

and if he would visit a certain club of which they were members, they could promise him a sociable evening, etc.

It was the old colonel, who had known Martin from boyhood, who, upon learning of his intention, came looking for him on the jump."

"What's this I hear, you young rascal?" he shouted, catching sight of Jimmy. "Jumping away just when the shooting is on! Gad, boy, it's not like you to want to get out now when the ducks are coming in. You can't go, that's all. To-morrow we'll go and have a day's ducking on the lake. Here, you fellows," he appealed to the captain and Billy, who had resumed their game of billiards, "come over here and help me reason with this young outlaw. Want's to skip out just when the duck-shooting is on. Ever hear the like of it?"

Captain Simms came over smiling. "Perhaps he is not sufficiently expert at the game of shooting to wish to try his hand," he smiled. "Of course, if you will stay, Jimmy," he added saucily, "we'll see that you have first choice of blinds, and all that."

"Sure, we'll do our best to place you so's you can make some kind of a showing," backed Billy magnanimously.

The old colonel doubled up in a loud guffaw. "Why, you hanged idiots, let me tell you something," he cried when he could get his breath. "Do you know that this same Jimmy Martin—"

Jimmy grasped his arm warningly and broke in with, "I hate to go, colonel, of course, but I've simply got to, that's all."

"I'm going to leave him in your hands," said the colonel, turning to the captain and Billy. "Convince him that his idea of going away now is a crazy one. I've got to go over to the boat-house with Williams to look over the decoys." And he stamped away.

"Better stay," suggested the captain mildly, and "Do stay, old top," grinned Billy.

"Thanks," grunted Martin. Then, glancing up, he caught sight of Marion in the doorway. He beckoned her over.

"And what is the question before the house?" she smiled, glancing from one to the other of her guests.

"We're trying to persuade Jimmy to remain over for the duck-shooting," explained the captain and Billy in a breath.

Martin wanted to look straight into Marion's gray eyes, but he knew he would find the word "quitter" there, so he squirmed and looked fully as uncomfortable as he felt.

Low chuckles from the captain and Billy brought him back to himself. Under the circumstances an ordinary chuckle was bad enough. A derisive chuckle was worse. Martin wheeled on his rivals.

"I'll stay on one condition," he said quietly. "That condition is, if I bag fewer ducks to-morrow than both of you gentlemen bag together, I go back to the city. If I bag more ducks to-morrow than both of you together—you go back to the city."

Silence, dead and awesome silence, followed Martin's challenge. He glanced at Marion and was sure he read approval in her eyes. "Of course," he smiled, addressing the other two, "if you feel the odds against you are too great—"

"Oh, we'll take the wager," cried the captain, "that is, providing Miss Marion is willing. Of course, it will look as though we were forcing you to leave, and we don't want it that way, you know."

"Certainly not," murmured Billy.

"Oh, dear me," smiled Marion, "do not let me interfere. While I and my father will hate to see anyone leave Shag Villa, I'm sure I voice his sentiments when I say—have it all your own way, gentlemen. Suit yourselves."

Jimmy caught a flash of approval from the hazel eyes, as with a laugh she turned away. He rolled a cigarette under the cynical, contemptuous