

DUST

BOB

Soon after lunch, Mother told R.E. and I, "If you boys aren't going to take a nap, then go outside and play quietly."

Outside in the back yard we played a game using my new rubber ball, of course R.E. always won because he knew all the rules, after ten minutes of his, "I win, you lose" game of self rule, I took my ball and sat down on the back porch step.

Gary, throw me the ball.

No!

Why?

You always win.

Gary, that is the way the game is played.

Then I'm not going to play your game.

Gary, Mother told me to come out here and play with you.

Then go wake her up and tell her that I won't play with you.

Just then Brian, Bud, and Don Potter, walked up to the yard gate.

"Hi, R.E. Do you want to play tin-can shiny?" Don asked.

Sure, how do you play it?

Bring a bean can and something to dig with, then we'll show you.

Don, can I play?

No Gary, you're too little.

(I could win a game if I had some rules, I thought.)

Standing on the porch holding my rubber ball, while the older boys were digging small holes in the lawn with a big WWI army serving spoon, 1, 2, 3 holes in a circle and a fourth in the center, each boy was holding a small tree limb or old broom stick. Brian had the tin can in his hand waiting until the holes were dug. R.E. came over to the porch laying the big spoon down.

Can I use the spoon? I ask.

DUST

OK., but go over there to dig because we're going to play tin-can shiny and you'll be hurt if you get in the way.

R.E. had pointed to the fence at the edge of the yard, so I took the spoon and walked to the fence, laid my ball down, and began to dig.

The hole became bigger and bigger. Curiosity about what I was doing finally got to Bob (Dad's black-n-tan Coonhound), so he raised up from under the brush where he was laying in the shade and came over to investigate, soon he stuck his nose in the hole, then with both front feet he started to help me dig. A few minutes later dirt started falling out from under the fence, which had been my prison for both of my years. With Bob and I working together we soon had a hole big enough to crawl under the fence (well with such a nice hole under the fence, someone should crawl through it) so Bob and I did.

Come on Bob, there are no more fences between here and Uncle Jake's [Pike] service station. (Uncle Jake always gives me a candy bar for going to see him.)

Down the street we went, just Bob and me shoulder to shoulder. (This is great, Dad always takes Bob with him when he and Lee Welchel go coon hunting, maybe we'll even catch a coon on the way. Dad would like that.)

Bob and I walked into Uncle Jake's service station, across the street from the hotel.

"What are you doing here?" Uncle Jake ask with surprise.

I came after my candy bar.

Your candy bar?

Yes, you always give me a candy bar for coming to see you.

Who's with you?

Bob.

Where's your Mother?

She's taking a nap.

Mr. Hutchison stopped his whittling and looked up from where he was setting on a case of oil, and said, "Well Jake, it looks like you're going to have to pay up, after all the boy did come to see you." Mr. Hutchison looked at Uncle Jake with a wide grin and a gleam in his eye that challenged for a reaction.

DUST

"Jake, I think Hutch is right." Mr. Lancet said, looking down from where he was setting on top of the iced down pop case.

That's one of Frank's fighting hounds the boy has his arm over and if I know anything, I know that when a kid and a dog are together you don't want to do anything that might make the kid cry. Especially if the dog has been trained for a fight.

Uncle Jake turned his attention back to me having received the best of advice from his friends.

"I better call your Dad first." he said picking up the telephone.

Ten minutes later Dad drove into the service station drive in his pickup truck. Bob quickly jumped in the back thinking it was time for them to go hunting, while Dad stepped out with a slight smile, looked at Uncle Jake, and said, "Thanks for calling. I had just talked to Marvell over the telephone and she's beside herself with worry not knowing where Gary went. The little devil dug out under the fence with a spoon and ran away."

"That's OK. He just wanted a candy bar." Uncle Jake said, as he dropped something into Dad's pocket.

Dad stood me up in the truck seat and drove away. (Boy this is great. Dad, Bob, and me. ALL together just like a real coon hunt.)

Dad stopped his truck in the driveway where Bob jumped out onto the ground and ran to the back gate expecting to be let into the yard.

Dad stood me down on the ground saying, "Stay there." then he went to open the gate for Bob.

R.E. ran over to look at me through the fence, holding onto the horizontal wire, and his beady little eyes on each side of a vertical wire, he warned, "Gary, you're in trouble."

What for?

You'll find out.

Once I was in the house, Mother took the fly swatter down from a nail in the door jamb. (Oh no! this is serious I thought as I ran through the house and out the back door screaming at the top of my voice.)

Mother was only two steps behind my heels with THAT fly swatter in hand.

(It's going to be a terrible day when I grow up to be as big as Mr. Guy Brown who sold THAT fly swatter to my Mother, as if THAT switch, THAT belt, and THAT yard stick wasn't enough.)

DUST

Just as she reached the back screen door, Bob hit the door with both front feet, teeth showing, and snarling like he was in a bobcat fight for his life. Mother backed up, then turned around and went back into the house.

(Good old Bob, he's the best Coonhound in the whole world.)

A moment later Mother returned to the back door with her .20 gauge shotgun, breach open, and a shell in her hand.

(Oh my gosh! NOW she's going to shoot me!)

"You dumb dog!" she said, as she fumbled to drop a shotgun shell into the barrel of her gun. Just then Dad grabbed the shotgun barrel from behind her. "Honey calm down. Please! I'll go out there and get him. That's a two hundred dollar Coonhound."

(Boy! Things sure have become confusing around here today. I wonder why Mother awakened from her nap in such a bad mood!)

Dad came out into the yard and picked me up returning me to the house.

The high chair was made of wood, painted white, with black trim pushed into the corner where everyone could watch me suffer. For my crime of "candy caper", I had been sentenced to the PRISON CHAIR and restricted to this diet of Baby Ruth candy bar.

(The worse tasting candy bar I have ever tried to eat and this last half is melting, chocolate is running through my fingers and down my arm, but I'm not going to ask for a washcloth, that would give them the satisfaction of saying, "No!" They like that word "NO!" that's the only thing they ever say to me. I said, NO! NO! NO! But she didn't stop.)

(Mother is setting in the big chair across the room crocheting some dumb looking pineapple table cloth. I would like to grab that string at the end and run all over the house until there was no pineapple left for her to mess with. That would get even with her considering how upset she became when I pulled only part of one apart the other day while she was washing dishes. If R.E. hadn't stopped me, I would have pulled all of it apart until there wasn't any of it left, then she wouldn't have known that part of it was missing, but no, he had to stop me so there was some evidence left. He's probably the one that told her I had escaped, just because I wouldn't let him play with my rubber ball. Over by the North wall Dad is setting on a kitchen chair listening to The Grand Ole Opry from the W.K.Y. radio station. Who would have thought it. He sacrificed me to a mad woman with THAT fly swatter?)

(R.E. just can't keep from coming by my chair to say, "Gary, you shouldn't have done that." Now he tells me! And I'll bet he didn't even get into trouble for not playing with me like Mother told him to.)

(I had believed that Mary Tolman [later married Jake Pike] was my friend, after all she had changed my diaper, gave me a thousand baths, taken care of me like a mother, but I saw her

DUST

smiling when I was in REAL trouble and needed some REAL help. So what! Bob likes me and he's a REAL true-to-the-blood Coonhound. There ain't no tuck-tail trading dog blood in him. No Sir. He'll fight for what's right. Even if it kills him. It ain't right that he and I are behind that old fence. The candy bars and the coons are all out there and that's what we're all about.)

DUST