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TRACKING THE BOBCAT TO ITS DEATH

The True Story of a San Antonio Hunt

Written for the Youngster to Whom the Skin was Presented

IT ISN'T every little boy of 5 years old who can have a story written all for himself, and illustrated by the real subject of it. But little Frankie Vanderlip, who lives in New York, is the proud possessor of just that. Frankie is the son of Frank A. Vanderlip, president of the National City Bank, sometimes called the Standard Oil Bank, and a recognized power among the country's financiers. And the subject of the story, as well as the story itself, came from San Antonio. It all fell about in this manner:

Mr. Vanderlip was in San Antonio two or three months ago, combining some business in the Southwest with enjoyment of the Texas climate, and one day he got into John P. Withers' automobile and motored out to the Rockhill Hunt Club, Mr. Withers' beautiful property seven miles west of this city.

Only the night before a fine specimen of bobcat had been killed by the dogs at Rockhill, and its skin was produced for inspection. Mr. Vanderlip admired it. Mr. Withers promptly presented it to him and sent it to New York at his earliest opportunity, and it became a valued addition to the furnishing of the room of 5-year-old Frank A. Vanderlip Jr.

You know how little boys are. Frankie wanted to know all about that bobcat—where it lived and how it came to be killed, and why, and who killed it, and what the dogs looked like, and a hundred more things that drove his father to despair when he tried to answer them. Finally he wrote Mr. Withers. The burden of his letter was that the curiosity of his progeny was wearing him to a shred. It was impossible for him to satisfy Frankie with what facts he knew. Would Mr. Withers supply him with additional details of the bobcat's life and death?

On the day when this letter came Mr. Withers chanced to have a party of friends out at Rockhill, which included J. Frank Davis, now in business in San Antonio, but formerly an Eastern newspaper man and magazine writer. He asked Mr. Davis if he thought he could put the story of the Rockhill bobcat into words that might satisfy the juvenile Vanderlip's thirst for knowledge. Mr. Davis "allowed" he would try, and the result was a story which Mr. Withers sent Mr. Vanderlip a few days later. Now the young Vanderlip declares he will never be contented until he has become acquainted with Tinker and Spot and Lightning and Crafty and all the rest of the Rockhill hounds.

Here is the story—the first one of the sort, so far as known, ever written solely for the amusement of one 5-year-old boy. It is called:

THE ROCKHILL BOBCAT.

TINKER walked up slowly and stretched first one foot and then another until he had the stretches out of all four legs. Then he scratched himself and shook himself and looked around.

It was getting along toward sunset and the hounds in the Rockhill Kennel were beginning to wake up. In the shade it was nice and cool and a breeze that came all the way from the Gulf of Mexico was whispering around the corner of the big dog house, where all the hounds of the Rockhill Hunt lived.

"There will be a full moon tonight," Tinker heard Stranger say. Stranger was a very wise old hound. He knew about how to tell when a storm was coming and when to leave the trail to cut off a deer in full flight, and when the moon was going to be full and almost everything.

"Maybe they will let us go out and hunt," said Dexter.

"Oh, I wish they would," cried Dreamer. "We haven't for days and days—oh, ever so long. I should think they would be afraid we'd forget how."

"Don't talk foolish," said Crafty. "A good hound never forgets how." There never was anything to say after Crafty had spoken. She was the leader of the pack and knew more than any of the other hounds and they all knew that she knew more. So when she spoke the other dogs admitted she was right by not having any more to say. That is to say, the grown-ups did. Of course the puppies kept on talking. Puppies think they know more than all the old dogs in the world. When they outgrow that they aren't puppies any more.

"They might let us go hunting just once," said Tinker. He didn't say it so the old dogs could hear it, but just sort of whispered it to his two brothers, who had waked up now and were standing beside him just outside the circle of grown-ups.

"I'll bet we could catch things just as well as they could," said Lightning.

"Of course we could," said Spot. "I want to be let out so I can chase a jackrabbit."

"Or a deer," whispered Lightning.

"I could kill a bobcat," boasted Tinker.

Both the others said "S-s-s-h!" at this, for even big dogs don't go around bragging about killing bobcats, and it is very foolish for puppies to talk so. But Tinker wouldn't stop.

Maybe he spoke a little louder than he intended. Or perhaps he forgot what sharp ears hounds have. They can hear things miles away, sometimes, that the sharpest-eared man couldn't begin to hear. At any rate, all the big dogs looked at him and Tinker realized that they had heard.

They looked at one another as much as to say, "What a conceited puppy it is," and then they all looked at Crafty. As the leader of the pack it was really her duty to do something about it.

"Children!" commanded Crafty, "come here." The grown-up dogs opened a path through their circle and Tinker, Spot and Lightning went in. Tinker felt very little, indeed. He wished he hadn't spoken so loud.

"Which of you said that?" demanded Crafty.

"I didn't," said Spot.

"I didn't," said Lightning.

Tinker hung his head and felt very much ashamed.

"Somebody did," said Crafty. "I heard it. I heard a small dog say 'I could kill a bobcat,' just like that. It sounded very, very foolish. Was it you, Tinker?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Tinker, very softly.

Then there was a long silence, while all the grown-up dogs looked at one another as much as to say, "Well, did you ever hear such impudence!" Then, after awhile, Crafty spoke, quite severely.

"I think you must have forgotten the bobcat poetry," she said.

"No, ma'am," said Tinker. "I can speak that piece with my eyes shut." This made one or two of the old dogs laugh, for when you come to think of it it is rather easier to repeat verses with your eyes shut than it is with them open. Crafty looked at them severely and they stopped laughing as quickly as they had begun. Even the oldest and biggest of them were a little afraid of Crafty.

"Well, I think you had better say it," she said. "Speak up loud, so that all the kennel can hear you."

So Tinker said it from beginning to end. Down in Texas, the bob-cat poetry is the first piece a well-brought-up puppy is taught to speak. It runs like this:

Oh, a deer will run like a flash of light,
And a rabbit will hop with all his might.
Be it day or dark,
When you get their scent,
You can run and bark
To your heart's content.
But a screech in a tree—when you hear, be wise;
You had better watch out when a bob-cat cries.

If you lose your head at a bob-cat yell
You are likely to lose your life as well;
For as quick as light
He can jump and catch,
And his teeth will bite
And his claws will scratch;
So you need to be careful and keep your wits,
For a bob-cat can tear little dogs to bits.

Tinker's voice was very low when he started, and trembled a little, but as he went along he got more courage, and he was speaking right up so they could all hear him before he finished.

There was a moment's silence after he stopped, and then Crafty said: "I think you had better go over in the corner of the yard and say it over again ten times. And don't ever, ever let me hear you boast again that you can kill a bob-cat. It takes more than one hound to do that—and not smart little whippersnappers, either."

Tinker put his tail between his legs and went over into the corner. The other dogs began to talk about other things. That is one good thing about dogs. When you have been punished, you have been punished, and that is the end of it.

Spot and Lightning were very glad to get outside of the circle without being noticed. They went over in one corner and whispered to each other, waiting for Tinker to get through saying his poetry.

"I'm glad I didn't say it," said Spot.

"But I do think they might let us go with them when they hunt," said Lightning. "We're most grown up."

"Maybe they will, next time," said Spot, hopefully. "Only the last time Sidney had the pack out I heard him tell Mr. Withers that he thought we were almost big enough to be learning something."

"What did Mr. Withers say?" Lightning asked breathlessly.

"He said, 'I guess you're right, Sidney.'"

"Then we'll get a chance pretty soon," said Lightning. "When Mr. Withers says a thing I've noticed it happens. Even Sidney does what he says, and Sidney is the master of the hounds. I heard a man say we all belonged to Mr. Withers. What do you suppose that means?"

"I don't know. Some day I'll ask Crafty."

It was getting dark now, and Tinker, having said the bob-cat poetry ten times, came quietly over and joined his brothers. They sat very still, listening to the grown-ups, who were talking about deer and jackrabbits and cotton-tails and wolves and wild hogs and things like that, which are what a pack of hounds always talk about when they are alone.

"Something was running on the next hill, last night," said Roman.

"You're right. I heard it," agreed Baritone. Baritone had the best ears in the pack—almost as good, in fact, as Crafty's nose.

"What was it?" said Dreamer.

"Something that jumped," said Roman. "Heavier than a jackrabbit, and jumpier than a deer."

"Do you suppose," said Random, "that it could have been a bob-cat?"

At this all the dogs began to talk at once. There is nothing that gets the pack more excited than thought of a bob-cat. They were still talking, so rapidly that Tinker and Spot and Lightning couldn't make out more than half of what they said, when Baritone cried out sharply:

"Look out! There's something coming!"

Tinker nearly jumped out of his brown, black and white skin. He thought it must be a bob-cat. All the big hounds were at the fence, with their noses to the cracks. Something was moving, away over on top of the hill, coming toward the kennel.

"It's a man," said Bashful.

"Two men," said Baritone. "I can hear their footsteps."

Crafty pushed the other hounds aside and lifted her head, sniffing at the wind. "It's Sidney and another man," she declared. She sniffed again. "The other is one of the Mexicans," she added. She sniffed a third time. "It is Antonio," she said.

The other dogs looked at her admiringly. For a time there was deep silence.

"Why are they coming here after dark?" asked Hester. And the answer occurred to her before anybody could reply. "We are going to hunt!" she cried, joyfully, and began to race up and down the kennel yard. "We are going to hunt! We are going to hunt!"

Then the other hounds took up the cry and began to race, too. "We are going to hunt! We are going to hunt!"

And Tinker and Spot and Lightning also ran up and down, and fell over each other, and got under the grown-ups' feet, and yelped, in their puppy-dog voices, "We are going to hunt! We are going to hunt!"

Sidney and Antonio were talking as they came to the gate of the kennel. "Eighteen chickens he's killed in three nights," said Sidney. "At that rate we'd lose all the poultry in a few weeks."

"I believe he has a place to live over on that second hill," said Antonio.

"Well, I think when this pack gets through work tonight there will be one less bobcat," Sidney remarked, as he took his keys out of his pocket and began to unlock the gate.

The hounds gave one united yelp. "Bobcat! Bobcat!" they shouted, all together. The voice of Crafty sounded louder than all the rest. "Remember the lessons," she cried. "Remember the teeth and the claws. When you take hold bite for the throat and pull away quickly before those terrible hind claws can scratch. Don't forget."

"We remember," called back the pack. "We can kill. Let us but find the track."

And the puppies, who really were almost grown, ran back and forth, yelping, "Let us go. Let us go. We can help kill the bobcat."

You notice that Tinker didn't say "I can kill a bob-cat." He said: "I can help kill a bobcat," which is much different. He was remembering the bobcat poetry.

Now, Sidney was in the kennel yard. "Down, Dreamer! Steady, Random! Easy, Roman! Down, Crafty!" he was shouting.

All the hounds gathered thickly about him. He and Antonio let them out of the gate.

"Shall we take the puppies?" asked Antonio. How breathlessly Tinker and Lightning and Spot waited for the answer.

"Yes, let them come along," said Sidney. "They've got to learn sometime that a bobcat can scratch, I suppose."

The puppies fairly fell over one another getting out. Tinker was shouting at the top of his voice: "We're going to hunt at last! We're going to hunt at last!" And nobody seemed to notice what he said, because they were all shouting too.

Sidney and Antonio took them over to the second hill. They were very quiet, now, running with their noses close to the ground and their bodies quivering from head to foot with the excitement of the hunt.

When they came to the hill they spread out like a fan, and each one ran back and forth, sniffing for the scent. It was Dexter that found it.

"O-o-n-o!" he called. "I've found it. Bobcat!"

The pack rushed toward him as fast as ever they could run. Stranger reached him first. "O-o-o-o! I've found it, too. Bobcat!"

Then, one after the other, they smelled the scent on the ground that told them the cat had passed that way. And one after the other all of them—Crafty, and Roman, and Bashful, and Hester, and Baritone, and Random and all the rest—cried, "O-o-n-o! I've found it! Bobcat!" And Tinker and Lightning and Spot ran just as hard as they could and yelped with the rest, and cried "Bobcat! Bobcat! Bobcat!" They had never been so happy in all their lives before.

How they did run! Crafty was at the head of the pack in two minutes, going like the wind, her head down, her nostrils quivering, leading the chorus that sang, "Bobcat! Bobcat!" until it seemed as if the music of the pack must have been heard away off in San Antonio, nearly eight miles away.

Over the second hill and into the valley beyond they ran, and then the trail circled around and came back almost toward the kennel, but bore off again soon and led toward the Blrcey Hills. The scent was getting fresher every minute. They were gaining on the cat. When they had run five miles, the wise old dogs up at the head of the pack knew that they were coming very near.

Crafty glanced over her shoulder without lifting her nose. "The trail is getting warm," she said. "Look out!" And the other old dogs passed the word along without ever slowing speed. "Trail getting warm. Look out!"

"Where are those puppies?" growled Baritone. "They can never go as fast as this."

"Here we are. We're coming," cried Tinker and Lightning and Spot, all together, but very breathless. "We're right behind. We can keep up. Let us at the bobcat."

They didn't say any more, because they were so tired, but they kept running. Now they knew, from a little change in the voices of the hounds ahead, that they were getting very near. And suddenly the whole pack came out into a clearing with a big live oak tree in the middle of it, standing out very plain in the moonlight. The trail led right to the tree and then stopped.

"He's in the tree. Bobcat!" called Crafty at the top of her lungs.

"In the tree! In the tree!" yelped Baritone and Stranger. "In the tree!" cried all the other grownups. "In the tree!" panted the puppies.

All the hounds gathered around the tree and panted for breath and leaped up toward the branches where they could see two shining green spots. These were the eyes of the bobcat, glaring in the moonlight just as sometimes you can see the eyes of a house cat glare, when she sort of half remembers that once upon a time her great-great-great-grandfather was the great-great-great-grandson of a bobcat. Only they were much bigger than the house cat's eyes—three or four times bigger. And up there in the tree, where he had climbed when he found the dogs were too close behind him, the bobcat was flattened along a bough, panting for breath, and glaring, and spitting, and threshing his tail slowly back and forth.

"Come down and fight!" called the hounds.

"He doesn't dare come down!" yelped Tinker, too excited to think what he was saying. "If he came down, I'd——"

But he remembered the bobcat poetry just in time not to say what he was going to say, although very likely he could have said it that once without being punished, because Crafty and all the

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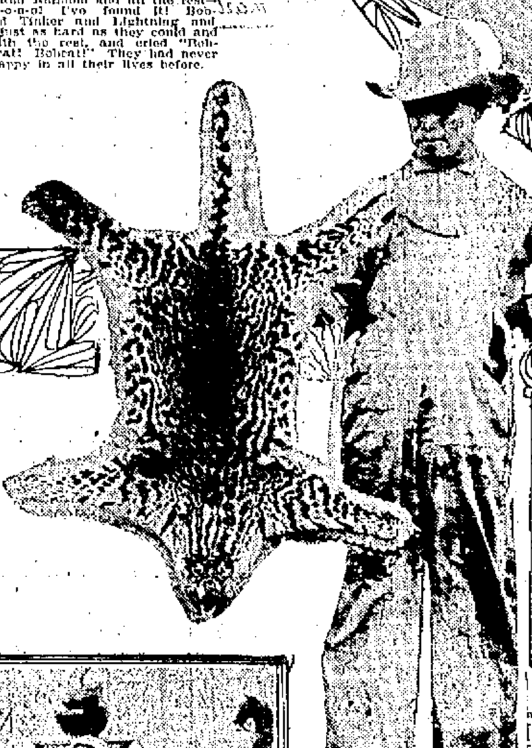
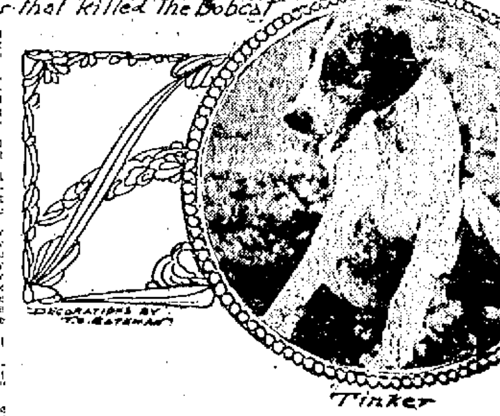


Antonio and the Bobcat Skin

Part of Pack of Hounds that Killed the Bobcat

Narcissa, Frank and Charlotte Vanderlip at a birthday party.



Tinker

DECORATIONS BY T. BATEMAN