

# 1

There were two very important things I didn't have time to tell you about in my last story, *Screams in the Night*. One of those two things was what happened when we ran *ker-smack* into the kidnapper himself and had a terrible fight with him, and the other was a strange moonlight adventure in an Indian graveyard.

In fact, the two were sort of mixed up together. The kidnapper was doing something mysterious in that Indian graveyard, and some of the gang accidentally stumbled onto him. Did you ever see an Indian cemetery, the kind the Chippewa Indians have away up in northern Minnesota? That's the country where the Sugar Creek Gang was spending its awfully fast vacation. Those cemeteries are the strangest-looking places in the world. I'll tell you about the one we had our adventure in just as soon as I get to it.

I was sitting on the farther end of the long dock with my back to the shore, swinging my bare feet. I was holding onto my fishing rod and watching the red-and-white bobber way out in the lazy water.

Now and then the bobber would bob a little and move around in a small, lazy circle on the surface of the big blue lake, which meant

that the live minnow I had put on the hook for bait was down there in the water somewhere and was still frisky enough to be a very attractive afternoon lunch for any hungry bass or walleye or northern pike that might be dumb enough to come along and eat it.

I'd been sitting there for maybe ten minutes, not getting any bites except from deer-flies, which had terribly sharp stings. So I smeared some insect repellent on my bare hands and arms and face and legs and feet and was getting a good tan to take back home with me after vacation would be over.

It was about three o'clock, and all the gang except me were in their tents taking an afternoon nap, which was what we all had to do every day. A boy feels so good on a camping trip that he might get too tired, and when a boy gets too tired without enough rest and sleep, he can get sick easier or catch cold, and his body will be a good growing place for most any kind of germ.

I'd already had a short nap and had sneaked out by myself to the end of the dock, put a frisky, wiggling chub on for bait, and cast my line way out into the deep water. I was hoping that by the time it was time for the gang to wake up, I'd be getting a terribly big fish on my line. Then I could yell and scream, and we'd all have a lot of excited noise to start the rest of the afternoon off right.

After that, there'd be a picture to take of the fish and me, and maybe it would be big

enough to enter in the northern Minnesota fish contest. And then maybe our hometown paper, *The Sugar Creek Times*, would publish the picture, and the write-up would say something like this:

SUGAR CREEK BOY  
LANDS FOURTEEN POUNDER

Bill Collins, eleven-year-old son of Theodore Collins, who lives just three and one-half miles west of here, has distinguished himself to anglers by landing a fighting, wild-running, very fierce-looking northern pike at Pass Lake, Minnesota, where he and his pals are camping.

I was still a little sleepy, and, since it's never very good fishing that time of day anyway, I sort of nodded. I must have dozed off, because all of a sudden I felt the dock shaking a little behind me, and looking around I saw one of the gang coming, his fishing rod in his hand and his straw hat flapping. His round face was grinning, although he had the finger of one hand up to his lips, meaning for me to keep still.

"Hi, Poetry!" I whispered.

He stopped close to me and looked down into my freckled face and said, "Hi, Bill! *Sh!* Listen! I've just thought of something important."

I watched him wiggle-twist his pudgy fingers into his khaki shirt pocket and pull out a

piece of white cloth with something wrapped up in it.

“What you got?” I said.

And he said, “See this piece of glass we found up there beside the sandy road last night where the kidnapper’s car was stuck?”

I remembered all about it—the kidnapper’s car stuck in the sand, the wheels spinning, him swearing and swearing, and Poetry and I hiding behind some bushes watching and listening, not knowing till afterward that a little kidnapped girl was in the backseat of the car right that minute.

The man all of a sudden had climbed out of the car and let out some of the air of his back tires to increase traction and then had climbed in again and roared away. After he’d gone, our flashlights had shown us something bright, and Poetry had picked it up and kept it, saying it was a clue. But it was only a broken piece of glass.

I stared at the piece of thin glass in Poetry’s hand and thought of how it was curved like a piece of broken bottle.

“He was maybe drinking,” I said, “and threw the bottle away and it broke and—”

“It’s *not* a piece of broken bottle,” Poetry said. He lifted the minnow pail that was sitting beside me and put it behind him so he could set himself down beside me. Then he said, “Take a look *through* it. It’s a piece of lens from somebody’s glasses, and I’ll bet the kidnapper broke them while he was having trouble get-

ting his car out of the sand. Or maybe the little Ostberg girl wiggled and twisted, trying to get away, and they broke that way.”

Poetry made me look through it, which I did, as he held it so that it wouldn't get dropped. While I was looking through it, I noticed it magnified things and also brought things up closer.

And then I saw my red-and-white bobber start moving faster than a four-inch-long minnow could have pulled it. Out—out—out it went. Then it dunked under, and the line on my rod tightened, and *then* the ratchet of my reel started to sing. As quick as a flash I tightened my grip on the pole and my thumb on the reel, letting the line unwind, waiting for the fish—or whatever was on the other end of the line—to get the minnow swallowed.

I quick dodged my face away from Poetry's hand and the piece of glass and got set to sock the line. I gave a quick fierce jerk, and you should have seen what happened.

Away out there about fifty feet, there was a fierce boiling of the surface of the water and a wild tugging on my line. I heard the reel spinning and felt the line burning hot on my thumb. I was sure I'd hooked a terrific northern pike, and Poetry and I all of a sudden started making a lot of fishermen's noise.

I scrambled to my feet and didn't even bother to notice what was going on behind me. I heard Poetry trying to get out of my way and out of the way of the minnow pail, which he

was having a hard time doing, but I couldn't look back to see. I had to hold onto my fish. I did hear Poetry grunt five or six quick grunts, though, and heard the pail get itself knocked over and heard and felt a heavy body go *ker-whamety-thump* on the dock.

Then there was a noisy splash beside me, and I knew it was the minnow pail. It'd had about twenty-five live chubs in it and shouldn't have been left on the dock in the first place but should have been down in the fresh water to keep the minnows alive.

Then there was another splash. I took a sideways look and saw Poetry himself down there in the water.

He grabbed the pail, yelling, "The lid wasn't fastened, and the minnows are all spilled out!" Poetry held up the empty pail with every single minnow gone that Barry, our camp director, was supposed to fish with that evening.

Well, my heart would have been beating hard with being to blame for losing the minnows if it wasn't already beating terribly fast with excitement because of the fish on my line. It was no time to worry over spilled minnows, though. So I yelled down to Poetry, "Look—look!"

And when Poetry looked, he saw what I saw. A great two-foot-long fish of some kind I'd never seen before jumped out of the water, showed every bit of himself in a long leap, and then splashed back in again and dived straight to the bottom.

And then all the gang were waking up in their tents. They came running out to the end of the dock to help by yelling and telling me what to do and what not to do all at the same time.

*Splash! Zip! Swish!*

I tell you it was an exciting time there for a few noisy minutes, with one member of the gang after another bounding onto the dock, and all of them telling me what to do and what not to do and why, and also how to and how not to.

But soon I had that big fish coming in a little closer to the edge of the dock where I was. Then, because he may have felt the way a boy would feel if he saw some giants yelling and waving their arms, he'd get scared and make a fierce run for the deep water again. And every time, I'd let him run and let the hot line go sizzling under my thumb from the whirring reel, so as not to let him break the line.

In about five minutes the fish was up close enough for Big Jim, the leader of our gang, to reach out with a long wooden-handled dip net and get him into it. In another jiffy he was landed.

"It-it-it's a *dogfish!*" Dragonfly, the pop-eyed member of our gang, yelled when he saw the lunging, fierce-looking, large-mouthed fish in Big Jim's net. I looked at Dragonfly's eyes, which, when he's excited, get extra large the way a dragonfly's eyes are.

"It is not," Circus said, squinting at it and at the same time shading his eyes with his hand to

keep the sun out of them. Circus, being our acrobat, felt so good after his afternoon nap that he started walking toward the shore on his hands. He wound up in the shallow water beside the dock, because he accidentally lost his balance and fell off in a sprawling splash right beside Poetry, who was already there.

Little Jim, the greatest little guy in the gang and the most innocent-faced one of us, squeezed his way through to where I was and said, "It's a two-foot-long bullhead!"

"It can't be," red-haired Tom Till said, squinting his blue eyes at the fish. "Bullheads have horns, and there isn't a one on him!"

Well, it turned out that Dragonfly was right—it *was* a terribly big dogfish and wouldn't be good to eat, although some people might want to eat it.

Anyway, that's how the minnow pail with Barry's two dozen minnows got turned over and all the minnows spilled out, and why Barry, for a friendly sort of punishment, decided that Poetry and I had to go to a resort about a quarter of a mile up the lake and get more minnows.

And that's how Poetry and I ran *ker-smack* into the kidnapper mystery again. This is the way it happened.

## 2

When Poetry and I realized that we had to take a hike up the lake to a resort on the other side, all of a sudden the weather seemed terribly hot, much too hot for two boys to have to hike so far to get a pail of minnows. In fact, it wouldn't be good for the minnows to stay in the pail all the way back without changing the water, the same as it is not good for boys not to have fresh air. All fish need plenty of oxygen.

"I'm sorry, boys," Barry said, his one all-gold front tooth shining in the sunlight, "but there'll be plenty of time. And besides, wasn't there a rule about the afternoon rest period lasting until a certain time? And didn't two boys break that rule? What do you say, gang?" He whirled around and asked Big Jim and Little Jim and Little Tom Till and Circus and Dragonfly.

Not a one of the gang answered at first, on account of all of us were very loyal to the rest of us, and nobody wanted anybody to be punished.

Then Dragonfly spoke up and said, "I think it's a good idea if I can go along with them."

He looked wistfully at my freckled face, then at Barry, just as Poetry said, "We could save time, and wouldn't have to stop on the way back to change the water on the minnows, if we could take the boat and the outboard motor."

The very thought sent a thrill up and down my spine. If there is anything I'd rather do than anything else, it is to sit in the stern of a boat with the steering handle of an outboard motor in my left hand and feel the vibrating rubber grip on the handle and hear the motor's roar. I like the feel of the wind in my face, too, as the boat shoots out across the water with its sharp prow making a V-shaped path and with water spraying over the gunwale and splattering a little on my freckled face.

Boy, oh boy! If Barry would only let us! It would be wonderful if the minnows could be brought back in just maybe five minutes after they were put in the pail!

Barry looked from one to the other of us—at Poetry's round, mischievous face, at my freckled and maybe excited face, and at Dragonfly's thin face with his dragonflylike eyes. I noticed that Dragonfly's eyes were squinting at things as if he had eyestrain and needed glasses. Then he sneezed and pulled out his big red handkerchief to stop the second and third sneezes by squeezing his nose shut and pressing hard against his upper lip at the same time.

Barry looked at Dragonfly and said to the three of us, "I believe there are a lot of wildflowers along the shore, and you boys might stir up a lot of extra pollen walking, and that'd be hard on Dragonfly's hay fever, so—well, go ahead, you three!"

Whew! I was glad we'd spilled the minnows!

Little Jim piped up and said, "It'd be hard

on my hay fever to have to walk too if I *had* the hay fever. And if I had to be punished, *I'd* rather go in the boat too!"

Barry grinned at Little Jim and said, "All right, if you think you can stand the punishment."

Little Jim said he could.

Pretty soon we were ready to go after the minnows. Now I hardly noticed the hot weather, even though right that minute the sky was like a big, upside-down, all-blue breakfast-food bowl that had a big round yellow hole in its bottom. Through that yellow hole a lot of fierce heat was pouring down on us and on the blue lake and all over the Paul Bunyan Playground, which was what people called that part of the North where we were. Paul Bunyan was an imaginary big lumberman who used to live up North. It was imaginary Paul Bunyan's imaginary big blue ox, Babe, whose imaginary footprints formed all the big lakes in Minnesota.

Dragonfly, Poetry, Little Jim, and I were just ready to shove off and go roaring out across the lake when Big Jim yelled to us from the shore and said, "Wait a minute!" which we did. He came hurrying out to the end of the dock to where we were.

"You forgot the roll call."

I was surprised, because we were going to be gone only thirty minutes maybe. I'd forgotten that that was one of Barry's rules. He'd given us a list of things that he said were "standard" for anybody in a boat, and the whole

gang had been memorizing the list. And here I was, forgetting it the very first day all on account of wanting to get going in a hurry. Every time any of us went out in the boat somebody "called the roll" to see if we had all of our equipment.

Big Jim looked at a slip of paper he had in his hand, which showed he wasn't trusting his memory either, and read off the list of things for us, and we answered. It reminded me of our teacher at Sugar Creek School calling the roll of his seventeen pupils and we answering our names if we were there.

"Fire extinguisher!" Big Jim read.

Dragonfly said, "Present," and held up an empty tin can, trying to be funny and giggling to make it sound funny, which it didn't, but Dragonfly's giggle did. There was a fire extinguisher on one of the big boats we used, but none of the small boats had any. The fire extinguisher was in case the outboard motor caught fire. It wouldn't be any fun if you were far out on a big lake and your motor and boat caught fire and your boat burned out from under you.

"Extra gasoline!" Big Jim called from his slip of paper.

And Little Jim answered by tapping with his stick on the two-gallon red gasoline can in the bottom of the boat. Little Jim always took his stick with him wherever he went.

"Screwdriver, pliers, and wrench!" Big Jim yelled.

Poetry opened Barry's tackle box, and there, right in the top drawer, were all three.

"What do we need pliers for?" Dragonfly asked me, he being the kind of person who always wants to know all the whys of everything.

"To take the hooks out of the big fish we catch," Poetry said, and Dragonfly said in a complaining voice, "Let's get started—we aren't going fishing."

"An extra spark plug!" Big Jim went on calling the roll, and I noticed that the spark plug was also there in the first drawer in a plastic bag.

"Oars!" Big Jim said.

We didn't have any.

Poetry said, "Don't need 'em. We've got plenty of gasoline and a good motor."

"Oars!" Big Jim said again, louder. "Go get 'em! They're in Barry's tent!"

Poetry, who nearly always had a hard time having his mind changed for him, scowled but knew that scowling wouldn't help. So up he stood, and out he stepped, and pretty soon back he puffed with two long green oars. He shoved them under our boat seats, where they'd be safe and wouldn't fall out easily.

Big Jim went on. "Life vests or safety cushions for each person on board!"

There were only three cushions in the boat and four boys, so Dragonfly had to chase back to the tent for another one.

"An extra length of starter cord," Big Jim said.

We had to have that too, on account of one might break or get dropped in the water while we were away out in the lake, and who would want to row back?

“Hurry up!” I called to Big Jim on the dock. “We’re in a hurry!” I was just itching to get out there on the lake and feel the boat doing what I wanted it to. If there is anything any boy likes, it is to run something that will do what he wants it to do when he wants it to, which is maybe why my dad and mom feel good when I do what they want me to, I thought—which was a crazy time to think it.

And for a second I felt a wave of homesickness go swishing over me like a big wave of water, and I wondered what my folks were doing at Sugar Creek and how my baby sister, Charlotte Ann, was standing the heat. And I wished Mom could have a chance to come to a lake like this and get cooled off—only it was hot here too today. I could imagine her sitting in this pretty green-and-white boat with Charlotte Ann and Dad and with me steering and roaring fast out across the blue water.

Dragonfly came dashing back with a red safety cushion.

Big Jim stooped over and unwound the starter cord, which I had already coiled around the starter disk of the motor so as to be ready to give a quick sharp pull the very second we were out in deep water.

“You can’t go with that starter cord!” Big Jim said and held it up.

“Hey!” I said. “Let me have it. We’re in a hurry!”

“Oh no, you’re not!” Big Jim argued. He pulled out of his pocket a round piece of wood about five inches long and quick made a special knot in the end of the starter cord and tied the cord to the middle of the stick.

“There you are,” he said. “Now if anything happens and this cord falls into the water, it will float, with this piece of wood tied to the end to hold it up.”

Well, that was the end of the roll call, and in a minute we were off, just as Big Jim called to us to hurry back because we were all going to visit an Indian cemetery before supper.

“I don’t see any sense in taking all those things along every time we go out,” Dragonfly complained, and I agreed with him until a little later.

It was a great ride and felt just as I thought it would, and I wished it could have lasted a long time. Soon, though, we rounded a bend in the lake and started zipping along the shore toward the resort where we were to get the minnows. Straight ahead of me, I could see a neat little rustic log cabin, which most of us saw at the same time and started talking about.

“There’s Santa’s cabin,” Little Jim said. “Look! He’s painted his boathouse green!”

Santa, you know, was the big man who had invited us to come North in the first place to camp on his property.

“Yeah,” Poetry yelled above the sound of

the motor, “he’s painted the inside green and white both—we saw it last night. That’s where the kidnapper had the little Ostberg girl.”

That started me thinking of the exciting time Poetry and I had had last night.

We took turns yelling to Little Jim and Dragonfly all the different things that had happened—how Poetry and I had got up in the middle of the night and with our flashlights had sneaked out of our tent and down to the boat-house, because earlier last evening we thought we’d heard something inside.

“You know what I wish?” Poetry yelled to me.

I yelled back, “What?”

“I wish we’d got a good look at his face so we could maybe help the police find him. He’s pretty sure to be hiding out up here somewhere.”

“I wish I had been with you last night,” Little Jim said. His small, mouselike, innocent face had a tense look on it, and he was gripping the stick in his hand so tight the knuckles showed white.

“What’d you have done?” Dragonfly, who was sitting in the prow of the boat, yelled to him.

And Little Jim said, “I’d have socked him with this stick.”

I looked at him and, remembering how he loved everybody and didn’t like to see anything or anybody get hurt, I was surprised.

But then he said in one of the fiercest voices I’d ever heard him use, “Anybody that’d

treat a helpless little girl like that ought to be socked.”

Dragonfly said, “Aw, you wouldn’t hurt a fly.”

Little Jim got a set look on his face, gripped his stick tighter in one hand and the side of the boat with the other, and said, “I say I’d have socked him!” He raised his stick and whammed it down on the gunwale right close to where Dragonfly was sitting.

“Hey!” Dragonfly yelled, “I’m no kidnapper!”

We steered close to Santa’s dock, then I swerved the boat so that we went swishing past and started a lot of rolling waves toward his shore. Then we zipped on up the shoreline toward the resort where we were going to get the minnows for Barry.

I noticed that Poetry had his hand on the pocket of his khaki shirt where his clue was—the piece of lens that we both had decided was from somebody’s broken glasses.

Dragonfly, who had been looking toward the green-painted boathouse, asked, “How’d you know the little Ostberg girl was in that boathouse?”

“’Cause we found a girl’s scarf up there where the kidnapper’s car was stuck in the sand, and it had fresh green paint and white paint on it.”

We were nearly there. We steered toward the dock of the resort, not knowing that we were about to have another experience that would start us to thinking even harder about the kidnapper.