

"Eighty-two," shouted the captain, and Billy danced a hornpipe on the sands. "Tell the fellows in the city that we'll see 'em later, Jimmy," he chortled.

Marion, clad in a heavy hunting-coat of her father's, came forward and bent to examine Martin's ducks, in the bottom of his skiff. Martin longed to see her eyes, but her head was bent as slowly she counted the birds. The colonel, official referee of the contest, stood by, smiling and watching her.

Martin was gravely shaking hands with his competitors when the colonel's voice came to his ears. "I say, Jimmy's beat you two fellows, at that! He was just kidding you when he said eighty-one. He has eighty-three ducks here!"

Martin pinched himself to see if he were awake. The captain and Billy, their faces anything but smiling now, stood beside the colonel and Marion, slowly counting the birds.

Then slowly they turned and faced Martin.

"Jimmy," spoke the captain, "you got us. Shake, and good luck."

"Same here," echoed Billy in soulless cordiality. Then they turned up the path.

"We're on our way," waved the captain from the knoll. But Billy did not echo the words. He was plodding along, head down.

The colonel had returned to his own

skiff to secure the birds he had bagged. Martin turned slowly and faced Marion. She was looking away across the now blue and tranquil lake. "Marion," he said softly, "you know, of course, why I made that wager."

She nodded.

He reached for her hand and took it in both of his.

"And are you sorry I won?"

She turned her gray eyes upon him. They were misty and full of a new and beautiful light. "No, Jimmy," she said chokingly, "I'm glad, I wanted you to win, Jimmy."

"Because?" he persisted.

"Yes," she whispered, "that's the reason."

They were standing, arms about each other's shoulders, planning, when the colonel's voice spoke for the third time, behind them.

"Jimmy," it said in mock severity, "you are an ambitious hunter, I must say. You have, I see, bagged the queen duck of Shag Villa."

"I have," agreed Martin frankly.

"But what I can't understand," said the colonel perplexedly, "is where the mischief the only pair of red-heads I bagged went to. Some sneaking bog-shooter must have found them in the skiff and took 'em—eh?"

"Quite likely, sir," said Martin.

He was trying to read Marion's gray eyes. But they were turned from him, gazing across the blue, untroubled lake.

