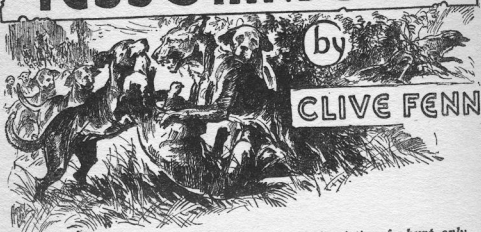


TESS STANDS BY!



by

CLIVE FENN

When Jupiter, the tame fox cub, finds himself the victim of a hunt, only Tess, his Alsatian friend, stands between him and the pursuing hounds!

THE FIRST CHAPTER

THE NEWCOMER

JEM TUFTON, the burly farmer of Stagg's End, gave a sharp ejaculation as there came the roar of a fast motor in the narrow lane. There was the dazzling flash of headlights and a big car charged past him, the speed being such that Tufton had only just time to back into the rough growth of a hedge which grew as it liked, before the racer slid past him into the darkness, leaving the night darker than ever.

The farmer was really no friend of motor-cars, though he possessed a cracked old bus which took him round his thousand-acre holding amidst the woods and hopfields, but at that moment he did not pause to vent anger on the racing car and its somewhat unthinking driver, for there was something else to think about.

The farmer heard a quaint little whimpering cry from some animal who,

less lucky than himself, had been right in the track of the fast roadster. Tufton had eyes as keen as those of a cat. He looked down at an odd little shadow there at his feet, and, stooping, picked up the victim of the rushing car. It was a very, very small fox cub, and it moaned as Tufton lifted it tenderly enough, for he knew how to handle a living creature. The poor thing had been bowled over in the charge and, as the farmer swiftly saw, had come out of the ordeal with a broken leg.

Tufton had no special reason to feel any tender sympathy for foxes, for his poultry yard was the happy hunting ground of the tribe. But he felt compassion for the cub. It, at least, had not been through his farmyard—far too young for that sort of sport. He trudged the mile he had to go, the tiny animal nestling close to him, and giving occasional yaps of pain. Tufton was a bit of a vet in his way, and once

inside the farm kitchen he did what he could for the sufferer, fixing up the damaged leg in splints. The injured cub lay passive on the table in the roomy old kitchen of the farm as the operation went through, watching the farmer as he worked.

Why he came to call the cub Jupiter, Tufton did not know, unless it was a remembrance of the word that escaped his lips as the devastating car swept by. But Jupiter it was, and the newcomer took kindly to his name, showing a deep appreciation of his friends at Crole Farm.

There was Tufton himself, gruff, a man of very few words; his wife, a lady who spent her life between her manifold duties in her dairy and the business of the wash-house; the odd man, Potter (he looked it!), and the others, including Tess, the wary old Alsatian, a dog of few barks, but those she gave she meant.

Jupiter shared the quarters of Tess, and a subtle fellow feeling sprang up between the pair. Anyhow, Tess was very gentle with the wounded stranger, and as time went on the two became fast comrades, sharing things together like sportsmen.

There were moments when Tess despised the fox side of her chum, but then she knew that Jupiter had never actually learned to be a real fox. He was caught too young. He was not in the least interested in those things which matter to the fox most, the ugly rumours of the chase, the baying of hounds.

Fox-hunting in that part of the country had practically fallen into abeyance, the mastership being vacant and nobody troubling about jerking things back into efficiency. As a result the foxes came and went as they chose, and never did a member of the race go short of a pulpet for a meal.

But the farmer, who had suffered from depredations as much as anybody, was downright pleased when he read in the district newspaper that a newcomer to the neighbourhood, a man with little knowledge of farming, pots of cash and plenty of leisure, had taken things in hand and set the pack going again.

Tufton was interested, of course, though he had little time for hunting. He would as soon have thought of shooting a fox as he would of going minus his dinner, but, for all that, he liked to hear that the ravager of poultry pens did not have things entirely his own way, but stood a sporting chance of closing his career, brush and all, after a smart run over the hills.

There came a sudden mystery urge to Jupiter, now a fully grown fox. He was fixed up now in a comfortable hide-out underneath the woodshed, for he had grown too big for the shake-down in Tess' kennel.

And there was no stifling that urge as one long glorious summer glided into fragrant autumn, with soft velvety nights, and not even the suspicion of a cold snap in the mornings. The nights made the fox thrill with an excitement which he could not understand—those nights with the moon at the full, gliding up there in radiant beauty amidst the cloud ships, the hedges still dense, the woods brown and gold, like the bracken, a strange peaty scent in the air. They tingled in his blood.

In the old farm garden the blackberries and bullaces were ripe. In the cultivated part the dahlias flourished, and here butterflies, the Brimstone, the Blue, the Red Admiral, the Tortoiseshell, and the Peacock, floated in the misty sunshine of the fall.

Less and less did Jupiter understand the meaning of the ideas that came to him. He was free to come and go, like any other member of the farm staff. He had plenty of food. It was not a quest for provender which made him simply yearn to be off and away—where he did not know. Some throw-back, perhaps, to the feeling of an ancestor who had listened on some hillside to the hallali of the hunting horn.

The urge would not be silenced. It was not the least bit of use for Tess, who would drop in to supper, to say it was all nonsense. Jupiter knew in his bones and his brush that there was something he had been kept out of, and, hang it all, he must know!

THE SECOND CHAPTER

HUNTERS—AND HUNTED!

ONE fine morning Jupiter slipped away, into that unknown world of which he felt he was really a part, and which his family had always understood.

Too late he found out his mistake—and yet it had to be. He had been

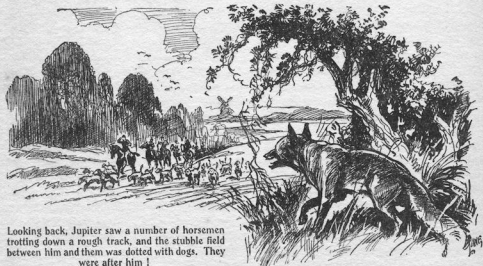
snuffing round the countryside, and was loping along the edge of a dense wood when he heard a distant sound of shouting, then the baying of hounds, after that the hunting call. Looking back he saw a number of horsemen trotting down a rough track, and the stubble field between him and them was dotted with dogs.

They were after him! He did not know why, but he sensed there was real peril, such as he had never experienced in his snug quarters at Crole Farm.

Jupiter flashed straight at the brown curtain of the wood and was gone, but if he thought he had thrown off danger, he was vastly mistaken. The hounds were swiftly on his track, as nimble as himself at flying across a stream, and darting up a hillside thickly clothed with yellow bracken.

If that was what he had dreamed of at the farm he most heartily wished he had dreamed again! It was a thousand pities he had not listened attentively to the wise advice of old Tess.

If only he had been less cocksure!



Looking back, Jupiter saw a number of horsemen trotting down a rough track, and the stubble field between him and them was dotted with dogs. They were after him!

It was no catch, being cheived and chased, realising at any minute the savage hounds would be on top. The members of the hunt were pleased as Punch, of course. This would be the first kill of the season.

The hunt held a flush hand, though it did not know it, for, while any ordinary fox would have made a bee-line for earth, this was out of the question in the case of Jupiter, for he had no earth. He had not been brought up that way! He understood little enough of the tricks of the trade.

There was only the farm, and Crole's was far away. Jupiter could run, but not well. He was puffed already. He had run to fat. When he and Tess were out together, Jupiter went at the Alsatian's dawdling amble out of respect for years.

And now he was winded already, while his pursuers were fresh as paint. Feeling pretty desperate he spurted on, the thunder of approaching peril in his ears.

Suddenly, mixed up in all that fury, he distinguished something else. It was a bark, a strangely familiar bark. The sound made his heart leap. He knew that bark, deep and throaty. It was Tess! But Tess could not be there. She was all snug at the farm. Tess did not know her companion was out! Did she not? The truth was that soon after Jupiter had mouched off on his own, the Alsatian had roused up, shaken herself, and gone to see how Jupiter was doing. But the fox was not there!

Had the fox thrown discretion to the winds, tossed his brush, as it were, over the windmill, and gone off in search of adventure? That was what it looked like. Tess sought her pal in all likely quarters, widening her range every minute. Then she picked

up the scent, and snuffled onward. Tess was wise to what was happening. Perhaps she might be in time to do something for the wilful fox.

Meantime the chase went madly on, with the soft life the fox had lived taking toll. He was not merely ignorant of the ropes, but ridiculously out of condition for a life-and-death run.

His spirit was ebbing away. He was handicapped at every turn. He felt his enemies were closing in on all sides. He would never make a getaway! Never! He charged on, and went head over heels into a gully, the fierce baying of the hounds sounding very near.

Then came that barking he had heard before. It was like music. The bark was a boom—louder and louder. Suddenly the grand old Alsatian leaped out from nowhere, as it seemed, right on to the spot where the scared fox, beaten to the wide, confused by his tumble into the ditch, tried to back into the tangled cover supplied by the damp gully.

The hounds fancied they had got the fox. Their mistake, that! They found themselves faced by a real adversary. An Alsatian is a loyal friend, a strong ally. It can be gentle enough, or otherwise. Tess at that moment was otherwise. Her old fighting spirit asserted itself. She was game, with bared teeth and a snarl of fury.

The hounds had cause for a pause, and under cover of the new turn of affairs, Jupiter got clear away. No need to blame him! He was too frightened to be censured. There is a funk which is only pitiable, not to be condemned.

Tess was ready to do battle, and she met the charge of the hounds, the

old wolf-like strain in her make-up to the fore. The momentary hesitation of the pack saved Jupiter, enabling him to slip for safety.

The hounds tore savagely at the old dog. A score of foes tried to drag her down, but she met the lot, the blood streaming from her flanks. There was life in the old dog yet. She fought on, conscious that her chum had got away.

The M.F.H. rode up and tried to make out what was happening. It was not a bit clear.

"I'm jiggered," he cried, "if it isn't that Alsatian from Crole Farm!"

He sprang out of the saddle and made to approach Tess, but the Alsatian eyed him warily, and backed away. Then she stood licking her wounds.

"Poor beast!" muttered the M.F.H. "How was it? I saw the fox myself!"

Tess could have told him, but the dog didn't, being always reserved. The Alsatian slunk off, being too much battered, anyway, to discuss matters. She stopped more than once to lick her hurts and these were pretty bad.

Jupiter tried to thank her much later, but was told to shut up.

Naturally the M.F.H. was curious as to what lay behind it all. He knew well there had been a fox, but it had faded out. Where? Then this sporting Alsatian had jumped in to play her own rôle!

Luckily, the master of the hunt bumped into Tufton next market day, and the genial M.F.H. heard all about the tame fox. Jupiter's getaway was dramatic, and the result was welcome to the farmer, likewise to Tess, who valued her foxy pal. But Jupiter has not forgotten the panic and the spinal cold feeling when he hears the horn, and he takes good care to stay at home.



ROOKWOOD RHYMES—

KIT ERROLL
(of the Fourth Form).

KIT ERROLL, fearless, frank, and free!
So true to all his vows and,
As "H. A." readers will agree,
A fellow in a thousand!
The way he backed up Mornington
Through fair and stormy weather,
Has for this dauntless junior won
Both praise and fame together!
He stood by Mornington throughout,
He backed him up in all things;
Nor was this faithful chum put out
By mighty things or small things.
If Mornington received the "sack,"
And caused a big commotion,
Kit Erroll would be at his back,
So great is his devotion.

He also brings off many feats
In every sort of pastime;
Each cricketing achievement beats
The score he put up last time.
His style at footer's very neat,
He joins in routs and rallies;
And, once the ball is at his feet,
He very rarely dallies!

Had Erroll lived in bygone days,
A knight in shining armour,
His chivalrous and manly ways
Would win him some fair charmer.
"A very perfect, gentle knight"
Would be his reputation;
And like a lion he would fight
For freedom and the nation!

Kit Erroll, you're a splendid sort!
The girls and boys of Britain
Enjoy your deeds in school and sport,
So well and ably written.
Long may you strive to play the game,
And noble virtues cherish;
Then never shall your name and fame
Within our memory perish!