

has come ashore to seek sustenance for his miserable body from the grass and withered vegetation. At the creaking of my pail-handle he shows himself and from the point of the willows a few yards distant he springs into the air and heading lakeward again flies feebly out across the snow-covered ice-sheet. Cold, cheerless, terrible prospect!

The picture of the freeze-up is in the making to-day; its story is being written plain. The center of interest is in mid-lake and all other details are incidentals merely to the play there. A mile from shore across the white ice-field hangs a slight hazy cloud-bank, the black water smokes below and sends up its steaming contributions to hold the vapour above. This is where the deeper water, still warm with the potential heat of the kinder season, defies the North and resists stubbornly. Dark strings and lines of dots at intervals may be seen speeding above or through the haze for a moment and then settling again into the dark water—ducks: the rear-guard of the hardy ones of the tribe. Most probably these are bluebills; for like the mallards these cold-loving chaps hold to the North as long as they can find an open water-hole in which they can dive for their pond-weed food and incidentally keep warm. For however much it may make us shudder to contemplate naked feet in icy water, it must be admitted that at least it is warmer than out in the air where the temperature is actually freezing; so perhaps the ducks and geese and muskrats and such others as stay immersed in stinging weather, after all have the best of it.

There is more to seen at the black water-hole in the distance. On the ice are dotted groups, big white dots, small white dots, and big and small black dots and blotches with a single one of each here and there alone; and to one who has watched the lake long at this critical time, the story is very plain. The big white objects grouped are whistling swans, resting while en

route for more southerly waters, or awaiting more happy weather; the smaller and scattered white objects are snow geese, strays, cripples, unfortunates, victims of gunners, left behind when their noisy legions streamed away southward but yesterday. The big, black-dotted strings—there are three or four of them—are Canada gray geese; like the swans, they too are waiting in hope of better things. The lonely, big black dots are unfortunates among the gray geese; the close-packed rank of small dark dots denotes a stubborn mallard score, mostly drakes, also bent on staying till the last; and the scattered solitary things of small stature are duck cripples, the lame and halt, also sufferers on account of men who make poor shooting. For it is the law that the lame and halt shall sit apart. Ah, this much of the tale of the water-hole may be guessed easily to-day; the rest will be a dreadful reality on the morrow.

At about nine a. m. by the clock, or when the low sun to south-eastward is warming the heavy sky guns begin to boom to southward from the big marsh beyond the woods. Two double guns firing quickly at intervals and intermittent strings of hurrying ducks speeding from behind the timber toward mid-lake tell with force and eloquence what is happening there. The deep-water marsh lying warmly muffled in its rush and reed-brakes always staves off the hand of winter as long as the lake does; and here the mallards had made bivouac and rendezvous. In the night and in the first hour of gray light of morning, they came down, hundreds of them, out of the freezing North and settled here to rest. Yet even here, surrounded by an ice-field, they have been denied sanctuary; for two shooters from the lodge on the lake-rim, primed with the cupidity that loves a bag of freeze-up mallards—(always fat and well fleshed, the very cream of the season)—have pushed their metal duck punt across the ice and invaded the heart of the stronghold.