

on the course they know so well. Sometimes they circle a time or two as though loath to leave, and many turn again and settle with their lagging comrades. Who gives the word? Who leads those whiffling lines as they stream off across the lake-rim, flying abreast in sinuous rank with wings all in tune? No man can tell; but the freeze-up companies are the pick of the species; the big green-head drakes predominate—in fact whole detachments at times show but a mere sprinkling of brown duck wives—and these strong and wise ones fanning off into the darkness know well their destination. Each flock follows the same course as the preceding; one could readily believe it was all prearranged; and there is music and mystery in the singing and whispering of their sharp wings as they steer off and fade into the dull sky. It is their farewell.

There is a hush in the darkness as of things ominous; it is the lull that follows the battle won, the surrender, the marching in of the powers of the North. It is the end of a season; and it is the end of things to-night for the unfit and unfortunate; for in the darkness the black water-hole will close. The coyotes that yell shrilly from the sandhills at dusk know it well, and every one of them turns his sharp nose lakeward; the restless weasel and mink know it too and are early abroad, each keen with the

blood-thirst. The snowy owl that perched all day on the white-capped hay-stack will find bigger game than mice on the frozen marsh to-night; and his horned brother of the oaks will leave his woods and make a killing out among the ice-bound rush-clumps. For to-night is the débacle, the shoreward march of the doomed.

And the new morning sees it in all its gruesomeness; the ice has become a veritable bridge of sighs. Dots upon the white lake-field from the vicinity of the former hole right to the shore, and patches of tremulous down and feathers near the rush-margins tell what has been in order during the hours of darkness as I slept up in the elms. Every patch of feathers tells of the mercifully cruel work of owl or mink or weasel or coyote. Here died a pintail duck, there a gadwall; here lies the half-eaten remains of a canvasback duck that made but sad picking for his murderer; and here died a gray goose and was carried away. Shoreward now is the prompting, each according to his strength. Birds but recently wounded and others that received their hurt from gunners early in the season, alike set out on their last journey, a funeral march where there are no mourners and no deceased, yet all are as dead; and to-night will bring the end. When the morning light next slants across the lake there will be no dots upon it—just a desolate expanse of ice.

