

* 1 1/2 pages of my types sheets

"Plover," he said. "I wanted you to see one. In my daddy's time they used to come through in thousands, millions maybe. Shooting, they said you could fill up a wagon, and a lot of damned hogs did." He gave a short whickering whistle that I'd heard myself without knowing what bird it came from. "You can hear them best on cloudy nights in spring and fall when they're flying over low," my uncle said. "It always makes me think about how things used to be."

The other uncle, a lawyer and sometime judge, was too singleminded about the chase to spend any time on instruction afiel unless you used a gun carelessly or approached birds wrong, at which juncture his instructions could be pungent. What you learned from him you learned by example, and it always had to do with the hunting itself. To learn it you needed young legs and good wind, since he seldom stopped to rest and would often break into a lope when dogs came down on point. He kept at it hard even after his left arm was sheared off by a truck that sideswiped his car, handling a light twenty-eight-gauge double almost as well as he'd handled a twelve before. In his late forties his heart gave out quite suddenly at the end of a long day spent following his dogs after quail. If he had the time to reflect on it, I imagine that he must have seen that kind of death as right.

My father, on the other hand, had begun to ease away from hunting before I got well started, and I suspect he'd have quit entirely long before he did if he hadn't wanted me to know some things that he had known. Two or three times each fall and winter we would drive three hundred miles for those outings with the uncles in the rolling, long-settled, very Southern region along the lower Guadalupe, where he had been born and reared and they still lived. All of his best stories were about growing up there in the 1890s and the early years of this century -- about town characters and feuds and black people and quirkish buggy horses and such things. Death being the thing that lets you see a father clearly, I know now that a deep homesickness for that small and satisfying world stayed with him all his life, even though he'd had to get out young to

escape my grandfather's old-style despotic love. But those are other matters.

By the time I had finished with college and a war, Papa had stopped hunting altogether and had turned into a bird watcher, albeit a somewhat unconventional one. My mother had always maintained a little feeder in winter, but now they had a big affair kept filled all year long, which hung from a hackberry limb outside their breakfast-room window. The neighborhood was an old one with trees and much shrubbery, and their seed mixtures and suet logs brought in some rather special birds like grosbeaks and house finches and nuthatches, in addition to proletarian throngs of English sparrows and a full assortment of other usual species. Without often using binoculars or leaving their yard for the purpose, they piled up a quite decent life-list of sightings during the next few years, a period when I came home only occasionally from wherever I was living at the time.

One winter and spring they even had a magpie, either a drastically misplaced vagrant or someone's escaped pet. Hopping and swaggering in gaudy black and white about the lawn, he uttered harsh or querulous sounds and terrorized smaller birds at the feeder, which interested him chiefly for that reason since he craved meatier sustenance than was provided there. Staunchly anthropomorphic, Papa named him Gus and doted on him, ignoring his bullying ways and his tendency to rob nests, and putting out grisly scraps of steak and raw liver and fried egg on the immaculate St. Augustine grass for his delectation. But in June Gus vanished for good, having either decamped toward his native high-Western climes or, as Papa grimly surmised, been assassinated by some youngster tiptoeing down the alley with a BB gun.

However, he kept a BB gun of his own and used it with enthusiasm on neighborhood cats that stalked his feeder, cackling in glee when a pellet bounced off one's hide and it leaped skyward and squalled and fled. Probably he'd have used worse weaponry on them if it hadn't been for my mother. The BBs were deadlier against sparrows invading his martin house atop the garage or the wren

boxes nailed up here and there, and he hated bluejays as well, rather illogically since their evil ways were not much different from those of their corvine kinsman Gus. One of the few times I ever saw him truly enraged, shaking in fact, was when he sighted a jaybird that was methodically pecking out the brains of a baby dove snatched from its parents' nest. Papa shouted and hurled a garden trowel, the only missile at hand, and the criminal flew off screeching in either anger or derision. But the dovelet by then was so horribly damaged that it had to be coup-de-graced.

2.

BIRD PEOPLE IN GENERAL belong to the ing much of my life such folk have caused me a good deal of pain, usually through my own fault. I am drawn to them nearly always. But I've got a certain chameleon inclination that's tied in with a hodgepodge of interests and a diverse taste in friendships, so that at one time or another I've managed to cherish laconic West Texans, owl-eyed professors, rightist-leaning Mississippians, leftist-leaning New Yorkers, hard-drinking ex-marines, bearded environmentalists, and individuals of a number of other differing types, many of whom have not cherished one another at all when and if they met. All of this seems to be especially hard on one's quieter, gentler friends when one's Mr. Hyde tendencies or acquaintances heave into view. They're disappointed or hurt, whereupon one's own quieter, gentler self has to feel guilt and remorse for having betrayed them thus. This may in part explain why, when young, I was already a bit leery of the sort of people who could have taught me most about birds, and also why in college at Rice I fell into a lifelong friendship with John Delabarre Staub, later to be known as the Mad Surgeon or the Horrible Doctor, who combined extremes in himself in a way that I could never approach, and energetically loved or hated whoever he cared to without fretting over complications. People tended either to love or to hate him too, uncomplicatedly. With small alert dark eyes and red hair and a profane

tongue, Jack was troublesome all his life and never the least bit restful to be around, whether his drive of the moment was directed into some obsessive interest or just into being awful. Beautifully mannered when in the mood, able to charm the gentlest of people if he liked them, he was nonetheless usually hell on peaceful atmospheres and quiet gatherings, being always bored by standard conversation and poised to leave or to stir things up.

He was one of those persons who seem to change little from infancy to age, too stoutly constituted to be much swayed by things that happen to them. After his funeral a few years ago a group of his friends, some of whom barely knew one another, sat around past midnight recounting Staub tales by the dozen. One of these involved his practice of climbing, at the age of about four, up a tree outside his family's River Oaks home and trying to poot on the heads of unwary sidewalk strollers. Later this Rabelaisianism would take such forms as talking back to highway patrolmen, crashing through French doors while walking on his hands at formal parties, or antagonizing large and stupid goat-ropers in roadside bars, so that friendship with him often led to a need for action or diplomacy.

But his ruling trait was a capacity for focused passions, which during his life ranged from medicine (somehow it fitted in) to coon hounds, Valencian-style pigeon shooting, and huasteca music. Most, though, had to do with one or another aspect of the natural world, birds and bromeliads being the most lasting of these, and when something seized his interest he could learn about it faster than anyone else I've known, while exhibiting an equally remarkable resistance to subjects he found dull, like fishing or metaphysics or inquiries into the why of things. Life itself was his why and he needed no other.

When we met he had already been fascinated by birds for years and knew a great deal about them. With Jack, though, the point was in knowledge itself and not in showing it off or imparting it, so that it would have been hard to learn much from him even if I'd been trying, and I wasn't. On the tall-grass coastal prairie west of Houston where we spent a lot of time together, something would

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USING THE Double Column format;
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ pages = 1 page of Double Columns

Plates that need to be edited for length only

XIV Pigeon Hawk ?

XXIV Snow Goose

XXIV Red-Billed Pigeon

XXXII Flammulated Owl

XXXIII Great-tailed Grackles
 Take out "Audubon in Philadelphia"

XXXVI CARACARA

? XL CANVASBACK ?

? L Surf Scoter

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BIRD PEOPLE IN GENERAL belong to the quiet, gentle, thoughtful branch of humanity, and during much of my life such folk have caused me a good deal of pain, usually through my own fault. I am drawn to them nearly always. But I've got a certain chameleon inclination that's tied in with a hodgepodge of interests and a diverse taste in friendships, so that at one time or another I've managed to cherish laconic West Texans, owl-eyed professors, rightist-leaning Mississippians, leftist-leaning New Yorkers, hard-drinking ex-marines, bearded environmentalists, and individuals of a number of other differing types, many of whom have not cherished one another at all when and if they met. All of this seems to be especially hard on one's quieter, gentler friends when one's Mr. Hyde tendencies or acquaintances heave into view. They're disappointed or hurt, whereupon one's own quieter, gentler self has to feel guilt and remorse for having betrayed them thus. This may in part explain why, when young, I was already a bit leery of the sort of people who could have taught me most about birds, and also why in college at Rice I fell into a lifelong friendship with John Delabarre Staub, later to be known as the Mad Surgeon or the Horrible Doctor, who combined extremes in himself in a way that I could never approach, and energetically loved or hated whoever he cared to without fretting over complications. People tended either to love or to hate him too, uncomplicatedly. With small alert dark eyes and red hair and a profane tongue, Jack was troublesome all his life and never the least bit restful to be around, whether his drive of the moment was directed into some obsessive interest or just into being awful. Beautifully mannered when in the mood, able to charm the gentlest of people if he liked them, he was nonetheless usually hell on peaceful atmospheres and quiet gatherings, being always bored by standard conversation and poised to leave or to stir things up.

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Suburban spraddle these days, that prairie was then a fertile flatness dissected by wandering wooded bayous and dotted with shallow ponds. It was grazed by Brahman cattle and lightly inhabited by white people who ran ranches and scattered farms, and black ones who lived in clusters of shacks near wells and garden patches and did much of the farms' and ranches' work, as their families had done back into days of slavery. Bosses or workers, Jack knew them all and had special friendships with some, the most notable of whom was a cranky, vigorous black man named Jim Burnett, part Indian and about seventy years old, who had wide, deep, lifetime knowledge of the region's wild things and subsisted almost entirely on undomesticated meat ranging in flavor from possum to sandhill crane.

We hunted meat there too from time to time, most often by sneaking one of the ponds. This required slithering along on elbows and hipbones through mud and damp grass for a couple of hundred yards, then scrambling erect and firing as ducks rattled frantically skyward from the water, sometimes dark thick hordes of them. It was an anciently prodigal place, part of the belt of level, mild, humid richness where the continent played out against warm Gulf waters and hundreds