

THE TALE OF TOMMY FOX

CHAPTER 1: TOMMY ENJOYS HIMSELF



BY ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



Tommy Fox was having a delightful time. If you could have come upon him in the woods you would have been astonished at his antics. He leaped high off the ground, and struck out with his paws. He opened his mouth and thrust his nose out and then clapped his jaws shut again, with a snap. Tommy burrowed his sharp face into the dead leaves at his feet and tossed his head into the air. And then he jumped up and barked just like a puppy.

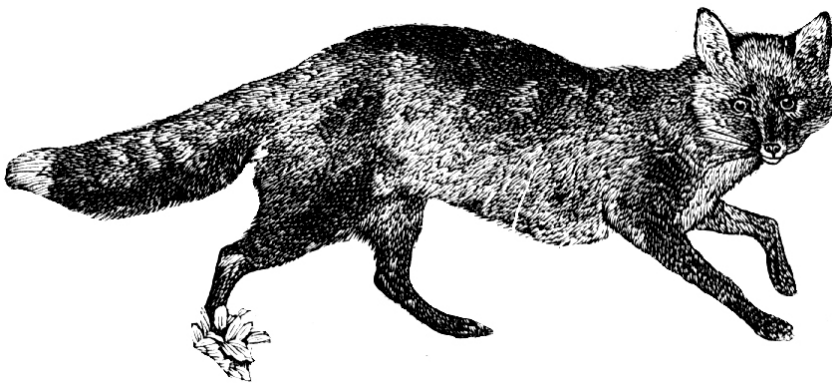
If you could have hid behind a tree and watched Tommy Fox you would have said that he was playing with something. But you never could have told what it was, because you couldn't have seen it. And you may have three guesses now, before I tell you what it was that Tommy Fox was playing with. ... It was a feather! Yes—Tommy had found a downy, brownish feather in the woods, which old Mother Grouse had dropped in one of her flights. And Tommy was having great sport with it, tossing it up in the air, and slapping and snapping at it, as it drifted slowly down to the ground again.

He grew quite excited, did Tommy Fox. For he just couldn't help making believe that it was old Mother Grouse herself—and not merely one of her smallest feathers that he had found. And he leaped and bounded and jumped and tumbled about and made a great fuss over nothing but that little, soft, brownish feather.

There was something about that feather that made Tommy's nose twitch and wrinkle and tremble. Tommy sniffed and sniffed at the bit of down, for he liked the smell of it. It made him feel very hungry. And at last he felt so hungry that he decided he would go home and see if his mother had brought him something to eat. So he started homewards.

I must explain that Tommy lived with his mother and that their house was right in the middle of one of Farmer Green's fields, not far from the foot of Blue Mountain. When Tommy was quite small his mother had chosen that place for her house, which was really a den that she had dug in the ground. By having her house in the center of the field she knew that no one could creep up and catch Tommy when he was playing outside in the sunshine. Now Tommy was older, and had begun to roam about in the woods and meadows alone. But Mrs. Fox liked her home in the field, and so she continued to live there.

Tommy was so hungry, now, and in such a hurry to reach home, that you



might think that he would have gone straight toward his mother's house. But he didn't. He trotted along a little way, and suddenly gave a sidewise leap which carried him several feet away from the straight path he had been following. Again he trotted ahead for a short distance. And then he wheeled around and ran in a circle. And after he had made the circle he jumped to one side once more, and ran along on an old tree which had fallen upon the ground. He was not playing. No!—Tommy Fox was just trying to obey his mother. Ever since he had been big enough to wander off by himself she had told him that he must never go anywhere without making jumps and circles. "It takes longer," she said; "but it is better to do that way, because it makes it hard for a dog to follow you. If you ran straight ahead, Farmer Green's dog could go smelling along in your footsteps, and if he didn't actually catch you he could follow you right home and then we would have to move, to say the least."

Tommy was so afraid of dogs that he almost never forgot to do just as his mother told him. He was half-way home and passing through a clump of evergreens, when he suddenly stopped. The wind was blowing in his face, and brought to his nostrils a smell that made him tremble. It was not a frightened sort of tremble, but a delicious, joyful shiver that Tommy felt. For he smelled something that reminded him at once of that feather with which he had been playing. And Tommy stood as still as a statue and his sharp eyes looked all around. At first he could see nothing. But in a minute or two he noticed something on the ground, beneath one of the evergreen trees. He had looked at it carefully several times; and each time he had decided that it was only an old tree-root. But now he saw that he had been mistaken.

Yes! It was old Mother Grouse herself!