

THE TALE OF TOMMY FOX

CHAPTER 5: TOMMY FOX IS HUNGRY



BY ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



Tommy Fox kept a sharp look-out to see what he could capture to eat. But he could discover nothing at all. To be sure, there were birds in the trees, and birds' nests too, and Tommy was very fond of birds' eggs. But he couldn't climb trees. The birds were out of his reach; and so were the squirrels. He saw plenty of red squirrels, and gray squirrels, and little striped chipmunks. They looked down from the branches and chattered and scolded at him. They were perfectly safe, and they knew it.

Tommy Fox sat down to think. As I have said, he was hungry. And there is nothing that sharpens a fox's wits like hunger. He looked very innocent, as he rested under a big chestnut tree, and gazed up at a gray squirrel which was perched on a limb over his head.

"Run along, Tommy Fox," the squirrel said to him.—"There's no use of your staying here. I shan't come down until you're gone."

Tommy didn't say anything. He just whined a few times, and held his paw against his stomach. And he gave one or two groans.

The gray squirrel came a little further down the tree and looked at Tommy again. He wondered if Tommy was ill. And then, when Tommy stretched himself out on the ground and lay quite still the gray squirrel was sure that Tommy Fox had eaten something that hurt him.

"What is it?" the squirrel inquired.

Tommy looked up and murmured something. The squirrel couldn't hear what he said,

but he thought he caught the word poison. And he decided that Tommy had probably devoured a poisoned chicken-head which Farmer Green had thrown out for him.

I am afraid that the squirrel didn't feel very sorry. He didn't like Tommy Fox, for Tommy was always trying to catch him. But if he wasn't sorry, he was curious. And he sat up on a low branch and looked at Tommy for a long time.

Tommy Fox never moved again. His eyes were shut; his beautiful red tail, with its white tip, lay limp on the ground; and his legs stuck out as stiff as pokers.

Mr. Gray Squirrel felt sure that Tommy was very ill. He called and called to Tommy. But he got no reply. And at last he decided that Tommy must be dead. So he slipped down the tree to the ground, to get a better look.

At first Mr. Gray Squirrel stayed close to the tree, so that he could scamper up again in case he was mistaken. But Tommy Fox never moved an eyelash. And at last Mr. Gray Squirrel grew quite bold. He edged closer to Tommy. He had never been so near a fox before, and he was curious to see what he looked like. He stole up beside Tommy and was just about to call to his friends in the next treetop to come down, when he received the surprise of his life.

As Mr. Gray Squirrel watched, he thought he saw one of Tommy Fox's eyelids quiver. And a great fear seized him. Had he been mistaken? Was Tommy Fox playing dead?