

In early spring of 1962, while I was living in a locked ward at McLean Hospital, no longer hallucinating, in therapy every day, and recovering from the psychotic break that had landed me there, an attendant came to my room to tell me I had a phone call. He walked me to the telephone closet down the hall, where I picked up the dangling receiver. “Marilee,” my mother said, “you’ve been invited to be Queen of the Krewe of Osiris Ball for next year’s debut season!” She was so excited. I could hear it in the false upbeat pitch of her voice.

“Mom, I’m in McLean. What are you thinking?”

“Marilee, we think it would be a great way for you to come home.” I could hear the determination in her voice. But she sounded so far away.

My heart shrank as I realized she had no idea that what she was asking me to do was absurd, not to mention dangerous. She believed it was in my best interest to go home for the balls, pick up the thread of my life, fold myself back into the tradition. She hadn’t a clue what leaving a psych ward to attend a fake royal bash might do to me. She didn’t know what she was asking of me. But she insisted, nonetheless.

“But you’ll make your debut! Yes, there will be heavy commitments and you’ll have to fly down from Boston for all the events. It’ll be wonderful. Just like it was for me. You’ll start in August, when the season begins. That’s when the deb parties begin and all the debs are featured in *The Times Picayune*. Then there are two large presentations of the debs on Thanksgiving weekend, more presentations during the Carnival or Mardi Gras Christmas), or January sixth, until the stroke of midnight on Mardi Gras, March sixth this year.”