

My First and Last Kill  
(Cont'd from last week)

There was a lot of killing around our farm. Father had secured the contract to take away the garbage from the kitchens of the hydro company, when they were building the Pagan dam at Low, Quebec, five miles from our farm. The animal herds, especially the pigs and chickens, exploded massively during this period. Father even ventured into an ill-fated try at turkey raising. But when the hay mower began slicing up the young turkeys, where they liked to hide in the cool grass, and when rheumatism and some other malady set in, he gave that up. We had the first combined pig and chicken ranch in the county.

The raisins, molasses, and other fermentable garbage, in concert with the hot sun in the summer, set the stage for probably the biggest pig and chicken party in history. It was a scream to watch the chickens leap and fly high into the air, to lay in a dazed heap, fluttering. And the pigs trying to navigate the barn yard, then falling here and there to sleep it off. The hogs went into a frenzy that left no sow in the district safe.

My own voluntary venture into the killer's world took place one late August evening, in the 1920's, when I found myself alone with the family dog Laddy. The rest of the family left for an evening visit to neighbor's, and I hadn't finished my chores in time, so they left without me. Laddy and I were sitting on the porch, one waiting for the other to



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suggest some mischief that we could indulge in, to break the monotony.

Then, I think we both spied the family of raccoons at the same time. The mother and four or five of her young were out in the open field, digging for their supper, and very vulnerable. I looked at Laddy, who was already starting to tremble, as he always did when a chase was in the offing. I commanded him with a stern no! He obeyed, as he sometimes did. I could feel the killer instinct developing.

I still don't quite understand what got into me. Whether it was the desire for revenge for having been abandoned, or to prove that I too could kill.

I took one of the guns that father kept about, and several of his shells, and skirted the field, putting myself between the raccoons and the bush.

There could be no escape for the animals. I thought. I had never fired a gun before. But I felt sure that all there was to it, was to point the gun in the general direction of the raccoons, and pull the trigger. Not so. I fired all my shells but one. Missing every time. For some reason the raccoons didn't move up to this point. Then mother raccoon must have decided that there was some peril afoot. She gave the alarm and the family scrambled. Mostly in my direction. When the raccoons entered the bushes surrounding the stump fence, they seemed to evaporate out of existence. There wasn't a sound, sight or movement from them.

Laddy crouched at the ready as I climbed onto a stump for a better look. Not three feet away was the mother raccoon, in her almost perfect camouflage. I raised the gun and fired my last shell. Again I missed. The noise startled her and she made several noises that I find difficult to describe. My dog, either tiring of my inability to handle the situation, or fearing that I was in danger, decided to finish the job himself. He sprang at the raccoon. He was a powerful dog. It was all over in seconds. The mother raccoon lay on the ground twitching. I raised the butt of the gun and brought it down on her head, to put her out of her misery. The barrel separated from the stock, and I flung the two pieces into the bushes, and Laddy and I made our way home.

Laddy followed behind and to the side, as he always did when I had scolded him for something. He showed no pride or triumph. and neither did I.