

THE TALE OF TOMMY FOX

CHAPTER 7: TOMMY CHASES MR. WOODCHUCK



BY ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



Tommy Fox went up into Farmer Green's back-pasture, which lay even nearer Blue Mountain than the field where Tommy and his mother lived. He skulked along among the rocky hummocks, and the old stumps which dotted the pasture thickly. His ears and his eyes and his nose were all alert to discover any small animal that might be stirring—especially his nose; for Tommy could smell things when they were a long way off.

Tommy's mother had explained to him that he must always hunt with the wind blowing in his face; because then the breeze brought to him the scent of any animal that might be in front of him, whether it happened to be an animal that Tommy was hunting, or some animal that was hunting him. In that way Tommy would be able to know what was ahead of him, even if he couldn't see it.

But if he were careless, and trotted along with the wind blowing behind him—ah! That was quite different. The other forest-people would all know he was coming, for then they would be able to get Tommy's scent. And some day, if he were so foolish as to go about with the wind at his back, some day he might stumble right onto a wildcat, or a dog, or a man, or some other terrible creature.

Well—Tommy remembered all these things that his mother had told him. The wind blew fresh in his face. And to his delight all at once he smelled a woodchuck. There was no

mistaking that savory smell. It affected Tommy very pleasantly—much as you are affected by catching a whiff of hot peanuts, or popcorn, or candy cooking on the stove.

Tommy stole along very carefully. And as he peered around a stump he saw, not ten jumps ahead of him, a fine, fat woodchuck. Tommy crept up a little closer; and then he sprang for Mr. Woodchuck with a rush.

Pudgy Mr. Woodchuck saw Tommy just in time. He turned tail and ran for his life; and he was so spry, though he was quite a fat, elderly gentleman, that he reached his hole and whisked down out of sight just as Tommy was about to seize him.

Tommy was disappointed. But he was determined to get that woodchuck, and he began to dig away at Mr. Woodchuck's hole. You see, Mr. Woodchuck was smaller than Tommy Fox, and since the underground tunnel that led to his home was only big enough to admit him, Tommy was obliged to make it larger. Though Mr. Woodchuck's hole was under a shady oak tree, Tommy found digging to be somewhat warm work, so he took off his neat, red coat and hung it carefully upon a bush.

He worked very hard, for he was eager to find Mr. Woodchuck. In fact, the further Tommy dug into the ground the more excited he grew. And he had just decided that he had almost reached the end of the tunnel, and that a little more digging would bring him inside of

Mr. Woodchuck's house, when he met with an unexpected check.

To Tommy's dismay, Mr. Woodchuck's tunnel led between two roots of the big oak, and Tommy could not squeeze between them. He reached his paws through the narrow opening and crowded his nose in as far as it would go. But that was all he could do. He did not doubt that somewhere in beyond, in the darkness, Mr. Woodchuck was having a good laugh because Tommy had done all that work for nothing.

I am sorry to say that Tommy Fox lost his temper. He called after Mr. Woodchuck. Yes—he shouted some rather bad names after him. But of course that didn't do a bit of good.

And Tommy Fox put on his coat and went home to think about what he could do. He didn't care to ask his mother's advice, because he didn't want her to know that Mr. Woodchuck had got away from him. But he hoped to find some way in which he could catch the old gentleman.