

Favorite Ghosts

Jean Austin

S. '39

When I am blind I shall be always seeing
The vivid ghosts of scenes my mind has kept
From days when I first knew my sight was fleeing:

The ragged glory where the wind has swept
The leaves in bordered patterns, brown and green;
My mother's hands, so skillfully adept

That everything they do comes firm and clean;
The triad formed by star, and cloud, and moon,
With just a tiny piece of sky between;

A drooping moth, not long from its cocoon;
The magic in the sky, when I can find
Arcturus, at his height in early June.

These pictures from the past shall be combined
With darkness, for my solace, when I'm blind.

The Trapper

Arnold Skromme

A. E. '41

LITTLE Lefty—he was proud of that nickname—rested his head in the palm of his hands and listened intently in his small bed. Streaks of gray light peeped dully over the high east window-sill in his room and blotched themselves sloppily on the ceiling.

From the room below he heard his father give the rattling grates in the kitchen range a last comforting shake before he picked up the clanking milk pails one by one and strung them over his left arm. Then he heard the thin clink of the strainer against the heavy pails as it, too, was deposited on that curved left arm. A soft, woody sliding sound told him his father had just eased the outside door shut.

It was only five o'clock in the morning, and an October morning, too, but seven-year-old Lefty vaulted onto the floor and began to dress silently and hurriedly.

THE TRAPS! The thought brought an unconscious smile on his lips. His own traps—not his dad's, or his brother's, or neighbor Bill's—but his very own traps were out there in that new misty world of adventure, and he was going to look at them alone, for they were his! Dad had given him the two black steel traps the afternoon before, and he had set them himself along the "great big" creek that curved through their pasture, widening out lazily in spots and then rippling, important-like, through the big cut in the hill.

He found his long club in the wood house just where he had left it. It was nearly as tall as he was, and had a thick knob on the end—that was for killing the animals, he reflected, as he took a few practice swings at some protruding husks in the cob pile. He stopped and looked longingly at the mysterious rifle that hung on two nails on the wall, but shook his head with an "it's-a-shame" sigh, and walked out the door with the club over his left shoulder, his back straight, and his short-billed cap cocked over his right eye.

A few hens clucked cheerfully and veered their inquisitive heads sideways to gaze indifferently at him as he strutted past the chicken house and circled around the barn, where he heard his father talking to the cows.

The blood-red sun had just risen over the fringe of the trees in the horizon and was battling silently with the fine gray mist and the lingering shadows. He began visioning what his catch would be—surely at least a rabbit, and maybe a 'possum or even a muskrat! He could visualize his dad's smile and hear his praise as he held up a large, dark, glistening muskrat!

UNCONSCIOUSLY he skipped around a little, first on one foot and then the other, before he broke into a run down the pasture lane toward the creek.

His first set was in the big hole in the cut through the hill, and he cautiously slid down the steep embankment and peered hopefully into the hole . . . nothing. The cold black jaws of the trap gazed back at him innocently.

A wave of disappointment surged through him—then he remembered his other set and jumped up joyfully and scrambled through the shadows of the cut to where a small tile ditch emptied its trickling burden into the creek. He leaned over the edge of the bank and looked down dubiously at the tile outlet. A thick black form leaped away from him and then flopped flatly onto the water as the chain tightened between the trap and the stake.

Lefty caught his breath and scrambled back several paces. Oh, boy, he had caught a muskrat! His heart pounded furiously and his little clenched hands quivered as they tapped the club excitedly against the ground. The muskrat was big and dark, too, and it was the very first day!

HE GRASPED his club firmly and stepped to the small bank above his captive. At his reappearance the muskrat squealed and began digging furiously into the soft mud. Lefty's heart melted and he wondered—why did it squeal and why was it afraid? He wasn't going to hurt it—oh, yes, he was too. He had to kill it if he was going to take it home. He had been planning on killing it before, too,—but now it seemed different.

THE NEARLY exhausted muskrat ceased its digging and gazed up wonderingly . . . a large lump rose in the tightening throat of the small, timid figure on the bank, and his plump face became flushed.

“Gee whiz, you darned old muskrat, why did you have to get caught?” he said chokingly.

The muskrat squealed and again resumed its digging.

Lefty began pacing the bank, pounding the club up and down as he walked. He looked down at the club. That darn thing! He slung it from him as far as he could. He was crying softly now.

Then he thought of his father. He started climbing the hill that lay between his traps and home, thinking about his father all the while, how big and brave he was, and how he had—oh, yes,— how he had planned to surprise him. Hm . . .

He looked toward the farmstead etched distinctly against the dark grove in the background. Smoke curled lazily from the thick chimney. Gee—he wished he were still up there in bed. He just wasn't old enough for trapping!

Thoughts of his father crowded out the regrets in his mind. He knew his dad would still be milking on his return, and he had planned to walk empty-handed up behind the long row of cows in the barn and make a bet with his father on what he was going to catch that day. His father would praise him for rising so early, and jokingly remark that if he caught anything it would only be a mouse. Then he would race after his muskrat and make his father take it all back. The smile crept back on his face and he returned down the hill with a look of grim childish determination in his blue eyes.

NOW, you darned old muskrat," he muttered as he retrieved his club and swung it tensely a few strokes.

He approached the bank bravely with the club raised above his head. At the sight of the muskrat he brought the club down blindly. Splash! He had missed. He scrambled back without his club and began sobbing in long drawn out wails. Then he dashed after his club and stood directly over his captive, pounding and crying, pounding and crying uncontrollably. At last he sank exhausted to the ground. The broken and bashed muskrat lay kicking feebly with its head under water.

For a long time Lefty lay there staring at what he had done. Pity surged through and through his body—pity for himself and pity for his catch. Finally he arose and grimly removed his prey from the cold jaws of the trap, slung his blood-stained club over his shoulder, and started through the dark tree-hidden cut in the hill.

On his way homeward he dropped a little rock on the pedal of his first trap. As its jaws snapped shut, the cold, metallic click sent a shiver down his sweaty back.

