

Fox Hounds

A 101 Dalmatians Fan Fiction

By Swift Fox

AKA Glen Rockhill

The sun rose over the countryside throwing its first rays of light over the Dearly Farm. The view pans over the sleeping farmhouse and barn and over the forested swamp, when from over the hills beyond sprint three dark forms. They run down the hill, paws beating madly, tails streaming out behind, and into the swamp. The baying of hounds in pursuit echoes in the distance as the camera pans in through the forest canopy.

Panting heavily, three reddish-brown foxes peek out from behind a thick bush looking back the way they came. The cries of the hounds fading in the distance, the foxes come out of their cover. Two of the foxes are nearly the same size, probably no more than three seasons old. It is quite clear from the posturing that the larger of the two is the leader. The third fox is much smaller than the other two and can't be much more than a season old.

The leader perks his ears forward, neck and head straining to their limits to catch any sound of danger.

"I think we gave them the slip." The leader said after a few moments.

"That was too close Thicket." The second foxed stated flatly, "Too close for my liking."

"I'm scared." Whimpered the small fox, "When are we going home?"

Ears flat, the fox leader, Thicket, turned and barked, "Shut up the two of you! The creator damn humans and their dogs! We were so close and then you had to get an attack of fleas Scratch and that set the whole coup a cackling."

"I can't help it Thicket." Worried the second fox, Scratch, "I can't control them and then it just gets to be too...muuuuch...and..." His excuse is interrupted as his eyes start to water and he brings his hind leg up to desperately scratch his shoulder.

Thicket shakes his head in annoyance and begins to look around, getting his bearings. "I wonder where we are?" He says finally.

"You mean you don't know?" whined the small fox; "We're lost! I'll never get home!"

"Now don't you start crying Swift!" growled Thicket, halting the pup's whimpers, "If it weren't for your wandering off, we wouldn't be in this fix."

"Its not my fault!" cried Swift "Scratch told me 'bout the rabbit. An' he said that I couldn't catch it. An'..."

"Enough already! Scratch! Scratch!?" Thicket called out and turned to see Scratch rolling around in the dirt, panting happily as the dirt bath relieved the itching sensations. About to vent on Scratch, Thicket heard something move behind him. He was about to turn when he heard.

"Howdy!"

All three foxes tensed, fur bristling. Thicket finished his turn and Scratch jumped to his paws. Swift just turned his head to look in the direction the voice had come from. Before them stood a rat. Seemingly unfazed by the three predators standing before him, the rat continued in his twang, "It's been a while since we've had foxes here in the swamp. Always good business partners they are, that is...iiiiif your interested."

Their wits returned and the foxes relaxed some. Thicket replied for the three of them, "A business proposition huh rat?" He considered it for a second, then finished, "Yeah, we're listening."

"Good. Good." Said the rat, pleased, "Come with me." The rat looked to either side, then advised quietly, "This is no place to talk, too many ears lurking behind every tree."

Ever cautious, and now looking around at the trees himself, Scratch asked, "Where are you taking us rat? How do we know this isn't a trick?"

The rat, heading back into the depths of the swamp, turned and smiled back as he answered simply, "You don't. Consider this the first test of our partnership. Trust." And with that he disappeared into the brush.

Pausing a few moments Thicket finally told the others, "Come on." The three foxes followed after the rat, going deeper into the swamp.

"But what about going home?" Asked Swift as he followed Scratch into the swamp.

#####

Back at the farm, breakfast over, Lucky, Rolly, Cadpig and Spot lay soaking up the morning sun in the doorway of the big red barn while they figured out what to do today.

Ahhh...Kibble!" Sighed Rolly with a slurp. He was stuffed as usual after meals and he was beginning to get sleepy. Rolly yawned and said, "I can't wait until lunch!"

"Yeah well, that's a few hours away and I have that thing with Tripod at Hiccup Hole in an hour." Said Lucky. Grinning an evil grin he continued, "And he's gonna eat his sweat band after he sees who the king diver is!"

"You boys have to let go of your machismo," soothed the philosophical Cadpig, "before it rots your brains." She looks at Lucky, who is still grinning and thinking about the victory he is sure to get, and rephrases her statement, "Oops!" she smiles, "Too late!"

"Ummm, Lucky?" Queried Spot the Chicken who had been watching the exchange quietly until now, "Doesn't Tripod always kick your tail whenever you two compete?"

Lucky snapped out of his daydream and angrily charged at the chicken. He stopped just in front of her and shouted, "Well not today! Not this tail and not this DALMATIAN!" Full of himself, Lucky walked passed her, head high, and headed for the swimming hole. "You guys coming?" He called back not slowing.

"Stay here and miss the show?" asked Cadpig facetiously; "I wouldn't miss it."

"Well, just so long as we're back by lunch." Said Rolly as he got up, stretched and followed his brother and sister.

Rearranging her feathers, Spot said under her breath as she followed after her friends, "Who ever said that a little competition was good for ya must never have had to lose."

#####

Back in the swamp the three foxes have arrived at the junked washing machine that is the Swamp Rat's home.

"Welcome, welcome, welcome friends!" Swamp rat greeted the foxes, "Come on in and make yourselves comfortable."

Pleased with the hospitality, Thicket and Scratch walked up the ramp, but Swift sat down stubbornly and cried out, "Thicket! I don't wanna be here in this yucky swamp! I wanna go home!"

Thicket leapt off the ramp and landed on the ground right in front of the fox kit. Swift cowered at the sudden and threatening position his older brother had taken. Highly annoyed at his younger half sibling Thicket barked at Swift angrily, "Fine you little brat! If you want to go home so badly then go! Get out of here!" Thicket brought his paw up and swatted at the young fox, but Swift, true to his name, had already bolted into the swamp.

"GET BACK HERE YOU WELP!!" yelled Thicket.

"Good one Bro." Commented Scratch as he got to the bottom of the ramp again, "Now we'll have to go and find him again."

"Don't y'all worry yourselves over that partners." Swamp Rat offered, "We have business to take care of. I'll send Steven to find your young friend. Now go on in and settle yourselves down. Help yourself to some kibble."

#####

Panting on a dry clot of earth in the swamp, Swift, muddy and wet from his reckless bolt into the swamp, looked around to get his bearings. He had no idea where he was.

"Foxie!" A deep voice called out faintly.

'That wasn't Thicket or Scratch.' Thought Swift who began to look around nervously. He wasn't happy about being in the swamp and he was even less happy that he now found himself completely lost and alone in it as well

"Foxie!" Again the voice called, louder this time.

'Whatever it is it's getting closer.' Swift thought again. He hunkered down on the clot of earth trying to make himself as small as possible. 'How do I get myself into these messes?' Swift wondered.

"Foxie!" This time the voice was much closer as it called out for him.

Swift was starting to shake more from anxiety than from being wet. He closed his eyes, hoping whatever it was wouldn't notice him and pass him by. 'I wish Thicket or Scratch was here.' The little fox wished silently. The sound of rippling water next to him caused Swift to look up. Before him a huge green mass issued up out of the swamp. Swift sat up, and watched in awe as the behemoth grew, and grew, towering above him. The look of utmost terror was etched across the fox's furry face as his mouth hung open and his eyes grew to the size of saucers. The beast bent down, its great maw opening to show Swift the rows and rows of sharp white teeth and dark, gaping throat beyond.

"Foxie." The great alligator said only to be greeted by...

"Aaaaaaaa!!!" Swift cried out in panic, his fur standing on end, and darted away.

"But..." Steven started to say, but the young fox was gone. "Darn." The alligator said, snapping his claws in disappointment.

#####

Not stopping for anything, Swift, completely panicked and acting on natural instincts, ran into a clearing and then head long into...Lucky. The impact launched the unprepared puppy into the air and tumbling into the swimming hole.

ARRRRGH!!!

SPLASH!!

It was a spectacular dive. One that would have easily handed him the victory he longed for. But ninety-eight spotted white puppies didn't notice. Instead they were growling and surrounding the red furred animal that had attacked their brother.

Spot screamed in panic, "A f, f, f, FOX!!!!!!!"

Swift was stunned by the impact but quickly realized the danger he was in as he saw all the snarling white dogs surrounding him. 'Oh, no.'

"OKAY! Who's the wise dog that wants his spots re-arranged!?" Lucky screamed as he pulled himself up from the bank of the pond. He was soaked and muddy. The horseshoe spotted puppy shook himself off and strutted up to the circle. The two Dalmatians in his way parted enough to allow him access into the circle. Stepping inside the ring of monochromatic puppies, Lucky saw before him, at the center of the circle, was a small red ball of fur, about the same size as Lucky himself. It lay, still partially sprawled on the ground, cowering, panting, and stammering to say something.

"I, I, I, I didn't mean it." Stuttered the little fox, "There, there, there was this, this big mu, mu, mu, monster in the swamp. An', an', an' I was so scared. An' I ran, an' ran. Then I ran into you, an', an'...I'm sorry!" Swift brought a paw up and protectively put it over his head and watched helplessly at the small dogs all around him, "Please don't hurt me."

Angry as Lucky was, he couldn't help but feel sympathetic for the creature before him. His brothers and sisters were beginning to feel the same way and all the puppies relaxed a little.

Reigning in her emotions first, Cadpig, the smallest of the 101 Dalmatians on the farm, bounced over to the huddled red form offered some comforting words. "No harm done." She said cheerfully, "Lucky seems to still be in one piece, and I for one know that he's taken harder falls than the one you gave him." She shot a playful smile at Lucky, who in turn grimaced, remembering the humiliation of the cone not so long ago. She looked back to the fox and continued, "My name's Cadpig, and these are my brothers and sisters," sweeping her paw around the circle, "and our **friend**," she stressed, "Spot the chicken."

Swift looked up at this inoffensive, small, white spotted dog and at the others, which were slowly approaching. Sensing the danger was passed, he introduced himself, "I, I'm Swift." Then, he looked at the dog identified as Lucky. Swift stood up and approached this pup and said, "I hope you're not hurt, L, Lucky."

Lucky smiled and replied in an astonished tone, "Me? Hurt? No way! No harm done. Ya just, uh, startled me." Lucky took a couple steps forward to meet the fox, "No hard feelings Ok? Put 'er there Swift!"

Lucky extended his paw and Swift took it. The competition forgotten, the puppies started back to the farm with their new friend. Every pup looked forward to meeting and playing with this new pup. All, except for one chicken.

She muttered under her breath to Cadpig, "I don't know about this." The chicken spread her wings wide, "It goes against my every feather to invite a fox onto the farm." She stopped and pointed a wing at herself, "I have a feeling something bad is going to happen. I can feel it."

"Oh don't be such a worry wort." Admonished Cadpig a little annoyed at her friend's stance on the topic, "Besides he's so little. What harm can he do?"

Spot moved in front of Cadpig and stopped, pointing her wing at the little dog, she stressed, "That's exactly the point. He **is** a young fox. A **very** young fox." She swept her wing across the countryside, "And where there's a young fox wandering around there may be bigger foxes near by."

"Well if it'll make you feel better," Cadpig sat back to look at her friend and soothed, "we'll keep an eye on him and for his parents. With 202 eyes and 101 noses around, a fox will be hard pressed to get around on the farm unaware."

"If you say s, s, s, so." Surrendered Spot and the chicken and Dalmatian made there way back to the farm.

#####

Back at the Swamp Rat's place, two juvenile foxes were sniffing the area and calling frantically for their missing brother.

"Great! This is just GREAT Thicket!" Shouted Scratch at his brother, while scratching some mud out of his fur.

"Aw shut up." Thicket replied tersely, annoyed as well, "We'll find him." He turned toward the old dryer and shouted, "Hey, Rat!"

The nickname grated on Swamp Rat, but he pushed his feelings of displeasure down. He was sure that he could benefit from this partnership. Foxes were the craftiest and most cunning animals he knew. Whatever schemes they worked up, usually paid out high dividends. Even if something went awry, he was sure he could lay all the blame on these foxes and walk away unscathed. So he put up with the nickname.

"Why, yes boys. Found that little one yet?" he asked looking down at the muddy, wet foxes and feigning concern.

"No we haven't." answered Thicket, "Didn't you say you sent someone to fetch him?"

"Well. Now that you mention it. I do believe I did." Remembered the Swamp Rat, "Now where did he get to?" "STEVEN!" the rat called out over the swamp. "STEVEN!!"

A rush of water roiled ahead of the huge green alligator as it swam up to the Swamp Rat's island, drenching both foxes in the slimy, putrid water yet again.

Both foxes stood stunned at the immensity of this beast.

"Y, y, you sent this thing after Swift??" stammered Thicket, still quite shaken.

"Great Creator." Was all that Scratch could muster.

"Yep. " answered the Swamp Rat nonchalantly; "Steven here knows the swamp as good as anybody. If anyone could find your little friend, he can."

Turning, Swamp Rat addressed the alligator like he was talking to a child, "Now Steven. Did you find the little fox?"

Steven nodded his head.

Leading the conversation along, Swamp Rat asked, "Well, where is he then?"

Scratch gasped, "He ate Swift!"

"No I didn't." said Steven in a deep, gravelly voice, " I frightened him an he ran off."

"Toward where, ya big oaf?" said Swamp Rat, clearly agitated.

"He ran off toward Hiccup Hole an all those Dalmatian puppies." Replied Steven, unfazed by the Swamp Rats irritation.

"He ran into a pack of DOGS!!" screamed Thicket clearly at his wits end with this whole exchange. " Why they'll rip him to pieces! He's only a kit for Creator's sake!"

'Uh oh.' Swamp rat thought as he looked at the two foxes baring their teeth and clearly thinking ill of him. 'I have to get these boys calmed down pronto.'

"Whoa now boys!" Swamp Rat spoke authoritatively, "If he's run into that bunch, I know for a fact that he's perfectly alright."

"Yep." Confirmed Steven without being asked, "In fact, they took him back to the farm with them, all friendly like."

"FARM!!" Both foxes screamed in unison. "THAT'S WORSE!!"

"No, it's, not!" Swamp Rat argued, "Them humans who own the farm ain't like real farmers. They're big time animal lovers and I'm sure they wouldn't harm a whisker on your little friend." Then a scheme popped into the rat's head. A truly devious scheme was working itself out in his mind.

His mood changed in seconds as he euphorically began to build the groundwork of his plan, "Well. This whole mess couldn't be better. Don't ya see?"

Both foxes became confused at this sudden change of emotion.

"What are you talking about you crazy rat?" Barked Thicket warily

"Why, that little fox has given you your free ticket onto the farm." Swamp Rat replied eagerly, unable to believe his luck and the gullibility of these foxes. This was going to be a profitable relationship, and these two dumb foxes would be lucky to get out of it with their skins. "All you two have to do is waltz on down there, find him, tell him your sorry and then you're in like Flynn. He'll introduce you to all his friends and then we'll have them all right in our paws!"

"Yes. I see now." Said Thicket, seeing the rat's plan in his own mind, "Very clever. Very clever indeed Swamp Rat. Now which way is it to that farm?"

Both foxes looked dangerous again, and Swamp Rat was glad to see that it was no longer directed at him. "Well, just follow me. We'll be there in no time." He said.

#####

Back at the Dearly Farm the puppies were playing in the barnyard.

"Whatsa matter Tripod!??" Jeered Lucky laughing, "Finally found someone who can beat ya at something?"

"Wow!" Admired Cadpig, "Look at him go!"

"Yeah." Said Rolly, breathing heavy, "He's makin' me tired just watching him. How many laps around the yard are they doing?"

"Ten." Answered Lucky taking the whole event in like he was watching a NASCAR race, "I think they're on lap eight now."

"Oh m, m, m, man." Groaned Spot, "If he ever gets loose in the chicken coop, w, w, w, we're history."

"Oh Spot." Comforted Cadpig, " You must let go of these negative vibrations and open yourself up to soak in the positive energies around you and view the good in all things."

"In other words Spot," Lucky interjected sarcastically, "Use the Force."

WHAP!

Cadpig landed a hard blow to the back of Lucky's head but she replied calmly, "Ah yes. The Force. I know it well."

"Uhhhh." Lucky groaned dizzily, "Help me Obe Wan Kenobi. You're my only hope." Then he shook off the effects to watch as Swift crossed the finish line in front of them, followed shortly by a panting, three legged Dalmatian, Tripod.

Swift turned and trotted back over to Tripod. "Phew. Nice race Tripod." Swift said breathing hard; "You nearly had me."

Yeah. -pant- I know." Panted Tripod, walking beside the fox. "But you set a hard pace -pant- and your cornering is remarkable." Tripod said admiringly.

"Well I must admit my tail gives me an advantage there." Answered Swift humbly, "Come on buddy, let's get a drink and I'll give ya some pointers."

Lucky, Cadpig, Rolly, Spot and the rest of the puppies gathered around Swift and Tripod at the water trough to congratulate the young fox and comfort their athletic brother.

At the edge of their range of hearing, the puppies and the young fox cub faintly heard, "Swift."

The chatter stopped as the puppies turned their heads this way and that to get a bearing on where the sound had originated.

Then the voice called out again, "Swift." This time louder and nearer and all the puppies locked in on the direction the voice had called from. The voice was calling from the direction of Hiccup Hole and the swamp beyond.

Swift ran over to the fence enclosing the pigsty and jumped up onto the top rail. From there he called out in the direction of the voice, "I'm here!" Then he looked down at Lucky, Cadpig, Rolly and Spot and said, "That's my brothers. They're looking for me." Then his tone turned worried as he finished, "I'll bet ya they'll be angry with me."

"G, g, g, great!" Stuttered Spot; "I told you there'd be more of them."

"Don't worry." Said Swift cheerfully, "I'm sure I can convince them not to go after the chickens."

"Well if not," Lucky added, "We'll have to chase them off the farm."

"Oh, I hope not!" answered Swift, "I'd hate to have to leave all my new friends here." Then he got an idea, "Tell ya what. I'll run out and meet them. I'll talk to them and if they agree not to attack the chickens and other animals here, I'll bring them back and introduce them to you. How's that sound?" Swift finished excitedly.

"G, g, good, luck." Spot said sarcastically.

Swift, excited as he was, didn't interpret it that way and smiled a thanks to Spot and the Dalmatians, then darted away towards his brothers yapping, "I'm here! I'm here!"

"Wow Spot." Said Rolly in awe; "You really made the little guy happy."

"Yeah!" smiled Cadpig at her friend, "See, a little positive energy can really go a long way! You have just taken your first step into a more fulfilling world." She finished mystically.

"Uh, well guys." Interrupted Lucky, "I think we ought to get ourselves ready, just in case Swift can't convince them."

"That's," Spot emphasized, "the most intelligent thing I've heard all day!"

The Dalmatians moved off to ready their brothers and sisters should there be a problem.

#####

Swift ran, bounding over the hilly landscape toward the call of his siblings. At the top of the next rise he could see them. Thicket and Scratch were cautiously working their way across a cultivated field towards the farm. Swift ran down to them and the three young foxes greeted each other playfully. Swift was relieved that he wasn't in trouble and went on to relay his story of how he got scared in the swamp, had run into the Dalmatian dogs, how they had taken them to their home on the farm, and cared for him. Through it all both foxes asked questions but otherwise listened patiently. By the time he was done, both juvenile foxes were eager to see the spotted white dogs and thank them for looking after their little brother. But before he would let them go, Swift went on to relay the rules of the farm to Thicket and Scratch. Both foxes agreed and the three foxes continued on their way to the farm, Swift leading they way. Thicket and Scratch looked at each other as they followed their brother to the farm and winked. "Too easy." They both communicated silently.

#####

Swamp Rat watched from the edge of the tree line and watched the whole exchange for what must have been an eternity for him. The little fox had leaped around and yapped for nearly an hour before he finally lead them away toward the farm. "YeeHaa." He said quietly, slapping his hip, "They're in. Now I'll wait for nightfall and meet with those two fleabags to see what deals they've worked up."

He turned with a smile and walked back into the forested swamp.

#####

"Hey guys!" Swift called out to the small group of Dalmatians sitting by the corner of the barn.

"Welcome back Swift." Said Lucky, "Is everything ok with your brothers?"

"Yep!" answered Swift only to be cut off.

"We don't have any problems with the rules." Interrupted Thicket, "We're more interested in thanking you for looking after Swift than eating chickens."

"No thanks are needed." Cadpig replied, "Your brother is a good pup and he's our friend now."

The conversation had gotten away from Swift and he hurriedly interjected, "Um, I didn't get to introduce you. These are my brothers Thicket, "pointing a paw at the larger fox, "and Scratch." Swift pointed to his other brother. "Thicket. Scratch. This is Lucky, Cadpig, Rolly and Tripod." He finished, pointing out each of the puppies as he named them. "Hey, where's Spot?" Swift asked, not seeing the chicken around.

"She's still at home." Answered Cadpig, "The chickens aren't taking well to this."

"Understandable." Commented Thicket, "I do hope we get to meet her though. Swift has spoken most highly of her."

"That might not be a good idea right now." Said Tripod, rather sternly.

"Besides, it's almost time for Thunderbolt to come on, "Lucky recovered, "and I know Swift said he wanted to watch it. "

"Oh yeah!" cried Swift, "I almost forgot. Well maybe Spot will come by while we're watching Thunderbolt?"

"I'll go get her while you boys are watching TV." Offered Cadpig.

"Thank you Cadpig." Lucky said politely. "Come on guys! Thunder's waitin'."

The three puppies led the three foxes into the barn where several more Dalmatian puppies were assembled to watch the adventures of the heroic canine.

#####

The episode was a re-run, but none of the puppies cared. Swift was enthralled. He had seen these TV things in garbage piles before, but he had never seen one working. It was like a whole world was behind the little glass thing. Lucky had said during a commercial, that the world in the TV was this world, only somewhere else. He

explained the picture was sent to the TV through the air and was picked up by the metal rods sticking out of the top of the TV. All of this made absolutely no sense to Swift. He was just happy to be able to watch the show in amazement. After the show was over, there was a collective moan. Then the puppies started to file out and make their way toward the chow tower. It was nearly time for dinner.

But as Lucky was getting up to leave, Thicket asked, "That was really nice, but wouldn't it be better on a bigger TV?"

"Yeah." Replied Lucky, "But that's all we have."

"I may be able to help with that." Thicket told him, "That is if you're willing to trade for it?"

"Trade?" Lucky asked warily, "Who would trade us a bigger TV for this small one?"

"Why, someone who only has room for a small TV." Answered Scratch

"Yeah. We come across bigger TV's than this one all the time." Continued Thicket, "Even the ones without the glass screens."

"What are you doing Thicket?" asked Swift, confused.

"Only offering to repay your friends for looking after you." Thicket answered, then turned back to Lucky, "One good turn deserves another, right Lucky?"

"Y, yeah." Lucky answered, but he was thinking about the TV without a glass screen that Thicket has mentioned. That could only mean one thing. LARGE SCREEN TV! All reason left Lucky as he asked eagerly, "You can get us a large screen TV in exchange for the one we've got?"

"Hooked." Thicket thought then answered, "Well it might take some time, they don't grow on trees ya know, but yes, we could do that."

"Uh, Lucky." Said Rolly, "There's nothing wrong with the TV we've got."

"Yes," confirmed Scratch, "Your brother Rolly's right. There isn't anything wrong with your TV."

"No! He's wrong!" interrupted Lucky, "The TV is too small! That's what's wrong! If you can get us a large screen TV, you can have this hunk a' junk!"

"Deal." Said Thicket holding his black furred paw out to Lucky who took it without hesitation.

Rolly opened his mouth to protest when the dinner bell went off. Whatever it was he wanted to say was pushed out of the way by the desire for kibble.

"Hey! Are you guys coming?" Lucky asked in the doorway.

"I am!" called Swift, running to the door.

"Dry or wet?" asked Scratch.

"Dry." Lucky answered, confused at the question.

"Then no." said Thicket, "We'll hunt down some mice. Is that allowed?"

"Yeah, sure." Lucky said. "Have all the mice you want!" Lucky called back as he ran with Swift down to the chow tower, thinking, "Mice? Blech!"

As usual it was a disorganized feeding frenzy at the trough as 99 puppies and one fox feasted on kibble.

#####

"Too easy." Thicket said to his brother.

"Yep Thicket." Agreed Scratch, "Seems like the rat was right."

"We've got to work one more deal." Announced Thicket.

"The fat one." Scratch said reading his brother's thoughts.

"One of the most malleable weaknesses are those which involve the stomach." Confirmed Thicket, "Now all we need is the proper approach."

"Well I for one could care less about these dogs," Scratch said, "But I could go for a chicken or two."

"Me too, brother." Acceded Thicket, "But we must be patient. All things come to those who wait. While we're not being escorted, let's check out the farm, shall we?"

Smiling a toothy foxie grin, Scratch said, "After you brother. After you."

The two foxes walked out of the barn and slunk into the long shadows thrown by the late day sun.

#####

"Ohhh, I'm stuffed!" called out Rolly to no one in particular. He had found a soft patch of grass several yards from the food trough and couldn't go any farther. So he just laid down to sleep off the drowsing effects of over eating. Sighing contentedly, he let his eyes drop into slumber.

"Hey there Rolly." A voice said from behind. His sensitive ears told Rolly that this was Scratch.

Not opening his eyes, Rolly replied to the fox, "Uh, not to be rude. But I was just about to take a nap."

"Guess you're too busy to talk about your stash?" needled Scratch as he set to work on an itch behind his ear.

But Rolly was no longer sleepy, and he rolled over and put himself in a sitting position in front of the fox. "What do you know about my stash?" Rolly said accusingly.

"Absolutely nothing my friend." Soothed Scratch, "I merely deduced that you had such a thing. Hey, even foxes cache some of their food away for a rainy day."

"I don't believe you." Said Rolly flatly.

"Believe me or not Rolly," Scratch replied, snickering a little, "it's obvious that the amount of food that the humans allot to you puppies is not enough to give you that figure, or else there would be 98 other rotund little puppies. So you must be supplementing it in other ways."

"Are you calling me fat?" Rolly asked dubiously.

"Not at all." Retreated the fox, "Rather, I am applauding you for your ingenuity. Only you out of all the creatures on this farm has the fore sight to put away a little for the times when you need a little extra, or, as we foxes do, for a rainy day. That makes you very clever my friend and worthy of a foxes admiration."

"Oh." Said Rolly conscientiously. He realized he may have been a little hasty in his judgement of these foxes. Perhaps they weren't all bad after all. "Can you really get Lucky a TV?" Rolly asked trying to change the subject.

"We sure can." Scratch assured, "Foxes are nature's best foragers. There's practically nothing we can't get. Which brings me to the reason for coming to see you." Scratch paused, and noted that he had this puppy's undivided attention. The fox continued, "I was hoping you'd allow me to help you with your cache. Swift told me a lot about you and just from his ravings I figured you were one of his favorites."

"Well..." Rolly looked down, bashful as he was, and giggled a little, "I guess you could say that. What exactly did you have in mind?"

It was what Scratch was waiting for. The phrase this puppy just uttered was like the sound of a trap suddenly closing. The analogy made him wince a little but he took comfort in the fact the snare wasn't closing around his neck.

He began to weave his tale, "Well Rolly. Have you ever seen accidents involving the large road movers?"

"You mean trucks?" asked Rolly helpfully.

"Yes. Trucks are what they're called?" Scratch asked, feigning ignorance. At the Dalmatian's nod of confirmation, the fox continued, "Yes well these trucks sometimes carry food for animals such as yourselves."

Rolly had seen such trucks being packed with Kanine Krunchies and other delicious products produced by that company. His jowls were starting to water as he thought of all that food. He nodded his understanding to the fox beckoning him to continue.

More than eager to please, Scratch went on, "Well, after an accident the food carried in the trucks aren't taken to the store anymore. It is considered contaminated and sent to another place. Now we both know, a little dirt doesn't make stuff inedible, but there it goes to sit."

Aghast Rolly leans forward grabbing the fox at his shoulders, "Say it's not so Scratch! Say its' not so!"

"Alas, my friend, it is." Answered Scratch solemnly, and extricating the dog from his fur. "But." He paused dramatically, "Thicket and I know where this other place is and we know how to get you some."

"Where! Where is it!" Cried Rolly in anguish. "Can you take me there!?"

"I'm sorry Rolly." Replied Scratch, "I can't take you there. It's kind of an exclusive club. But I'm willing to use my contacts to let you in on some deals. How does that sound?"

"Really?" Rolly inquired, "Oh Papa that would be great. Thanks Scratch!"

"Whoa now buddy." Scratch halted, "I'm afraid that there is a slight cost to access this service that I haven't mentioned yet."

Rolly looked warily at the fox, "I knew that it sounded too good to be true."

"Not so hasty my friend." Calmed the fox, "It's a good deal I assure you. Even I have to cough up some scraps to make a withdrawal. But at 3 for 1 you can't beat it."

Rolly's expression changed to surprise, "Th, th, three for one?"

"Yep, " said the fox confidently, "Not a bad deal, huh?"

"That's a great deal!" exclaimed Rolly, "What do you need from me?"

"Whatever you're willing to give me to exchange for the stuff." Said Scratch nonchalantly.

Rolly looked around, making sure there wasn't anyone else around, then beckoned the fox nearer and spoke in a whisper, "Meet me behind the barn tonight after all the pups are asleep and I will pack you down so heavily, you'll need a truck to deliver all the goodies you'll be picking up."

"I'll be there." Scratch answered simply and held his paw out to the fat little puppy who took it gladly. "Deal?"

"Deal." Acknowledged Rolly, and both canines parted ways until evening.

#####

In the waning light of dusk, both foxes stole across the fields toward the edge of the forested swamp.

Under her fedora, and chewing on a wheat sprig, Spot, posing as Pullet Marlow, Private Chick, watched over her beak at the two foxes and thought to herself, 'I wonder what mischief will befall this night?'

#####

"A large screen TV, huh?" responded the Swamp Rat approvingly, "Well you two don't believe in doing anything small do ya?"

Both foxes looked confused.

"Hey, don't get me wrong." Swamp rat soothed, "That's not a bad thing. In fact it's just what I expected from two foxes."

"Don't forget about the deal I made with the fat pup." Interjected Scratch, defensively.

"Goodness no!" Replied Swamp Rat, rubbing his hands together, "In fact, your deal is all the more sweeter. I've been looking for a way to get even with that two faced, lying, pup since he turned on me. The double crosser."

Thicket and Scratch both looked at each other upon hearing this bit of information and their eyes narrowed. 'So these puppies have bested this rat. Perhaps they're not as ignorant as they appear? We'll have no trouble taking this rat out, but we must be more wary of those Dalmatians.' The silent thought was shared by both foxes.

Shaking the foxes out of their feigned stupor, Swamp Rat addressed them, "Yes, I can arrange for these things."

Both foxes smiled, an eerie and unnerving sight. Scratch excused themselves, "Well, we must get back to meet with that pup. We'll be back as soon as we can."

"Good." Declared Swamp Rat, "Just leave the stuff here. I know just where to get the television. Steven and I will get it and bring it back. We'll meet you here and then we'll get the surprise for Rolly."

The foxes nodded their approval, turned and raced across the fields, back to the farm.

#####

"It's my whole stash." Said Rolly proudly.

"My goodness Rolly," observed Scratch, "Are you sure you want to use it all?"

"At three to one, I'll get it all back and then some." Replied Rolly confidently.

"Well, Ok." Conceded the fox, "Where do you want us to put the goods when we get it?"

Rolly winked and pushed on a board, which appeared to be securely nailed in place, and it moved aside revealing a tunnel to under the barn. He said proudly, "Right down here will be fine, and I'll thank you not to reveal this to anyone else."

'This dog was resourceful.' The foxes thought, but they both sat back and raised their right paw and said in unison, "Foxes' Honor."

Satisfied, Rolly helped to load all the food and snacks onto both foxes and waved to them as they finally left. He returned to the barn loft and lay back down to return to sleep. But one puppy was awake.

Actually one kit was awake and he had heard the whole exchange between Rolly, Thicket and Scratch and wondered what was going on. Very quietly Swift got up and padded outside. Sneaking around to the back of the barn Swift turned the corner and collided with a chicken dressed in a trench coat and fedora who had also been sneaking around.

"Whoa!" Swift cried.

"B'gock!" Cackled Spot

The two animals scuffled and struggled on the ground, the panicked chicken shouting out for help and the fox kit trying desperately to extricate himself from this flailing ball of feathers.

The commotion woke the farm up. When they came running, they found Swift standing over the chicken who had fainted from fright. The whole scene didn't look good.

"I, it's not the way it looks." Pleaded the small fox as he moved out from over Spot.

"Yeah." Yawned Lucky, unconvinced.

Cornelia, Spot's mother ran over to her daughter and cradled Spot's head in her arms while shouting at the fox and Dalmatians, "See! I told you they weren't to be trusted. Now look! That little red assassin tried to eat my Spot!"

"Swift. I think you had better come with us." Observed Lucky

Looking around, ears down, tail dragging on the ground, all Swift saw were disappointed, accusing eyes. He lowered his head in shame and went with Lucky as the Dalmatian lead him back into the tool shed. There they posted a guard on the young fox of not less than four Dalmatians. Swift did his best to explain the whole incident to the saddened pups, but mistake or no, the chickens were all stirred up and come morning it would be hard to convince the farm animal community to continue to allow the fox to stay.

#####

Morning brought with it a grey, overcast day to compliment the mood of the animals on the farm. Lucky found a large screen television in the place of the old TV.

Rolly discovered that his secret hiding place was full of bags of kibble and boxes of dog biscuits and snacks. But these things brought no happiness to either puppy on this day. Today the Dalmatians would be losing a friend. All the animals congregated in the barn to try Swift on the charge of attempted murder. The trial went quickly as the only other witness, Spot, was still unconscious and lying in the chicken coup. Since all of the

animals had seen the same thing last night, it was hard to defend the fox. Swift spoke on his behalf and tried to explain the whole thing as an accident and misunderstanding. However, the animals agreed that a fox does not belong on the farm, and it was in the purest optimism that they had allowed it in the first place. So in the end, Ed Pig laid down the verdict and sentenced Swift to be exiled from the farm and it's surroundings. Effective. Immediately. The Dalmatians, Lucky, Tripod, Patch and Rolly volunteered to escort the young fox to the edge of the property. Once there, they said their good-byes.

#####

A light rain was falling as Swift finally turned and walked into the forested swamp. Stepping behind a small, scraggly tree, he looked back to watch the four Dalmatians walking back toward the farm until he could no longer see them. Then he sat down and began to cry. While he was crying Swift didn't notice that Steven, the alligator, had crawled up beside him.

"Hello Foxie." Steven greeted the fox kit. "Why are you crying?"

Not caring anymore, Swift just sat there instead of running away. "I just lost my friends and it wasn't my fault." Swift said through his tears.

"Awww. Please don't cry." Asked Steven, "I hate to see younguns crying."

Swift slowed his crying to a few sobs as he looked at the large alligator in front of him.

"There now. See, isn't that better?" The alligator consoled.

"Ar, aren't you gonna eat me?" Swift asked.

"Who me?" Steven asked sitting upright and pointing at his chest, surprised, "Nah, I'm a vegetarian."

"You!?" Swift said incredulously and started to laugh at the absurd notion.

"Yep!" answered the alligator, "I swore off meat ever since I ate that pizza delivery boy. It gave me indigestion." Steven finished smiling at the young fox. "Come on." He said, "Jump on my back and I'll take you to where your brothers are. I'm sure they'll know what to do."

#####

A pall had fallen over the farm that morning, and it only got worse. As the Dalmatians scurried for whatever consolation they could find, they began to find out that all is not as it should be.

Running out of the barn and into the farmyard, Lucky shouted, "The TV doesn't work!!"

At the same time, Rolly charged out from his hidden grotto and into the farmyard too, spitting out chunks of kibble and biscuits. "All that stuff is stale!!" Rolly cried out.

Puppies came out of the woodwork and looked at the raving puppies in the middle of the yard.

"WE'VE BEEN HAD!!!" They both yelled.

The Dalmatian pups wandered down and clustered around the two irate puppies, who more than willingly vented their discoveries.

"The television is broken!" Lucky cried, "I looked in the back and there's a ton of stuff missing and wires cut. The thing never worked. I traded away our good TV for a dud!"

"Well." Interjected Rolly, "All the food I traded for," He paused, caught himself and added quickly, "which incidentally I have been stocking up in the event that Kanine Krunchies stops shipping due to the impending Y2K crisis for the benefit of the whole family." He smiled sheepishly and looked around him at all the dubious looks he was getting. Rolly quickly finished his story, "Well, all the food I got is stale!"

"Well, I for one am ashamed at both of you." Admonished Cadpig, "Trading away those things to fulfill your own selfish needs! I hope you've both learned a valuable lesson!"

"Yeah." Both Lucky and Rolly said together, "Never trust a fox. Good riddens to that no good Swift and his brothers."

"Several other puppies voiced their agreement.

"Hey guys. What's going on?" Asked Spot, who had come up to the group of puppies unnoticed, "Where's Swift?"

"Oh, he's been thrown off the farm." Answered Tripod flatly.

"WHAT!" Screamed Spot, "B, b, but why?"

The puppies stared at her in confusion and Cadpig answered, "Because he tried to kill you Spot."

Spot laughed at that. "He didn't try to kill me." She said.

"WHAT!" barked 99 puppies in unison.

"I said he didn't try to kill me." Spot repeated.

Cadpig and the puppies were starting to sense that a great injustice was not only done to themselves, but that they also had performed a great injustice on their small red friend.

"Guilty until proven innocent." Cadpig said for all of them. "How blind we've been over the passed two days." She turned to Spot and asked the chicken, "So then, what happened?"

Spot streaked away in a flash, and then returned, wearing her fedora and trench coat. Swanky music began to play in the background as she began to relay her tale.

"Oh, no." Said Lucky bringing his paw to his shaking forehead only to be shushed by the dogs around him.

"I had been watching the foxes as soon as they arrived at the farm." Spot began, "It was immediately apparent that the young fox Swift was not a danger. BUT! " she emphasized, "Those two brothers of his were very crafty. Choosing their victims very carefully. First they preyed upon Lucky, who is entranced by the television. Then, while everyone was busy eating, the two foxes set out to scout out the farm. Then they hit their next target: Rolly. I watched as Rolly and the smaller fox conversed and I knew something was up. Rolly went from being his usual cautious self to sheer, gluttonous exuberance. I staked out to the barn last night, and watched as Rolly gave every last scrap of food he had stored up to the two foxes. As they ran off and Rolly returned to the hayloft, I set out to follow the two foxes and find out once and for all, what they were really up to. I hadn't expected to run into anyone else. When Swift and I ran into one another, we were both surprised. " She looked down, embarrassed and finished in a lower tone of voice, " I panicked and struggled, then fainted. That's the last thing I remember."

Lucky stood up tall and said commandingly, "We have'ta go out and find Swift and tell him!"

"B, b, but he's been gone most of the d, d, day now." Spot told Lucky. "He could be anywhere."

"Not a problem." Lucky exclaimed confidently, "Rolly! Ready for tracking duty?!"

Rolly stepped forward and saluted Lucky, "One nose reporting for duty, Sir."

The assembled puppies parted. With Rolly leading the way, Patch, Lucky and Tripod followed close behind in search of their friend Swift.

"Now that's positive energy in motion." Cadpig admired as she watched the four Dalmatians head out toward the swamp. "Don't you think Spot? Spot?" Cadpig looked over to where her friend had been standing but the chicken was nowhere to be seen. "Now where did that chicken go?"

#####

"Hey Swift!" Scratch called out when he saw his brother, "What brings you back?"

Thicket came out of the Swamp Rat's den. He laughed saying, "Yeah! I was sure you were just gonna turn in your shiny red coat and tail for white with spots!"

"They kicked me off the farm." Swift answered dejectedly.

"You!" called Thicket in shock, "You got kicked off the farm? This I have to hear. Come on over here little brother and tell me about it."

"Yeah." Said Scratch, equally surprised, "I have to know what our goodie, goodie little brother managed to do have that happen."

The three foxes huddled together and listened closely while Swift told his story. Many times the older foxes would snicker, but by the end they were out-raged.

"Chickens are always distrustful, nasty birds." Observed Thicket after Swift had finished, "And those puppies, well they have a surprise coming, right Scratch?"

"Yep!" Scratch answered, "Probably better off that you did get thrown out, otherwise you might have ended up in worse shape."

"What do you mean?" Asked Swift.

"Never you mind that." Thicket told the young fox and quickly changed the subject, "How would you like to get even with those chickens?"

"Gee Thicket. Do you think he's old enough?" Scratch asked his older brother.

"Yeah, I think he's old enough to start learning how to be a fox." Answered Thicket. "What do ya say Swift?"

Swift looked at his brothers. He knew they had been up to no good and he knew that whatever they were planning now wouldn't be any better. But in the hopes that he might gain some information that he could take back to the farm and use to clear his name, he played along.

"Of course I'm old enough Scratch!" Swift defended, "What do you need me to do?"

Thicket smiled and proceeded to outline their plan to raid the hen house on the farm. Tomorrow, they would steal onto the farm, while the puppies were engrossed in eating, enter the rookery and take as many chickens as they could.

Swift grinned as evilly as his little face could manage and said, "That sounds delicious! What do you need me to do?"

Grinning as well, Thicket replied, "We need you to keep watch and let us know when the dogs come running. The whole deal will make a terrible racket, but it'll take them dogs a little time to react, and that's all we'll need to do the job and get away with our prizes."

"OK!" Swift shouted enthusiastically.

"Good. That's settled. Swift. Welcome to the team!" Thicket congratulated the kit. The two large foxes patted the little fox on the shoulder.

Swift beamed at the attention, "Guys, guys." He laughed, "I've gotta know. What did you do to those puppies?" Swift hoped that he sounded convincing, because his mind was racing to figure out how he was going to get away and warn the Dalmatians about his brothers' plot.

It appeared that he had been convincing because his brothers proudly told of their deceit of fraudulently dealing with the two 'gullible' puppies. Then they took Swift inside the Swamp Rat's lair to show him the fruits of their labor. Inside the old washing machine was the Dalmatians' old television and a pile of kibble and dog biscuits.

"So now what do we do?" Asked Swift excitedly.

"Now we wait and get some sleep." Thicket said bluntly and yawning he stretched out to take a nap. "Tonight we'll reconnoiter the farm again."

"But I'm too excited to sleep." Swift said truthfully. He wouldn't be able to sleep until he had passed on all this information to the puppies.

"Well then go outside." Scratch told Swift, "We're tired and don't want to be disturbed."

"Ok." Swift said meekly as he left the lair. 'Too easy.' He thought as he got to the end of the ramp and started for the farm. 'I must hurry and get back before they wake up again.'

"Hello foxie!" greeted Steven.

"OH! Steven." Swift said surprised then he had an idea, "Steven. Can you give me a ride back to the edge of the swamp? Towards the farm?"

"Sure." The alligator answered, "But why do you wanna go back there?"

"I can't tell ya." Swift said urgently, "But I really need to get there."

"Ok. Hop on little fox." Steven offered. When the fox had stepped onto the alligator's back, Steven announced, "Start the engines Foxie!"

Swift smiled and began to scratch the big amphibian between the shoulder blades. Steven pushed off and away they swam through the swamp. When they reached their destination the two were laughing and singing pirate ditties.

Swift debarked and asked the alligator, "Steven? Would you wait here for me to come back?"

"Sure foxie." Steven agreed, "Besides, we have seven more verses of the song to sing."

Swift smiled at the big green alligator then turned to make for the edge of the forest and the farm beyond.

#####

Speeding around trees, Swift cut around a bush and ran smack into Spot.

CRASH!!

Both creatures sprawled and tumbled to the ground. Swift shook off the effects of the crash and trotted over to see if his friend, the chicken, was all right.

"Spot!" Swift called, "Are you all right?"

"Oowww." Spot moaned and looked at the young fox, "You have to slow d, d, down!"

"I'm sorry." Apologized the small fox, "I'm in a hurry. I've got to warn everyone on the farm!" Then Swift stopped and asked the chicken, "Uh, Spot? What are you doing out here?"

"Well I'm here looking for you." Answered Spot looking out under the brim of her hat. "But since I've found you, lets go back to the farm."

"I can't go back to the farm." Swift said dejectedly, "But maybe I can tell you and you can warn everyone?"

"Nonsense Swift." Laughed Spot, "I told everyone what happened and Lucky and the others immediately set out looking for you. It's ok for you to come back to the farm."

"Yeah!?" Swift asked excitedly, and getting a nod from Spot, jumped in the air and shouted, "Whoopie! Let's go Spot! There's no time to lose!"

The fox and the chicken ran back to the farm. Everyone was glad to see Swift and Spot again and they apologized for their rash judgment of the little fox. Swift accepted their apologies but being pressed for time immediately began to tell the farm animals and puppies about his brothers' deceitful activities and plan for the chicken coup.

"Don't worry about it Swift," Said Lucky, "One hundred and one minds can easily out wit two greedy foxes. We'll take care of them so they'll never want to come to this farm again!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Swift.

"Don't know yet." Lucky answered honestly, "But you can be sure, it'll be something they'll never forget."

The other puppies yipped in agreement. Satisfied, Swift bade the puppies good luck and headed back to the swamp. The sun was close to setting and he had to be back before his brothers woke up.

#####

Lucky, Cadpig, Patch, Tripod, Spot and several other puppies planned their trap well into the night. The plan would be two fold. Stage one would center on out foxing the foxes. Stage two would involve the reacquiring of the TV and food stash from the Swamp Rat. By midnight the plan was established. All that was left was to get everything in place. The little group went to bed, confident that Operation "Back to Normal" would work.

#####

Later the next day...

Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding...The dinner bell rang and ninety-some puppies, give or take, ran down to the food trough to eat.

#####

"Everything is ready?" Whispered Lucky to Cadpig.

"Yes sir, Lucky sir." Cadpig confirmed in a whisper, "Operation "High Fly" is ready."

Lucky waved a paw and a paw waved back in return from atop the Swamp rat's lair. "Ok, Rolly's in place." Lucky stated. "Let's go see the Rat."

The two pups headed for Swamp Rat's den.

#####

"Now's the time." Said Thicket. "Swift, you go down first and sit by the ramp into the hen house. We'll be just behind you. If everything is clear, wave your tail high. If not wave it low."

Swift nodded.

"Once we're in, it's gonna get pretty noisy." Advised Thicket. "Don't get nervous. Keep watch and if you see anything coming, start barking and we'll be right out. Got it?"

"I got it Thicket." Swift answered.

"Then off with ya!" Thicket ordered.

Swift ran the 50 yards to the back of the hen house. Quietly crawling underneath Swift made his way to the front. The puppies were busy eating. The other farm animals were not around. All was clear and he waved his tail high.

Thicket and Scratch bolted from their hiding place. They ran toward the blind side of the chicken coup. In a minute they were rounding the front of the chicken house. The two foxes made a wide arc to bring them in a straight line run to the ramp that would lead them inside.

Swift watched in awe at the courage in his two brothers. He had no idea what the puppies had planned, but he was confident that the Dalmatians had everything under control and soon, he and his brothers would find out.

#####

"We want to make a trade to get our stuff back." Said Lucky.

"Well now." Answered the Swamp Rat, "And exactly what did ya bring to trade with?"

"We didn't bring anything." Cadpig replied.

"Then how do you expect to get your stuff back?" Swamp Rat said incredulously. Highly annoyed.

"Get serious Swamp Rat," Lucky called back, "The two of us couldn't possibly carry what we felt would be a sufficient trade for our stuff. Instead we came to find out what you would want from us in return for our TV and food."

"Ahh, an official trade delegation huh?" Swamp rat observed. He thought for a while before finally naming his price, "Ok. I'll give you your stuff back, but in exchange I want the sheep dog's house."

"Sure!" Said Lucky without hesitation. "No problem. Let's shake on it and seal the deal."

Lucky held out his paw to the Swamp Rat, who began to walk down the ramp to the waiting puppies. Lucky and Cadpig took a step back and off the lower end of the ramp. As the rat reached the end of the ramp he reached out to clasp Lucky's paw. At the last moment Lucky pulled it up, signaling to Rolly, who was waiting atop the Swamp Rat's home.

Rolly leapt off with a "Geronimo!" and fell onto the upper end of the ramp, which had been moved away from the rat's front entrance a fraction of an inch by Cadpig. It was moved just enough so that Rolly's momentum pushed the upper end down creating a fulcrum point at the ramp's center support. Swamp Rat, still confused, never had time to react before he was launched out of the swamp.

WHOOSH!! EEEEEEEYAAAAaaaaa!!!

#####

Claws clattering up the wooden ramp, Thicket burst into the hen house and getting a few feet inside stopped dead in his tracks, or at least he tried to. Scratch, hard on his heels, followed right behind Thicket and charged head long into his brother. Both foxes tumbled and sprawled to the floor in the middle of the chicken coup deep, threatening growls issued forth from the racks of nests. Looking around the foxes were bewildered to find that instead of chickens, the roosts were full of fox hounds!

An angry burst of barks erupted from within the hen house as the twelve humiliated hounds leapt from their perches onto the hapless foxes. Seconds later, the two foxes, a bit ruffled, charged out of the chicken coup opening and fled across the fields for their lives. The fox hounds were not far behind in hot pursuit, baying loudly.

The puppies raised up a cheer. Spot and the rest of the chickens did as well, as they came out of the barn where they had been hiding. The other animals came out as well and they all watched as the two red foxes raced over the hills and away.

Swift trotted down from his hiding place to the sea of animals and puppies congregated in the middle of the barnyard and another cheer rose up. The Dalmatians, animals and especially the chickens were thanking the young fox and patting him on the back.

Swift found Patch and Tripod and asked them, "That was ingenious, though I hope neither of them gets hurt. How did you come up with such a perfect trap?"

Patch and Tripod smiled at each other, proud of what had been accomplished and disclosed the tale of how they planned the trap to the young fox.

"First off," began Tripod, "It wasn't just our plan, but we knew, or rather hoped that your brothers would be confident enough to throw caution to the winds and just charge into the chicken coup."

"Yeah," continued Patch, "Then it was just a matter of getting the chickens out of harms way, and putting something else in their place."

"We know there are hounds at a manor house a few miles away," Tripod picked up the story, "So we used the Barking Chain to ask if they would be interested in helping."

"They were all too eager when we described Thicket, Scratch and yourself to them." Continued Patch, "They told us that they had been chasing three foxes that met that description a few days ago and had lost them."

Swift shivered, remembering that ordeal and nodded a confirmation to the pups. They continued.

"So the hounds came by early this afternoon. We told them the plan and they loved it." Tripod concluded, "They've been waiting in the hen house ever since."

"So where are Lucky and Cadpig and Rolly?" Swift asked, looking around for them.

"Oh, they should be back soon." Answered Patch, "They went to see Swamp Rat to get the things your brothers took from us."

No sooner had Patch made the statement, than Lucky, Cadpig, and Rolly came back to the farm. They were followed by Steven, who was carrying the TV and food on his back.

#####

The puppies celebrated well into the night the success of "Operation Back to Normal." Even Rolly shared some of his private stash. Everything was back to the way it was. Well almost, for the farm had gained a new animal and the Dalmatians had made a new friend. The Dalmatians and fox played and watched TV. As the celebration was winding down, each puppy began to move off to bed as they got tired until only two puppies remained awake.

"You know what, Swift?" asked Tripod.

"No. What" replied Swift.

"I want a rematch." The three legged Dalmatian said purposely as he smiled at the fox.

Swift smiled back and invited, "Anytime Tripod. Anytime."