



P E R H A P S I T ' S T H E

D A B B L E R S

at 20 knots, spitting snow. Ice covered most of the field and it didn't look like a thaw was likely. Our only hope was to find open water somewhere — anywhere. If we could do that, the rest would be just a matter of hard work and determination on our part.

As we approached the flooded field, Ira scanned the horizon with intensity. This was serious business. The ice meant that the ducks would be in search of open water and Ira had a good notion that he had just found both. If we'd been shackled to a pit blind we would have been out of luck, but we had an ace up our collective sleeve, and Ira was determined to play it just right.

"The birds are obviously working the southwest corner of the field. With the wind howling out of the north, my guess is that they have managed to keep a fairly good size hole open in that ice. What

do you say we set up against that distant cover?" Without taking his eyes off the distant, swirling flocks, Ira continued. "You up for a death march?"

Looking through my own field glasses, I assessed our prospects somewhere between bleak and non-existent. Apart from scattered clumps of rice straw and long-dead Johnson grass, there was almost no cover. I was having a hard time believing you could hide anything in that part of the field; how Ira thought we would conceal two fair-sized duck hunters, two boats and a dog was beyond me. But the smile on Ira's face was eager, with just a touch of mischief thrown in. I had the feeling he knew something I didn't. The only option I had at that point was to agree and follow. It was my turf, but it was all Ira's game. If a death march was what it was going to take, so be it. I had come this far and I wasn't about to turn back now.