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## The Death Leap

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ome Wood, and during the nights that followed he made several similar raids on other farms-farms far distant from his own home, and located on the ranges of other foxes. In this manner he became familiar with an immense belt of country all up and down the Redstone River-came to know the gaps in the walls, the gates with the narrowest bars, the drains and the swamps, all of which were endlessly useful to him in the way of baffling the clumsy sheep dogs.

One day, when all was very quiet, Fireflank stole from his subterranean dwelling and fell to amusing himself by tearing the bark off a dead tree in order to nose out the insects hibernating beneath it. Presently a movement near by attracted his notice, and looking up he saw another young fox standing quite near with ears acock, eyeing him enquiringly. Fireflank uttered a rumbling growl and his mane stood on end, but the newcomer did not stir. Fireflank moved to the windward side to get the caller's body scent. Both seemed satisfied, and they approached in attitudes of armed neutrality to sniff each other's noses. Thus formally introduced they considered themselves on terms of discussion, and half an hour later, strange to relate, the two solitary little dog foxes were curled up together in Fireflank's den, sharing each other's warmth.

Whence Goldeye had come I do not know, but he proved to be the most warm-hearted, silly-good-natured little fox cub that ever poked his nose into a cold mouse hole. The two foxes now took to hunting together, and ere their strange partnership was a week old it all but culminated in a tragedy for one or both of them. It happened thus:

With intermittent breaks the Frost King still held the country in his iron grip, and Fireflank and Goldeye, hard pressed for food, one night stole through the high boundary wall and out on the moor above Garolgome. Here the snow lay in deep drifts among the crags; there were blue mountain hares and red grouse in the heather, but the foxes were after nobler game. They paused on a ridge, and sniffed the icy wind. It bore to them a strange scent, like the scent of sheep only more potent, for it was the scent of the half wild goat herd that dwells to this day among the crags of the Redstone Rigg.

Goldeye showered his kisses on Fireflank's nose to indicate his eagerness, then silently up wind they stole, keeping to the hollows, never showing themselves against the sky-line. There were the wild goats, basking in an open space among the crags—twenty or thirty strong; comprising mothers with their kids and one enormous billy who possessed towering, upsweeping horns.

Hidden in a hollow the two foxe cided upon their plan of campaign. Goldeye was to dash right in-which was just his mark!—looking as big and terrible as possible, and thus, having scattered the herd, Fireflank would single out one old nanny and keep her occupied, while Goldeye drove her kid down the slope away from the rest, and thus made sure of it.

Now this scheme would probably have worked very nicely had the goats been sheep instead of what they were, but being goats-and Fireflank and Goldeye knew about as much about goats as they knew about Euclid-it was just as likely to succeed as it was to evolve itself into a pleasant afternoon tea party.

Goldeye carried out his instructions to a nicety. He stole up unseen to within a few paces, then dashed out towards the goats, bristling and snarling. They, for their part, should now have scattered like chaff before a cyclone, but they did nothing of the sort. Every nursing mother of the clan calmly got up and sniffed her kid. The billy also got up, shaking his noble head, stamping his forehoofs and glaring at the fox. Then, in a perfectly orderly manner, without panic, even without haste, the whole herd, led by a disreputable old nanny, teamed out along a narrow shelf running across the face of the precipice to the were gone, then, with dignity, he too

Once on the shelf the goats began to move, running in single file—drifting like a string of ghosts along the black face of the erags, while the rumble of hoofs filled the air. "Chase them!" yapped Fireflank, and suiting the action to the words he bounded out along the shelf in hot pursuit, Goldeye yapping wildly at his heels.

The shelf was scarcely two feet in width, and below them was a black fall through space almost sheer to the valley. Pell-mell along the perilous path the two young foxes ran, till they reached a point at which the mountain side jutted out, the trail beyond it invisible, and here, just round the corner, that fearless old billy was awaiting them. Fireflank was face to face with him in the twinkling of an eye. Down went those sweeping horns, and with a snort the old warrior dashed to meet the fray.

Another second and Fireflank would have been swept to meet his doom, but in that narrow interval of time he saw a protruding boulder jutting out from the face of the cliff twelve feet below. He made a desperate leap for it, and as he left the shelf the battering ram of bone and muscle hurtled past him, filling his eyes with dust. Goldeye had already turned back and was fleeing for his life, so, glaring and shaking his head at Fireflank, now secure below, the billy plunged on into the night after his harem.

Fireflank glanced about him. Only a young and foolish fox would have found himself in such a predicament, for there he was, perched dizzily on a pinnacle protruding from the sheer face of the precipice, gloomy space beneath him, night on every side, and positively no way up or down. He saw immediately that he was a fixture, and remain here he must—until, pressed by hunger, perhaps, he might nerve himself to making that risky and well nigh impossible leap back to the shelf. He began to whine pitifully, at which Goldeye came back and peered down at him, seeming to think his predicament vastly amusing. He yapped in mockery, while Fireflank growled thunder, and eventually Goldeye sauntered off leaving him to his fate.

But with the first streak of dawn Goldeye was back. All ridicule had left him now, he whined anxiously, and had there been a way down he would doubtless have descended to Fireflank's side, which was the sort of silly thing he would do. When daylight came he sneaked off into the heather near, overlooking the imprisoned Fireflank, and curled himself up there.

Some hours later two peregrines spied the stranded fox, and came hurtling down from the clouds, screaming savagely, and apparently intent on driving Fireflank over the edge with their lashing wings, but Goldeye dashed out along the shelf and stood above his friend, fangs gleaming, mane on end, and the peregrines planed and looped and cork-screw-

The wretched day passed, night came with cold, driving sleet, and the noble little Goldeye, himself lean with hunger, appeared on the shelf above carrying & blue mountain hare. He dropped it to his mate and Fireflank caught it, feasting hungrily.

Again the cold grey dawn stole across the valley, and then, from away down the corrie at the foot of the crag, there sounded the barking of dogs. was silence, then the dogs appeared at the foot of the crag, coming in this direction, and with them a man with a gun -a game warder! Foxes are not protected in these wild hills, in fact they are shot and trapped whenever possible.

Fireflank crouched low, in terror now, while Goldeye watched anxiously from his outlook near. To them the appearance of the man and dogs could mean but one thing-that the imprisoned Fireflank was seen, and they were coming to destroy him. Steadily the three approached, the man constantly pausing to peer up the face of the crags-looking for the peregrines really, though the foxes did not know this. They knew only that it was a time of mortal peril, and it was then that Goldeye did a very noble thing, which many a fox has done to save its cubs, but few have done to save one of their own kind who was north. The billy held the way till all purely a friend. Heastole cautiously out to meet the man and his dogs-to lead

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