

THE TALE OF TOMMY FOX

CHAPTER 10: MRS. FOX OUTWITS DOG SPOT



BY ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



Poor Tommy Fox! How he wished that he had obeyed his mother, and kept away from Farmer Green's hen-house! Now Farmer Green's dog Spot was chasing him. Tommy could hear him baying joyfully as he followed. But you may be sure that Tommy was not joyful. He was terribly frightened. He could think of nothing to do except to run, run, run! as fast as he could go. He was headed straight for home, and he only hoped that he would get there before the dog Spot caught him.

Now, Tommy was doing just about the worst thing he could do. He never once jumped sideways, or ran around in a circle. And though he might have waded a little way in the shallow brook in the meadow, where Spot would have lost his trail, Tommy used the bridge to get across the stream; so the dog Spot had no trouble at all in following him. And Spot kept drawing nearer and nearer.

It happened that Mrs. Fox heard the baying of the dog. And she knew what Spot was saying. He was crying—"I've almost got him! I've almost got him!"

A shiver passed over Mrs. Fox; for she thought at once of Tommy. He was not at home, and she wondered if by any chance he was in trouble. She hurried through the field to see who it was that Spot was chasing. And sure enough! Pretty soon Mrs. Fox saw Tommy come tearing through the field, panting

hard, with his tongue hanging out, and a most frightened look upon his face.

Mrs. Fox hastened to meet him. The dog Spot was then on the other side of a low hill, and running along with his nose to the ground.

"Jump!" Mrs. Fox said to Tommy, as soon as he joined her.

Tommy remembered, then, what his mother had always told him. So he gave a long leap to one side.

"Now make a big circle, and jump again. Then go home!" That was all Mrs. Fox had time to say. She stopped just long enough to see Tommy dash off; and then she started right in the opposite direction.

The dog Spot saw her and gave a yelp of delight. He did not know what had been happening. He only thought that now he was going to catch the fox, which was the stupidest fox he had ever chased, running as it did, straight away, with never a leap or a circle, or any other sort of trick to fool him. Little did Spot guess that old Mrs. Fox had not the slightest idea of being caught. She had been followed by Spot himself many times; and she knew exactly how to escape him. She just lingered for a few moments, to make sure that Tommy was safe, and that Spot was chasing her. And then how she did run! In no time at all she left Spot far behind.

Now, Mrs. Fox knew that there was a ploughed field nearby, and that was just what

she wanted. She scampered towards it at great speed and went straight across it. And when she had reached the other side of the ploughed ground she sat down for a short breathing spell.

You see, Mrs. Fox was very wise indeed. She knew that in dry weather, such as there was then, a ploughed field takes no scent at all. She knew that when Spot reached that loose dirt Spot could not smell her footsteps. And so she just sat there on her haunches, and caught her breath again.

A grim smile crossed Mrs. Fox's face as she heard Spot barking away in the distance. It was a very different bark from what she had heard when he was chasing Tommy. This time Spot was saying, "Oh, dear! oh, dear! I've lost him!" over and over again.

When Mrs. Fox reached home she found Tommy safe inside their house. He was crying, because he was afraid he would never see his mother again. And after his mother found out how Spot had happened to chase him, Tommy cried some more—but for an entirely different reason.

Who can guess what the reason was?