

# THE TALE OF TOMMY FOX

## CHAPTER 9: TOMMY FOX IN TROUBLE



BY ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



A few days after Tommy Fox caught old Mr. Woodchuck, something happened that set him thinking. Perhaps I should say “a few nights” instead of “days.” For one night his mother came home with a fat hen slung across her shoulders. She had been down to Farmer Green’s hen-house, right in the middle of the night, when Farmer Green and his family were asleep; and she had snatched one of the sleeping hens off the roost and stolen away with it without waking anybody.

Only a very wise old fox could do that. “You mustn’t go near Farmer Green’s hen-house,” Mrs. Fox said to Tommy, as they picked the bones of the fat hen together. “You are not old enough to get one of Farmer Green’s hens.”

You notice that Mrs. Fox didn’t speak of “stealing” a hen. She called it “getting” one. For foxes believe that it is only fair to take a farmer’s hen now and then, in return for killing field mice and woodchucks, which eat the farmer’s grain. But the farmer never stops to think of that. He only thinks of the hens that he loses.

Tommy Fox never said a word while his mother was talking to him. He was very busy, eating. But that was not the only reason why he kept still. He heard his mother’s warning, but he thought she was silly. He really believed that he was quite old enough and quite big enough and quite wise enough to go down

to Farmer Green’s and get a hen himself. After catching old Mr. Woodchuck Tommy felt that he was able to do about everything his mother could do. And he made up his mind right then and there that he would show her. He would pay a visit to the hen-house that very night.

Tommy Fox could not wait for night to come. In fact, he could wait only until the close of day—he was in such a hurry to capture a hen. The sun had scarcely sunk out of sight in the west and the sky was still red, when he crept slyly up to Farmer Green’s hen-house.

Tommy had heard that Farmer Green went to bed very early, after working hard in the fields each day. And since he saw nobody stirring about the place he thought that everyone was asleep.

The hens were asleep. There was no doubt of that. Peeping inside their little house, Tommy could see them roosting in rows. And he lost no time in squeezing through one of the small doors. He felt a bit timid, once he was inside. And for a moment he almost wished that he hadn’t come. But he was determined to take a hen home with him; so he reached up and grabbed the very first hen he came to, on the lowest perch of all.

It was a big, old, white hen that Tommy Fox seized. She awoke the moment he touched her, and began to squall. And to Tommy’s alarm, all the rest of the hens heard her and began to cackle loudly. The noise was deafening. And

Tommy made a dash for the little door, with old Mrs. White Hen in his mouth. She was flapping her wings and kicking as hard as she could. And Tommy was dismayed to find that he could not get her through the narrow door. Every time he tried to push through, one of Mrs. White Hen's legs, or a wing, or her head, struck against the edge of the doorway.

Then a dog barked. And Tommy heard something running around the chicken-house. He just knew that it was a man. And he dropped the old hen in a hurry and slipped through the door.

He was just in time. He heard a man shout, "After him, Spot!" And giving one frightened glance over his shoulder, Tommy saw that Farmer Green's dog was close behind him.