the situation in Korea by the Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force and the Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East. Then most of us elected for a siesta in order to be ready for the grand dinner, which featured roast canard au orange among a host of other delights. In the lottery for the Sunday morning hunt, I drew the president of Louisiana State University, a pleasant and very able man whom I had known when I taught at LSU briefly before going to Tulane for the first time. I noticed that we all retired earlier than we had the night before.

Sunday brought us blue bird weather again and the shooting was slow, with three blinds failing to fill out, but no matter—just being out there was reward enough. When we got back in, everyone showered and changed clothes, and after coffee and Danish, we began our departures. Stibbs and I loaded the camper with our possessions, which now included two large waterproof cartons, each of which held 12 fat birds cleaned, gutted, and packed in ice. John came out to see us off and performed the kindest act of all when he said, "I'll see you guys here next year." We could have floated home but we stuck to terra firma, making just one stop at Morgan City for crawfish, oyster loaves, and a touch of Dixie.

Missing next year, of course, was the anxiety of waiting for the invitations, and in due course we were asked to appear at the Florence Club for the final hunt of the season on the sixth weekend. Seeing no reason to deviate from our flight plan of the previous year, we arrived late Friday afternoon well-fed and happy. One difference this time was the weather; a cold front was heading in our direction, the leading edge of which was already bringing increased winds and a dropping temperature, conditions which would discourage the birds from sitting idly in the rice paddies and preening themselves in the sun but force them into the air in search of more clement feeding grounds. In other words, duck hunting weather, following the maxim that the more uncomfortable the hunter, the better the hunt. So Saturday morning brought plenty of activity over the blinds with constant flights going this way and that, giving the guides plenty of opportunity to exhibit their skill with the duck call. Without

exception the blinds got their limits, and the hunters returned cold and wet and sated.

There was another difference from last year's proceedings as far as Jack and I were concerned, one which for us was monumental. Just before the grand dinner, Doe took Jack and me aside.

"On the last hunt each year," he explained, "one guide is given his choice of blinds and hunters and is permitted 'to shoot for the camp,' which means that he can ignore the bag limits. We take those birds and distribute them among the guides and the help at the Club and to some of our neighbors and even to some of the game wardens, the idea being that when we shut the place down tomorrow, we won't leave any wasted birds around. Tomorrow it is Jules', the head guide's, turn, and he has asked that you two go with him, so you won't be in the lottery. But I don't want you to say anything about this beforehand. And you should know that since this is the last night, some of my friends are inclined to have a bit of a do, but you get your sleep because in the morning I want you bright eyed and bushy tailed."

What we didn't know, which John explained in town later, was that each guide kept a running tally on the guests: their deportment in the blinds, their concern with gun safety, their shooting skills, their general enthusiasm, and on the basis of that reckoning he selects his partners for this last shoot-out. So Jack and I retired shortly after dinner before the party really got going, which is not to say that we slept soundly, we were so excited.

When we got up at 5:00 a.m.—and there were very few of us stirring at that hour—it was as black as the inside of a goat and cold as a witch's tit. The main front had passed through during the night, but the trailing edge was still with us and there were rain squalls all over the place—duck hunter's weather with a vengeance. We really ploughed into that breakfast, and afterwards we donned every piece of foul weather gear we possessed getting down to the pier looking like Eskimos. There stood Jules clapping his gloves together, a big grin on his face, clearly relishing the prospect, and saying over and over, "Dem ducks de fly today!"

The blind he had chosen was the one farthest from the Club, and that run up the canal through a squall was not a memory I cherish. We tied up the boat and he poled up to the blind with amazing dexterity, and then his selection became clear: the wind was coming from directly behind us right into our decoys which were bobbing furiously in the roiling water. Fortunately there was enough space under our shooting bench to keep our shells dry, and we left our

guns in their cases until just before daybreak. And this morning there was no fiery orb rising in the east, just gray, swirling clouds and patches of rain, although to the north a brightening sky marked the end of the front.

"Five minutes, genmen," said Jules.

Off came the gloves, out came guns, shells pumped into the chambers, and safeties on. And this time there were three guns at the ready. Whoosh came the morning flight right into us, three guns emptied, and as far as we could tell we had at least five in the water. Before we could reload, another flight came in and took our decoys, which moved Jules to say, "By damn, de lucky duck!" But no sooner said than here came another batch that weren't so lucky. And three more went down. And the same with the next flight. It had been so fast and furious that we had forgotten how miserably wet and cold we were until Jules called a halt. Back went on the gloves, and Jack and I stood up and began stomping our boots to try to get the circulation going. Jules mercifully passed around the thermos, and we discovered that some thoughtful soul had laced the coffee with, a goodly dollop of brandy which went right down to our toes. Given the action, we decided that we would take turns shooting with Jules first, Jack second, and me third. Jules let several flights go by and waited until two lost souls came into range to get his double. Jack, who was really on his stick, was not quite so selective, but he got his double out of a larger bunch. Neither said a word, but I just knew they had exchanged smiles. I wanted to reach for the thermos but decided to wait and was thankful I did, for the miracle might never have happened. In the distance I spotted a flight of six coming in our direction from 3 o'clock. They were at reachable height, and when they came in sight of our decoys I expected them to flair, but they kept boring in. So I jumped up and went BAM, BAM, BAM, and lo and behold, I had a triple, the third one falling in the reeds just behind our blind. Now, I have had a hole in one, in fact, two, but that is not a patch on the thrill of getting a triple with a pump gun and a three shell chamber.

"Jules," I said, with as much equanimity as I could muster, "pass me, the thermos."

And so it went. With each passing flight, the weather improved, and with the frontal system finally past, we found ourselves warming to the sun. Off came our heavy gear, and we took turns going out in the pirogue to pick up our birds, not an easy chore since we could only approximate where many of them had fallen. When we had forty odd in hand, Jules called a halt, saying the muskrats could have

the rest. Now all that remained was to pick up the decoys which had served their purpose for this hunting season, the last act as it were, of this fabulous experience. But Jules was in no hurry, suggesting that we have a cigarette and finish the coffee. He stood on his little platform, his eyes scanning the heavens. Jack and I looked at each other quizzically; we had just finished the ultimate hunt of our lives, our guns were stowed, our birds were harvested--what was left? And then it dawned on us: we had had our hunt, but Jules had not had his; the action around our blind had been so furious that not once was there need for his magic flute.

"By damn," he said, pointing upward and reaching for his duck call. High overhead three birds were circling aimlessly, their wings flashing in the sun. Quack, quack, quack, quack, went Jules. Quack, quack, quack, quack, quack. We could see them break their rhythm slightly, meaning that they had heard. Jules stepped up his cadence, and they widened their circle, seeking the source of those calls of love. Jules was in his element as they began their descent; soon they were circling our blind within easy range as we tried to become invisible. Around they came again as Jules went into his trill. Again they came around, went down wind, turned, and glided with utter grace into our decoys. It was simply beautiful to watch, a symphony of one man in perfect tune with nature. Jules, head guide, before his hand-picked audience, at the very top of his game. Jack and I stood, and clapped in awe.

"Now we pick up decoys," he said.

Going back, down the canal, Jack and I could not resist taking a headcount of our birds: 47. After tying up at the pier, we staggered into the cleaning shed with our heavy burden, grinning from ear to ear. John was there to see how we had done, and he nodded in approval.

"Well, Jules," he asked, "should we invite these fellows back next year?"

"By damn, Mr. Doe," Jules exclaimed, "dem two Jacques shoot de gun!"

We had been anointed from on high, we had been knighted at the Round Table, we had been elected to the *Academie Francaise*, we were the chosen among the chosen. We had made the permanent short list of the Florence Club.

For the record, Jerry Capers did marry Marie. He brought her into the city, did his best to clean her up in mind and body, subjected her to the beauty parlor, outfitted her in smart attire. And to their

everlasting credit, the faculty wives rallied around, doing their level best to put her at ease and feel welcome. But it was hopeless; she was a wild creature in unwonted captivity, and before six months were out she was back in Green Gables with the marriage annulled. Jerry's desperate bid to end his loneliness had failed, but he took it without apology. He became less ebullient, drank more than usual, and disappeared from time to time, but none of this seemed to affect his scholarly performance adversely. At the end of a year he remarried, and this time the shoe was on the other foot. She was the patrician cultured one, a distinguished art historian and chairman of our Department of Fine Arts and quite willing to share the blessings of civilization with him and provide the civilizing influence. I am told the marriage lasted five years before she called it a day.