Tilly's Moonlight FOX

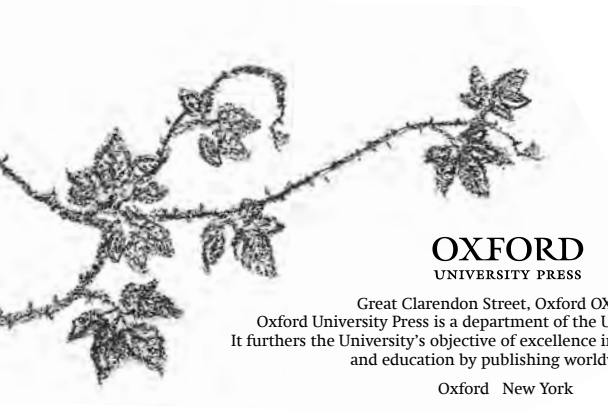


Tilly's Moonlight FOX

JULIA GREEN



OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS



OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and in certain other countries

Text © Julia Green 2012
Inside illustrations © Paul Howard
The moral rights of the author and illustrator have been asserted

Database right Oxford University Press (maker)

First published 2012

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press,
or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate
reprographics rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction
outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department,
Oxford University Press, at the address above

You must not circulate this book in any other binding or cover
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

ISBN: 978-0-19-275791-3

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in Great Britain
Paper used in the production of this book is a natural,
recyclable product made from wood grown in sustainable forests
The manufacturing process conforms to the environmental
regulations of the country of origin

For my parents
Barbara and Reg Green
with love



Chapter 1



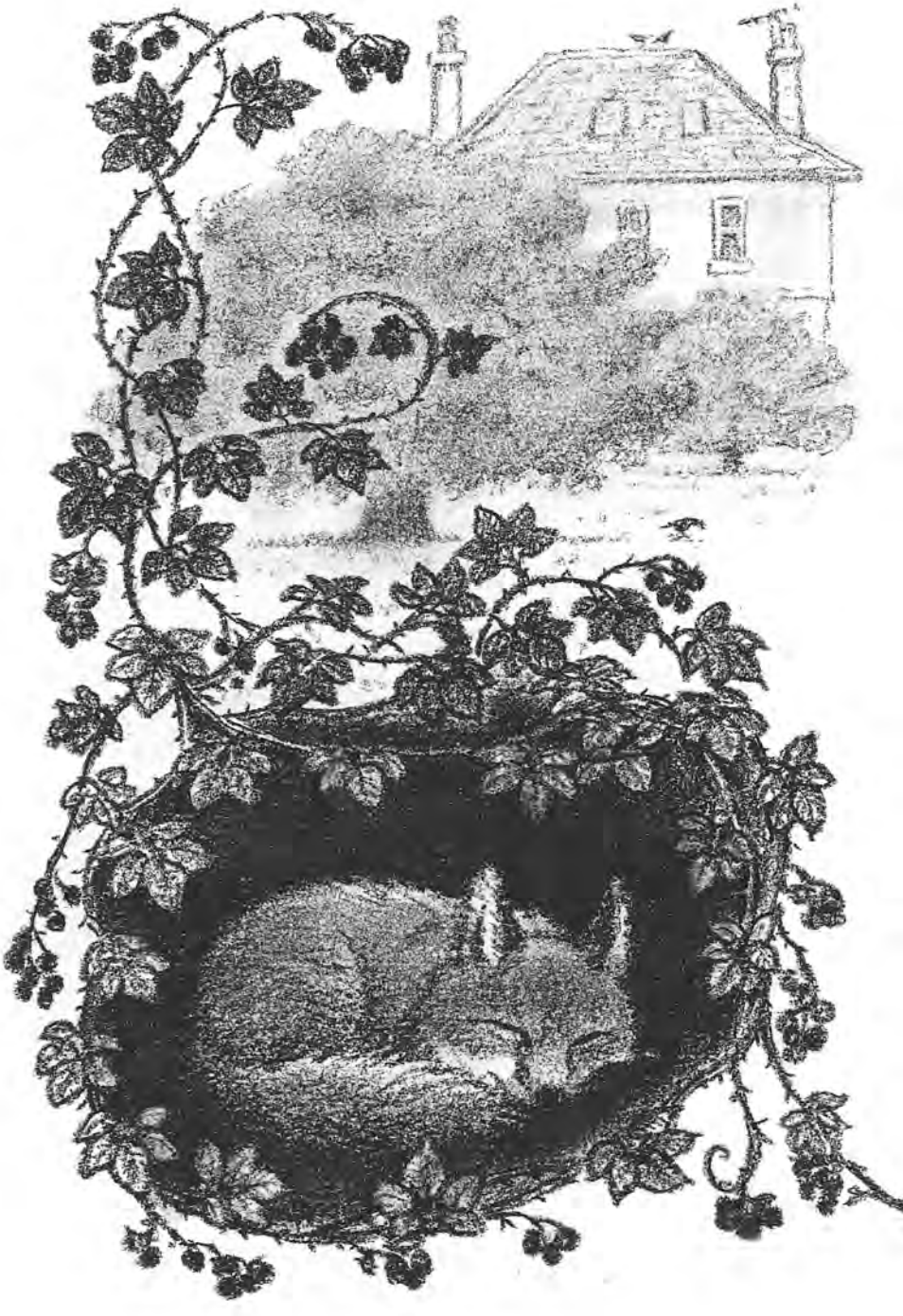
Something was different.

The fox sensed it.

Curled up in its daytime hiding place in a nest of brambles, the fox lifted its head. It pricked up both ears to listen.

It heard a car, and voices. Next, a big removal lorry drew up on the road outside the house. Someone banged a door at the back as they opened it.

For hours, the removal men went to and fro, carrying boxes into the house. Tables and chairs came next; beds and bookcases, lamps and cushions and rugs. A whole house-load of things was carried out of the lorry, up the front path, through the open door into the house.



All day, the fox tried to sleep, curled round with the tip of its tail wrapped round its body, but its ears twitched, listening out for danger.

As evening came and shadows lengthened across the grass, the lorry drove away. The front door banged shut. At last it was quiet—just the normal sounds of an autumn evening. A blackbird sang at the top of a tree. A squirrel ran along the edge of the rickety wooden fence.

The fox uncurled itself. It yawned, and stretched.

Silently, on velvet paws, it slipped through the bars of the gate into the garden. No one saw its slim, red-brown body and long tail as it stopped at the edge of the lawn to sniff the night air. It looked up at the house.

The fox called out, into the dark. It was a strange sound, an eerie, high-pitched scream that echoed round the night garden and made everything afraid.



Chapter 2



Tilly's spine tingled. She uncurled her legs from under the rug, slid off the sofa and went to the window to look out. What had made that horrible noise? But it was dark outside; all she could see was her own reflection in the glass, staring back at her.

'Tilly?' Dad called from upstairs. 'Time to get ready for bed. I'll come and say goodnight later.'

Tilly opened the sitting room door. The hall was dark. A tiny bit of yellowy light shone in from the streetlight outside, through the pane of glass above the front door, just enough to fill the hall with shadowy creatures. The stairs seemed to lead up into a yawning black nothing.

Tilly waited, in case that scary screaming sound came again. It was so quiet in the house she could hear the tick, tick, tick of the clock on the kitchen wall. She took a deep breath. She made herself step into the shadowy dark. She dashed to the bottom of the stairs, reached up to the light switch and flicked it on.

There! Now she could see it was just the hallway, with coats hanging on pegs, cold tiles on the floor, and a staircase with a strip of green carpet going up the middle, held tight by gold metal rods on each step.

Everything in this house was old-fashioned and strange and smelt funny. The ceilings were high up and there were plaster flowers in the middle where the lights hung from. It was much bigger than their old house. It was almost big enough, Tilly thought, to get lost in. The furniture was big and dark too—wardrobes and cupboards and tables and chairs and pictures in heavy gold frames that had belonged to the old lady who had lived in the house before she died. The walls had old-fashioned wallpaper, with patterns of flowers and birds.

They would change all that, Dad said. Paint the whole house, top to bottom, to freshen it up. Get

rid of some of the furniture that the old lady had left behind, and make the house more theirs. Eventually.

It would be a good house for playing hide-and-seek in, Tilly thought. But she didn't know anyone round here to play with. Not yet. In her old street, where the houses were all joined together and went in steps down the hill, all the children dashed in and out of each other's houses every day after school, and all day at the weekend. Her best friend, Ally, lived in the house two doors down. And now they were all miles and miles away.

Tilly went up the bit of stairs that turned the corner, and then along the landing. The carpet was soft, like moss, under her feet. It went in a strip, with bare brown boards either side. She was careful to stay in the middle. The dark wood either side was shiny, like water. She was on a moss bridge, going over a river, and if she fell . . .

Tilly stopped outside Mum's bedroom door. She listened. Not a sound. There was no strip of light shining out from under the door. Mum must be asleep. For a moment, Tilly thought about pushing open the heavy door, tiptoeing in to kiss Mum good-night . . .

But she mustn't wake Mum up. Mum wasn't very well. Just as they'd unpacked the very last boxes, Mum's head started hurting so much she had to go and lie down. And then it got much worse, and the doctor came, and all Tilly's excitement about moving house got swallowed up in worrying about Mum.

The doctor said Mum needed to sleep so she could get better faster, and so that the baby would be all right. The baby was growing inside Mum; it needed to grow a lot more before it was ready to be born, in early spring.

'So, please be extra quiet and helpful, Tilly,' Dad said, when the doctor had gone again, 'because I've got enough on my plate already.'

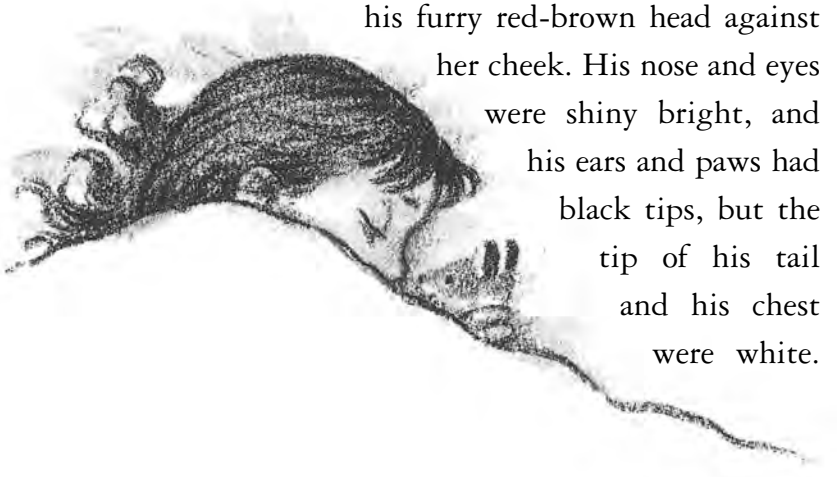
Tilly padded on past the shut door, along to her own room. She stretched her hand up through the open gap and switched on the light. What was that, scuttling under the bed? She shivered again.

She knew what Dad would say. 'Old houses are full of noises. It's the radiator clunking and gurgling, water running along old pipes. It's only the draught from the window making the curtain twitch. You've such a vivid imagination, Tilly!'

Tilly turned on the night-light next to the bed. She

picked up her neatly-folded pyjamas from her pillow and took them with her to the bathroom next door. It was a small room, so you could see into all its corners straightaway, and it was bright with white tiles and shiny taps and the towels hanging on a warm rail. Tilly washed her hands and face and cleaned her teeth. She put on her pink rose-patterned pyjamas and slippers. She padded back to the bedroom and closed the door and turned off the big light and climbed into bed, to wait for Dad to finish his work, and come upstairs to say goodnight.

The night-light on the bedside table glowed like a moon. Little Fox was waiting for her, tucked under the duvet where no one else could see him. She knew she was too old, really, for night-lights and cuddly toys. But Little Fox was different. Tilly stroked his furry red-brown head against her cheek. His nose and eyes were shiny bright, and his ears and paws had black tips, but the tip of his tail and his chest were white.



Little Fox had been with Tilly for ever and ever. She had stroked and loved him so much he had a bald patch on the back of his head.

She waited for ages, but still Dad didn't come.



The fox called again. Its eerie cry echoed into the night.

The sound wove in and out of the night garden, and into Tilly's dreams.