

THE TALE OF TOMMY FOX

CHAPTER 2: JOHNNIE GREEN GOES HUNTING



BY ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



When Tommy Fox discovered old Mother Grouse crouched beneath the evergreen tree he grew hungrier than ever. And he decided that he would catch Mrs. Grouse and eat her on the spot.

Tommy had never caught a grouse. But his mother had brought home some of old Mother Grouse's relations for him to eat; and Tommy knew of nothing that tasted any better.

He thought that old Mother Grouse must be sleeping, she was so still. And he did not mean to wake her if he could help it—at least, not until he had caught her. So Tommy flattened himself out on his stomach and began to creep towards her, very slowly and very carefully. He didn't make the slightest noise. And soon he had stolen so close to old Mother Grouse that he was just about to spring up and rush upon her. Then all at once there was the most terrible noise. It was almost as loud as thunder, and it seemed to Tommy that the ground was rising right up in front of him. He was so startled that he fell over backward. And his heart thumped and pounded against his ribs.

The next moment Tommy Fox felt very sheepish, for he realized that the noise was nothing but the beating of old Mother Grouse's wings against the air. And instead of the ground rising, it was old Mother Grouse herself who had jumped up and sailed away.

She hadn't been asleep. She had seen him all the time.

And she had just waited until she saw that Tommy was trying to catch her before she flew off.

Old Mother Grouse didn't fly far. She perched in a tree just a little way off and sat there and looked down at Tommy Fox and chuckled to herself. She knew that she was perfectly safe. And though Tommy Fox trotted up to the tree where she sat and stared longingly up at her she wasn't the least bit worried. For she knew quite well that Tommy couldn't climb a tree.

Tommy felt very peevish. He was so hungry! And he couldn't help thinking how good old Mother Grouse would have tasted. He couldn't reach her now. But still he didn't go along toward home. He simply couldn't keep his greedy eyes off fat old Mother Grouse! And he squatted down beside a bush and stared at her.

Old Mother Grouse didn't mind that. She just stared back at Tommy Fox; and she didn't say a word to him, which somehow made Tommy still more peevish.

How long Tommy would have stayed there it would be hard to tell. But in a little while something happened that sent him home on the run. If Mrs. Grouse and Tommy had been looking out as sharply as they generally did, Farmer Green's boy never could have crept up so close to them. But they were so busy staring at each

other that they never saw Farmer Green's boy at all.

Now, Johnnie Green had his gun with him, for he was hunting grouse. He did not see Tommy Fox at all, because Tommy was hidden behind the bush. But Johnnie Green saw old Mother Grouse; and almost as soon as he saw her he fired.

The old shotgun made a tremendous roar. The woods rang and echoed with the noise. And Tommy Fox saw a cloud of feathers float down from the limb where old Mother Grouse had been sitting. But old Mother Grouse herself flew away. The shot had knocked out some of her tail-feathers, but hadn't hurt her at all.

It all happened very quickly. And Tommy Fox felt himself leaping high in the air. He was so frightened that he had jumped almost out of his skin. And he ran and ran, and ran faster

than he had ever run before in all his rather short life.

Johnnie Green saw him run. But his gun wasn't loaded now, and he couldn't shoot. And he didn't have his dog with him, either. It was lucky for Tommy Fox that there was no dog there. For Tommy was so scared that he forgot all about jumping sideways, and running in circles, as his mother had taught him. He just ran straight for his home in the middle of the big field; and when he got there he scurried through the door and scampered inside; and he never came out again all that day.