

Hunger

His stomach started to rumble. It had almost been a week since he had eaten. He stared carefully at the chickens across the field. Easy pickings. They were not the problem. That lay with the gruff man sitting on his back porch with a shotgun. He remained squatted, motionless, not sure if the farmer had seen him. His stomach rumbled again causing him to instinctively tighten the muscles to silence it. This was his best chance for food, and he couldn't chance it.

The farmer started to move, rocking back-and-forth to get out of the chair. Now might be the moment, the best moment he had all morning to get sustenance. He remained still, his eyes fixed on the farmer, following the little round man as he waddled indoors. He chanced a small step forward, and then a second. The farmer made no indication of seeing his movement. The field, however, was too open to go unnoticed. Instead, he had to work his way along the wooden rail fence, through weeds, briars and thickets.

Each movement was calculated, to hide not just his position, but his intent. Slowly, carefully, he weaved his way through the brush. Thorns pierced his skin, briars clung to his hair, his eyes squinted in reflex to keep the chaff out of his eyes. Every few steps, he paused to check on the farmer who had not made his way back to his chair yet. In real time ten minutes had passed, but to the hungry it was no time at all. All that was on the mind was food, a delicious chicken whose clucking was getting louder and louder.

Now that he was twenty feet away from the prize, he saw something he hadn't seen before – a wire fence four feet high guarding the chickens and impeding him. He studied it, looking for any of the smallest opening he could squeeze through but found none. He'll have to

jump it. Not an impossible task, one he's accomplished before, but never with an intense observer as the farmer had been all morning. His eyes followed the chickens for a moment, then shifted to the door, then back to the chickens, door, chickens, door, chickens. The moment of chaos was fast approaching.

He pushed off with his powerful legs, the dirt spraying behind each thrust. In just a few strides, he was at full gallop. The chickens, still clucking away, were completely unaware what was about to happen. But he knew, he could taste the fresh meat, already feeling it fill his stomach. Three more, two more, this is it, he leapt and hurdled the fence, landing softly. It was only then the chickens became aware of their dire situation. He knew he only had a few precious moments before the screeches drew out the farmer.

He quickly fixed his eyes on the grandest, fattest prize in the chicken yard. She may have been hefty, but she was certainly not slow. She darted this way, that way, jumping up, flapping her wings in every attempt to deny her fate. He heard shouting and shuffling from the rounded man making his way back outdoors. It was now or never. He faked right then lunged forward, clenching the neck of the chicken in his last try.

He heard the farmer reign down obscenities and bumble toward the chair where the shotgun lay. He knew what that meant and the pain that would accompany the ear-splitting noise. It had been over two years, but he still vividly remembered the two pellets that had grazed his leg. That was not going to happen again. He was either leaving that chicken pen unscathed or dead.

His grip on the chicken tightened, nearly severing the neck in two. With one step, he jumped but only half of him cleared the fence. His bottom half flailed, his feet trying to catch on the wire fence. He heard the unmistakable sound of the pump action. The left, then the right got

just enough of the fencing to propel himself over just as the first shot rang. He felt the pellets whiz by his head, mere inches away. The smell of gunpowder stung his nostrils as he landed. Instinctively his legs dug into the ground and launched him into full sprint across the field.

Another loud blast. For a moment he thought he had been hit when a pellet parted his wind-swept hair. He didn't look back, he didn't stop, he remained in the full sprint and jumped the back fence into the wooded thicket. More briars got tangled in his hair, more thorns pierced his skin as he heard the third shot ring out. He was still not safe but was a lot more secure than he was just ten seconds ago.

He continued to run deeper into the woods until the farmer, the chicken coop, and the field, were out of sight. He slowed down to a trot for a few paces, and then stopped completely. He dropped the lifeless chicken onto the ground. Air moved rapidly in and out of his mouth while his heart beat faster than he had escaped. It took a couple of minutes, but the breathing slowed, his heart rate slowed, and his energy regained.

He lowered down and snatched the chicken back up and trotted home. All the way he could taste the chicken in his mouth, tempting him to stop and eat right there, but he couldn't. The hunger was not just his but his family's as well. His stomach gnawed at him the whole fifteen-minute journey back home, but when he finally arrived and dropped the chicken in front of the family, it was worth the wait. The little pups wasted no time and began tearing into the chicken. Papa wolf smiled for a brief moment then he too began to have his fill and his stomach growled no more.