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The things that happened to the Sugar Creek Gang that dark night we all went hunting with Circus's dad's big, long-bodied, long-nosed, long-tongued, long-voiced dogs would make any boy want them to happen all over again, even if some of them were rather spooky and dangerous.

Let me tell you about our hunting trip right this minute—that is, as soon as I get to it. As you probably know, Circus is the name of the acrobat in our gang. His dad, Dan Browne, makes his living in the wintertime by hunting and trapping—catching animals whose fur is used to keep people warm and to trim hats and collars for women's coats.

Anyway, the Sugar Creek Gang were all invited by Circus's dad to go hunting with him that Friday night. We expected to have a lot of fun, walking by the light of kerosene lanterns through the dark woods along the creek, listening to the mournful bawling of the hounds on the trail of—well, most anything, such as raccoons, possums, and even skunks. We also all hoped we might run into another bear. Remember the one Little Jim killed in one of the other stories about the gang?

Friday night finally came, which is the best

night for a boy to be up late, because there isn't any school on Saturday and he can sleep late in the morning if he wants to. And if his parents want him to, which some parents sometimes don't.

Right after chores were done at our farm—we did them in the dark by lantern light as we always do in the late fall and winter—the Collins family, which is ours, ate a great supper of raw-fried potatoes and milk and cheese and cold apple pie and different things. Boy, it was good!

I looked across the table at my baby sister, Charlotte Ann, who was half sitting and half sliding down in her high chair. Her eyes were half shut, and her little round brown head was bobbing like the bobber on a boy's fishing line when he is getting a nibble, just before he gets a bite and *kerplunk* it goes all the way under and the fun begins. Just that minute Charlotte Ann's round brown head went down a long way, and my grayish-brown-haired mom, who has a very kind face and the same kind of heart, stood up, untied the cord that held Charlotte Ann in the chair, lifted her carefully, and took her into the bedroom to put her into her crib, which I knew had a Scottish terrier design on its side.

I felt proud to think that I knew nearly every kind of dog there was in the world, certainly all the different kinds there were in Sugar Creek, which is a very important part of the world. I even knew the dogs by name, but

for some reason we had never had a dog in the Collins family.

Well, for a minute Dad and I were alone, and the way he looked at me made me wonder if I had done anything wrong, or if maybe I was going to and he was going to tell me *not* to.

“Well, Son,” he said, looking at me with his blue eyes, which were buried under his big, blackish-red, bushy eyebrows. His teeth were shining under his reddish-brown mustache, though, and when his teeth are shining like that so I can see them, it is sort of like a dog wagging his tail. That meant he liked me, and there wasn’t going to be any trouble. Yet trouble can happen mighty quick in a family if there is a boy in it who likes to do what he likes to do, which I did.

“What?” I said.

Dad’s voice was deep, as it always is, like a bullfrog’s voice along Sugar Creek at night, as he said, “I’m sorry, Bill, to have to announce that—” He stopped and looked long at me.

All of a sudden my heart felt as if some wicked magician had changed it into a lump of lead. What was he going to announce? What was he waiting for, and what had I done wrong, or what was I *about* to do that I shouldn’t?

Just that minute, while Dad’s sentence was still hanging like a heavy weight of some kind about to drop on my head, Mom came in from having tucked Charlotte Ann into bed. “I’ll fix a nice lunch for you to take along in your

school lunch pail, Bill. Apple pie, warm cocoa, sandwiches, and—”

My dad must have been thinking about what he was going to say and not hearing Mom at all. He went on with his sentence by saying, “Sorry to have to announce that Dr. Mellen called up this afternoon and said he would be ready for you to get your teeth filled tomorrow morning at eight. I tried to arrange some other time for you, but we had to take that or wait another week, so you’ll have to be home and in bed a little after eleven.

“I’ve made arrangements for Dan Browne to leave you and Little Jim at Old Man Paddler’s cabin, where Little Jim’s daddy will pick you up. Little Jim’s piano lesson is at nine in the morning anyway, so his mother—”

Well, that was that. Little Jim and I couldn’t stay out in the woods as late as the rest of the gang. My heart was not only lead but hot lead, because I didn’t like to go to a dentist and have my teeth filled, and I didn’t want to come home till the rest of the gang did.

I felt sad and must have looked sadder.

“What’s the matter?” Mom said. “Don’t you like apple pie and cocoa and sandwiches?”

I was thinking about a cavity I had in one of my best teeth, and I was thinking about how I would look with a little piece of shining gold in one of my front teeth, so I said to Dad, “What kind of filling?”

And Mom said, “Roast beef and salad dressing.”

And Dad said, “Gold, maybe, for one and porcelain for the others.”

And Mom exclaimed, “*What* in the—” and stopped just as we heard the sound of steps on our front porch, and I saw the flashing of a lantern outside the window and heard different kinds of voices at different pitches. I knew the gang was coming.

In a minute I was out of my chair and into my red crossbarred mackinaw, with my red corduroy cap pulled on tight. I was making a dive for the door when Dad’s deep voice stopped me by saying, “You forgot your manners again.”

So I said, “I mean, excuse me, please. Where’s my lunch, Mom?” Maybe I didn’t have any manners at all for a minute.

My lunch wasn’t ready, so I went outside and waited for it and for the rest of the gang to come. Our house was the place where they had all agreed to meet.

I say the *rest* of the gang because only two were there: Poetry, our barrel-shaped member, who knows 101 poems by heart, and Dragonfly, the spindly-legged member, whose eyes are too large for his head and whose nose is crooked at the bottom.

Dragonfly’s teeth are also too large and *will* be until his face and head grow some more. And he is sometimes “seeing” things that are not there. The very minute I saw Dragonfly with his big dragonflylike eyes shining in the lantern light, I knew that something new and different was going to happen on our hunting

trip—nothing to *worry* about, of course, but just to *wonder* about. I had enough to worry me by thinking of the dentist and the next morning at eight o'clock.

I had no sooner gotten outside than there was a whimpering sound at my knees. Looking down, I saw a tan long-muzzled dog with curly rough hair. It was sniffing at my boots to see if it liked me enough to wag its stumpy tail at me, which it did, only it didn't waste much time on me, because right that minute our black-and-white cat, Mixy, came arching her back along the side of the porch, looking for somebody's legs to rub up against. She and that tan dog saw and smelled each other at the same time.

The next thing I knew, a streak of brown and a streak of black-and-white were cutting a terribly fast hole through the dark on the way to our barn.

Dragonfly let out a yell. "Hey, Jeep! Leave that cat alone!" It was Dragonfly's new dog, which his parents had bought for him somewhere.

Just then Poetry's squawky, ducklike voice began quoting one of his poems. It sounded funny, and his round face looked funnier in the light of his lantern, which he was holding close, trying to see what was happening to the cat—or maybe to the dog, because old Mixy cat was a fierce fighter if a dog ever caught up with her. The poem went:

Hey! diddle, diddle,

The cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon.
The little dog laughed
To see such sport,
And the dish ran away with the spoon.

“The dog ran away with the *cat*, you mean,”
I said.

Just then we heard a banging out in the barnyard, which sounded as if one of our cows had tried to jump over the moon and hadn't been able to make it on account of the barn or a hog house being in the way.

“You *certainly* aren't going to take that Airedale along with us on our hunting trip!” I said to Dragonfly.

“I *certainly* am!” he replied. Then he added, “And why not?”

It was Poetry who answered squawkily, “'Cause any dog that is nervous like that and goes shooting like a torpedo after a cat wouldn't be worth a picayune on a hunting trip. He'd have the hounds off the trail half the time, barking at rabbits in a brush pile or up the wrong tree or chasing somebody's house cat.”

“What's a *picayune*?” Dragonfly wanted to know.

And because I'd had the word in spelling that week and had looked it up, I said, “A picayune is 'a person or a thing of trifling value.'”

Well, that little spindly-legged guy was peeved on account of what Poetry had said about his Airedale. He said saucily, “Here,

Picayune, give me that lantern a minute, and I'll go out and save the cat's life."

He snatched the lantern, which Poetry let him have, and started off to the barn *lickety-sizzle*, leaving Poetry and me alone in the dark, with the light from the house shining out across the porch on Poetry's green corduroy cap and his brown leather jacket.

The light also shone on his round face and his very big feet. Poetry had the longest feet in all the Sugar Creek Gang. He was wearing leather boots with rubbers on them to keep his feet dry because it was muddy in places and there would be plenty of wet grass and leaves and maybe puddles to walk and run in on our hunting trip.

The weather was just right for hunting, though, because when the ground is damp like that, the hounds can smell better, and the coons and possums and things leave their scent on the leaves and grass or wherever they walk or run or climb.

I had learned all that from my dad and from Circus himself. Besides, any boy on a farm knows these things.

Just that minute we heard galloping hoofs and a snorting horse. And then Circus came riding into our lane and up to our back door. The minute his pony slid to a quick stop, Circus kicked his feet out of the stirrups. In a split second he was standing on his hands on the saddle with his medium-sized feet balanced in the air, before he swung himself out over the

pony's heaving side and landed on the boardwalk beside Poetry and me.

"Hello, gang," he said. "Where's everybody?"

"I'm right here!" a new voice called from the path that ran through our orchard. Looking behind me, I saw a flashlight bobbing back and forth like the pendulum on our kitchen clock. It was two people, a tallish boy with his cap on sideways, and a short-legged little guy with his cap on backwards and with the bill turned up. It was Big Jim and Little Jim. Both were wearing rubber boots, and all of us were wearing mittens or gloves.

That was all of the original Sugar Creek Gang except for Dragonfly, who just that minute came galloping up from the barn, swinging Poetry's lantern. His Airedale dog was beside him and in front of him and behind him at almost the same time. The light of the lantern made so many shadows in different directions that Dragonfly looked like three boys with four dogs jumping around him.

There was one other member of our gang, Little Tom Till, who lived across the creek a half mile or so away and whose big brother, Bob, had caused us so much trouble. Tom Till had red hair and freckles like mine and wasn't ashamed of it. He and I didn't have any more fights, because I'd found out he was a better guy on the *inside* than showed on the *outside*, as lots of red-haired, freckled-faced people are—including maybe me, some of the time.

Just as I was wondering if red-haired Tom

was coming, Little Jim, who is my best friend in the whole gang except for maybe Poetry or Dragonfly, sidled over to me and, tugging at my arm, started to tell me something.

I leaned over and listened, and he said, “Tom Till’s daddy is gone again, and nobody knows where. My daddy says we’d better—we’d better—”

“Anybody seen anything of Tom?” Big Jim wanted to know. Big Jim and Big Bob Till had been terrible enemies for a year or two, you know, but weren’t anymore although they still didn’t like each other very well and maybe never would. Big Jim was kindhearted though, and he was especially kind to Little Tom.

Big Jim’s question stopped Little Jim from telling me the rest of what he was about to tell me.

“Tom can’t come,” Little Jim said.

Little Jim, I’d better explain, wasn’t Big Jim’s brother. They just happened to have the same first name.

Then Little Jim tugged at my arm again, and I leaned over again, and he started to finish his sentence again, and it was, “John Till is in trouble with the police, and Daddy says we’d better—we’d better—”

Just that second our back door swung open wide, and the light came splashing out across the porch and into all our faces. And my mom called, “Your lunch is ready, Bill! Oh, hello, everybody! They’re all here, Dad!” she called back into our house.

My big strong dad came out onto the porch and looked us over with eyes that were almost buried under his bushy brows. He said, "Well, gang, have a good time. I'm sorry I can't go along, but I have some letters to write. When you get to Seneth Paddler's cabin up in the hills, tell him I'll be around to see him about Palm Tree Island tomorrow sometime."

"We'd better get going," Circus said. "Dad told me to tell you all to hurry up. That's why he sent me over—to tell you to step on the gas. The hounds are almost crazy to get started, and it may either rain or clear off or turn cold, and if it turns cold and freezes, they can't trail very well."

That was that, and Little Jim still hadn't told me what his dad wanted him to tell me—or us.

In a few minutes we were ready. Little Jim was riding on the pony behind Circus, and the rest of us were scrambling along behind. Dragonfly's crazy Airedale shuffled along all around and in between us. Dad's last words were ringing in my ears, "Don't forget, Bill, to tell Seneth Paddler I'll be over to see him tomorrow about Palm Tree Island."

That didn't interest us much except that we all knew that Old Man Paddler, who is one of the greatest old men that ever lived, had probably asked my father to send some money down there to some missionaries. Old Man Paddler was much interested in things like that.

Just then Dragonfly's Airedale darted in

between my legs on his awkward way across the road to give chase to a rabbit. I stumbled over him and over myself and went down into a small puddle.

“That crazy *dog!*” I exclaimed from somewhere in the center of the road. “What on earth do you want him to go along for?”

“That’s what I say!” Poetry huffed from beside me. And—would you believe it?—he was getting up off the ground at the same time I was.

“He’s a wonderful dog,” Dragonfly said defensively. “Just you wait and see. He’ll maybe catch a bear or a lion or maybe save somebody’s life or something. I read a story once about—”

“Hurry *up*, you guys!” Circus called back to us from his pony, and we did, all of us starting to run to try to keep up with him.

Poetry, puffing along beside me, said between puffs, “I just know that curly-haired mongrel is going to get us into trouble.”

“He’s *not* a mongrel!” Dragonfly exclaimed behind us. “He’s a purebred Airedale.”

“He’s a *picayune!*” I told Dragonfly. “He’s a thing of trifling value.”

“He’s a *person!*” Dragonfly cried. “Here, Jeep! Here, Jeep!” he called. “Come back here and leave that rabbit alone! We’re going *coon* hunting!”

Pretty soon we came in sight of Circus’s sort of old-looking house, where there was a light in an upstairs window with somebody moving

about, maybe turning down the covers for some of Circus's many sisters who lived there. He was the only boy.

Circus's dad and Big Jim's dad's hired hand, who lived close by, were there waiting for us with two more kerosene lanterns and a long, powerful flashlight and one long rifle. Tied close to the woodshed were two big, sad-faced, long-nosed, long-eared, long-bodied hounds, one a rusty red and the other a kind of blue-and-gray. They were leaping and trembling and acting like wild things, trying to get loose so they could go where they wanted to go.

Circus put his pony away in the barn, came back to where we were, and in less than three minutes we were on our way.

His dad, who had on a sheep-lined brown coat and high boots—as also did Big Jim's dad's hired man—went over to the dogs, scolded them so they would be quiet, and unsnapped their leashes. You should have seen them go, just like two streaks of greased lightning, out across the yard and over the fence and straight for Sugar Creek.

Maybe the dogs smelled something out there and knew just where to go, for we hadn't been following along behind them more than a half minute when one of the dogs—Old Bawler, the gray-and-blue one—let out a wild, long, sad bawl that sounded like a loon and a woman crying for help and running at the same time:

“Whooo . . . whooo . . .”

Then Old Sol, the red-and-rusty hound,

took up the cry, and his voice was deep and hollow as though it was coming through a hollow log in a cave and he was in a lot of trouble:

“*WHOOO . . . WHOOO . . .*”

“It’s a coon!” Circus cried, and so did his dad and almost all of us, each one trying to be first to tell the other one what we thought it was.

“It’s headed straight for Sugar Creek! Come on! Everybody!”

And away we went—lanterns, boots, boys, Dragonfly, Jeep, all running, *sloshety-crunchety*, *slippety-sizzle*, through the woods, over logs, up and down little hills, around brush piles and briar patches, panting and feeling fine and excited and wondering if it was a coon or a fox or what.

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I couldn't help but notice that, just a minute or two after we had started, the dogs changed direction and were running not toward Sugar Creek but toward the little stream of water that we called the "branch" and which emptied itself into the creek quite a long way away from where we were.

It looked as if they were going to take us right back toward Circus's house, and we all followed along behind them, running or walking, whatever we had to do. Sometimes we had to hurry to keep up with the dogs, and then again we had to just amble along at a snail's pace because the dogs would lose the trail, going around a tree or a brush pile or something else.

"What do you know about *that!*" I heard Circus say. "That coon's going straight for our orchard!"

And it looked as if it was. It had left the woods. The dogs were far ahead of us. Jeep was darting in and out and around. First he would be with us, then he would be away up ahead with the "real" dogs.

The men were ahead of us, too, following the hounds, which had already turned and started toward Sugar Creek again.

Pretty soon, while we were walking along, I heard little Jeep barking all by himself. It was a funny sort of bark, entirely different from any he had barked yet. It sounded as if he felt he had done something wonderful. He wasn't ahead with the other dogs either. He was all by himself, barking up a little tree right at the edge of Circus's orchard. In fact, he was barking up a persimmon tree.

Circus, Big Jim, Poetry, Dragonfly, Little Jim, and I stopped to see what Jeep was after, which we supposed was a house cat.

Poetry squawked, "I'll bet it's one of Circus's sisters, and that picayune doesn't know the difference." Circus had many sisters, but he couldn't help it. For that reason he didn't know how to dry dishes very well.

I had Big Jim's flashlight, and I shoved its light toward the top of that tree and around it but couldn't see anything. Some of the leaves of the persimmon tree were still on. They were dark brown and not round and oval as they are in the summertime when they are large and shining and green. Now they were curled up the way old Jack Frost had left them.

Then my flashlight showed me, about halfway up, a strange looking little light-gray creature of some kind. Jeep was all around that tree now, barking and yelping and jumping up and down, scratching his claws on the thick, scaly brown bark.

Do you know what I saw when my flashlight was focused up there? Right in the crotch of a

limb was *something* all right. The underpart of it was very dark. Beginning about the middle of its sides and going up toward its back, it was black-and-white, its fur mixed like a man's hair who is maybe about forty-seven years old. Its fur was nice and long.

The animal swung around a little then and shut its eyes against the light, and I could see that its head was a different color, a sort of yellow-white. Its cheeks were as white as the snow would be in another two weeks—or maybe even that very night if it should happen to snow, which I wished it would.

I knew right away what the animal was, because of its tail.

“Boy, oh, boy!” I heard Poetry say. “It’s a possum!”

“Sure!” Little Jim said. “It’s a big possum! Look at his little black ears, would you!”

“Those ears aren’t black,” Dragonfly said. “Not all black, anyway. See that little yellow streak up there on the tiptop of its ears!”

The fur on the underpart of this possum was dark, and it was also shorter than the rest, with just a few white hairs sprinkled in.

“I don’t think it’s a possum,” Dragonfly went on to say, “because—look how black its legs are, and look how black its feet are.”

I lowered my voice disgustedly. “It’s a possum!”

I focused the flashlight on its tail, then moved the light right up the possum’s body until the gray-furred little varmint scrambled

around, turned his tail toward me, and began to climb on up the tree.

“See that tail!” I exclaimed. “That’s what they call a prehensile tail!”

Big Jim, who was standing quietly looking on, said, “Here, Bill, let me have that flashlight!”

He had it almost before I could let loose of it, and he was directing the light still closer to the possum, reaching as high as he could.

Well, with all that noise going on, all of us jabbering to each other and Jeep barking and yelping, we forgot about Old Bawler with her loonlike voice and Old Sol with his hollow, gruff voice. We forgot all about Circus’s dad and Big Jim’s dad’s hired man. We were excited because Jeep had proved that he wasn’t such an ignorant dog, although I still claimed that he was a picayune.

So I said to Dragonfly, “It’s just an accident that he ran onto this possum here.”

“Yeah,” Little Jim said, probably feeling like teasing somebody himself. “I bet he didn’t know the difference when the possum’s trail crossed the coon’s trail, and he got off on this sidetrack.”

“Sure,” I said. “He thinks a possum is important.”

Circus spoke up. “It *is* important! That possum is worth two dollars!”

Well, the possum was not interested in having us too close to him, so he squirmed on up the tree, reaching one long front leg after the other from one limb to another, and pretty

soon he was going up very fast. I could see his long tail dragging along behind him.

“See his prehensile tail!” I exclaimed.

Dragonfly answered by saying, “What’s a prehensile tail?”

As I told you, I’d been looking up useful words and learning how to use them by using them, so I said, “A prehensile tail is a tail that can hold onto things almost as well as a boy’s hand can.”

“A possum can hang by its tail as easy”—Poetry turned to Dragonfly, wanting to tell what he knew, too—“as easy as Circus can hang by his!”

Circus, as you know, was our acrobat.

Well, that was a bright remark, and we all had a good laugh.

“That,” Circus answered gruffly, “is a bright remark without the glow!”

I heard a bit of scuffling behind me and looked around just in time to see Poetry beginning to get up off the ground.

Well, Circus decided it was time to go into action. He swung himself up into the branches of that persimmon tree and started up, hand over hand, after the possum. It was a funny sight to see Circus going up the tree following the possum and to see the possum hurrying and scurrying up ahead of him.

Still on the way up, he called back to us, “It’s a good thing we are catching this possum. We’ve been missing too many chickens out of our chicken house!”

That was a fact. Possums eat a lot of different things that they shouldn't. They not only eat all kinds of insects in the summertime, but they are very destructive animals. Nearly every bird that nests on the ground around Sugar Creek has to be afraid an old possum will come along and tear up its nest and eat all the baby birds or destroy the eggs. Not only that, possums go right into people's chicken yards and chicken houses at night. If they get a chance, they will eat the little chickens too. And if it's a large possum, it will catch even the big chickens and eat them.

I remembered all that while Circus was on his way up the persimmon tree. He stopped once to pick and eat one of the little plum-sized yellow persimmons, which, since fall and frost had come, were ripe and tasted very good to boys and possums. But in the summer and early fall, they made your lips pucker if you tasted one.

Little Jim, who never liked to see anything get hurt, called up to Circus, "My dad says that possums are very good to catch all the mice on the farm, and they catch the moles too." That was just like Little Jim—always defending something or somebody, which maybe is a very good character trait to have.

Big Jim was holding his flashlight on the little gray varmint and on Circus, who knew that tree almost by heart and where every limb was. He'd climbed every tree on their place and almost every one along Sugar Creek, so he didn't

have to wonder where the next limb was even if he couldn't see it. He just went right on up that tree.

"I'm going to shake him down!" he called back to us, and he started to do what he said he was going to do.

By that time, the possum was close to the top of the persimmon tree and was on the end of one of the branches, way out among the twigs.

Circus grabbed the small limb that the possum was on and started to shake it as hard as he could, holding onto the tree trunk with his other hand. I can tell you, the possum held on tight with his gray hair and his blackish stomach and his very black legs and feet. He even held on tight with his long, gray, round, tapering, prehensile tail.

But Circus knew how to shake possums out of a tree. He just jerked and shook and jerked and shook that branch and stopped and shook and jerked, and suddenly the front feet of that possum were loose. And then not only his front feet were loose, but every single foot was loose, and that clever gray-furred little rascal, who had his eyes shut because he didn't like to look into the flashlight, was hanging by his tail only. His back feet were reaching up, trying to clasp the limb his tail was still holding onto, the way a turtle's legs search all around trying to get hold of the hand of the boy who is holding it up by its tail—and also the way a crawfish's pincers do when you have hold of it somewhere.

Generally it does find your hand or finger just before you let go of it and it gets away.

Circus gave another quick, sharp jerk, but the possum just that second managed to get a grip on the limb again, and he scrambled up and onto it.

Big Jim threw up an idea to Circus. He called, "How about this? Maybe your dad wants that persimmon pruned up there a little!"

That was a good idea, so Circus had his knife out right away and decided that the possum's limb wouldn't be needed anymore. It was cut off in almost no time. Circus gave it a little shove, and out went Mr. Possum down through the outer branches of the tree to the ground. The minute he struck, he curled himself up into a ball the way they say porcupines do when they're about to be caught.

Well, Jeep didn't know what to make of it. He darted in there and started to grab hold of the possum with his teeth. Then he let go and jumped back. Then he dived in again and jumped back, and barked and panted and panted and barked and dived in again.

All the time the possum was still curled up in a ball, acting as though he was sound asleep.

"He's playing possum," Poetry cried, and that was true. Possums do that, you know, when they're about to be caught. They curl up into little balls, shut their eyes, open their mouths with a silly, sickly grin on their white faces, and look as if they are dead. Then if you leave them alone, they will run away.

Jeep darted in again, and this time grabbed the possum with his teeth, shook him as if he was a big rat, then jumped back, looking scared.

You couldn't wake up that possum, though. He lay on his side and had his head down between his forelegs. His sharp, long nose was almost touching his stomach, as if he was trying to protect his head or maybe to keep from getting bitten in the throat, the place a weasel likes to bite first when it catches a live supper.

Dragonfly spoke up then. "I wonder if he thinks he's safe just because he has his head down between his two front legs, like an ostrich does when it buries its head in the sand when there is danger."

Poetry answered him by saying with his ducklike voice, "Possums don't think. Possums *can't* think. Animals don't have brains enough to think."

"Dogs do," Dragonfly said, and it looked like the argument was in his favor.

We didn't have time to have an argument right then, though. Big Jim told them both to keep still.

Circus knew exactly what to do with a possum and how to kill it so it would die very quickly.

Little Jim turned his face away while Circus did that.

Then Circus took the possum by its prehensile tail and said, grunting a little, "He's pretty heavy to carry all the way. I think I'll lock him up in our woodshed. Come on, everybody!"

We all came on, following him up to their

weathered old house where we waited at the gate. All of us boys felt very bashful on account of Circus having so many sisters. Only one of them would even look at a boy with red hair and freckles. Her name was Lucille, and she wasn't afraid of spiders.

Pretty soon Circus was back again, and we all started to holler to each other, "Hurry up, or we'll never catch up with them."

Almost as soon as we were out in the woods again, we heard Old Bawler's high voice—and it sounded very far away—going "*Whooo . . .*"

A fraction of a second later, we heard Old Sol's baritone voice also bawling, "*WHOOO . . .*"

"I'll bet they've really found a coon's trail," one of us said to the rest of us, and we ran still faster.

"If it is a coon," Circus yelled to us, "we'll have a real fight on our hands."