

DUST

BILL

Early fall of 1943 was a busy time for everyone in the country. Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, and America and England were mobilized to fight for their very existence on two fronts of battle. Every available young man was filling ranks of the Army, Navy, Army Air Force, Coast Guard, or Merchant Marines, leaving many civilian jobs with no one to fill them, so those who could were working two jobs. Dad kept working at the service station, as well as, working every spare daylight hour he had trying to set up the farm operation, most important of which, were the milk cows so Mother could have plenty of exercise for her hands and feet that was essential if she was to have any chance of defeating the crippling authorities that had attacked her at such an early age.

Toots, the female Coonhound, had a litter of ten pups that made fifteen hounds on the farm, the pigs had grown very rapid on a diet of skim milk and grain, so just before Thanksgiving it was time to take the hogs to market.

Dad awoke early on Saturday morning and loaded the hogs to take them to the livestock sale at Watonga, leaving me in charge of the farm. (Of course it's my job to make sure that Mother and R.E. do their work, it's a lot of hard work to follow two big people all around a farm bossing them all day especially when they keep resisting, but I'll do it anyway.)

Dusk was just beginning to creep night shadows across the prairie when we heard Dad's old pickup drive into the yard. All fifteen of the hounds ran out to meet him then there was a lot of growling from Bob and Toots, when Mother, R.E., and I, went out to the truck we found their reason for the hounds to be growling at Dad's pickup, tied in the back was another long eared black-n-tan Coonhound.

Oh boy! Another new Coonhound.

"I don't think so Gary, it looks more like another old beat up, scared up, flea bitten Coonhound to me." Mother said, with obvious discontent in her voice.

(I think Dad is going to have to explain where that hound came from.)

Dad stepped out with a smile and a gleam in his eye.

A new hound for the pack.

Mother looked at Bill, then at Dad, and said, "No, just another mouth to feed!"

Honey, wait until you hear about this hound.

"No! You wait, until you hear this!" Mother replied, looking at Dad, standing in a sea of Coonhound tails milling around him impatient to be fed.

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Frank Hooper, the yard around this house already looks like this is a Coonhound tail farm, and there can't be as many coons out in those canyons for these dogs to catch as there are dogs in this yard to catch them.

But Honey, there is a real funny story behind this hound.

You always have a real funny story to tell about hounds and hunting, but I have a serious story to tell you, I don't want to hear about the Fur Market with Russia, how good the price of number one coon hides are with the war going on in Northern Europe, or a good treeing hound, and how pretty his voice is, or how long his ears are.

Dad looked back over his shoulder at Bill who was still tied in the back of the pickup then at Mother as she turned to walk into the house, saying, "I thought you went to Watonga to sell the hogs?"

I did.

An then you spent the money on another hound!

No, I haven't bought him yet, I'm only going to try him out for a night or two.

YET? You haven't bought him YET? But you are going to with the hog money.

"Honey, you just don't understand, this hound has the funniest guarantee any one has ever heard of." Dad said, with a smile so big he was about to break out into laughter.

Mother turned around seeing his boyish smile. She folded arms and set down on top of the cellar door.

All right Frank, tell me your Coonhound story, but if I don't like it you don't get any supper!

Well on the way to market I stopped by Lee Welchel's place to see if he wanted to go along with me.

Lee Welchel! I knew he would be in this story somewhere.

No, no, Lee didn't have much to do with this. In fact he warned me that this very thing was going to happen the minute I came home and you saw this long eared hound.

OK, Lee can live for another day, but you better start talking fast.

When we arrived at the livestock sale, before we went into the sale barn, we met Mr. Webb outside holding this hound by a rope leash. You know Mr. Webb, the black watermelon farmer from across the river. Well, Lee ask him why he had brought his Coonhound to the sale with him, to which he replied, "Well Sir, I wants to sell dis here hound to a reeeel Coonhound man."

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Well Mr. Webb, you know that Hooper and I are reeeel Coonhound men, now if that is a reeeel Coonhound we might just buy him, if the price is right.

The price will be right once you have taken him to the woods. You'll see.

But will you guarantee him to be, true-to-the-blood?

Yesseree Mr. Welchel. I'll guarantee him to be true-to-the-blood, in fact I'll guarantee him just this way, you take dis here hound to the woods and if he do, he do, and if he don't, he don't.

Mother laughed and then went into the house.

Dad smiled as he went around the pickup to untie Bill because he knew supper was as well as on the table then he and Lee could go to the canyons and try the new hound.

Later that night Lee drove into the yard in his old model "A" Ford car ready for the tryout run.

Frank, what do you think he will do, or will he don't?

"From the scars on his face and ears, I'll bet he do, if you can find a canyon that has a coon in it." They both laughed as they drove off into the early winter night.

I couldn't go to sleep until I knew if Dad was going to buy Bill, so I laid awake listening for Lee's old car to return.

About one o'clock in the morning I heard the unmistakable sound of Dad and Lee returning from the hunt, slipping out of bed quietly to go see if Bill do. Mother was already in the kitchen heating water to make coffee for the hunters when Dad walked through the door with Lee right behind him.

"Well do he, or don't he?" Mother ask.

He do, where's a butcher knife?

You're going to buy him?

Lee and I together, where's the butcher knife?

Why are you in such a hurry for a butcher knife?

I shot a turkey for Thanksgiving.

Frank Hooper, you beat anyone I have ever seen, first you go to sell the hogs and you come home with a hound, then you leave to buy a hound and come back with half a hound. While I think you are out coon hunting you come back with a turkey, sending you to do something is worse than sending Gary!

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I didn't think we could afford fifty dollars for a hound right now so Lee said he would buy half of him since he and I hunt together every winter anyway.

Well, I guess half a hound is better than all of another hound.

Dad took the knife and walked out on the back porch.

Lee I'll dress this turkey so you can take half of it home with you for Thanksgiving.

No Frank, all of that turkey is yours, you shot it, besides I was so frightened over that turkey I couldn't eat a bite of it if I was starving to death.

"How did that turkey scare you Lee?" Mother ask.

You better ask Frank, I don't think I'm calmed down enough to make sense even now.

"It's a long hunt story Marvell." Dad said, looking up at Mother as if he really didn't think he wanted to tell her.

Mother folded her arms and leaned back against the kitchen door jamb.

Frank I've been listening to your long hunting stories for a long time and one more isn't going to keep me from going to sleep. Now talk.

Well, we were trying Bill out when he struck a bobcat trail and ran him for about two miles, then he put that cat up a tree and the cat stuck until Lee and I arrived. That's a good hound that can do that by himself.

Sure, I know you're going to buy the half of the hound that eats.

Yes, well anyway, we pulled the cat hide before we realized that bob had taken us down a canyon where we hadn't hunted before, so Lee put the leash on Ole Bill so he wouldn't strike another trail before we were sure of where we were.

Already he is "Ole Bill".

Yes, well anyway, we were walking down the canyon looking for the next road crossing and along the way I looked up into the trees and what do you know? The trees were full of turkeys!

I said, Lee wait a minute.

What's the matter?

Look up there, those trees are full of turkeys, does anyone live around here?

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Not that I know about.

Then those must be wild turkeys.

Yes, they must be.

Since those are wild turkeys I think we should have a couple of them for our Thanksgiving tables. You hold the lantern behind me so I can see the sights on my gun and I'll pick a couple of them off.

When I pulled the trigger this big tom turkey fell to the ground. Just then some lights came on in a house so close to us we could have reached out and touched the window.

You mean that is somebody's tame turkey?

Honey, I could have been shot for shooting someone's tame turkey right out of their back yard.

Well you should have been shot! OK, what did that turkey cost us for Thanksgiving dinner?

Well, when that light came on, Lee blew the lantern out and ran off with Bill so the people couldn't see me.

You shot someone's turkey then you stole it in the dark? No wonder Lee doesn't want any of it. That's a pot shot stolen turkey, and I don't want it either! You could have at least offered to pay them for it.

No I couldn't, in fact I couldn't even stand up or talk by the time they came outside.

Lee is this true, or is he just telling me this?

I don't know, I blew out the lantern and ran with Bill trying to keep him from barking.

That's true he blew the lantern out and ran while I was picking up the turkey, then I took off trying to catch up with Lee and Bill running as fast as I could and jumping a pole fence, but when I ran through their cow lot I hit a snubbing post about chest high that knocked me back on the ground. While I was setting there trying to catch my breath a man and woman came out of the house to see what it was they heard. After walking all around me with their lantern and not seeing me all slumped over around that post with a gun in one hand and their Tom turkey in the other they went back to the house and that's how I got away.

You should have went to the house and offered to pay them when you could get up and talk.

Well, uh, I would hate to get someone out of bed twice in one night, besides they had at least a hundred turkeys.

Now they have only ninety-nine and you have one stolen turkey?

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Dad tried to change the subject by looking at me and asking, "What's that little devil doing up this late in the night?"

Mother looked at me, then glared back at Dad, and said, "That little devil is up this late in the night because for a Daddy he has a big devil who runs around all over the country in the middle of the night shooting other peoples turkeys and then running off with it! And furthermore, I hope you do cook that turkey and choke on it! That would serve your right for poaching other peoples turkeys in the dark of the night!"

Lee quickly left while Mother pushed me back into the kitchen leaving Dad on the porch to clean his Thanksgiving turkey.

I don't ever remember eating that turkey, but I do remember Mother, and I think when she found a stolen turkey in her refrigerator the next morning, the hounds had Thanksgiving turkey in the winter of 1943.