

3SHORTGRASS.DOC

Yesterday, either the Wednesday before Thanksgiving Day, or perhaps a date on a lunar calendar, a 21-pound broad-breasted turkey shifted from the refrigerator's bottom shelf to one notch above. Proper response to the sign, if the time was Wednesday and the turkey weighed 21 pounds, was to remove the turkey by the plastic sack loops to rest on the kitchen floor against a butler's cart wheel.

Steam, clouds of heavy fog, blurred the surroundings. Kettles whistled; the top oven expanded to resound with sharp cracks. One telephone rang; another telephone flashed.

All the kick had left the half-thawed gobbler and the half-aware cook. Half-aware sprawls in a captain chair at the breakfast table. Out of the haze – and there isn't any blue, only haze – he watches a candle moth circle the sourdough crock.

He directs his attention to the turkey: "You comfortable, little supermarket fowl? Sorry the tight plastic wrapper holds your wings and legs so tight against your body. (Pauses) Did you hear something ring? Like a timer?"

He – the cook, not the gobbler – arises and goes over to the north kitchen window. He prints on the steamed

glass: "When you are through, press 7." The work pleases him; pleases him so much he underlines the "7."

Back in the captain's chair, he reads out loud from a cookbook: "Place the turkey (stops and looks over his glasses) in a large stockpot. Add two gallons water and one pound salt. Refrigerate or set in a cold place for eight hours. Salt brine makes for a better-tasting turkey."

He bends down, addresses the turkey. "That water on my kitchen floor better be from defrost. Things are bad enough around here with your wild brethren eating all my pecans and roosting over the garage entrance without you making a mess. (Rears up) Pecans! I forgot to ask Cato to peel a few from his soft-shell tree for the dressing. Ol' Cato, we go way back further than his old pecan tree to a summer day picnic, drinking cold beer on the Scout Dam's concrete spillway. Nobody called us 'ol' in those days."

From nowhere, no connection in the slightest, he taps his foot to a 'Cotton Eyed Joe.'

"Ol' Tommy May, or 'Turk,' forget which...Her old mammy woulda' killed us if she knew how much we liked to dance the 'Cotton Eyed Joe' after the Sherwood court and go up and down those ol' stairs from the empty district courtroom to refresh ourselves with Salty Dogs. Just the other day, told a lady raising money to restore the old

courthouse to count me in when they make those stairs easier to go up and down at midnight."

Dave and I swore that once rich we were going to build a dance floor across Spring Creek, lighted by the moon and put to music by The Texans.

He looks down again: "Know what? Don't guess you or anyone else cares, but that stainless steel stove over there replaced a tinfoil counterfeit that'd put man back to cooking over a campfire."

Without pause, he continues: "Too bad the featherhead turkey growers don't endorse cook stoves or roasting pans or oven thermometers. Until I learned better, I thought how much more money there is in poultry than hollowhorns, but later learned any business beats the cow business."

Roused, he arises to cut off a burner. On the way back he says, "I'm gonna put you back in the refrigerator. See that you stay on the right shelf."