

THE TALE OF TOMMY FOX

CHAPTER 20: THE DRUMMER OF THE WOODS



BY ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



Tommy Fox stopped short and listened. It was early spring, and the snow was still deep on the sides of Blue Mountain.

Thump—thump—thump, thump, thump, thump! Rub—rub—rub—rub, r-r-r-r-r-r! If you had heard that sound you would have said that there was a boy hidden somewhere on the mountain; and that he was playing a drum. But Tommy Fox knew better than that. He knew that it was Mr. Grouse calling to Mrs. Grouse. And Tommy knew that he made that noise by beating the air with his strong wings.

Now, Tommy Fox had not eaten a grouse for a long, long time. He had never captured a grouse himself. In fact, he had never even tried, since that time in the summer, when old Mother Grouse had played a trick on him, and led him away from her children.

Tommy made up his mind now that he was old enough and wise enough to capture Mr. Grouse. But he thought he had better wait until night, when Mr. Grouse couldn't see well. Tommy Fox's eyes, you know, were even sharper at night than they were in the daytime.

Well! Tommy Fox went home. And that very night he stole back again to the clump of evergreens where he had heard Mr. Grouse drumming.

It was pretty dark up there on the mountain. But Tommy had no trouble at all in finding his way. And he kept looking up at the thick branches of the evergreens, for he hoped that

Mr. Grouse was asleep on a low branch, which he could reach with a good, high jump.

Yes—it was dark. And it was very cold up there on Blue Mountain, for all it was early springtime. And the evergreen trees bowed beneath a burden of snow, which had fallen only the day before.

It was very still in the forest. And when Tommy Fox suddenly heard a cry of “Who—whoo—whoo!” he jumped, in spite of himself. Tommy knew, right away, that it was only Mr. Owl. And he felt very sheepish. And then all at once Tommy jumped again. This time he was terribly frightened, for the strangest thing happened. The snow rose right up beneath his feet, and flew in his face. And something struck him a good, hard blow under his chin. Tommy fell over backward in the snow, he was so surprised. And a roar like thunder rang through the forest.

Tommy knew then what had happened. Maybe you have guessed, too. For it was Mr. Grouse himself. He had burrowed his way into the snow, so that he might have a warm blanket to cover him during the night. And Tommy Fox had stepped squarely on top of him.

It was no wonder Mr. Grouse had sprung up in a hurry. He was just as frightened as Tommy himself, because he had been sound asleep, and he had no idea what was the matter.

As for Tommy Fox, it was a huge joke on him. But it was a joke that didn't please Tommy at all. He felt very silly, when it was all over.