

Again, and again, and yet again, the mink repeated his elusive attack, each time inflicting a deep and disastrous wound, and each time successfully escaping the counter-assault. The trail of the fox was now streaked and flecked with scarlet, and both his hind-legs dragged heavily. He reached the edge of the smooth ice and turned at bay. The mink drew back, cautious for all his hate. Then the fox started across the steel-grey glair, picking his steps that he might have a firm foothold.

A few seconds later the mink once more delivered his thrust. Feinting towards the enemy's right, he swerved with that snake-like celerity of his, and bit deep into the tender upper edge of the fox's thigh, where it plays over the groin.

It was a cunning and deadly stroke. But in recovering from it, to dart away again to safe distance, his feet slipped, ever so little, on the shining surface of the ice. The delay was only for the minutest fraction of a second. But in that minutest fraction lay the fox's opportunity. His wheel and spring were this time not too late. His jaws closed about the mink's slim backbone and crunched it to fragments. The lean, black shape straightened out with a sharp convulsion and lay still on the ice.