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Opening extract from

Fox Friend

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Summer and winter, the sheep were out on the steep hills around the farm-house. There were three cows and a few hens and geese as well. And Clare had her own horse, Red. She liked to ride him as often as she could. Red was her best friend. Clare was happy when she could gallop out over the moors on Red, or groom him in his stable. Clare spent a lot of time in there. She liked to talk to him. Clare was an only child. But she had Red, and that was all she wanted.

Clare saw her first fox on the way back from school one day. It was just a bit of good luck. It was cold and it was getting dark when Clare saw the fox. He came trotting out into the road right in front of her. He didn't seem at all scared. He lifted his nose and sniffed the air. Then he ran across the road in front of Clare, jumped up onto the grass bank and was gone.

"He was really lovely," she said at supper.

"Lovely? Foxes aren't lovely, Clare," her dad said. He was looking very angry. "The only good fox is a dead fox. We've lost ten lambs this year. Foxes ate them all. And two hens just last week. Foxes are killers. That's what they are, killers."

"They've got to eat," Clare said. She was getting angry now, too.

"Clare only meant that they *look* lovely," said her mum. Clare and her dad were always at war. Her mum tried to stop them. But it was very hard.

"A tiger looks lovely," Clare's dad went on. "But he's still a killer. That lovely fox you saw may be the one that killed my lambs. Anyway with a bit of luck it won't be around much longer."

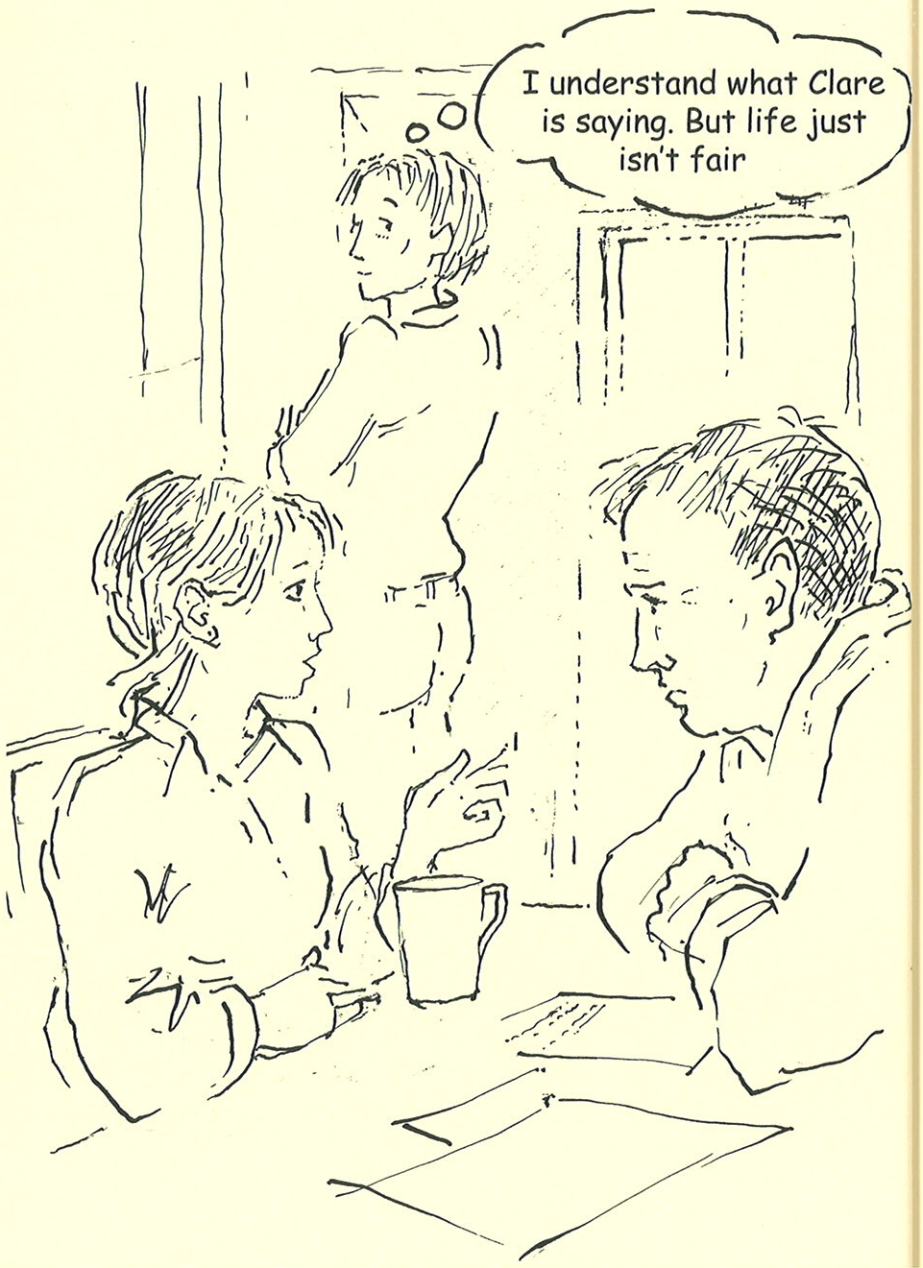
"What do you mean?" asked Clare.

"The fox hunt. They're coming tomorrow. They'll be hunting all over the moor. The hounds will soon sniff him out, and that'll be the end of him."

"Well I think hunting foxes is cruel," said Clare. "All those horses and hounds chasing after one poor little fox. It's cruel."

"But you have to hunt foxes, Clare," her mum said. "If you didn't there would be too many of them."

"There's too many of us," Clare snapped back, "but no-one goes around hunting us, do they? It's not right and it's not fair."



"Maybe it isn't fair," her father said. "But that's how it is. One thing you've got to learn, Clare," he went on, "is that life isn't fair. You want it to be. We all do. But it isn't."