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The very thought of my city cousin coming to visit us for a whole week while his parents went on a vacation was enough to start a whirlwind in my mind.

A whirlwind, you know, is a baby-sized rotating windstorm. On most any ordinary summer day around our farm, you can expect to see one of these friendly fun makers spiraling out across the fields or through the woods like a little funnel of wind. It laughs along, carrying with it a lot of different things such as dry leaves and grass and feathers from our chicken yard or dust from the path that goes from the iron pitcher pump across the barnyard to the barn, or anything else that's loose and light.

Away the little whirlwind goes, *whirlety-sizzle*, like an excited boy running in circles. Is it ever fun to toss yourself into one of them and go racing along with it and in it. Nearly every time I get into the middle of one, though, it acts as if it can't stand having a red-haired boy getting mixed up in it, and all of a sudden it isn't a whirlwind anymore. All the leaves and grass and dust and stuff stop whirling and just sail around in the sky awhile before they come floating down all over the place.

So Wally, my whirlwind city cousin, was com-

ing to visit us. He not only had a lot of mischievous ideas in his mind, but he didn't like to be told anything, such as how to do a thing and especially *not* to do a thing.

The worst thing was, he was going to bring with him his copper-colored dog, which he had named Alexander the Coppersmith and which didn't have any good country manners. Certainly there would be plenty of excitement around the place, and some of it would be dangerous. Just how dangerous, I couldn't tell until Wally and his dog got there.

There isn't any boy who likes excitement more than I do, and I even like it a little bit dangerous, as well as mysterious, but I *didn't* want Wally to come, and I *didn't* want Alexander the Coppersmith either.

Honest to goodness, I never heard or saw or smelled such a frisky, uncontrollable, uneducated, ill-mannered dog without any good country breeding, from his mischievous muzzle all the way back to his "feather."

Maybe you didn't know that dogs have feathers, but they do. "Feather" is the name of the tip end of a dog's tail. It's the featherlike hair that grows on the very, very end. I didn't know that myself until I read it in a book about dogs, which Dad gave me for my birthday.

When I had first seen Wally's dog, I thought it was an Airedale. Wally was extraproud of his copper-colored quadruped because he could do several things, such as sit up and bark when he wanted food.

I never will forget what happened the year Wally brought him the first time. It was on a Thanksgiving Day. Wally had been so sure that if we tied our turkey's neck to a rope and tied the other end of the rope to Alexander that he would lead the turkey all around the pen like a boy leading a pony. We tried it, and for a while it was a lot of fun watching the dog do his stuff. The turkey followed along behind like a baby chicken following its mother, until all of a sudden our old black and white cat, Mixy, came arching her back and rubbing her sides against things the way cats do. A second later, Alexander was making a wild dog dash toward Mixy. At that very second also, Mixy made a wild cat dash out across our barnyard toward the barn.

Alexander forgot his neck was tied to a turkey's neck. He dragged the turkey *flip-floppety-sizzle* behind him.

You can believe that I, Bill Collins, came to the quickest life I had ever come to. I started to make a wild dash for the gate of the turkey pen to shut it so that Alexander couldn't get out to catch Mixy, and also so the turkey couldn't get out, because it was the very turkey we had been saving for months to have for Thanksgiving dinner.

Besides, Mixy was my very favorite cat friend, and I couldn't stand the thought of her getting hurt, although I knew she was a fierce fighter and could probably take care of herself if the dog did catch up with her. I had seen her lick the daylights out of several of our neigh-

borhood dogs. Boy oh boy, when she gets her temper up, she can lick the stuffings out of the fightingest dog in the whole territory.

Squash! Wham! *Floppety-gobblety-sizzle!* Even though Mixy got to the barn safely, and Wally finally got Alexander the Coppersmith quieted down, the turkey's neck was broken, so Dad had to come and finish killing it, which he did, thirty minutes sooner than he would have anyway.

Even though Wally had been training his dog the best he could, that dog didn't seem to have any control of his emotions whenever there was a cat around.

And now Wally was coming again, and it was *that* dog he was bringing with him! Dad and I were talking it over one day about a month before Wally and Alexander arrived.

"Don't worry," my reddish brown mustached, bushy eyebrowed father said. "He will be a year older and a year smarter than he was last year." Except that Dad was thinking about Wally.

"He'll be a year older and a year dumber," I said, thinking about the dog.

"You can't say things like that about one of your relatives."

"I mean the dog will be a year dumber."

"And besides," Dad said, "Wally is not only your cousin. He is your Aunt Belle's only son, and an only son is sometimes a problem."

"I am your only son, too, and I hope I am not as wild as he is."

"I hope so myself," Dad said.

For a second I was half mad.

But Wally was really bad. He just couldn't learn anything. He couldn't be *told* anything, and he was always wanting to do what he wanted to do, whether anyone else wanted him to do it or wanted to do it with him. And it wasn't because he had red hair and freckles, because I had them, and I certainly wasn't that independent a person—not all the time. Not even half the time.

Dad tried to make me look at things more cheerfully by saying, "The Lord hasn't finished making Wally yet. He's only been working on him ten years, and about the only tools He has had to work with are his parents. Parents have a lot to do with what a boy turns out to be."

Because Dad and I were always joking with each other, I asked, "Is that why I'm such a good boy—I have such good parents?"

Dad grinned under his mustache and with his eyes and said, "You *are* a pretty good boy—don't you think?"

"I hate to say it," I said.

I remembered that when I was just a little guy, Dad would scoop me up in his arms and hug me. But that would look silly for a red-haired, freckle-faced boy as old as I was to be getting picked up by his father at nine o'clock in the morning. Besides, Dad had that bristly mustache, and what boy in his right mind would want to get mixed up with that? It'd be as bad as a dog getting mixed up with a fat porcupine.

Just thinking that reminded me of Wally

once more and also of his uncontrollable dog, and I was worried again. Nothing Dad could say that morning helped a bit. I simply couldn't get reconciled to the idea of losing a whole week of my life.

Mom had her say-so on the subject that same day. "I'll expect you to put on your very best manners when your Aunt Belle and Uncle Amos are here—for a very special reason."

"Why?" I said. "What reason?"

Mom was taking an apple pie out of the oven at the time, and I was smelling pie and thinking maybe it might not be such a bad thing to have Wally come. Every time we had company at our house, she always baked a lot of pies and cookies and stuff.

"Don't you know?" she asked.

"I don't see any special reason why I have to be extragood when such an extrabad boy is coming to see me," I said.

She answered, "Ask your father, then," which a little later I did when my dad and I were out in the garden hoeing potatoes.

"How come I have to be an extragood boy when Wally is here? How can I be, when it is hard enough just being as good as I am?"

"Can't you guess?" he asked.

I racked my brain to try to think what he was thinking of—and couldn't and said so.

"Well, let it go at that. You'll probably think of it yourself."

Mom called from the back door then, saying, "Telephone, Bill!"

I dropped my potato hoe as if it were a hot potato and started on the run, not knowing who wanted to talk to me but hoping it would be one of the gang, hoping especially it would be Poetry, the gang's barrel-shaped member.

And sure enough it was. He was coming over to my house right after lunch. "Have I ever got a surprise for you!" he said in his usual squawky voice.

Boy oh boy, did it ever feel good when Poetry talked like that. He had a detective mind and also what is called an "inventive" mind. He was always thinking up something new for us to do, and nearly always it was something especially interesting or exciting. Sometimes it was dangerous, but it was always fun!

A little later, when he hung up, I was tingling all over. My almost best friend, Poetry, was coming to play with me that afternoon, and he had a surprise. It could be—well, almost anything!

Right after the noon meal, he came sauntering over to our place. He stopped and waited for me in the big rope swing under the walnut tree beside the road. I was just about to take my last bite of blackberry pie when I looked out the east screen door and saw him. I also heard him making one of his fancy bird-calls, which was half like a harp and half like a musical whistle. It seemed to say, "Bill Collins! Bill Collins! Skip the dishes!"—which I knew I shouldn't do, and didn't.

Dad also heard Poetry's whistle, and his

voice came out from under his mustache, saying, "You boys have plans for the afternoon?" The way he said it was like a cowboy's lasso settling down over a calf's neck. I felt myself and my plan for the afternoon being stopped in their tracks.

"We *did* have," I said. "Is there something I ought to do around the house and garden first?"

"First and second and third," he answered. "The dishes first, the potato patch second, and the barn third." He stopped, and I thought I saw him wink at Mom.

Not being sure, I used a very cheerful voice, saying, "OK, I'll hurry out and tell Poetry to go on home. We were only going on a hike anyway."

"And maybe go swimming also?" Dad's voice said again.

"I'll go out right now and tell him he shouldn't have come." In a flash I was off the bench I had been sitting on. I was halfway through the screen door before Dad tightened the noose of his lasso with "STOP!" in a thundery voice.

I stopped stock-still, then stumbled down the steps and stopped again in a tangled-up heap as the door I'd gone through slammed shut.

It was quite a while later before Poetry and I got started on our hike—he having helped me with the different kinds of work I had to do first.

“You’re a good boy,” Mom said to Poetry as he and I were getting a drink at the iron pitcher pump just before leaving.

“Am I?” Poetry asked politely. Then he added, “Will you tell my mother that sometime?”

“She knows it. She told me that herself once.” Mom was wearing her very friendly mother face, the kind that was especially nice when we had company at our house.

“Maybe *your* mother could tell my mother to tell *me* that, too,” I suggested to Poetry.

Mom laughed a friendly laugh. “Oh, Bill Collins, you *know* you are a good boy.”

“You know it, and I know it,” I said, “but you might tell my *father* that sometime.”

I pumped another cup of cold water and tossed it over the horse trough, where it surprised a dozen yellow butterflies that had gathered around a little pool of water. The butterflies shot up into the air in different directions like sparks from a log fire do when you poke a stick into it, or as if a whirlwind had come along and swooped them all up into the air. Then they settled down again around the water pool.

Well, Poetry and I were finally off *lickety-sizzle* across the yard, past “Theodore Collins” on the tin mailbox, across the dusty gravel road, over the rail fence—I vaulting over and Poetry hoisting his roly-poly body over the top rail—and the two of us racing barefoot in the path that had been made by boys running toward the spring.

On the way, I was hoping that some of the rest of the gang would be there, such as spindle-legged Dragonfly, the pop-eyed member whose nose turns south at the end, or Little Jim, with his mouselike face and curly hair—the only one of the gang who could play the piano and also maybe the only one of us for sure about whom, if his mother told him he was a good boy, it would be the truth any time of day she happened to say it.

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Even as Poetry and I ran through the woods, I was thinking and wondering how I would ever live through Wally and Alexander the Coppersmith's visit. But there wasn't a thing I could do to stop their coming. I would just have to endure it.

I was remembering that other time Wally had spent a whole, never-to-be-forgotten, awful day and night at our house. Alexander had about six bad habits. One was, he would make a wild dash for every car that came down the Sugar Creek road and would bark at it and run alongside its front wheel, acting as if he hated the very sight of a moving car. Sometimes he would follow it clear down to the north road—or at least until it outran him and he was so far behind he gave up. Then he would come trotting, panting, and grinning dog style back to “Theodore Collins” on our mailbox and wag his tail as much as to say, “Boy oh boy, did I ever chase that car down the road! I never saw a car yet I couldn't chase away.” Only maybe, instead of saying, “Boy oh boy,” he was saying, “Dog oh dog.”

Then, even before he got through bragging on himself for scaring a car out of the neighborhood, he would spy Mixy or one of

our old hens or roosters and would be off again.

Another bad habit was to bark at night when everyone wanted to sleep. He slept—or was supposed to sleep—on a rug in the little tent we had put up for him under the grape arbor, but it seemed he was the most wide awake dog that was ever born. He would start barking at something he saw or heard, or thought he saw or heard, and keep it up until he'd wake up everybody in the house—except Wally, who was the soundest sleeper I ever saw or heard.

Wally sounded like a saw going through a hickory log, and he and Alexander the Copper-smith together were like a big bass viol solo with a barking dog accompaniment.

Alexander also had two or three other bad habits, but the worst one—the one that would get him into the worst trouble before our topsy-turvy week was over—was that he wasn't scared of anything. Everything he saw or smelled started him into action, and he would make a running dive for it, teeth first—cat, chicken, duck, goose, rabbit, squirrel, anything.

I told Poetry all about how Wally the Whirlwind and Alexander the Coppersmith, the scatterbrained dog, were coming to spend a whole terrible week at our house. And how they would be all over the whole place and all around Sugar Creek and up and down and in it, upsetting the peace of its quiet shores. And

how the gang might have to take Wally in and let him and his dog go on hikes with us and go swimming and do things!

But Poetry tried to console me by saying in his squawky voice, "I was dumb myself once, and look at me now."

It seemed there never was a time when Poetry wasn't mischievous. About the only time he had a sober face was when we were in church and our minister was praying or preaching. Our minister was the father of Sylvia, the extranice girl whom Big Jim, the leader of our gang, thought was extranice—nicer than anybody else in the whole world.

Well, when Poetry said, "I used to be dumb myself," I looked at his roly-poly back—he was trotting along in front of me at the time—and at his big bare feet and his turned-up overalls. I answered him, "You're still kind of *thick*."

"That's not funny." Away he went on a faster running wobble, with me right after him, toward the Sugar Creek bridge.

When we came to the north road, we scrambled over the rail fence and stopped awhile on the bridge itself. Then we lay down on our stomachs on the bridge's board floor. We looked over the edge into the deep, clear, quiet water, where there were scores and scores of big suckers lazily lying down there, all of them headed upstream.

Those fish certainly were taking life easy. Many a time we had tried tempting them with nice fishing worms, but they were not interested.

All they seemed to want to do was to lie around and sleep.

We tossed in a few stones to scare the suckers, but they didn't stay scared very long. They were like a boy being waked up too early in the morning. Pretty soon they were settled down again and acting lazier than ever, taking their afternoon nap.

"They never have to do any dishes or hoe any potatoes," I said.

"Or eat any blackberry pie," Poetry said. "The poor fish!"

Then we stood up, shook the iron girders of the bridge a few times just to hear them rattle, and went on toward where we had been going in the first place, which was down to the old trash dump on the other side of the mouth of the branch.

Nearly every weekend, people would drive along the dusty lane that skirted the brow of the hill just above Sugar Creek. They would stop then and throw out trash that had accumulated around their houses, such as old bottles, tin cans, typewriter ribbon boxes, and pieces of plumbing and stuff. Sometimes there would be something very pretty or different, which members of the gang could add to their collection.

Well, it was a lucky day for us. We found a lot of extra-interesting things, and it looked as if we were the first boys in the neighborhood to sort them over. In a little while I had quite a pile of stuff I wanted, including a purple per-

fume bottle that was shaped like a tiger and an alarm clock that, when I shook it and accidentally dropped it, started to run. The alarm also worked.

“Maybe all it needed was a good shaking up.”

“You’d run too if somebody shook you that hard,” Poetry said. “But you better not let your folks know you have it, or you’ll be getting up too early in the morning from now on.”

“I won’t need one next month,” I said. “I won’t even get to go to sleep with Alexander the Coppersmith here. That dog’ll bark all night, and Wally’ll snore all night.”

A little later Poetry was looking around near the water when he let out an astonished yell. “Of all the ignorant people! Somebody has thrown away a lot of books!”

Well, if there was anything I liked better than anything else, it was a good book. Both my parents were always reading, and I had sort of caught the reading habit from them, the way a boy catches the measles or mumps from another boy.

In seconds I was half sliding and half climbing down to where Poetry was picking up one book after another and stacking them on a rocky ledge beside him.

But when I saw what kind of books they were, I said, “Aw, they are just some old school-books. No wonder they threw them away.”

And that’s what most of them were—a spelling book that was half worn out, with a lot

of pages missing; an atlas of the world that was dated fifty years ago; and different kinds of old-fashioned textbooks. “Just leave them,” I said. “They aren’t worth carrying home.”

“But, look!” Poetry cried excitedly. “Here is a book of poems!” He opened the book, and before I could have stopped him, if I had wanted to, he had started to read one.

“I had a little pussy,
Its coat was silver gray;
It lived down in the meadow,
It never ran away.
It always was a pussy,
It’ll never be a cat,
Because it was a pussy willow—
Now what do you think of that?”

It wasn’t a bad poem. In fact, it was kind of cute, I thought, and decided Poetry could keep that book anyway, since he liked poetry so much.

If there was anything I liked better than anything else growing around Sugar Creek, it was a pussy willow, which is a shrub that grows along the bayou and in other places where the soil is wet. It is one of the first signs to tell you that winter is dying and that spring has honest to goodness been born. When you see a pussy willow with its reddish brown bark all decorated with silky, silvery tufts of hair, even before its bright green leaves come out, you get a wonderful feeling. It makes a boy feel good just to *think* about a Sugar Creek pussy willow.

Then I thought of Wally's coming and of his dog, and that made me feel like throwing things. So I started picking up stones and tossing them into the fast-flowing creek.

Poetry caught my half-mad mood and quickly started tossing in stones, too. A minute later, rocks were *really* flying.

It felt good to let off steam that way. I was still throwing things when Poetry picked up a big corrugated box and decided to make a boat.

The box did look like a square boat dancing on the waves. And the water acted as if it was happy to get something that would float. It whirled the carton around and carried it toward the island, where the current was strongest, and there it caught in the crotch of an overhanging willow and stopped. We decided to use the box for a target, and right away all kinds of stones were flying thick and fast toward it, most of them landing in the carton.

While I was still working off my temper, I spotted another book, and the very second I saw its title, I wanted it. It was *All Kinds of Dogs and How to Train Them*. A picture on the book's jacket was of a laughing, friendly faced collie.

I made a grab for the book, but Poetry beat me to it. Before I could stop him, he had tossed the *book* into the box, where it landed with a *ker-plop*.

That, I thought, was one book I really wanted. If I was going to have to live a whole week with an uneducated city dog, I at least ought to

know something about how an educated dog ought to behave itself.

So, before Mom or Dad could have stopped me if either one of them had been there, I rolled up my overall pant legs to my knees and stepped into the narrow, fast-running, singing riffle, wading as fast as I could toward the Sugar Creek island where the box with the book in it was lodged against the overhanging willow.

I figured that the box boat would soon sink with all the weight of the stones we had thrown into it. So I hurried as fast as a boy can who has orders from his parents not to get his new overalls wet. The water was knee-deep, and the stones and stuff on the bottom made it hard to keep my balance.

“Hurry up,” Poetry yelled to me. “It might sink!”

But how could I? My bare feet kept slipping on round stones and bottles and different things that some dumb boys had thrown into the creek. Soon I would be there, though, and would have the book, if only—

Then Poetry yelled, “Quick! It’s breaking away from the willow! It’ll be gone downstream in a minute!”

I took a fast worried look and saw that Poetry was right. In seconds, the box boat would be out in the center of the riffle, swirling down the creek, where before long it would get water-soaked and sink, and my book would be both spoiled and lost.

So forgetting my new overalls and my parents' orders not to get them wet, I took several fast steps, took a wild lunge toward the box and the book, stepped on another bottle, lost my balance, and landed *ker-splash* beside the box.