

big prick ears were turning ceaselessly, now back, now forward, their whole demeanour suggestive far rather of a very highly strung, highly intelligent nervousness than of that bold, cunning bloodthirstiness for which men have given them the name. It seemed, here and now, in this cold, silent, grim place, that the fox in print and the fox in fact were, if you properly understood them, somewhat different characters.

The fowlhouse was gained, truly, but not yet entered. It took them about five minutes to examine it from every point of view—even to jumping on the roof, and trying to scratch a way in there—but very little was to be seen of them in the progress. And the five minutes included one bolt to cover, and one statuesque period of motionlessness, caused by the rattling of a bull's chain in the cow-house (they thought it was a dog's), also a quick survey of the place, a hurried snuffing at every crack, a swift endeavour to force back the door with paw and muzzle, and a lightning but abortive attempt to dig under the wooden wall.

Then the bull's horns hit the wall of the wooden cow-shed with a whack that made the whole big edifice—it stalled fifty cows—shudder, and—the foxes were gone.

In a minute, however, they were back again, hunting like terriers in and out around the cornstacks for rats and mice (an act for which, one fears, the farmer never gave them credit), but the rodents had already been much alarmed by an owl that night, not to mention a farm cat, and kept to their fastnesses in token thereof. Still even so, I fancy they must have been successful among the well-strawed pens, sheltered behind the stackyard and the line of stately elms towering aloft into the blue-black sky. Some early lambing ewes had been placed here, and our friend the dog-fox discovered the fact rather cleverly with his nose, while a good hundred yards away.

There were two young lambs that

they knew of. They could see them between the straw-padded hurdles. There was no one about, and in the then lull of the wind the night was as still as it is in a well. You will remember also, that the vixen was starving.

All at once though, in the silence, both distinctly heard another fox bark in the fir-belt across the road opposite; he also sought a love.

This does not sound much, but if it had been a blast from the very hunting-horn itself it could scarcely have had a more lively effect.

Instantly, from three different parts of the yard and house, came the rattle of dog-chains in kennels, followed by the furious clamour of dogs threatening the red dog of the wild, bark challenging bark, until in a second the uproar was astonishing. But our foxes were not there to hear it. The dog-fox had faded out like a puff of smoke, the vixen had leapt back into the shadows and nowhere, and before you could wink there was nothing but the calm moon, the spotless carpet of white, and the tell-tale footprints.

Fully a field away our foxes were trotting down along the leeward side of the hedge. It was almost as though they had flown there, so speedily had they removed from the danger zone. But our friend the dog-fox was no longer happy. He had failed to provide the starving vixen with food, as in every action he had as good as staked his honour as a hunter to do, and she had heard the weird and guttural challenge of the other fellow in the fir-belt.

Our friend had been tried and been found wanting. Wherefore, the vixen no longer followed; she edged in a long detour towards the fir-belt, and anyone could see what that meant.

Our fox fairly danced with vexation. He bobbed, he gambolled, he tore forward and back, and in every possible action he said, plainly as words could speak:

"My dear, I swear by my brush and fangs, which I hold most dear,