

UNCLE HARVE

by Charlie Young

Daylight had just brought color to the low hills that rose on the side of River Road. Ground fog covered the river and the low places of the other side, mocking birds were beginning to sing, and the world was coming to life. There was still a chill in the air and the vegetation was wet with dew. They crossed the road toward the bottom lands to hunt rabbits, and soon Bif's overalls were wet to the knees. If it hadn't been for the effort it took to work his way through the brush and clinging briars, he would have been chilled clear through. He didn't mind though; the boy would have suffered anything to spend some time with his uncle Harve, especially if the time were used to hunt or fish. A few hours with Harve was an education; Bif learned natural lore along with a little history, philosophy, and some social skills.

In spite of the chilly nights of late fall, the northern Georgia sunshine warms things up pretty good during the day, and this morning was no exception. The sun had been up for several hours and Bif was getting hot and tired when he shot his second rabbit. Harve thought that was enough for the day, and Bif took the rabbit down to the river to clean it. He was squatting on the bank when he spotted a slight movement from the corner of his eye. He froze and waited for whatever it was to show itself. His patience paid off as he watched

a beautiful doe step out of the brush. She saw Bif on the other side of the river and stared at him. She turned, as if to leave, stopped, and stared at Bif for a few seconds. She raised her head, tested the air, and turned the other way.

Bif remained in his position as if he were stone. The doe retreated into the brush, came back and stared at Bif for a few more seconds; she put her head down to drink, raised it quickly, and stared some more. Finally, still nervous but partially reassured by Bif's immobility, she drank. When she had finished, she turned her head toward the brush and without a sound a smaller deer slipped down to the water, and secure in her friend's vigilance, delicately touched her muzzle to the water. While the smaller deer was drinking, the doe didn't take her eye off the object on the other side of the river that didn't move, though she was sure it didn't belong there. Then they silently slipped back into the brush.

After the deer had gone, Bif finished gutting the rabbit that he had killed, washed it in the river, and slipped it into the bread sack that he carried for that purpose. Harve had told him that any time an animal was killed it should be dressed right away. It could be hours before you got home with it and the blood and entrails left in there that long could spoil the meat. He picked up his shotgun, climbed back up the bank, and found Harve sitting under a tall pine tree with his shotgun leaning on his shoulder. When Harve was out in the woods he didn't lean his shotgun against a tree or lay it on the ground; he wanted it handy if he needed it. He had been in a good position to watch Bif and the deer.

Harve squirted tobacco juice off to the side from his ever present chew and said, "Right purty, wasn't they?"

"Yeah, like to of took my breath away."

"Reckon you could shoot one?"

"If I needed the meat and if I could kill it clean. Wouldn't want it to suffer."

"Wall, don't ever shoot one 'less you got a gun heavy enough to do it then."

"Reckon you could git close enough to kill one with rabbit shot, Uncle Harve."

"Naw, and don't ever try it—unless—wall, they is one way."

"How's that?"

"Wall, you got to be keerful or you'll kill yoreself 'stead of the deer, but I reckon I can show you how."

Harve took a paper shot shell from one pocket, his knife from another, and proceeded to demonstrate. He said, "Now ye know that the powder is down to the bottom of the shell and they is a wad of packin' on top of that, then they is the shot on top of that. Wall, ye take your knife and cut a little place around the shell just about where the wad 'tween the powder and the shot is, 'bout the middle of the packin'. Now ye got to be keerful and not cut all the way through the shell or the damn thing will blow up the gun. Just cut a groove around the shell 'bout half way through the paper. When ye shoot it the shot will come out in one solid lump. It's about like shootin' a slug and it will take keer of anything at close range. Don't try it 'less'n it's an emergency, son, cause it's dangerous." Harve put the shell he had cut into his shotgun and neatly cut down a sapling about twenty yards away. *(This is very dangerous and will not work on modern, plastic shot shells, so please don't try it.)*

Bif and his uncle Harve sat in the cushion of pine needles, enjoying the late fall sunshine, the peacefulness of the woods, and just being together. After a few minutes of silent companionship, Harve took a pint bottle from his back pocket and after squirting a stream of tobacco juice, took a swallow of the clear liquid. He replaced the bottle, heaved a long sigh and said, "That there is another thing, son, guns and whisky don't mix. Now, we're done huntin' and

soon on the way home or I wouldn't a'done that. Guns by theirselves, and when handled proper, is a good thing. An a little sip of whisky, now and then, never hurt nobody neither. But put 'em both together and they ain't nothing worse. In yore life time yore gonna run into some men that cain't handle neither one. Them's the kind of people you don't want to hunt with or drink with."

Harve was known as a laconic man; few people had ever heard him say much more than what he needed to, but with the boy he felt the urge to teach, to try to explain life and the best way to handle it. This morning he wanted to get a particular point across.

"That calls to mind a little rumpus that happened a few years back, when me and yore daddy was boys of about sixteen or seventeen, I guess. Ye've heard stories told about yore granddaddy. I reckon, he got shot before you was borned. Wall, Paw was a heller and maybe he warn't no good, but he was my paw. However, the time I'm a'tellin you about, Paw found some whisky that was hid from the revenue agents. The man that hid it was gonna take it to Chat'noogie and sell it when he thought he could git away with it, but the agents was watchin' him purty close right about then. Paw know'ed whose whisky it was, but he took me and yore paw up there and we loaded it in the wagon and took it to Chat'noogie and sold most of it. Paw kept some for his own use.

"Now I don't hold with stealin' nothin', but Paw was givin' the orders and we didn't argue with Paw, less'n we wanted to have to whoop him, and we couldn't do that. So me and yore daddy went along with him. Wall, it warn't long after that that Paw got drunk in town one night and run off at the mouth about stealin' that whisky. Purty soon word got back to old Tug Whirley, the man that the whisky had belonged to.

"Tug was about like Paw, dirt farmer, never had a pot to piss in, meaner'n the devil, and he brought his boys and come a huntin' Paw and us. Course he knowed where to find us, but Paw found out he was a'comin and we met 'em back in the woods over yonder on the old place by the river. Us boys didn't want no part in it, but we had to git our guns and go along or we would'a been laughed out of the country. Them Whirley boys was just as mean as their paw was, but I don't think they wanted to kill either me or yore daddy cause they was all shootin' at Paw.

"Anyway's we was all out there in the woods just a'blastin' away at one another with rabbit shot, and first one thing an' another, we was too pore to have much else. The leaves and pine needles was fallin' out of the trees and ever once in a while Paw would take another drink out'n his bottle and Old Tug Whirley would take a drink out'n his and they would cuss each other for a while and shoot some more.

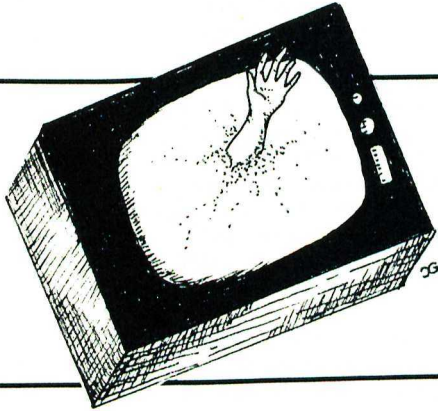
"Then old Tug Whirley started gittin' brave, or drunk, one or t'other, and come out from behind his tree and set on a stump. He set his bottle down beside him and he would shoot a couple times and take another drink. He never had much sense no way, and he was a'settin' right out there in the open, jest a'shootin' up a storm, when Paw cut one of them shells like I jest show'ed you and shot him off his stump. Like to of killed him, but he lived over it. Wall, his boys dragged him home and that ended the battle for that day but they's been bad blood between us ever since.

"You know yore daddy is a drinkin' man, jest like Paw was, and every time he'd run into one of them Whirley boys while he was a'drinkin' they'd be a fight. That's why he's up north now. The last time they went at it, yore daddy pulled a knife and cut one of them Whirley boys might near to pieces. The sheriff had enough of 'em fightin' like that and was gonna run yore daddy in. I

kept to myself, most the time, didn't do no drinkin' with folks like that, and still don't, so I never had no trouble with 'em."

Harve squirted another stream of tobacco juice, took another short pull from his bottle, stood up and said, "Take them rabbits home to yore mamma. Reckon it'll be a change from beans for supper. Come the right time I know where they's a big buck deer ye might be able to git this year."

On the way back to the River Road, Bif followed along behind Harve wondering to himself if any other boy in the world had ever had such a wonderful uncle.



I Won't Turn Off The T.V.

by Bruce Braden

I won't turn off the t.v.
 it's the only thing
 between me and lonely
 t.v. keeps me company
 while I'm going through feeling empty
 watching characters developing roles
 one show is like so many other shows
 only the names have been changed
 something like you and me
 We used to watch friends parting ways
 we passed our reviews
 'til it all became old news
 Now, we've got the script
 we say the lines that seem to fit
 only the names have been changed
 . . . can we protect the innocent?