

THE TALE OF TOMMY FOX

CHAPTER 6: MR. GRAY SQUIRREL'S MISTAKE



BY ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



Mr. Gray Squirrel certainly was mistaken, when he thought that Tommy Fox was dead and came down out of the chestnut tree to look at him. Tommy wasn't even ill. You remember that he was very hungry? And that he had not been able to find anything to eat? Tommy could not climb the tree, where Mr. Gray Squirrel sat. So the only thing left for him to do was to make Mr. Gray Squirrel come down where he was.

That was what Tommy Fox was thinking about, when he sat there on his haunches and looked up so innocently at Mr. Gray Squirrel. As Tommy sat there a bright idea came to him. So he held his paw to his stomach and pretended to be ill. And as soon as he saw that Mr. Gray Squirrel thought he was ill, Tommy fell over on his side and made believe he was dead.

Though his eyes were shut tight, Tommy's ears were so sharp that he could tell when Mr. Gray Squirrel came down the tree. And he could hear him slowly picking his way nearer and nearer. Tommy's nose was sharp, too, and he could smell Mr. Gray Squirrel. He smelled so good that Tommy couldn't help opening one eye the least bit, just to see him. That was when Mr. Gray Squirrel noticed that his eyelid quivered. And Tommy saw at once that Mr. Gray Squirrel had caught that flicker of his eyelid, and that he was frightened. Tommy knew then that he must act quickly.

He jumped up like a flash. But quick as he was, Mr. Gray Squirrel was even quicker. He reached the tree just ahead of Tommy Fox; and though Tommy leaped high up the trunk, he was too late. Mr. Gray Squirrel scrambled up the tree so fast that his big, bushy tail just whisked across Tommy's face. And in another second he was safe in the treetop, chattering and scolding, and calling Tommy names.

Tommy Fox felt very foolish. He realized that if he had jumped up without first opening his eye he would not have given Mr. Gray Squirrel any warning; and then he would have caught the plump old fellow. But it was too late now. Another time he would know better. And he sneaked off, to try the same trick on one of Mr. Gray Squirrel's friends.

It was no use. Mr. Squirrel followed him, jumping from one treetop to another, and made a great noise, calling after him, and jeering at him, and telling all his friends about the mean trick Tommy had tried to play on him.

And to Tommy's great disgust, an old crow high up in a tall tree heard the story, and haw-hawed loudly, he was so amused. He made such a racket that all the forest-people heard him; and Tommy knew that there was no sense in trying to catch a squirrel around there that day. He went down into the meadow and began hunting crickets. And though he didn't have as good a lunch as he wanted, probably he ate all that was good for him.