

THE TALE OF TOMMY FOX

CHAPTER 11: TOMMY GROWS TOO CARELESS



BY ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



By the time summer was nearly over, Tommy Fox was much bigger than he had been in the spring. So many things had happened, and he had learned so much, that he began to be quite bold. And he had grown so saucy that his mother often had to scold him. Tommy had fallen into the bad habit of going about calling all the forest-people names; and in that way he had gained for himself the ill-will of all the creatures who lived near the foot of Blue Mountain. It interfered with his hunting, because whenever he started out to get something to eat, as soon as they saw him the forest-people told one another that he was coming. Old Mr. Crow especially was the worst of all. He was forever calling "Stop, thief!" after Tommy Fox; and then he would haw-haw in a manner that was frightfully annoying. In fact, he made matters so unpleasant that after a time Tommy began to roam far down the valley, along Swift River, where he tried to catch fish. The fish, at least, couldn't call him names, and there was some satisfaction in that fact, even if he hadn't much luck as a fisherman.

And just for excitement Tommy began to worry Farmer Green's Spot. He delighted in barking at Spot. And Spot would always stop what he was doing and rush pell-mell after Tommy Fox.

Then Tommy would skip away with a laugh. First he always ran for the river, and

jumped from one stone to another, and waded where the water was shallow.

Then he would dash off through the meadows, leaving so crooked a trail behind him that when Spot at last found the place where Tommy had left the river, he never could follow him very far.

But one day Tommy stumbled upon Spot quite by accident. There was no wind at all that day, to bring any scent to Tommy's sharp nose. And he suddenly found that Spot was right in front of him, between him and the river.

Tommy Fox turned and ran. He laughed, too; because he felt quite sure that he could outwit old Spot. And he leaped and twisted and turned about, and made so many circles, that he felt sure Spot couldn't follow him.

Yes—Tommy felt so safe that he stopped running and was trotting slowly along through the field in which he lived. He was almost home, when he heard a noise behind him. He looked around and to his great surprise there was Spot almost upon him.

There was no time to lose. There was only one thing Tommy could do. The door of his mother's house was only a short distance off and Tommy made for it. Luckily, he managed to reach it. Once inside, he could hear the dog Spot barking in the opening. But he knew that Spot was too big to follow him.

Although Tommy was very glad to be safe at home, he was worried. For now Spot knew

where he and his mother lived; and they would have to move. Tommy was afraid his mother would be very angry with him for being so stupid as to let Spot follow him. But he couldn't help it now.

Meanwhile, old Spot continued to bark, and scratch at the door of Tommy's home. But at last he stopped. And all was still.

Tommy wondered where his mother was. She was not at home. And he wanted to see her, even if he was afraid that she would punish him. For Tommy did not know exactly what to do. He did not dare go out for fear Spot might be lying in wait for him. So Tommy stayed there. And still his mother did not come home. He wondered where she could be.