

I don't know how long it took Rufus to work right round his victim till he reached the hedge on the far side, but it certainly seemed like hours; and all the time, in the wonderful stilly lulls between the gusts, the vixen could hear that other dog-fox barking his doleful challenge to fight for a mate in the deep gloom of the fir-tree belt only just across the road. But this time she took no notice—for the moment at any rate. Her heart was in the work on hand, and, though neither beast had spoken, she must have been a party to our dog-fox's plan. She could attend to the other dog-fox if this one failed this time, she seemed to think.

Then the fox, which had finally reached the hedge, walked straight through it and went from sight. The spot where he went in was about fifty yards up the hedge to the right of the hare, but about ten yards down the hedge to the left of the hare was a well-worn gap, which "Puss" had no doubt used many times. The hunted one brought his great eyes, with their permanent look of foolish terror, round to the vixen, and solemnly regarded her for the next two minutes, and it is possible by then that he had forgotten friend fox. Anyway, the vixen did her best to help him to forget him.

At the end of two minutes, with all the suddenness and unexpectedness and every atom of speed of which she was capable, she hurled herself at the hare, the snow fairly flying in a cloud behind her as she kicked off at the start. She knew she could not catch that swift beast, but that was of no account. Her game was to startle him, hustle him, terrify him into that blind, mad flight which is the hare's weak point.

And she did. Holding slightly to the right, she had covered fifteen yards before "Puss" realized what

she was "at". Then he went, whipped into the night on the legs of sudden panic, going only as a hare can—straight to the gap in the hedge. He looked like simply a brown line swiftly drawn across the snow, and—

The dog-fox must have been lying right flat on the ground in the runway on the other side of the gap, and—it was a hair-raising sight. As the hare fairly whizzed through the gap, it seemed as if a reddish streak flashed up under his very feet. The two shot straight up into the air, locked, it seemed, together, and, falling apart, came down with a thud, sprawling. Quick as thought, and grunting loudly, the hare had scratched himself up to his feet again; but, quicker still, the red fox had rolled over, and even as he lay on his back his neck stretched out, his fangs flashed in the moonlight, there was a loud snap and a high, thin, piercing scream as the hare struggled and bounded madly upwards—caught by one hind leg.

Then, before you could wink, another red form shot at full gallop through the gap, fairly on top of them. There followed a second gleam of fangs, a second snap, the scream was switched off like an electric light, and the vixen was rolling over and over on the snow, all mixed up with the fox and the hare together.

Then, all alone in the hedge-ditch, far too busy to speak or make love, but content, quite, quite, content, the two made their wedding feast off the giant hare—whose weight, by the way, must have been certainly 9lb, 9 oz. And the other fox, who was still yapping in the fir-plantation, could go hang for a wife, so far as that one vixen was concerned. *She* wasn't going to leave a husband who could use his brains as our dog-fox had done his, and could snatch a meal from the very lap of Fate through sheer, almost human reasoning.

