

The dog was inside the wire fence, looking out. The fox was outside the fence, looking in.

The first few times he had met the fox, the dog had barked and jumped and made a great fuss. But as his master had not been pleased to be woken up, he stayed quiet now. He and the fox spoke to each other often, though the dog would never have said he was friends with a fox.

“Good evening,” said the fox. “I just thought I’d say hello on my way back from dinner. I’ve just killed one of the farmer’s hens. Quite delicious. I think I should get quite bored if all my food came out of a tin, as yours does.”

The dog had noticed that the fox only ever seemed to visit when he had just made a kill. The dog was a little embarrassed that, despite his sharp teeth and big claws, he had never had the chance to kill anything for his dinner. So he said to the fox, “Oh, it’s not so bad. I would hate to have to go hungry if I wasn’t able to steal a chicken.”

The fox remembered how empty his belly had been the night before. But he looked down his snout at the dog’s belly and said, “If I could eat every night, I worry that I would get fat. Especially if I sat at home all day.”

The dog thought about how he had puffed and panted as he climbed the hill that morning, but he said “Oh, I get plenty of exercise. I went for a long walk today with my master. We went all the way through the woods and up onto the hill.”

“Yes, I saw you,” said the fox. “The man you were with seemed to walk very slowly. You must wish you could walk further and faster, and see what there is on the other side of the hill. Don’t you find it sad that you cannot go where you like?”

That very day, the dog had caught the scent of a cat, rising on the breeze from the other side of the hill. He had longed to go and chase it, and had tried to pull his master that way. But his master had wanted to go home.

Those were his thoughts. But what he said to the fox was, “Oh, I don’t think there’s anything that interesting on the other side of the hill. My master and I like going to the same places, anyway.”

The fox was always asking him awkward questions, so he thought he would ask one of his own. “How did you get on the other day when the hunters came? They looked splendid on their horses, in their red coats. But I did think to myself, ‘I hope my dear friend the fox is still quick enough to outrun them.’ I would hate to have to run for my life as you do. It must be terrifying.”

The memory of the chase made the fox’s stomach tighten. The hounds had got close enough to him that he could hear their breath as well as their bark. At the last moment, he had been able to lose them in some brambles. The next time, he might not be so lucky.

Those were his thoughts. But what he said to the dog was, “Oh, it’s quite exciting really. And of course the hounds are rather stupid and easy to trick.”

The dog looked at the fox. The fox looked at the dog. And neither was sure whose lies were easier to believe.