

The Death Leap

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them off in pursuit of himself and so save Fireflank.

Thus the keeper was suddenly surprised to see a little red fox loping across the open space just ahead of him in full view of the dogs, but also that Goldeye had never learnt the exact range of firearms! The keeper carried a long barrelled, ten bore gun, charged with heavy shot, and in an instant little Goldeye was aware of stinging pains all over his body, as though a swarm of hornets had attacked him. He yelped and doubled his pace, not mortally wounded though severely injured, and behind him came those two iron limbed missiles of death, schooled in all the lore of mountain foxes and nursing a bitter feud against their kind.

Fireflank, on the pinnacle above, watched the opening of the chase—saw the two hounds closing, closing, while Goldeye, limping as he ran, and leaving little spots of blood upon the whiteness of the snow, headed for a sheep hole in the wall and vanished.

Did Fireflank understand? Did he realize that his friend was gambling with death on his behalf? Be that as it may the sight of the chase excited him, seemed to make him desperate, and he forgot even his terror of the man.

Thus the keeper, looking up the face of the cliff, saw what he thought was a sheet of brown paper caught by the wind and beating against a shelf, till he realized that there was no wind. Then he heard a yelp, and realized that what he saw was a fox, leaping desperately to gain the goat track, leaping and falling

back again and again in mortal peril of sliding to his doom. The range was too great and the keeper stumbled towards a nearer point, but as he went he saw the fox gain a hold with its forepaws on the extreme edge of the shelf, and writhing, struggling madly, haul up till its hind paws gained a hold, and so on to safety. In a moment it was gone—racing along the shelf and into the heather, and the keeper swore softly.

Yet he knew he had seen a noble thing—he had seen a fox risk everything to save its mate, crag-bound on the shelf above!

Goldeye, in the meantime, hard pressed by the dogs, was making desperate efforts to regain Garolcome Wood, and each time he headed in that direction one of the dogs headed him off. His tongue was lolling now, his steps lacked their buoyancy, and every here and there a crimson spot on the snow told the tragic story. The trees seemed to sway before his eyes, a mistiness enveloped the trail ahead, and—goodness, how weary he was! His limbs ached, his brain throbbed, a burning thirst racked his throat, yet just behind him were those red-eyed snarling dogs, ready to tear him asunder. Once he fell; it was at the crest of a deeply washed watercourse, and one dog was upon him in a trice. Down they went together, over the edge, rolling and sliding down the almost perpendicular bank of moving shale, to land with a thud and split asunder among the rocks sixty feet below. The fox fell lightly and was up in an instant, but the fall shattered the breath out of the dog and left him panting. Goldeye headed tottering down the rocky bed of

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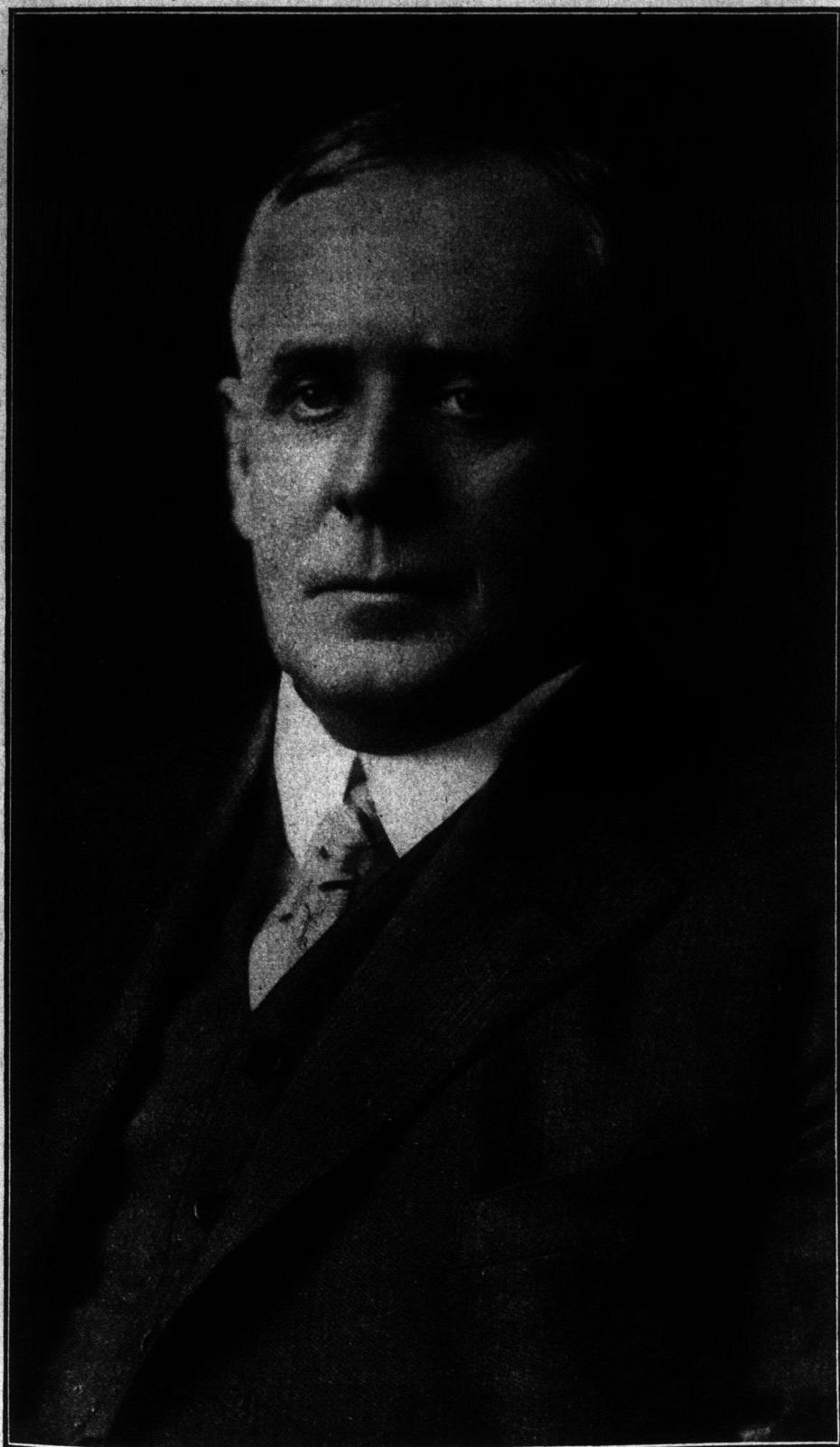
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