

Again and again the four-fold reports rattle from behind the timber. Some of the flocks, but half wise to the way of gunners and bent on holding to the open water, circle about and return foolishly to be fired at again. Others go out to the lake; but the greater number take up their journeying again, and resolutely whiffle off into the gray southern sky.

A moving thing heading toward mid-lake swings over the brown marsh grass to northward. A glance is sufficient to realize its part in the freeze-up picture. A spoonbill duck is skimming along low; though his wings move more rapidly than is usual even with his swift kind, his progress is slow; he droops a trifle in the rear; his beak is more elevated than he commonly carries it, and feebleness is written in every motion of his fluttering progress. Poor fellow! He, too, is an unfortunate; he has been cured and recovered the use of his wings since he was stricken with his leaden missile—but too late. His strength will not carry him off with the others into the southern sky. He is but shoving back a day or two the clutches that are reaching for him.

What a death's harvesting is this time of the freeze-up! What a slaying of the weak and unfit, a lopping off of the fools and weaklings and unfortunates—Nature's inexorable way, heartless yet sternly benign. Only the strong and the sane go off boring into that gray sky above the southerly ice-rim. The birds that have tarried too long or that lack the instinct to go journeying—and from tree sparrows to crows there are many such yearly in any neighborhood—now suffer the extreme penalty and perish miserably. To-day there are scores throughout the land—sparrows, meadowlarks, blackbirds, doves, snipe and sand-pipers, no race or tribe seemingly immune to the failing—many that sit about here or there, hungry, cold-racked, awaiting a wretched end. Many there are, too, younglings, that suffer for the short-comings of their parents. In the black water-hole are

some young ducks and grebes and coots. Their foolish parents erred and hatched them so late in the season that now their half-fledged wings are useless and they must stay to pay the penalty they so little deserve. Verily the freeze-up is a weeding-out of the unfit; those that err and stray from the path of their fathers must perish.

At noon when the wood-pile is growing steadily in response to the camp-axe—provident foresight against the long hours of evening—when the two chickadees are merriest about the tent-door, and a nuthatch in the big elm—surely the very last one of his tribe in the North—is calling crankily in response to a forsaken tree sparrow, there is a whirr and flutter of wings across the way and visitors have arrived. In an elm-tip are nearly a dozen pinnated grouse. Even such grass lovers change their ways with the freeze-up. Now at mid-day they are perchers; for it is warmer up in the light than down in the snow-laden cover. They, too, are laggards; their tribe, breaking most grouse traditions, have already moved south into the Dakotas; but these, my neighbours, are the hardy, tenacious ones of the breed, and their presence here in the elm-top is a challenge to Boreas to do his worst. Only much snow and continued cold will be able to rout these hot-blooded chaps.

The November day now is short, the cloudy afternoon little better than a twilight, and night comes early. But like the morning, the evening is a stirring time with the wild things. First go the roughlegged hawks—great blackish fellows, cruelly indifferent to wind or weather; they hunt as they journey and post off slowly, serenely southward. Then later when the yellow sun-patch is burning feebly in the south-west, the mallards pick up and follow. It is always an event, their leave-taking; at intervals from the water-hole in the big marsh or from the lake there rises a pattering of webbed feet and a rushing of whiffling wings, and a detachment half a hundred strong rises and bears away