

A close-up photograph of a silver fox's face, showing its large, upright ears and intense, dark eyes. The fox's fur is a mix of light and dark brown tones. The background is dark and out of focus.

***ERNEST
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***THE BIOGRAPHY
OF A SILVER-
FOX; OR,
DOMINO
REYNARD
OF GOLDUR
TOWN***

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The Biography of a Silver-Fox; or, Domino Reynard of Goldur Town

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O the reader, who would know the *motif* of this tale, I might here repeat the general preface to my first book of Wild Animal stories, but instead will give it more pointed application.

The purpose is to show the man-world how the fox-world lives—and above all to advertise and emphasize the beautiful monogamy of the better-class Fox. The psychologically important incidents in this are from life, although the story is constructive and the fragments from many different regions.

It chanced that at the time I was writing it Mr. Charles G. D. Roberts also was writing a Fox story (“Red Fox”), his a general treatment of Fox life, mine a particular phase of the same. Neither has read the other’s story. Yet, I am told, one or two incidents in the Domino’s life are in “Red Fox,” published in 1905, and that on the other hand certain adventures which appear in my “Springfield Fox” (1898) were used in Mr. Roberts’s tale. This means simply that we have independently learned of traits and adventures that were common to the Foxes of New Brunswick, New England, and farther west.—E. T. S. 

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Part I
EARLY DAYS



I HIS EARLY HOME

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THE sun had dropped behind the Goldur Range, the mellow light beloved of the highest earthborn kinds was on the big world of hill and view, and, like the hidden lights of the banquet-hall, its glow from the western cornice of the sky diffused a soft, shadowless radiance in the lesser vales. High on a hill that sloped to the Shawban from the west was a little piney glade. It was bright with the many flowers of this the Song-moon time; it was lovely and restful in the neither-sun-nor-shade, but its chief interest lay in this—it was the home of a family of Foxes.

The den door was hidden in the edge of the pine thicket, but the family was out now in the open, to romp and revel in

the day's best hour.



The mother was there, the central figure of the group, the stillest, and yet the most tensely alive. The little ones, in the woolly stage, were romping and playing with the abandon of fresh young life that knows no higher power than mother, and knows that power is wholly in their service, that, therefore, all the world is love. Thus they romped and wrestled in spirit of unbounded glee, racing with one another, chasing flies and funny-bugs, making hazardous investigations of bumble-bees, laboring with frightful energy to catch the end of mother's tail or to rob a brother of some utterly worthless, ragged remnant of a long-past meal, playing the game for the game, not for the

stake. Any excuse was good enough for the joy of working off the surplus vim.

The prize of all, the ball of the ball-game and the “tag” in the game of catch, was a dried duck-wing. It had been passed around and snatched a dozen times, but the sprightliest cub, a dark-looking little chap, with a black band across his eyes, seized it and, defying all, raced round and round until the rest gave up pursuit, losing interest in the game they could not win; only then did he drop the wing and at once achieved a new distinction by actually catching mother’s tail. He tugged at it till she freed herself and upset him by a sudden jump.



In the midst of the big, little riot, the form of another Fox gliding into view gave the mother and, by transmission, the cubs a slight start; but his familiar appearance reassured her: it was the father Fox. He carried food, so all the eager eyes and noses turned his way. He dropped his burden, a newly killed Muskrat, and mother ran to fetch it. Tradition says he never brings it to the door when the young are out, and tradition sometimes tells the truth. When mother threw the muskrat to the cubs, they fell on it like a pack of little wolves on a tiny deer, pulling, tugging, growling, rolling their eyes toward the brother they growled at, and twisting their heads most vigorously to rend out each his morsel of the prey.



DOMINO'S EARLY HOME

Mother looked on with love and seeming admiration, but she divided her attention between the happy group about the meal and the near woods, which might contain a lurking foe; for men with guns, boys and dogs, eagles and owls, all are ready to make quarry of a baby fox. She never relaxes her vigilance, and is ably backed by her mate, who, though secondary in family matters and not allowed in the den while the young are blind sucklings, is nevertheless a faithful provider of food and a tireless sentinel.

Their merry feast was at its height when the far-away “*Yur-yur-yur yap*” of the father was heard, telling plainly of approaching danger. Had the cubs been half-grown, they would have known what it meant; but being so young, mother quickly told them: translating the far barking into low sounds of menace, she sent them tumbling back into the den, where in dim light they quietly finished each the piece of Muskrat that he had secured.

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Among the farms of New England alone there are at least a thousand pairs of Foxes. Each and every pair raises a family every year, and it is very certain that such home-scenes as this described take place by every den door at least once every fine day during the late spring and early summer. Not fewer than a hundred thousand times every year, then, it is repeated in one form or another under our very noses, and yet so furtive are they, so clever and so unremitting are father and mother, that not more than one man in every hundred thousand has the good luck to see this family group that charms us by its appeal to the eye, and touches our hearts by showing how very near these creatures are to us in their affections and their trials.



The lucky man in the township of Goldur, the hundred-thousandth man, was Abner Jukes, and he was not a man at

all, but a long-legged, freckle-faced, straw-thatched Yankee boy, who had climbed a tree after a crow's-nest when he should have been bringing in the cows.

He had taken in the merry scene below with something more than the mere hunting instinct of a boy: he had felt little thrills of delight that told of a coming naturalist. He had noted the dark cub with the coon-like mask or domino, and had smiled with pleasure over the cub's exploits. He had no thought of injuring the family or even of disturbing their frolic, but he was the cause of its ending then, and later of a sad bereavement.

Like many of the farmer boys, Abner used to fox-hunt in the winter. He was the proud possessor of a Hound that promised to be "the finest in the State." Though only a puppy, he already was large-limbed, thin-flanked, and deep-chested. He had a voice of peculiar resonance and power, and a sullen, savage temper that boded ill in his prime. Abner had locked him up, but a chance had set the puppy free, and off he went in search of Abner. It was his near approach on his master's track that had startled the father Fox.



The mother, having seen her seven young hopefuls safe indoors, now ran to intercept the danger. She deliberately laid her trail so as to catch the Hound should he come near