Last Breath: Cautionary Tales From the Limits of Human Endurance, 1st edition

Peter Stark

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Everybody loves a good story, and *Last Breath: Cautionary Tales From the Limits of Human Endurance* reads like a modern-day collection of Aesop's fables for Wilderness Medicine aficionados.

In *Last Breath*, Peter Stark, an award-winning contributor to *Outside* magazine, uses his knowledge of the outdoors and his journalistic flair to bring to life a variety of wilderness medicine scenarios. Each chapter contains a short story concerning a fictional character who finds himself or herself in a life-threatening situation in the wild. Stark then interjects medically accurate descriptions of what is happening within the character's body throughout the ordeal, from probable thought processes all the way down to the microscopic and biochemical details in some cases. Though some might

worry that a book of this type might easily become bogged down in medical minutiae, it actually translates into an interesting and—dare I say it—exciting read.

The characters in *Last Breath* are composites of the typical types of people who seem prone to falling into their unique wilderness peril. Be it succumbing to the harshness of subfreezing temperatures, taking a wrong step on a steep cliff, or being on the receiving end of a *Chironex fleckeri* jellyfish sting, the profiles of Stark's characters are based on extensive research and multiple interviews with the medical professionals who treat these patients. Each chapter covers a different case, and although the physiologic and treatment descriptions might seem superficial to some, they are without exception scientifically based and surprisingly current.

In sum, *Last Breath* is an entertaining read and an excellent way to introduce laymen to the world of wilderness medicine. Readers with no medical background will find the physiology behind the stories extremely well explained and appropriately detailed, while medical professionals will be transfixed by the creative narrative and interesting historical footnotes. With more and more people leaving the safety of their homes for the thrill—and potential hazards—of the backcountry, *Last Breath* might prove to be the necessary book of adventure parables for our times.

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