



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

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[[image - drawing of a Panther crouching on the limb of a tree]]
[[drawing by]] Charles C Dawson

then run for dear life! So to guard against being fooled in this way, Knute would first rear up on the trunk of the tree, sniffing as high as his long nose could reach; if he found that the quarry had climbed part that point, he would next back away from the base of the tree to a distance of about thirty feet, and then carefully make a complete circle; if the tree had been tapped, the fugitive's scent would invariably be picked up and the chase continued without Knute's having given a false alarm. But if after circling the tree several times he failed to pick up the scent, he became convinced, and soon the forests would be resounding with his deep call for his master.

"Sounds like they're chasin' a coon all right!" Will soliloquized while pausing to wipe perspiration from his heavy brow; but even as he spoke, he was thinking it most unusual that a coon should be galavanting about in broad daylight. Squirrels always come out of their hiding places just before sunset to get fresh air, exercise, and food for the night. Because of this, Will fed the hogs early, intending to stalk among the hackberry bushes in hopes of potting a few for tomorrow's breakfast. He had just swung the door of the last pen shut, thrown the heavy bar into place, when from deep in the woods came four muffled, staccato barks. Like a soldier snapping to attention, Will froze into a listening attitude; again it came, from far away, but quite distinct:

"Woof!" a pause, and then "Woof! Woof! Woof!" three times in rapid succession. It was Knute all right, and Will knew without a doubt that something was at bay.

Years of experience had taught Will that it is not wise to disappoint a good dog. To forsake him when he has gone to the trouble of chasing a coon or possum over hill and dale, through briars and underbrush, until he has succeeded in putting the animal at bay, is next to sacrilege; that was Will's conviction. If he did not answer that call, he would feel like a criminal; he would be ashamed to face his dogs next morning. But then, there was another side of the matter to be considered; take the case of Dan Aney, for instance: It was because of Dan's loyalty to his dogs that he had let the sun go down on him in the woods. Will had been a member of the searching party that found him next day, or rather, what was left of him. They had also found evidence of a furious battle to death, waged between man and beast. Scattered about an enormous ironwood tree were twenty-four dead wolves, dozens of empty shells, and a single barreled shot gun, with a discharged shell in its chamber; its stock had been broken away, depicting a grim story of a brave man who, having made every shot count, reverted to the primitive weapon, the club. But all of this had been of no avail, for nearby, they had found a skeleton; the only flesh thereon was laced tight in Dan Aney's rubber hunting shoes.

While hesitating, Will looked at the sun. He realized that he would be running a risk if he went into the woods with the sun only two hours high, but decided that he could go the distance to the dogs and back easily, if he wasted no time. Wolves were the only dangerous animals anyone ever encountered in those woods, and they were always careful to lie low until dusk, at least.



"Woof!... Woof! Woof! Woof!" came the insistent call of Knute.

"Comin'!" shouted Will, at the same time making a dive for his gun and hunting-bag.

Jumping over the fence and flinging the gun over his right hand looped firmly in the trigger guard, Will set off at a half trot. He had gone perhaps a mile at this furious gait, when he paused suddenly to get his bearings. He was startled almost to the point of shooting when something plunged heavily against his legs from behind. Springing about, he beheld the persistent Tiny. The master did not rebuke this time; only glowered, whereupon the pup retreated, wiggling his long tail in rapid apology. Soon they were off again; through vines, underbrush, and boggy swamps; each second bringing them closer to the dogs, who seemed almost

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