

THE TALE OF TOMMY FOX

CHAPTER 19: TOMMY FOX LEARNS A NEW TRICK



BY ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



Now, there was a road that ran through the valley, along the bank of Swift River. And when Mrs. Fox reached it, with Tommy close behind her, she turned again—this time to the left—and ran along in the beaten track which the horses and sleighs had made.

Tommy Fox thought it very strange that his mother should lead him to the road, where they were sure to find people driving. Tommy followed her. But he was very unhappy. They swung into the road just ahead of a farmer, who was driving along in a sleigh. The sleigh-bells tinkled merrily as the horse trotted smartly down the road. But the jingling of the bells did not sound at all pleasant to Tommy Fox. It only frightened him all the more.

The farmer in the sleigh did not see Tommy and his mother, for the snow rose high on both sides, and the road wound in and out. Little did he know that Mrs. Fox and Tommy were scampering along in front of him. Of course, he couldn't catch them, anyhow. Tommy knew that much. But if they ran very far down the road they would be sure to meet some other man.

To Tommy it seemed bad enough to have that dog chasing them, without going where they were sure to find other enemies. Tommy could hear the dog baying. And he knew dogs well enough to know that that dog felt very sure he was going to catch them. But pretty

soon Tommy heard the dog talking in a very different fashion. He gave a number of short barks, which meant that he was in trouble.

Mrs. Fox looked over her shoulder and smiled at Tommy. She knew that they were safe. She knew that the dog had not reached the road until the farmer had driven right over their footsteps and spoiled their scent. After the horse had passed over their trail the dog could smell only the horse's footprints, instead of theirs. And Mrs. Fox could tell what was happening back there in the road. She knew just exactly as well as if she had been there herself—she knew that the dog had stopped short, and was running all around, with his nose to the ground, trying to find where she and Tommy had gone. But he never found out.

You see, he wasn't half as clever as Mrs. Fox. It never once occurred to him that Tommy and his mother had turned into the road just ahead of that farmer in his sleigh. And finally the stupid dog gave up the chase and went back to Farmer Green's house.

By that time Mrs. Fox and Tommy were safe at home. Yes—they were even having a good laugh over the way they had fooled the dog. And Tommy had quite forgotten how frightened he had been. In fact, he began to feel very well pleased with himself. For he never once remembered that it was his mother, and not himself, who had thought of that trick. He ought to have felt very grateful to his grandmother, for

having taught his mother that clever way of cheating a dog out of his dinner. But Tommy Fox was so conceited that if his grandmother had been there with them he would have thought he knew ten times as much as she did. I've no doubt that he would even have tried to teach her to suck eggs—never once stopping to think that she knew all about such things many years before he was born.