

THE TALE OF TOMMY FOX

CHAPTER 21: THE BIGGEST SURPRISE OF ALL



BY ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



It was a pretty big surprise for Tommy Fox, when Mr. Grouse sprang out of the snow, right beneath his feet. But it was nothing at all, compared with the surprise Tommy had when he reached home.

Very late at night Tommy stole into his mother's house. In fact, it was nearly morning. And Tommy crept in very quietly, for he hardly expected that his mother would be awake and he did not want to disturb her.

Tommy had just curled up on his bed and was all ready to go to sleep, when to his great astonishment he heard his mother talking. She was not talking to him, but to someone near her, for she spoke so low that Tommy could not hear what she was saying.

He thought right away that somebody had come to pay them a visit. And he called out—

"Who's here, Mother? Is it a visitor?"

"Yes, Tommy," Mrs. Fox answered. "Come here and see who it is."

Tommy jumped out of bed and hopped across the room. At first he couldn't see anybody but his mother.

"It's just a joke!" Tommy exclaimed. "You're only fooling!"

"Look sharp!" said Mrs. Fox. "It's a surprise. What do you call this?" She moved aside a bit, and pointed to a little, soft, woolly thing which lay close beside her. Tommy had

to look two or three times to see what it was. And even then he wasn't sure.

"Is it—is it—a baby?" he asked.

"That's just what it is," his mother said.

Tommy certainly was surprised. And before he could find his voice again Mrs. Fox showed him another baby fox, and another and another and another.

Yes—there they were—five of them all together, small and soft and woolly. They weren't nearly so brightly colored as Tommy and his mother—just a pale, brownish red. Tommy Fox could hardly believe it. As he stared at them he suddenly noticed something strange about the baby foxes. "Why—they're all blind—every one of them!" he cried. "Hadn't we better send them back and get some good ones?" he asked.

Mrs. Fox laughed.

"Of course they're blind," she said. "You were blind when you were their age. Their eyes will be open in a few days.... Well—what do you think of them, Tommy?" she asked; for Tommy Fox seemed to be lost in thought.

"I was wondering how they would ever be able to hunt—they're so small."

"Oh! I'll have to hunt for them, for a long time," his mother explained. "When they get big enough I shall teach them to hunt for themselves, just as I taught you."

"Now you see why I showed you how to catch mice and rabbits and woodchucks," Mrs. Fox said. "You'll have to look out for yourself

now, Tommy. For I shall have all I can do to find enough for myself and five children to eat, without feeding a big fellow like you.”

That made Tommy Fox feel very proud. He felt bigger, and stronger, and wiser than ever before.

“I shall get along all right,” Tommy said. “I almost caught Mr. Grouse tonight. But he got away.” Tommy yawned, for he was very sleepy. And pretty soon he was curled up on his little bed again, dreaming of a wonderful bird that he had caught, which was so big that he and his mother and his five little brothers and sisters made a fine meal off it.

But of course it was only a dream.