

THE TALE OF TOMMY FOX

CHAPTER 12: OLD MR. CROW IS PLEASED



BY ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY



There was a very good reason why Mrs. Fox did not come home that day when the dog Spot chased Tommy Fox into his house. She had heard old Spot barking in the field and she had hurried toward home as fast as she could, to see what was the matter.

To her great dismay, when she leaped up on the stone-wall not far from her house Mrs. Fox could see Spot scratching at her door. And she guessed at once that he had driven Tommy inside.

The poor old lady hardly knew what to do. But she hid in the grass, hoping that Spot would grow tired of his task and go home. But old dog Spot kept up a great barking. He howled so loudly that they heard him way off at the farm-house; and Mrs. Fox nearly wept when she saw Farmer Green and his boy Johnnie come hurrying across the fields.

Pretty soon Johnnie Green returned to the farmhouse; and when he came back Mrs. Fox could see that he carried a steel trap. For a short time Johnnie and his father busied themselves at her doorway. And then they went away, calling old dog Spot after them.

After they had gone, Mrs. Fox stole sadly across the field to the home she had liked so well. She knew that she could live there no longer in peace and quiet. Yes—she would have to move. And now the first thing to be done was to get Tommy safely out of the house.

Mrs. Fox reached her door-yard. And there she paused. There was no trap to be seen, anywhere. But the path leading to her door was sprinkled thick with fresh earth; and wise old Mrs. Fox knew that hidden underneath it, somewhere, lay that cruel trap, with its jaws wide open, waiting to catch her if she stepped between them.

She crept as close to her door as she dared, and called softly to Tommy. I don't need to say that her son was delighted to hear his mother's voice. He poked his nose out of the hole at once. And he would have jumped out and fallen right into the trap if his mother had not warned him.

"Don't come out!" she cried sharply, "There's a trap here, beneath this dirt. Now, do just as I tell you, or you'll be caught!"

Tommy Fox was frightened. For once, at least, he believed, that his mother knew more than he did. And he didn't dare move, except when she ordered. He didn't dare put a foot down except where she told him to.

Tommy had taken several careful steps, and his mother had begun to think that he was almost safely past the trap, when a very unfortunate thing happened. Tommy was just about to set one of his front feet down upon a spot that his mother had pointed out to him, when somebody suddenly called, "Stop, thief!"

Tommy Fox was so startled that he gave a quick jump. Snap! went the trap. And though

Tommy sprang up into the air, he was just too late. The trap closed tightly across the tips of his toes. It was only one foot that was caught; but that was enough. He could not get away—no matter how hard he pulled.

It was old Mr. Crow who had called “Stop, thief!” He was laughing now. His “Haw-haw! Haw-haw!” could be heard plainly enough, as he flapped away in great glee, to tell all the forest-people that Tommy Fox would trouble them no more.