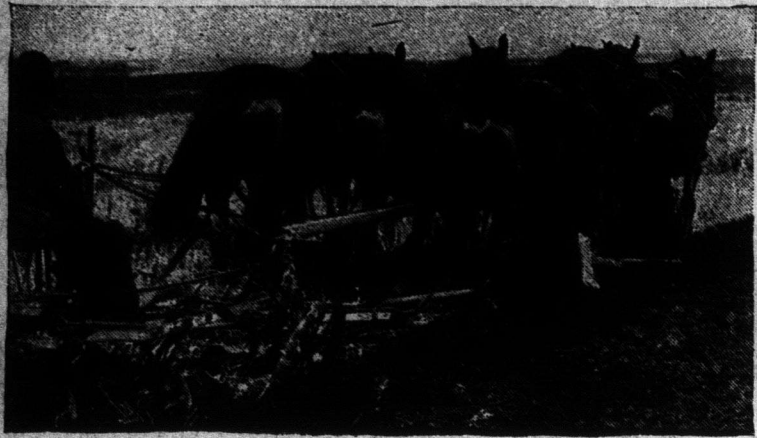




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The Death Leap

Continued from Page 13

the creek, at which the second dog came tobogganing down the bank of shale in savage, bristling pursuit.

Goldeye tottered. Could he make it?—no! No! His own life's blood, teeming from a wound in his scalp, got into his eyes, his heart was thumping like a trip hammer, and behind him, not ten paces behind, came the leading hound. At the foot of the gorge, fifty yards ahead, he decided to turn at bay—to stand and fight for his life to the bitter end!

But as he neared this point there was a flash of gold and russet, and there, behind a windfall, stood Fireflank, white-fanged and prepared—a terrible little fighting machine, ready to meet his foes on their own ground—ready to take up the desperate gamble with death on his friend's behalf. Goldeye slipped weakly past him, then as the hound came dashing up Fireflank shot from his retreat like a bursting shell. His big tail struck the hound across the eyes, momentarily blinding him—snap, click, snap went his jaws, and the dog, thrown from the trail he was running, turned with dripping muzzle to face his assailant.

But Fireflank was up and away, sliding under the windfall, gliding in and out among the rocks, both hounds bellowing their hatred, following by sight. Away down to the river he led them, then across from rock to rock, through the poultry yard of the farm he knew, scattering the hens like chaff, then up a little-frequented valley that led to a land of dead and abandoned lead mines in the heart of the Bentland Heights.

Fireflank was running easily, but for the hounds it was the stiffest chase they had ever known. Now and then the fox seemed almost within reach, then suddenly he would slide through a gate with bars so narrow that the dogs bruised their backs and their shoulder bones trying to wriggle after him. Once he skimmed daintily down the sheer mountain side, leaping from rock to rock, but his heavy pursuers, hard behind him, set a veritable avalanche moving, and were almost annihilated by the crashing boulders. At the foot of the slope the fox looked round and leered at them, then down the valley again, back the way he had come towards the river and the friendly Garolgame.

There was a breath of icy wind, the snow flakes began to fall, blotting out all objects thirty paces away. Through the whirling whiteness Fireflank ran, decoying on his pursuers, ready now to lose them in the blizzard, for his breath was giving out. Then harsh fate dealt a stunning blow to the hunted fox, robbing him, in the moment of triumph, of his glorious gifts, for leaping the wall and landing on the highroad near the farm Fireflank trod on something—on a pointed spike of glass, buried in the snow! It passed clean through his forepaw, all but stunning him with agony, and hearing his yelp the dogs doubled their efforts, drew in behind him, encouraged to the utmost of their speed by his close proximity.

On three legs now, scarcely able to hold his own, sick with pain, panting for breath, Fireflank headed for home—straight and true, knowing that life lay in that direction only. He gained the

river bank with not a yard to spare; he felt the hot breath of the hounds on his flanks, and knew that they would catch him ere he could get across. Then he remembered—remembered another chase, glorious in its triumph! Quickly he turned and dashed down stream—down along the grassy bank till the thunder of the falls filled the air.

The single rock in midstream was covered with snow to-day, but beneath the snow was a coat of ice. Fantastic ice formations festooned every rock and clung in clusters from every beard of moss. Fireflank leaped, using his wounded paw and leaving a crimson imprint—he leapt and landed, light as a thistle seed, buoyant as a russet leaf of autumn, landed and floated on towards the rocks of his secure home.

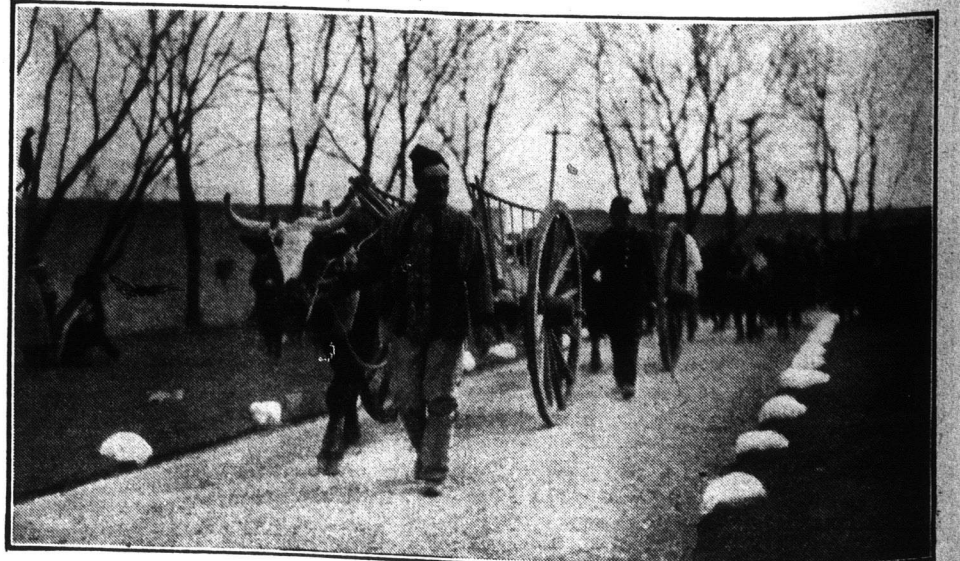
The hounds did not falter, and through the whirling whiteness they too leapt for the pointed rock in mid-stream. Instantly the first lost his foothold, clawed desperately for a moment but was caught by the tide and whirled away, uttering the cry of a dog who knows itself doomed. Unwaveringly, fearlessly, the second also leapt, gained a footing, slithered back, clawed to the top, slithered over, then fell back downwards over the edge, lashing the water into foam. And he too was drawn over the brink of the fall, to be shattered lifeless among the rocks, caught by the eddies of the whirlpool, sucked into its vortex, and so, beaten and pulped, to become the sport of the waves.

Long after darkness had fallen the voice of a man could be heard along the river bank, calling for his dogs as he searched the whirling whiteness. The snow had covered all signs, he could not tell what had happened, but it was only the stubborn Celtic blood in his veins that bade him continue the search long after all hope was relinquished. He knew that his dogs had been decoyed to their doom, he knew that he would never see them again, yet far into the night he searched. And when at length he turned his steps wearily homewards he heard from the heart of Garolgame Wood a mocking "yap-yap," which told him that he and his dogs were the sport of the wild creatures they had designed to kill.

IN JUNE

June's the time when all the wild things come a-peeping in the grass,
When the buttercups and daisies bob and curtsy as you pass;
Such a flushing, such a blushing of the roses, pink and red,
Such a stirring, such a whirring of wee bird-wings overhead,
Such a tilting, such a lilt of the bonny bobolinks—
Oh, the June days are the joy-days of the whole glad year, methinks!

June's the time when all the children come a-dancing out of school,
Out to find the wild strawberries, and the fishes in the pool;
Such a tripping, such a skipping, such a rush of eager feet,
Such a sounding and resounding of gay voices, clear and sweet—
Ah, 'tis you, wee lads and lassies, with bright faces all aglow,
Make the June-days just the joy-days of the whole glad year, I know!



Transcontinental 1879. Hudson's Bay Pageant. May 3rd, 1920, Winnipeg.