

THE TALE OF TOMMY FOX

CHAPTER 18: THE WORLD TURNS WHITE



BY ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



After he outwitted the strange dog, Tommy Fox became more of a braggart than ever. He thought that he knew just about all there was to know. But with the coming of winter Tommy found that he had many things to learn. It was almost like living in a different world, for the ground was white everywhere. And though Tommy Fox loved to play in the snow, he discovered one thing about it that he did not like at all. It frightened him when he saw how plainly his footprints showed after a fresh snowfall. And he wondered how he would ever be able to escape being caught, should any strange dog chase him.

As the winter days passed, Tommy learned that it was very hard for him to run fast in a light, dry snow—that through such snow a dog could run much faster than he could. But when there was a thin crust he could go skipping along like the wind, while dogs, being heavier, broke through the crust and floundered about in the softer snow beneath.

One day Tommy and his mother were out hunting. The snow was very deep everywhere, for it was mid-winter. And it had thawed and frozen so often that the snow was quite hard, except for just about an inch of fresh snow which had fallen during the night. Tommy and his mother could see rabbit tracks all around them; and they had very good luck hunting. But something happened

that wasn't exactly lucky. They had turned toward home, when a dog bayed somewhere behind them, and pretty soon Mrs. Fox saw that they were being followed.

She and Tommy started to run. And Tommy saw that there was one more bad thing about winter. Swift River, and all the little brooks, were covered with thick ice and there was no chance at all for him and his mother to run through shallow water and throw the dog off their scent.

It was that strange dog that was chasing them—the one that belonged to Farmer Green's hired man. He was a very fast runner, and in spite of the usual tricks that foxes know, Mrs. Fox and Tommy could not lose him.

Tommy began to be frightened. And old Mrs. Fox herself was somewhat worried. But she still had a few tricks up her sleeve. She didn't intend to let that dog catch them if she could help it.

"Oh, Mother! whatever shall we do?" Tommy said. "Do you think we can get away from him?"

"Of course," Mrs. Fox answered. "But you must do just as I tell you. Now, follow right in my tracks, and don't be frightened, I'm going to show you a new trick—one that my own mother taught me when I was no older than you are."

Mrs. Fox turned to the right and started back across the valley. She was going straight toward Swift River.

“Oh, dear!” Tommy cried. “Don’t you know that the river is frozen solid, Mother? The dog can follow us across it, as easy as anything.”

“Stop fussing!” Mrs. Fox said, looking over her shoulder at Tommy. “We’re not going to the river. You just mind me and you’ll see, in a few minutes, that we can fool that dog.” And she kept on running, with Tommy right at her heels.