

# THE TALE OF TOMMY FOX

## CHAPTER 4: MOTHER GROUSE'S CHILDREN



BY ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



The very next day after his first lesson in hunting, when his mother had brought home the live woodchuck, Tommy Fox went off into the woods alone. He had made up his mind that he would surprise his mother by bringing home some nice tidbit for dinner—a rabbit, perhaps, or maybe a squirrel. He wasn't quite sure what it would be, because you know when hunting you have to take what you find—if you can catch it.

Tommy Fox hadn't been long in the woods before he had even better luck than he had expected. He was creeping through a thicket, making no noise at all, when what should he see but that sly old Mother Grouse, with all her eleven children! They were very young, were old Mother Grouse's children; and they hadn't yet learned to fly. And there they were, all on the ground, with the proud old lady in their midst.

Tommy Fox was so pleased that he almost laughed out loud. He tried to keep still; but he couldn't help snickering a little. And old Mother Grouse heard him. She started to fly. But instead of tearing off out of danger, she lighted on the ground quite near Tommy.

"How stupid of her!" he thought. "I'll just catch the old lady first, and then get the youngsters afterward. They can't fly away."

So Tommy made a leap for old Mother Grouse. He just missed her.

She rose in the nick of time and slipped

away from him. But she didn't fly far. So Tommy followed. And he stole up very slyly; and once more, when he was quite near the old lady, he sprang at her.

It was really very annoying. For again old Mother Grouse just escaped. Again she flew a little further away, lighted on the ground, and seemed to forget that Tommy Fox was so near.

That same thing happened as many as a dozen times. And the twelfth time that Mrs. Grouse rose before one of Tommy's rushes she didn't come down again. She lighted in a tree. And since it appeared to Tommy that she had no intention of leaving her safe perch, he gave up in disgust. He was very angry because he hadn't caught old Mother Grouse. But there was her family! He would get them—the whole eleven of them! And he turned back toward the place where he had first come upon them.

Now, sly old Mother Grouse had played a trick on Tommy Fox. If he had just left her alone he could have caught every one of her children. But she had tempted him to follow her. And every time she rose from the ground and flew a short distance, she led Tommy further away from her little ones.

Tommy had some trouble in finding the exact spot where he had stumbled upon Mrs. Grouse and her children. But he found it again, at last. And little good it did him; for not a trace of those eleven young grouse could he discover. They had all disappeared—every single one

of them! They knew what to do when their mother led Tommy Fox away. Each of them found a safe hiding-place. Some of them burrowed beneath the fallen leaves; some of them hid behind old stumps; some of them crept into a hollow log. And try as he would, Tommy Fox was unable to find so much as one downy feather.

He was so disappointed—and so ashamed—that he went home and stayed there. But he had learned something. Yes! Tommy Fox knew that if he ever met old Mother Grouse and her family again he would catch her children first. Afterward he would try to capture the sly old lady herself. But he didn't believe, just then, that he would ever be able to catch her. You see, Tommy realized that he wasn't quite so clever as he had thought.