

Where the Red Fern Grows Book Notes

Where the Red Fern Grows by Wilson Rawls

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Author/Context

Wilson Rawls was born Woodrow Wilson Rawls on Sept. 24, 1913, on a small Oklahoma farm. His parents were Minzy O. Rawls and Winnie Hatfield Rawls. Winnie, Wilson's mother, was part Cherokee. The land where Wilson grew up was old Cherokee land given to his mother by the government because of her ancestry.

Like Billy Colman, Wilson's family was very poor. Thus, his mother home schooled Wilson and his siblings by reading aloud to them. Wilson never enjoyed the stories his mother read because he said they were too "girly." However, he did enjoy one book by Jack London, *Call of the Wild*. That book inspired Wilson to want to grow up and write an adventure tale about a boy and his dogs.

In 1935, Wilson's family moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico. A little bit before this time and continuing afterwards, Wilson sought out odd jobs, some of which included writing for little papers. He dreamed of becoming a writer and would start stories wherever he was. Then, he would lock them up in a trunk so no one could find them. Eventually, Wilson traveled to Idaho. He began to work at the Atomic Energy Commission site in the Arco desert. Here he met Sophi Styczinski who would become his wife in 1958.

Meanwhile, Wilson decided to forget about his dreams of becoming a writer because he thought that he had to be responsible. He burned all of the old manuscripts he had ever written. But when he told Sophie what he had done, she did not agree. In fact, she encouraged Wilson to keep on writing. And in 1961, *Where the Red Fern Grows* came out in a three-part series in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Wilson went on to write one more book, *Summer of the Monkeys*.

Wilson and Sophie moved to Cornell, Wisconsin in 1975 and he died there in Dec. of 1984.

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Plot Summary

Billy Colman, now a grown man, reflects back on the year he got his dogs and the events that happened afterwards.

Billy, a ten-year old boy from the Ozarks, has an unyielding desire to have two hunting hounds of his own. He repeatedly asks his parents for the dogs, but considering their financial situation, they have to tell Billy no. Hunting hounds are too expensive and Papa has a farm to take care of, as well as Mama, Billy, and Billy's three sisters.

One day while out in the woods, Billy finds a fisherman's catalogue. In the back of the magazine is an advertisement for redbone hunting hounds. Billy is determined to have the dogs. He works for two years in his Grandpa's store, picking huckleberries, and selling bait to local fisherman in order to save the fifty dollars needed to buy the hounds. At the end of the two years, Billy has enough money and he finally orders his dogs. He walks to a nearby town, Tahlequah, and picks up his dogs. He couldn't be happier; he has all he has ever wanted. Billy makes his way back home with his new dogs. He has to sleep overnight in a cave and this is when he decides on the names for his two new pups. He calls the male Old Dan, and the female Little Ann. This is also the first time Billy gets to see what his dogs' personalities are like. Old Dan barks at a lion walking outside near the cave and Billy senses that Old Dan is going to be a tough and determined dog. He assesses that Little Ann is going to be the smart dog of the two.

Once home, Billy immediately starts to train his dogs how to hunt raccoons. Billy takes the dogs out every night. They learn quickly and they also do everything together. Billy quickly learns that he has two great hunting hounds. They will stop at nothing to tree a coon. Billy and his dogs have all sorts of adventures in the river bottoms of the Ozarks. Eventually, Billy's name starts to get around (with the help of Grandpa's bragging) and his dogs develop a reputation for their coon hunting skills.

One afternoon at Grandpa's store, the mean Pritchard boys, Rubin and Rainie, bet Billy that his dogs cannot tree the "ghost coon." Grandpa and Billy take on their bet and that night, the hunt starts. Old Dan and Little Ann tree the coon, but the Pritchard boys' dog, a blue tick hound, picks a fight with Old Dan. Just as Rubin is about to go after Old Dan with Billy's ax, Billy trips Rubin. Rubin falls on the ax and dies. Billy is shaken up and goes home. He feels so badly about what happened to Rubin that he cannot hunt for days and has nightmares for a while afterwards.

Weeks pass and Grandpa tells Billy about a championship coon hunting contest about to take place. Billy is excited and Grandpa has already entered Old Dan and Little Ann. For the past couple of months, Grandpa has been keeping track of how many coons Old Dan and Little Ann have caught and it is more than any other hunter around. Grandpa is confident Billy's dogs can win the championship gold cup. Grandpa, Papa, Billy, and the dogs leave for the contest. Before the hunt, Little Ann wins a silver cup for first place in a beauty contest. The hunt begins and Old Dan and Little Ann make it to the finals. On the final night of hunting, a terrible storm approaches. Billy's team gets

caught in the storm, Old Dan and Little Ann get lost, and Grandpa falls and twists his ankle. Billy thinks all hope is lost and that his dogs are dead. The next morning, after the storm, the other hunters find Billy, Papa, Grandpa, and their judge. One of the hunters saw Billy's dogs and leads them right to them. They are frozen from the storm, but Billy revives them by warming them in a fire. Everyone makes their way back to the campground and Billy is awarded the gold cup as well as three hundred dollars in prize money.

After a few weeks, Billy is out hunting with his dogs. They are on the trail of what Billy thinks is a coon, but actually turns out to be a mountain lion. Old Dan and Little Ann get into a terrible fight with the lion. The lion rips the dogs apart, especially Old Dan. The dogs save Billy's life by jumping in between the lion and Billy. Finally, Billy plunges his ax into the lion and kills him. Unfortunately, the wounds are too bad for Old Dan to take and he dies. Soon after, Little Ann dies, as she has no will to live once Old Dan is dead. Billy is saddened by the death of his two dogs, but he does his duty and buries them up on the hillside. His parents try to console him, but nothing works.

The following spring, Billy's family decides to move away from the country and into town, where the children can get a better education. The money from the hunting contest and all the money made from selling coonskins enabled them to move and this was what Mama had been praying for, for a long time. Right before they leave, Billy goes to Old Dan and Little Ann's gravesite one more time to say goodbye. He is astonished at what he sees. A beautiful red fern had sprung up in between their mounds. Billy recalls the old Indian legend that says that red fern seeds can only be planted by angels, and once planted, they will live forever. Billy finally feels at peace with the death of his dogs. Now, he is able to move away and not feel guilty about leaving them. He says goodbye and tells them he will never forget them or the red fern.

Major Characters

Billy Colman: Main character of the story. Billy's love and devotion to his dogs lead him on a mission to train his dogs to be the best hunting dogs in the valley. Through the process of fulfilling this mission, Billy undergoes tremendous self-development as he matures into a young man. The memory of his dogs as well as his life lessons, including love, devotion, and bravery stick with him even through his adult life.

Papa: Billy's father. He is a farmer and will do just about anything to make Billy happy. When Billy is upset over not getting the dogs, Papa buys Billy three steel traps to make Billy feel better. He teaches Billy how to use the traps. Papa is very proud of Billy's determination and commitment to his dogs and hunting raccoons; he is proud of his son's development into a young man. He is the one who always calms Mama's fears about Billy's safety.

Mama: Billy's mother. Similar to Papa, Mama also will do just about anything to see Billy happy. Although Billy's constant begging for the dogs starts to annoy Mama, she is heartbroken over her son's grief. When Billy finally gets the dogs and starts hunting, Mama is constantly worried about him. She is always thinking that it is too dangerous for him to be out in the wood all alone at night and cares greatly for his safety.

Old Man Hatfield: A neighbor of Billy's. His dog is having collie puppies and Billy's parents offer to get Billy one of the pups, but Billy refuses because he only wants coon hounds.

Grandpa: Billy's grandpa. Billy works for two years in his Grandpa's store and saves all of his money. When Billy finally saves \$50, Grandpa helps him to get the dogs. Grandpa is astonished to the point of tears; he is so proud of Billy's hard work and dedication. Grandpa frequently helps Billy out, like when he helps Billy to make the scarecrow in front of the big sycamore tree to keep the coon from getting down out of the tree. Billy greatly respects and appreciates his Grandpa's advice and help.

Rubin Pritchard: Older brother of Rainie Pritchard. He has a very bad reputation; he is known for stealing, fighting, and causing trouble with his younger brother, Rainie. Rubin is two years older than Billy. He is a big boy with mean eyes. He bets Billy two dollars that Old Dan and Little Ann cannot tree the ghost coon.

Rainie Pritchard: Younger brother of Rubin Pritchard. Rainie is about Billy's age and known for causing trouble wherever he goes. He is a nervous boy, and is not liked by anyone. Billy says that he has the meanest disposition out of any boy he has ever known. He always wants to make bets.

Minor Characters

Billy's sisters: Billy has three sisters. One is older and the other two are younger. They share Billy's excitement over having two hounds in the house. Billy is close with his

sisters and always offers them some of the candy that Grandpa gives him. They are very grateful.

Grandma: Billy's grandmother. She checks up on Grandpa to make sure he has everything he needs for the trip to the coon-hunting contest.

Mr. Kyle: One of the hunters in the contest. He owns the dog that is runner-up in the beauty contest. Little Ann is the winner of the contest.

Mr. Benson: One of the hunters in the contest. He is the one that finds Billy's dogs. Then, he finds Billy and the rest of the hunters to tell them what he found - that the dogs are alive, but covered in ice.

Dr. Latham: One of the hunters in the contest. He helps Grandpa with his twisted ankle back at the campground. After the contest, Dr. Latham takes Grandpa into town to put a cast on his ankle.



Objects/Places

Snake River Valley: A valley in Idaho, where Billy lives as a grown man. The story opens in this part of the country. It is far from the Ozark Mountains, where Billy grew up as a child with his family and dogs.

cups: The prize cups Old Dan and Little Ann win in the hunting contest. Billy keeps them on his mantel. Old Dan's is big and gold, and Little Ann's is smaller and made of silver. Old Dan's is from the actual hunt, and Little Ann's is from the beauty contest.

coon hounds: A type of dog used for hunting raccoons. This is the only kind of dog Billy wants and he wants two of them. Old Dan and Little Ann, the dogs Billy eventually gets, are coon hounds. Old Dan is bigger and stronger, but Little Ann is smarter. Together, they successfully hunt raccoons and even go on to win a coon hunting contest. Old Dan and Little Ann work together as a team; they look out for each other and Billy. They even save Billy's life. The dogs also give Billy's childhood meaningful memories that he grows to cherish into adulthood.

Ozarks: Where Billy grows up with his family. One of the finest hunting places in the world, the Ozarks are a place of rich, fertile soil where huge red oaks grow. It is not highly populated. The Illinois River runs below the fields where Billy's log house is. The land where Billy lives is Cherokee land, given to his mother because she is part Cherokee. The Ozark mountains are where Billy spends all of his time hunting with his dogs.

steel traps: Traps used for hunting. Papa buys Billy three steel traps and Billy could not be happier. He uses them to catch river coon.

Samie: Billy's cat. Billy catches Samie in his steel traps the first day he uses the traps. It causes a huge commotion in the barn and all of the animals and Billy's sisters howl and yell at the sight. Samie is a very sneaky and nosy cat; he watches Billy's every move and gets caught in the trap numerous times.

ringtail coon: A type of raccoon. Billy is determined to catch this animal, but it is too smart for him. It eats the bait from the traps, springs the triggers, and sometimes turns the traps over altogether. With help from his dogs, Billy is finally able to catch a ringtail coon.

K.C. Baking Powder Can : An old, dirty can Billy finds in the campground where he first finds the magazine with the advertisement for the dogs. He cleans off the can and uses it as a bank to hold the money he saves to buy the dogs.

Tahlequah: The town where Billy picks up his dogs. Billy travels to this big country town by himself on foot. He is taken aback by all of the stores, people, and merchandise in this big town. He has never been to a town like this before. It is here that the schoolchildren make fun of his clothes and call him a 'hillbilly'.



sycamore tree: The tree that Old Dan and Little Ann chased their first coon up. This is the biggest tree in the river bottoms and Billy is sure that he will not be able to chop it down. For days, he chops at the tree. He is in tremendous pain all over, but he will not give up. He says that he owes this to his dogs. Finally, Billy asks God for the strength to chop the tree down. It falls and the coon gets out of the tree. Old Dan and Little Ann then go on to catch their first coon.

ghost coon: Coon that lives upriver in the part of the country where the Pritchard boys live. The Pritchard boys bet Billy that his dogs cannot catch the old coon that has been running around the country for years.

blue tick hound: The Pritchard boys' dog. He is straggly, mean, and dirty, just like the Pritchard boys. When Billy and the Pritchard boys are out hunting for the ghost coon, this dog shows up. Old Dan and the Pritchard dog get into a bad fight. Little Ann jumps in to help Old Dan and they end up badly hurting the blue tick hound.

mountain lion: This is the animal that ultimately kills Old Dan. The lion tears Old Dan to shreds. No matter how much Billy does to doctor Old Dan, it is of no use. His wounds from the lion are too deep and he eventually dies.

red fern: Just as Billy is about to leave the Ozarks, he goes to see his dogs' graves one more time. Growing in between Old Dan and Little Ann's mounds is a beautiful red fern. Billy is in shock as he recalls the old Indian legend about the red fern. The legend is about a little girl and a little boy who get lost in a blizzard and freeze to death. In the spring, when their bodies were found, a red fern had sprung up between them. The seeds can only be planted by an angel and once they are planted, the red fern will never die.

Quotes

Quote 1: "It's strange indeed how memories can lie dormant in a man's mind for so many years. Yet those memories can be awakened and brought forth fresh and new, just by something you've seen, or something you've heard, or the sight of an old familiar face." Chapter 1, pg. 3

Quote 2: "Lying back in the soft hay, I folded my hands behind my head, closed my eyes, and let my mind wander back over the two long years. I thought of the fishermen, the blackberry patches, and the huckleberry hills. I thought of the prayer I had said when I asked God to help me get two hound pups. I knew He had surely helped, for He had given me the heart, courage, and determination." Chapter 3, pg. 21

Quote 3: "I wanted so much to step over and pick them up. Several times I tried to move my feet, but they seemed to be nailed to the floor. I knew the pups were mine, all mine, yet I couldn't move. My heart started aching like a drunk grasshopper. I tried to swallow and couldn't. My Adam's apple wouldn't work. One pup started my way. I held my breath. On he came until I felt a scratchy little foot on mine. The other pup followed. A warm puppy tongue caressed my sore foot. I heard the stationmaster say, 'They already know you.' I knelt down and gathered them in my arms. I buried my face between their wiggling bodies and cried." Chapter 5, pg. 37

Quote 4: "I had a time with this part of their training, but my persistence had no bounds." Chapter 7, pg. 67

Quote 5: "Although they couldn't talk in my terms, they had a language of their own that was easy to understand. Sometimes I would see the answer in their eyes, and again it would be in the friendly wagging of their tails. Other times I could hear the answer in a low whine or feel it in the soft caress of a warm flicking tongue. In some way, they would always answer." Chapter 7, pg. 68

Quote 6: "'I thought about that, Papa,' I said, 'but I made a bargain with my dogs. I told them that if they would put one in a tree, I'd do the rest. Well, they fulfilled their part of the bargain. Now it's up to me to do my part, and I'm going to, Papa. I'm going to cut it down. I don't care if it takes me a year.'" Chapter 8, pg. 80

Quote 7: "I always took their kidding with a smile on my face, but it made my blood boil like the water in Mama's teakettle." Chapter 10, pg. 102

Quote 8: "I opened my mouth to call Old Dan. I wanted to tell him to come on and we'd go home as there was nothing we could do. The words just wouldn't come out. I couldn't utter a sound." Chapter 11, pg. 117

Quote 9: "I told them I wasn't giving up until my dogs did." Chapter 12, pg. 133



Quote 10: "As I sat there on the limb, looking at the old fellow, he cried again. Something came over me. I didn't want to kill him. I hollered down and told Rubin I didn't want to kill the ghost coon. He hollered back, 'Are you crazy?' I told him I wasn't crazy. I just didn't want to kill him. I climbed down. Rubin was mad. He said, 'What's the matter with you?' 'Nothing,' I told him. 'I just don't have the heart to kill the coon.'" Chapter 13, pg. 141-2

Quote 11: "As I skipped along, it was hard for me to realize all the wonderful things that had happened to me in such a few short years. I had two of the finest little hounds that ever bawled on the trail of a ringtail coon. I had a wonderful mother and father and three little sisters. I had the best grandpa a boy ever had, and to top it all, I was going on a championship coon hunt. It was no wonder that my heart was bursting with happiness. Wasn't I the luckiest boy in the world?" Chapter 14, pg. 160-1

Quote 12: "As graceful as any queen, with her head high in the air, and her long red tail arched in a perfect rainbow, my little dog walked down the table. With her warm gray eyes staring straight at me, on she came. Walking up to me, she laid her head on my shoulder. As I put my arms around her, the crowd exploded." Chapter 15, pg. 178

Quote 13: "Regardless of all the discouraging talk, the love and belief I had in my little red hounds never faltered. I could see them now and then, leaping over old logs, tearing through the underbrush, sniffing and searching for the lost trail. My heart swelled with pride. I whooped, urging them on." Chapter 16, pg. 188

Quote 14: "'I've been out in storms like this before, all by myself. I've never left my dogs in the woods, and I'm not going to now, even if I have to look for them myself.'" Chapter 17, pg. 199

Quote 15: "'Men,' said Mr. Kyle, 'people have been trying to understand dogs ever since the beginning of time. One never knows what they'll do. You can read every day where a dog saved the life of a drowning child, or lay down his life for his master. Some people call this loyalty. I don't. I may be wrong, but I call it love - the deepest kind of love.'" Chapter 18, pg. 214

Quote 16: "I knelt down and put my arms around them. I knew that if it hadn't been for their loyalty and unselfish courage I would have probably been killed by the slashing claws of the devil cat. 'I don't know how I'll ever pay you back for what you've done,' I said, 'but I'll never forget it.'" Chapter 19, pg. 230

Quote 17: "I'm sure the red fern has grown and has completely covered the two little mounds. I know it is still there, hiding its secret beneath those long, red leaves, but it wouldn't be hidden from me for part of my life is buried there too. Yes, I know it is still there, for in my heart I believe the legend of the sacred red fern." Chapter 20, pg. 249

Topic Tracking: Determination

Determination 1: During Billy's spare time from helping Papa, he goes down to the fishermen's campground and collects left-behind items. One day, he finds a sporting magazine. Inside is an advertisement for hunting hounds. They are \$25 each. Although Billy has no money and his family is poor, he is determined to get himself two hunting hounds and will do whatever it takes to get them.

Determination 2: After Billy sees the advertisement in the magazine for the pups, he is determined to get them. He spends two long years working hard and earning enough money to buy the dogs. He sells things to the fishermen like crawfish, minnows, fresh vegetables, and berries. Billy will stop at nothing to buy his pups, and after the two years are up, he finally has the \$50 that he needs.

Determination 3: Grandpa tells Billy that his dogs will be shipped to a nearby town called Tahlequah. He happens to know someone who is going out that way and Billy can ride with him if he wants to. Billy agrees, but later that night at home, he cannot stop thinking about his dogs. He needs to have them now, so he packs some food and leaves the house. He is so intent upon getting his dogs right away that he travels to Tahlequah on foot that night through the woods.

Determination 4: Billy trains his dogs to hunt raccoons. He spends all summer training them, running them throughout the river bottoms of the Ozarks. But when it comes time for them to jump into the water, they won't go; they are frightened of the water. Billy is determined to teach them how to swim and he eventually does. And even though it was tough, he says that his persistence had no bounds. He was willing to do whatever it took to teach Old Dan and Little Ann to swim.

Determination 5: Old Dan and Little Ann tree a coon up the biggest sycamore in the river bottoms. Billy knows it is going to be quite a task to cut the tree down, but he is determined to do it. Papa suggests going somewhere else, to another tree, but Billy insists on trying to cut this one down. He says that he will do it even if it takes him a year.

Determination 6: After two days of trying to chop down the biggest sycamore in the river bottoms to get the coon out, Billy is drained. His entire body is sore, he has blisters on his hands, and he is tired and hungry. Again, Papa suggests that Billy leave the tree, for it is just too big of a task to take on. But again, Billy does not give up. He promised his dogs that if they treed a coon, he would do the rest by chopping down the tree. He is determined to keep his promise to his dogs and he continues to chop the tree despite his pain.

Determination 7: Billy and his dogs arrive at the meeting place for the "ghost coon" hunt. The Pritchard boys are there and they tell Billy that it's no use; he might as well just give up now because his dogs won't be able to catch the "ghost coon." Billy does not give up

and he does not call his dogs in. He says that he is not going to give up until his dogs give up.

Determination 8: Old Dan and Little Ann treed two coons at the championship coon hunt and they are on their third. They start to bark treed, but when everyone runs over, the coon seems to have disappeared. Grandpa, Papa, and the judge tell Billy to give up on this coon and move on to another, but Billy refuses. As long as his dogs are searching, he knows they will find the coon, and they do. Billy is determined to continue his unyielding faith and pride in his dogs and he sees no reason to stop now, just because a coon has pulled a trick.

Topic Tracking: Love

Love 1: Billy has worked for two long years saving every penny so that he could buy the things he has wanted for a long time - two redbone hunting hounds. He finally saves enough money and walks on foot to pick his dogs up in Tahlequah. When he arrives at the depot and sees his pups for the first time, it is too much for Billy to handle. All of his hard work has finally paid off and he can hardly believe it is true. He spent so many long days dreaming about having dogs of his own and now he finally does. He does not know what to do except to cry out of utter happiness.

Love 2: On their way home from Tahlequah, Billy and his dogs have to sleep in a cave. The sound of a mountain lion frightens Billy and his dogs. He builds a fire to keep the lion away. Billy feels very defensive and is willing to do anything to protect the pups he has worked so hard to get. He even says he is willing to die for them.

Love 3: Billy has spent the entire summer training his dogs for the upcoming hunting season. He has gotten to know their every move and they have gotten to know Billy's every move as well. They follow Billy around everywhere he goes. Billy and his dogs have a very special connection. They understand each other even though they speak completely different languages. Billy understands them just by their eyes or their wagging tails and they understand Billy. It is a unique and special bond.

Love 4: During one of the dogs' hunts, they chase a coon up the biggest sycamore tree in the entire river bottom. Billy doesn't think he can chop it down, but he tries anyway. It takes him two days of backbreaking work to cut the tree down, but he doesn't give up because of the promise he made to his dogs. He promised them that if they treed a coon, then he would do the rest and chop it down. He will not go back on his word to his dogs. He cares about their relationship and his promise too much to go back on his word.

Love 5: Sometimes Billy hangs out at Grandpa's store. When the other hunters are there, Billy and the hunters exchange tales about their hunting adventures. Every now and then the hunters make fun of Old Dan and Little Ann. They say that Billy's dogs are small and that Little Ann isn't half as smart as Billy says she is. Hearing negative remarks about his dogs greatly offends Billy. He says that it makes his blood boil. His anger is a direct result of how much love he feels for his dogs. He worked too hard and cares too much about his dogs to not let someone's mean comments offend him.

Love 6: During one the dogs' hunts, Little Ann falls into the frozen river. Billy sees she is in desperate trouble. He takes off his clothes, wades into the frozen water, and hooks her collar with his lantern wire. He pulls her out and is thankful that she is ok. Billy loves his dog too much to just let her die in the water. He goes so far as to risk his own life to save the life of his dog.

Love 7: Billy leaves Grandpa's store after Grandpa has just told him about the championship coon hunt that Billy is going to participate in with his dogs. Billy is on top



of the world. He thinks back to all the wonderful things that have happened to him over the past two years of his life and he is so thankful for all of them. He thinks about getting his dogs, how lucky he is to have his Mama, Papa, and three sisters, how lucky he is to have Grandpa, and now to be entered in a championship coon hunt. It is all too much for him to take and he says that his heart is bursting with happiness.

Love 8: The dogs begin their first night of hunting during the championship coon hunt. They catch two coons and are soon barking treed for a third coon. However, when they get to the tree, they see that there is no coon. The coon seems to have pulled a trick on the dogs. Papa, Grandpa, and the judge tell Billy to give up and move on to another area to hunt, but Billy refuses. The love and faith he has in his dogs make him confident that they will catch the coon. Billy stands by his dogs and they eventually catch the coon.

Love 9: During the final night of hunting at the championship coon hunt, a bad storm approaches. Old Dan and Little Ann get lost in the storm. Papa, Grandpa, and the judge want to leave and find their way back to the buggy, but Billy refuses. He would never leave his dogs out in a storm by themselves. He loves them too much to just leave them out in the cold. He says that if he has to look for his dogs by himself, then he will do just that, but he will not leave them.

Love 10: Old Dan and Little Ann stay by the tree all night, so the coon won't escape. Even though they got covered in ice from head to toe from the ice storm, they did not give up. Somehow they knew that Billy needed one more coon to win the championship hunt. Everyone is impressed with Billy's dogs. Mr. Kyle says that people have been trying to understand dogs for years. He says the only way to explain Old Dan and Little Ann's behavior is love, for dogs have a special kind of love for their masters - the deepest kind.

Love 11: Billy is out hunting with his dogs one night and instead of treeing a coon, they end up treeing a mountain lion. Old Dan and Little Ann get into a terrible fight with the lion and the dogs are badly hurt. At one point, the lion is about to go after Billy. In an instant, Old Dan and Little Ann jump right in between the lion and Billy, saving Billy's life. Billy is so thankful for his dogs, for their love and loyalty. He knows he will never be able to repay them for what they did for him, but he will never forget it or them.

Topic Tracking: Maturity

Maturity 1: Billy is walking home from work one afternoon when he comes across a dog fight. He helps one of the dogs and takes him home. That night, Billy feeds the dog and gives him a warm place to sleep. It reminds him of the two hunting hounds he used to have when he was a boy and this makes him feel good. The next morning, Billy thinks about keeping the dog. Despite the fact that it would be nice to have the dog around, Billy sets him loose because he knows that it is not right to pen up a hunting hound. He does the right thing and acts for the good of the dog.

Maturity 2: Billy is finally in Tahlequah, the town where he is to pick up his brand new pups. Upon arriving in the town, he starts to feel guilty about leaving his house without telling anyone where he was going. He sees a store and decides to buy gifts for his family. He buys new overalls for Papa, cloth for Mama, and candy for his sisters. Billy is mature in that he is able to realize when he has done wrong. And even though he did something wrong, he feels badly about it and has the heart to want to try and make it better.

Maturity 3: Billy and his pups head home after their trip to Tahlequah. Billy knows he shouldn't have left home without telling Mama and Papa where he was going. He wonders what he will tell them when he finally arrives home. After much thought, he decides that he will tell them the truth. He is mature and does the right thing.

Maturity 4: During one of the dogs' hunts, they chase a coon up the biggest sycamore tree in the entire river bottom. Billy doesn't think he can chop it down, but he tries anyway. It takes him two days of backbreaking work to cut the tree down, but he doesn't give up because of the promise he made to his dogs. He promised them that if they treed a coon, then he would do the rest and chop it down. He will not go back on his word to his dogs. He cares about their relationship and his promise too much to go back on his word. He is mature enough to recognize the importance of keeping one's word.

Maturity 5: The dogs chase a coon up the biggest sycamore in the river bottom. Billy tries to cut the tree down for days. His back is sore, he has blisters on his hands, and he is tired and hungry. However, as much as he wants to quit he won't give up for two reasons. One, he promised Old Dan and Little Ann that he would cut the tree down if they treed a coon. Two, he knows that if he quit now, the tree would die from all the chopping already done. To have killed the tree for nothing is not something Billy thinks is right.

Maturity 6: Sometimes Billy hangs out at Grandpa's store. When the other hunters are there, Billy and the hunters exchange tales about their hunting adventures. Every now and then the hunters make fun of Old Dan and Little Ann. They say that Billy's dogs are small and that Little Ann isn't half as smart as Billy says she is. Hearing negative remarks about his dogs greatly offends Billy. He says that it makes his blood boil. However, Billy is mature enough to not fight back. He says that he always took their kidding with a smile on his face.

Maturity 7: Rubin and Rainie Pritchard make a bet with Billy that his dogs cannot tree the "ghost coon." Billy agrees to the bet and Old Dan and Little Ann end up treeing the coon. When it comes time for Billy to climb the tree and kill the coon, he stops and doesn't go through with it. Rubin and Rainie think he is crazy and they want the coon dead, but Billy sees something in the old coon. He feels badly for the coon. The coon is old and has been around for quite a while, unable to be caught by any hunter, and Billy sees this as special. He is more mature than Rubin and Rainie who just want the old coon dead. Billy stands up for the coon, even though he faces embarrassment and ridicule from the Pritchard boys.

Maturity 8: After Rubin dies, Billy walks to his grave and leaves flowers on the grave. Despite the fact that Rubin tormented Billy and made fun of his dogs, Billy still feels awful about Rubin's death and how it must have affected Rubin's family. Billy sets aside all his bad feelings about the Pritchards and leaves the flowers for Rubin. When Rubin's mother sees this, she cries. Billy knows that he did the right thing.

Maturity 9: The championship coon hunt is over and Billy is awarded the gold cup and the three hundred dollars in prize money. He is speechless. It is more money than he has ever seen. He hands the money over to Papa. Billy has continually acted out of the greater good for his family and this is just another instance. Instead of keeping the money for himself, he gives it to his father because he knows that his family needs the money. Billy is selfless and it is the ultimate act of charity and maturity.

Maturity 10: Old Dan and Little Ann go out hunting for coons. Instead, they tree a mountain lion. After a terrible fight, Old Dan and Little Ann are badly hurt. Billy does not know what to do. Instinctively, he plunges the ax into the lion in order to save the life of his dogs. When the lion is finally on his last breath, Billy sits and looks at him. Even though the lion hurt him and his dogs, he says that in every evil, there is a little bit of good (referring to the lion, Rubin Pritchard, and life in general). Billy is not too quick to make judgments and he has a mature understanding of the world around him.

Chapter 1

Billy, now a grown man, leaves work in the Snake River Valley, in Idaho, on a beautiful spring day. He hears dogs fighting and cannot help but to get caught up in the dog fight. During the fight, Billy witnesses one specific dog that is the target of all of the fighting. The dog fends off all of the other dogs and it reminds Billy of a time when he was younger, when a certain dog had given up his life for Billy. Billy feels badly for this dog, and decides to save the dog from the other dogs. He can see the dog is hurt badly and is starved. He also notices that this is not an ordinary hound - it is a hunting hound. When Billy looks at the dog's collar, he sees that his name is "Buddie," and it looks as though a little boy scratched the name in the collar. This brings back many memories of Billy's boyhood and the love he once had for his own dog.

"It's strange indeed how memories can lie dormant in a man's mind for so many years. Yet those memories can be awakened and brought forth fresh and new, just by something you've seen, or something you've heard, or the sight of an old familiar face."
Chapter 1, pg. 3

Billy takes the dog home, feeds him, bathes him, and gives him a place to sleep. The next night, Billy sets the dog free. He feels something for the dog, and wouldn't mind keeping the dog forever, but he knows that it is wrong to pen up a hunting hound.

Topic Tracking: Maturity 1

After the dog leaves, Billy makes a fire and sits in his rocking chair. He thinks about the two red hounds he once had. He looks over to his mantel and sees two cups resting there. He takes them down, stares at them, and reflects on the many wonderful memories of his boyhood days.

Chapter 2

Billy starts the tale of his boyhood days. He explains that when he was ten years old, he wanted two coon hounds. His Papa and Mama say that he can't have them because they are too expensive. They offer to get Billy a collie from Old Man Hatfield but Billy is not happy with this suggestion; he will only be happy if he gets coon hounds. Billy is very upset with his parents' refusal to buy him the dogs. He lives in the Ozarks, one of the best hunting places in the world and he doesn't even have a dog to hunt with.

Billy occupies his time during the day roaming through the valley, observing the tracks of many different types of animals. He is especially interested in the tracks of the river coon. His longing for the dogs gets worse and worse. It even gets to the point where he cannot eat or sleep normally. Mama tries to get Papa to do something about it, but Papa insists that they just don't have the money for coon hounds. To make Billy a little bit happier, Papa buys him three small steel traps. Billy is overjoyed. He sets his traps immediately the next morning in the barn and the first thing he catches is Samie, his cat. The animals in the barn along with Billy's sisters howl and yell at the sight of Samie in the trap. This is not the last time that Billy catches Samie in the trap. Samie is very nosy and watches Billy's every move, so he gets caught in the trap many more times. Eventually, Samie runs away. He returns every now and then, but he is never the same.

Billy begins to learn to trap away from the family's animals. He goes behind the fields and starts to trap opossums, skunks, rabbits, and squirrels. The only animal he cannot catch is the ringtail coon. Billy is determined to catch this mischievous animal that eats the bait from Billy's traps without ever getting caught.

Soon, the newness of the traps wears off and Billy is back where he started - wanting nothing but hunting hounds. He asks his parents again and they say, "no." He decides to run away, but that decision reverses quickly when Billy hears a wolf in the forest. It is now the opening of hunting season. Sometimes, as Billy is going to bed, he hears a hunter with his hounds out in the forest. The sound of this makes Billy ache, as he longs to be that hunter with those hounds. He even stays up all night listening to the sounds. His sleep is greatly affected and this begins to worry Mama. Papa tells her not to worry as the summer is approaching and Billy is going to help him in the fields and learn how to become a farmer. After all, Billy's father thinks Billy only needs some sunshine and some good exercise. Billy is excited about this new opportunity to be a farmer and to ultimately grow into a man.

Chapter 3

Billy, now eleven, helps his Papa more than ever and in his spare time, he runs down to the campground to collect left-behind items of the fishermen who just fished there. He finds all sorts of things, including knives, cans, and on this particular day, a sporting magazine. Billy sits down and looks through the magazine. In it he finds an advertisement for redbone hunting hounds for sale in Kentucky--just the kind of dogs he wants. They are \$25 each, and even though it is a lot of money, Billy is determined to get two hounds. He says a prayer and asks for God to help him get the pups.

Topic Tracking: Determination 1

He thinks of a plan to save money for the hounds. Billy decides that he will sell things to the fishermen, like crawfish, minnows, and fresh vegetables. He will work in his grandpa's store. With this idea, he looks on the ground for a can to start saving his money in (beginning with the 23 cents in his pocket). He finds a K.C. Baking Powder Can, cleans it, and uses it as a bank.

Two long years go by and Billy is now thirteen. He has been working hard in his grandpa's store, collecting minnows, and berries to save the \$50 needed to buy the dogs.

"Lying back in the soft hay, I folded my hands behind my head, closed my eyes, and let my mind wander back over the two long years. I thought of the fishermen, the blackberry patches, and the huckleberry hills. I thought of the prayer I had said when I asked God to help me get two hound pups. I knew He had surely helped, for He had given me the heart, courage, and determination." Chapter 3, pg. 21

Topic Tracking: Determination 2

After the two years are up, Billy approaches his grandpa, shows him the money, and asks him to help him get the dogs. Grandpa is astonished that Billy managed to save this much money; it brings him to tears and he agrees to help Billy buy the dogs. He tells Billy not to say anything to Papa about the hounds and Billy agrees. Grandpa says he will call about the hounds and let Billy know as soon as he finds out. He gives Billy a large sack of candy. Billy can hardly believe his eyes. He hasn't had candy in a long time. He sucks on the candy and whistles the whole way home, thinking about how wonderful his grandpa is. When he gets home, he shares the candy with his sisters and feels good just seeing how much they appreciate it.

Chapter 4

Billy waits and waits for Grandpa to let him know about the dogs. Finally, he tells Billy that he got a hold of the kennel by mail and he ordered the dogs in Billy's name. It turns out that the price went down \$5 for each dog, so Billy gets \$10 back. He is so excited for his dogs. The only problem is that the mail buggy cannot carry dogs, so Billy will have to pick them up at the mail depot in Tahlequah.

That night Billy goes home and almost spills the news to his family about the dogs. He asks how far away Kentucky is and his parents get suspicious. The next few days go by and Grandpa tells Billy that he knows a man who happens to be riding out to the depot in Tahlequah; Billy can ride with him if he wants. Billy is overjoyed and cannot wait. He becomes so impatient that later that night, he decides to pack some food and get the dogs himself.

Topic Tracking: Determination 3

He runs off that night into the mountains and heads straight for Tahlequah. He keeps the river to his left and the railroad to his right to guide him. Billy is sore from the traveling and rests to eat. His feet are all cut up and he is tired. When he finally arrives in Tahlequah, people stare at him, for he looks disheveled. He is amazed at the shops, people, and merchandise in this big country town; he has never been to a town like this before. At one point, he stops at a shop and stares at his reflection in the window; this is the first time he has ever seen himself. Billy now understands why people looked at him as they did. His hair is long and a mess, his feet are cut up and dirty, and his clothes are messy.

After looking in the store window, Billy thinks of his family. He decides to buy them gifts as a way of making amends for leaving without telling them where he was going. For his sisters and mother, he buys several yards of cloth and a large sack of candy. And for his father, he buys new overalls.

Topic Tracking: Maturity 2

He leaves the store and heads for the depot. Along his way, he passes through a residential section of town. Billy is in awe of all of the beautiful houses, with their different colors and manicured lawns. He passes a school and sees the children outside playing. They are jumping out of what appears to Billy to be a pipe to see who can get the farthest. One child walks up to Billy and asks him if he attends school there. Billy says he does not. He tells them that he lives in the hills and gets schooled at home by his mother. The children laugh at him and call him a "hillbilly." As they start to run towards him, the school bell signals them back. Billy is now alone and feels badly. He tries the pipe out and ends up flying out and landing with a great loud smack. He hears a woman laughing at him; it is an old woman-farmer. He grabs his things, gets up, and heads for the depot. He cannot understand these town people. They either stare or laugh at him.

Chapter 5

Billy arrives at the depot. He is a nervous wreck. The stationmaster sees Billy standing around and approaches him. He tells Billy that he is waiting for a boy from the hills to come and pick up some pups. Billy can hardly stand it because he knows he is that boy. He tells the man he is Billy Colman, the boy from the hills who is supposed to pick up the dogs. The man leads Billy to the back where the dogs are in a box. He takes them out of the box and Billy is so overwhelmed with joy that he cannot even move his feet. He is so filled with love for these pups that he begins to cry.

"I wanted so much to step over and pick them up. Several times I tried to move my feet, but they seemed to be nailed to the floor. I knew the pups were mine, all mine, yet I couldn't move. My heart started aching like a drunk grasshopper. I tried to swallow and couldn't. My Adam's apple wouldn't work. One pup started my way. I held my breath. On he came until I felt a scratchy little foot on mine. The other pup followed. A warm puppy tongue caressed my sore foot. I heard the stationmaster say, "They already know you." I knelt down and gathered them in my arms. I buried my face between their wiggling bodies and cried." Chapter 5, pg. 37

Topic Tracking: Love 1

Billy puts the dogs in his sack and begins to walk back through town. Everyone stares at him again and this makes him feel awful. He does not understand what everyone is laughing and staring at. Some kids his own age gather around him and call him "dog boy." One even steps on his toe and makes it bleed. Then, the boy pulls one of the pup's ears. Billy is outraged. He puts down his sack and punches the boy in the face; the boy falls to his feet, but then the others step in and beat Billy to the ground. They punch and kick him until finally a marshal arrives and helps Billy to his feet. The marshal asks Billy about the pups and Billy explains how he saved money for two years to buy them. The marshal is impressed with Billy's maturity and offers to buy him a soda pop. They walk to a general store and Billy has pop for the first time in his life. He really likes it and appreciates the marshal's kindness.

After the pop, Billy leaves and heads for home. The pups are heavier than Billy thought they would be. At nightfall, Billy sets up camp in a cave. He makes a fire and cooks dinner for himself and the pups (three boiled eggs and the rest of the salt pork). Afterwards, they all have some candy for desert. Lying down, Billy plays with the pups, observing their features and differences. The male is larger, a deeper red, and more aggressive (he goes near the fire, while the female does not). The female pup is very small and powerless, but is smarter than the male dog. Billy is confident that the combination of the two dogs (power and brains) will make for a great hunting team.

In the middle of the night, Billy is awakened by a scream that he says sounds like a woman's scream. He realizes it is a mountain lion and he is scared to death. The dogs wake up and the boy dog goes over to the mouth of the cave and whoops out, as if to compete with the scream of the mountain lion. Then, he rushes back over to the girl

pup, and both pups are scared. Billy rebuilds the fire to keep the lion away; he gets angrier and angrier at the thought of something hurting his pups. He says he is willing to die to protect his dogs. Billy and the dogs sit up the whole night watching the lion, and by morning, the lion finally leaves.

Topic Tracking: Love 2

Chapter 6

Billy makes breakfast for his pups and then they are on their way back home. Billy tries to think of what he will tell Papa and Mama. He decides he will tell them the truth.

Topic Tracking: Maturity 3

Billy arrives at the campground where he first found the magazine with the advertisement for the pups; they rest here for a little while. He tries to think of names for his dogs. He happens to look over at a tree and see the names "Dan" and "Ann" carved in it with a heart around the names. At that instant, Billy knows that is what he wants to call his dogs. He says he will call the male "Old Dan" and the female "Little Ann."

Billy and the dogs finally reach home. He is worried about the reaction his parents will give him, but to his surprise they are delighted to see him. Mama was so worried about him, but happy now that he is finally home. Papa had gone and asked Grandpa about Billy's whereabouts and he told Papa everything. Everyone is so pleased with the pups, especially Billy's sisters. Then, Papa finds the gifts Billy purchased in town. Mama and the girls are delighted. Now, Mama can make a new dress and the girls can eat the candy. Papa and Billy talk about town and how busy it is. Billy tells them about his experiences in town with the young boys, the marshal, and the soda pop. Papa asks him if he liked it and Billy says that he didn't. Papa then goes on and explains that the town, not the hills, is a good place to raise a family; the town offers a good education, something that the hills do not. Mama and Papa hope to some day be able to move to town, because they cannot bear the thought of their children not going to a real school and not ever drinking soda pop. It is late and everyone gets ready for bed.

The next morning, Billy makes a doghouse for his pups. Papa helps him make two collars for the dogs. Billy carves the names "Old Dan" and "Little Ann" in them. That night Billy tells Mama about how he prayed to God for the pups. She asks him if he thinks God heard his prayer, and he says that he knows God did and he will always be thankful.

Chapter 7

Now that Billy has his pups, he wants a coon skin to train them how to hunt. He goes to Grandpa for advice on how to catch a coon and Grandpa tells him an old trick that he used to do when he was a boy. He used a brace and bit; the coon would stick his hand inside the brace to pick up something shiny (like a piece of a tin can) and then the coon's enclosed fist would be too big to pull it out of the brace. The coon was too stupid to drop the object and then just pull his hand through. Billy thinks Grandpa is joking with him, but finally, Billy sees he is serious. Billy makes fourteen traps just like Grandpa said and sets them all. The next morning, he is almost positive there will be coons caught in the traps, but there aren't. Billy asks Papa why and Papa says that the coons probably smelled Billy. Papa suggests that Billy wait a few more days for his scent to be gone and then to check. Billy does this and still there are no coons. He waits a week, and still, no coons. He is very discouraged. Papa encourages Billy to look at the traps again and sure enough, his first coon is in one of the traps. He is overcome with excitement.

Billy brings his dogs with him to check the traps. When Old Dan sees the coon, he immediately tries to go at it. Little Ann goes towards the coon as well. The coon grabs Old Dan and starts biting and clawing him; Little Ann comes from behind the coon, bites him on his neck, and sets Old Dan free. The dogs are hurt and whimpering. Old Dan's nose is split open and bleeding. Billy picks them both up and they run back to the house. He shouts and causes a ruckus outside. Mama, Papa, and Billy's sisters all come running outside because they think something happened; Mama thinks Billy was bitten by a snake. Everything settles down and Billy explains that he just caught the biggest coon on the river. They all go to get the coon. Papa kills it and the girls and Mama turn away. They go home and Papa skins the coon for Billy. Papa tells Billy that the younger the dogs are, the better they are for training. Billy decides to start training the very next day.

Billy's oldest sister helps him to start training the dogs. They drag the coon skin all over the place and the dogs chase after it, as if it is a real coon. Billy learns that his dogs do not like water; in fact, they are afraid of it. Even though it is difficult, he is determined to teach them how to swim: "I had a time with this part of their training, but my persistence had no bounds." Chapter 7, pg. 67 Soon, the dogs begin to love the water.

Topic Tracking: Determination 4

Billy continues to train his dogs all through the summer into the fall. He listens to Grandpa and the other coon hunters tell tales about their hunting adventures. Billy listens intently. Hunting season is just a few days away and Billy and his dogs are ready. He lets them rest so they will be ready for opening day. He is so happy with his dogs. He says that they have a way of communicating all on their own, but even so, Billy understands them:

"Although they couldn't talk in my terms, they had a language of their own that was easy to understand. Sometimes I would see the answer in their eyes, and again it would

be in the friendly wagging of their tails. Other times I could hear the answer in a low whine or feel it in the soft caress of a warm flicking tongue. In some way, they would always answer." Chapter 7, pg. 68

Topic Tracking: Love 3

Chapter 8

Opening day for hunting season is here and Billy gets ready for the big night of hunting. Papa tells him that he can hunt during hunting season all he wants because he doesn't need much help with farming at this time of year. Mama is worried about Billy being out in the woods all alone at night, but Papa assures her that everything will be fine, as Billy is practically a man.

Old Dan and Little Ann are all ready for hunting. They are waiting for Billy on the porch steps to leave. Mama, Papa, and Billy's sisters wave goodbye and Billy and his dogs begin their first night of hunting.

The dogs run off on the trail. Billy follows behind and listens intently to the sounds around him. Finally, he hears Old Dan and Little Ann barking. Billy knows they found a coon. He is so overcome with excitement that he starts to cry. He whoops back at them and goes after his dogs. When he finally gets to them, he sees that they lost the coon because it probably jumped into the water. The dogs were too frightened to go in after it. Billy will not help his dogs because he wants them to do it for themselves. He tells them to remember their training. And with that, Little Ann jumps into the river. Old Dan follows her and they are once again on the trail of the coon. The coon tricks them and crosses the river again. Just as Billy tells his dogs to forget about the coon and that they can hunt somewhere else, Little Ann darts off into the brush after the coon. Old Dan follows after her and they are again on the hunt. Billy hears that the dogs got the coon up a tree (this means Billy can finally get the coon). However, when he finally arrives at the tree, he sees it is the biggest, and well-known sycamore tree in the woods. There is no way Billy can climb this tree to get the coon out of it. But, Old Dan and Little Ann will not stop barking at the coon in the tree.

Billy starts to cut the tree down. It is a tremendous task, but his dogs keep him motivated. Little Anne licks the sweat off of Billy's face and Old Dan checks Billy's work from time to time. Billy chops into the night and by sun-up, he needs sleep. He is awakened by the sounds of Papa's voice. Papa finds Billy and tells him that Mama and he were concerned when Billy didn't come home. He suggests that Billy leaves the tree and finds a smaller one to chop down, but Billy will not hear of it. He insists on chopping this tree down.

Topic Tracking: Love 4

"I thought about that, Papa," I said, "but I made a bargain with my dogs. I told them that if they would put one in a tree, I'd do the rest. Well, they fulfilled their part of the bargain. Now it's up to me to do my part, and I'm going to, Papa. I'm going to cut it down. I don't care if it takes me a year." Chapter 8, pg. 80

Topic Tracking: Determination 5

Topic Tracking: Maturity 4

Papa asks Billy if he wants to go home and eat some breakfast. Meanwhile, Papa will stay and chop the tree. Billy declines the offer; he made the promise to his dogs and he is going to fulfill that promise. Papa is proud of Billy and his commitment to his word, even if it is to two dogs. Papa leaves and around lunchtime, Billy's sister arrives with a basket of food. She thinks he is crazy to think he can chop down a tree that size. Billy doesn't care what she says. He chases her out of the woods with a stick. He is starved and he eats like never before. There are even some scraps for the dogs. After lunch, Billy is reenergized; he continues to chop and his dogs watch his every move.

Chapter 9

Billy is exhausted from chopping. His muscles ache and as he is just about ready to give up, he hears Grandpa coming in his buggy. Grandpa tells Billy that he needs to eat and rest if he is going to chop down that tree. Billy says he cannot leave the tree or else the coon will get out. Grandpa shows Billy an old trick so that he is able to leave the tree and still keep the coon in it. Together, they make a scarecrow. The coon will think it is a real man and be too frightened to get down out of the tree. Billy is thrilled, and as they begin to leave to go home, Old Dan is reluctant. He wants to stay by the tree. Grandpa and Billy are pleased with his determination to catch the coon. Grandpa says he is a real coon hound.

They arrive home and eat a delicious meal of chicken and dumplings. Mama has been so worried about Billy and does not like his hunting at all. Papa assures her everything will be fine. Grandpa tells Billy of a new fad he heard about in New England where everyone is wearing coonskin coats. Billy gets excited because this means the price of coonskins will go up and Billy could make a lot of money if he catches a lot of coonskins.

The next morning, Billy wakes up from a sound sleep. He still aches, but is ready to head back out to the tree. Just as breakfast is being put on the table, they hear the sound of Little Ann. She is on the porch whimpering and Old Dan is not with her. She signals that he is in the woods. They are all amazed at both of the dogs - Old Dan for his determined nature to go back to the tree and Little Ann for her smarts and consideration to come and get Billy. Billy darts out into the woods immediately looking for Old Dan. He finds him right where he thought he would be - by the big tree. Just as Billy is about to scold Little Ann for not being as committed to watching the coon as Old Dan, he looks and sees two beds in the leaves. He realizes that Old Dan was not out all night alone. Little Ann was with him and she had returned home to get Billy. Billy is so pleased with his dogs.

Billy starts to chop the tree again. His hands are sore and he wants to quit, but he doesn't. His hands have blisters and when they pop, the pain is too much to bear. Old Dan and Little Ann lick Billy's sores and snuggle up against him. Billy feels badly about quitting because he feels like he would have killed the tree for nothing, and he knows that is not right.

Topic Tracking: Determination 6

Topic Tracking: Maturity 5

He asks God to give him the strength to chop down the tree. As he turns around to finish the job, he hears a crackling sounds and sees the top of the tree starting to blow in the wind. All of the other trees around the big tree are steady - not a movement among one of them. Billy knows that it is time for the tree to fall. It finally falls and Old Dan darts after the coon. He bangs into a log and is hurt. Little Ann goes after the coon and wrestles with it. Just as she is about to lose the fight, Old Dan comes back in to

help her. Together, they catch their first coon. Billy is thrilled. They go home and show everyone. Mama is still worried about Billy's safety, but again, Papa assures her everything will be fine.

Later, when Billy and Papa are skinning the coon to put on the smokehouse wall, Billy asks Papa about the wind. Billy knows that it wasn't just any wind that blew the tree over. He knows that his prayer was answered and that he was helped by God.

Chapter 10

Mama makes Billy a cap out of his first coonskin and he goes "coon crazy". He hunts for coons almost every night and hangs all the skins on the smokehouse for all the passersby to see. He is making a lot of money and he gives it all to Papa. Billy thinks Papa is saving it for something, but he doesn't know for what. Billy spends some time in Grandpa's store because he brings the skins to the store to be sold. Grandpa always marks down things and Billy wonders what he is marking down, but Grandpa doesn't tell him. He says that he has his reasons. Billy enjoys going to the store because he can get into conversations with the adult coon hunters. They all share tales of their adventures. The only time Billy doesn't like the hunters is when they poke fun of his dogs. They say that Little Ann is scrawny. This infuriates Billy, but he doesn't show it: *"I always took their kidding with a smile on my face, but it made my blood boil like the water in Mama's teakettle."* Chapter 10, pg. 102

Topic Tracking: Maturity 6

Topic Tracking: Love 5

Billy goes on to describe Old Dan and Little Ann. Old Dan is tough, aggressive, and friendly. Old Dan is friendly with anyone; he also cares greatly for Little Ann. When she gets hurt, he is always by her side. Little Ann is a good girl. She is smart and helps Mama catch chickens. She also gets Old Dan out of predicaments. She will not have any puppies, as her birth did not allow for her to; she was the runt of the litter. Billy relates one tale of a hunt where Old Dan and Little Ann really worked together to get the coon. Seeing Old Dan run to help Little Ann made Billy's heart fill with pride. They chase the coon all over the woods and up and down the river. Finally, Billy sees Little Ann whimpering and he runs to see what is the matter. Old Dan is nowhere in sight. Little Ann digs a hole and this clues Billy in to the fact that Old Dan is underground in a muskrat hole. Nervous, Billy runs home and gets a shovel to dig Old Dan out. When he gets him out, Old Dan is covered in mud. Billy cleans him off and sets him loose again. Together, him and Little Ann finally get the coon.

Billy then relates another hunting tale. Old Dan and Little Ann were chasing a coon when they finally treed it. Old Dan climbed up the tree through a hole, but was now stuck. He couldn't jump or he would break his legs. Billy climbs the tree and pushes Old Dan back down the hole. He doesn't want to go down because he wants to get the coon. He tries to climb up the hole again but Billy reaches the ground and grabs his tail just as he is about to go in the hole. The coon finally comes out and Old Dan gets it. Billy and his dogs head for home.

Chapter 11

Billy tells a story of when Little Ann needed Old Dan's help. After a few days of sitting inside during a bad blizzard, Billy cannot stand it anymore and decides to go out for a hunt with his dogs. It is slippery and foggy and Papa and Mama warn Billy to be careful. He starts the hunt and soon he hears his dogs whooping; he knows they are on the trail of a coon. Old Dan and Little Ann chase the coon around the river bottoms and all the way back to the house. Mama, Papa, and Billy's sister's are shouting with joy. Soon enough, the coon is back in the bottoms and the dogs are right behind him. After a while, there is silence; Billy can no longer hear the sounds of his dogs and he knows that something is desperately wrong. He finally hears a long moan from Old Dan. Billy follows the sound and arrives at the terrible scene. The dogs chased the coon over the river. Old Dan made the jump, but Little Ann fell through the ice. Billy holds out his lantern over the river to see through the fog and he sees Old Dan sitting on the ice next to Little Ann, who is in the water and holding onto the ice with her claws. The scene is too much for Billy to bear and he doesn't know what to do. He cannot go out onto the ice because he will fall through. He feels hopeless and just cries: *"I opened my mouth to call Old Dan. I wanted to tell him to come on and we'd go home as there was nothing we could do. The words just wouldn't come out. I couldn't utter a sound."* Chapter 11, pg. 117

Billy says a prayer and asks God to help him. Just when he thinks all hope is lost, Billy gets an idea. He takes the handle off of his lantern, stretches it out, and bends the end so that it forms a hook. He checks to see how deep the water is by the bank. It is only 18 inches - he can make it. He takes off his clothes, wades into the water, and makes his way out to Little Ann. When the water is finally up to his chin and he can go no further, he starts to "fish" for Little Ann's collar with the lantern handle. He eventually hooks it and pulls her out of the water. Billy starts to make his way back out of the water, but it is difficult because his whole body is numb. When he finally makes it out of the water, he dresses and builds a big fire. He and Old Dan revive Little Ann, as the cold water froze her body into a temporary state of paralysis. Billy feels good and knows she will live.

Topic Tracking: Love 6

Billy is so thankful for his lantern. He promises to keep it clean and rust-free forever. He goes home and does not mention any of what happened to his parents. He does not want to worry them. When he comes down with a cold for the next couple of days, he tells Mama that he just got his feet wet. Again, Billy asks Mama about God and if he answers everyone's prayers. Mama tells him that He only answers the ones that come from the heart. Mama is proud of Billy asking a question like that and kisses him all over. Billy is disgusted with her kisses because he says that a Mama shouldn't kiss a "coon hunter" like that. He leaves the house to check on his dogs.

Chapter 12

Billy's dogs become known as the best hunting hounds in the Ozarks. Grandpa brags to everyone about Billy and his dogs. One day, Mama asks Billy to go to the mill to get some corn ground. Upon Billy's arrival at Grandpa's store, he runs into Rubin and Rainie Pritchard. They are boys with a bad reputation and no one likes them. They bet Billy two dollars that his hounds cannot catch a coon that has been running around in their part of the country for years. They call him the ghost coon. They also think that their dog is better than Billy's and that the reputation of Billy's dogs is just a bunch of lies. Grandpa encourages Billy to agree to the bet and he does. He gives Billy the money to hold on to. The boys agree to meet tomorrow night up by the Pritchards' part of the country. Grandpa tells Billy how badly he wants him to catch that coon and Billy knows he will. Billy thinks his Grandpa is the best grandfather a boy could have.

Billy goes home and decides not to tell Mama about the bet because she would be mad at Billy for having anything to do with the Pritchard boys. The next night, Billy arrives at the meeting place. He has a talk with his dogs about how much he loves them and how much the bet means to him and Grandpa. The Pritchard boys arrive and Old Dan and Little Ann start the hunt. They are immediately on the trail of the ghost coon. The Pritchard boys tell Billy to just give up, as no dog has ever treed the coon, but Billy refuses: *"I told them I wasn't giving up until my dogs did."* Chapter 12, pg. 133

Topic Tracking: Determination 7

They follow the sounds of the dogs to a place where a tree had fallen into the river. It is hanging on a slant from the bank ten feet up. Billy looks and sees Little Ann making her way down the log. Billy knows she is on the trail and trying to pick up the scent. Within seconds, the biggest coon Billy has ever seen jumps out and over Little Ann's head. She chases after it in the big tangle of roots, limbs, and logs. Soon, Old Dan jumps in and runs right after her. They are all running up and down the river bottoms with Billy and the Pritchard boys following behind. At one point Billy looks over and sees Rainie. He is excited and having a good time, not like the miserable boy he usually is. This makes Billy feel good. The sounds of Old Dan's bark signals that he has treed the coon, but Rubin warns that once the coon goes into this particular tree, he disappears, hence the name - ghost coon. Rainie tells Billy to take his money out, for the bet is just as good as over, but Billy knows it is not over yet.

Chapter 13

The boys and the dogs are at the tree where the ghost coon supposedly ran up, but the coon is nowhere in sight. Rubin and Rainie bade Billy to give up, but he won't. He won't give up until his dogs give up and Little Ann is still sniffing around the fence that is behind the tree. Billy climbs the tree twice, but cannot find the coon. It just seems to have disappeared. He climbs down and finally gives up; he give the two dollars over to Rubin. Seconds later, a breeze blows and Little Ann whoops; she caught a smell of the coon's scent from the breeze. Little Ann goes over to the gate post. Now, Billy realizes that the coon is inside the post. He pokes it with a stick and the coon runs out. The dogs chase him back up the tree. As Billy climbs the tree to finally kill the coon, something happened inside of him that changes his mind:

"As I sat there on the limb, looking at the old fellow, he cried again. Something came over me. I didn't want to kill him. I hollered down and told Rubin I didn't want to kill the ghost coon. He hollered back, 'Are you crazy?' I told him I wasn't crazy. I just didn't want to kill him. I climbed down. Rubin was mad. He said, 'What's the matter with you?' 'Nothing,' I told him. 'I just don't have the heart to kill the coon.'" Chapter 13, pg. 141-2

Topic Tracking: Maturity 7

The boys hear a noise in the distance. It is the Pritchards' dog, a big blue tick hound. Old Dan and the dog growl at each other and Billy warns Rubin to take the dog away before the two dogs get into a fight. Rubin refuses; he says that his dog can take of himself and Billy is the one that should be worried about his own dog getting hurt. Billy asks for his money back, as he did tree the coon and after all, that is what the bet was for. Rubin refuses and insists that the bet was for Billy to kill the coon. Rubin wrestles Billy to the ground and warns him not to mention any of this to his grandfather. As they are struggling, Rainie yells out that Billy's dogs are killing his dog. Rubin grabs Billy's ax and runs over to the dog fight, which involves Old Dan and Little Ann tearing the Pritchards' dog up alive. He is going to kill Billy's dogs. Billy quickly runs after him and trips him by putting a stick between his legs. He runs over to the dog fight to try and break it up. The Pritchard dog is just about lifeless and Little Ann will not give up her grip on the dog's neck. Billy manages to get Old Dan away, but Little Ann will not stop. Billy calls Rainie over for help, but Rainie is standing over Rubin. He will not come over to help Billy, nor will he answer Billy. He is just standing there paralyzed with fear over what he sees on the ground.

After Billy gets both of his dogs away, he ties them to the fence and walks over to Rainie. Rainie runs away and disappears into the darkness. Billy looks down and sees the awful sight. When Rubin fell on the ground, he fell on the ax - it went into his stomach. Rubin asks Billy to take it out and he does. The blood gushes everywhere, even on Billy's hands. Blood comes out of Rubin's mouth and Billy knows he is dead. Billy looks up into the tree and sees the ghost coon. Even though everything happened because of the coon, Billy feels no hatred towards him, and he is not sorry that he didn't kill him. He thinks of his mother and wants to go home.



Billy goes home, wakes his parents up, and tells them everything. Papa gets out of bed and immediately goes to get Grandpa. Grandpa is the only person with the authority to move the body. Papa is gone all of the next day and Billy waits impatiently for his return. When he finally returns, he tells Billy about Rubin. He and Grandpa got Rubin and met the Pritchard family as they were on their way to their house with Rubin's body. Papa tried to explain what happened the best he could. The Pritchard family is going to take care of everything. Rainie is in a bad state of shock and may need to see a doctor in town. Billy feels so badly about what happened. He keeps having nightmares and cannot get Rubin's face out of his mind. He wants to do something, but he doesn't know what. He talks to Mama and she says that some people, like the Pritchards, just don't want to be bothered. Billy tells her that he thinks it is dangerous to have an ax while hunting and so he is going to get a gun. Mama gets furious with this idea and forbids it.

Billy leaves the house with some old, fake flowers his sisters had made a while back. He walks all the way upriver to where the Pritchards live with his dogs trailing behind him. He arrives at the fresh grave, and puts the flowers there, carefully, so that no one in the house will hear him. On his way out, he accidentally kicks loose a large rock. The noise alerts the blue tick hound and he starts barking. Mrs. Pritchard comes out of the house and looks around, but she doesn't see Billy. She sees the flowers on the grave, and walks back towards the house with tears in her eyes. Billy feels better now and makes his way home. He promises his dogs to take them out hunting that night.

Topic Tracking: Maturity 8

Chapter 14

Billy walks to Grandpa's store. Grandpa tells Billy how sorry he is to hear about Rubin's death. He thinks it is his fault, but Billy assures him that it was no one's fault. Grandpa really called Billy to the store to show him the newspaper. In it is an advertisement for a championship coon hunt. The winner receives a gold cup. Grandpa wants Billy to enter with Old Dan and Little Ann; Billy is overjoyed just thinking about it. Grandpa has already paid the entry fee and has taken care of everything. Billy just has to show up with his dogs. The hunt is in six days; Grandpa tells Billy to head home and make sure the dogs rest up for these next few days. He also tells him to meet back at the store on the morning of the fifth day and they will drive his buggy to where the contest starts. Grandpa tells Billy to invite his father as well. He gives Billy a sack of candy and tells him to share it with his sisters. Billy is thrilled.

Billy makes his way home, enjoying the clear sounds of nature the whole way. He is in a state of bliss over the thought of the contest and he reflects on all that has happened to him over these past couple of years:

"As I skipped along, it was hard for me to realize all the wonderful things that had happened to me in such a few short years. I had two of the finest little hounds that ever bawled on the trail of a ringtail coon. I had a wonderful mother and father and three little sisters. I had the best grandpa a boy ever had, and to top it all, I was going on a championship coon hunt. It was no wonder that my heart was bursting with happiness. Wasn't I the luckiest boy in the world?" Chapter 14, pg. 160-1

Topic Tracking: Love 7

Billy makes it home and tells everyone about the coon hunt. They are all excited and Papa agrees to go. Billy has been so wrapped up in his hunting that he did not even notice that Mama is pregnant. He feels badly and goes up to her and kisses her. Billy's youngest sister asks him to give the gold cup to her if he wins it and he agrees to. The next few days are filled with excitement for Billy; he can hardly sleep. He helps get things together for Mama, considering he and Papa will be gone for a few days. He also talks to his dogs about the hunt.

Papa and Billy walk to the store. They talk about the dogs. Billy tells Papa that Little Ann is gun-shy. Whenever she hears a gun, she runs to Billy, shaking all over with fright. They finally make it to the store and Grandpa is all ready to go. The groceries are packed and the buggy is ready. Billy just has to get some hay to make a bed for his dogs. Grandma comes outside and makes sure Grandpa has everything he needs. She kisses Billy goodbye and they leave.

Chapter 15

Grandpa, Papa, and Billy make their way to the campgrounds. They stop at night and set up a place to eat and sleep. Grandpa prepares dinner and Billy and Papa set up places for them to sleep, including beds for the dogs. Grandpa insists on feeding the dogs good food to keep them healthy for the big hunt. He makes them corned-beef hash. Old Dan waits for Little Ann to get her share before he eats his. Grandpa is astonished at how the dogs do everything together. Papa tells the story of how one time he saw the girls throw two biscuits out to Old Dan; Old Dan picked them both up and took them to the doghouse where Little Ann was so she could have one as well.

They all eat dinner and Billy drinks coffee like a man. He is pleased that Papa and Grandpa let him drink the coffee. That night Billy can't sleep, as he is excited about the hunt. He also hears all the noises of nature around him. At one point, he sits straight up because he thinks he hears two screech owls, which is a superstition that says bad luck is coming. He wakes Grandpa up, but he assures Billy that there will be no bad luck. Billy feels better once he convinces himself that it was probably just one owl that flew over to another tree.

The next morning, they pack up and leave. They drive farther along, looking for the flag. The flag signals that they should turn off the main road. Billy sees the flag first. Driving off the main road, they see smoke rising and know it is the campgrounds, where the hunt is to start. After setting up the tent, Billy goes for a walk around the grounds to look around. He can't get over how many people, cars, and hounds are there. All the dogs are good-looking, clean hounds and Billy is impressed. He hears someone mention that he must be the boy with the red hounds. He is swollen with pride. Grandpa informs Billy of the beauty contest in the morning and asks him which dog he is going to enter. Billy doesn't think he will enter either dog because compared to everyone else's dogs, his are small. Also, Billy's dogs don't look like the other dogs in that they all have nice, leather collars and have the finest combs and oils for their fur. He says he will think it over and decide in the morning.

In the morning, he decides to enter Little Ann into the beauty contest. Old Dan has too many scars and bruises from always getting into fights. Billy goes to find Grandpa and Papa to tell them he will enter Little Ann, but they aren't around. Billy looks down and sees Grandpa's combs sitting out. He takes them and along with some butter, combs and smoothes Little Ann's fur; until she looks perfect. Billy walks over to the long table where all the contestants are with their dogs. Judges start eliminating dogs, and after a while, there is only Little Ann and one other dog left. Billy is overjoyed and his heart is pounding. He can't believe she made it this far. The judges can't decide, so Billy and Mr. Kyle, the owner of the other dog, both go to one end of the table and call their dogs over to them. This is 'the walk', and the judges will decide on a winner depending on which dog walks more gracefully. Mr. Kyle's dog starts to walk down the table, but then jumps off. Billy is worried that Little Ann will do the same, but instead she stuns the crowd:

"As graceful as any queen, with her head high in the air, and her long red tail arched in a perfect rainbow, my little dog walked down the table. With her warm gray eyes staring straight at me, on she came. Walking up to me, she laid her head on my shoulder. As I put my arms around her, the crowd exploded." Chapter 15, pg. 178

Little Ann wins a small silver cup. Billy is so proud of his dog, he cries.

That evening, the rules are given for the hunt. The hunt will start tonight. Each night, five sets of hounds will go out, each with a judge. Whichever set of hounds catches the most coon skins by morning will be declared the winner of that particular night, and will go on to the final runoff in a few days. Each person is allowed to bring an ax, a lantern, and a gun. There will be five nights of hunting and each hunter will draw a card to see which night he will go. Billy draws and sees he is to go on the fourth night.

That night, the hunters not in the contest for that night sit around and drink coffee and tell stories while they listen to the hounds hunting. Billy feels a bit out of place in his old shoes and clothes, but the hunters treat him just like any other man. By morning, two blue tick hounds came out ahead with treeing three coons. The next morning, no one beat those blue ticks, so all five sets were eliminated. And by the third morning, two black and tan hounds were tied with the blue tick hounds. On that morning, Billy sees Grandpa take his comb out of his bag. Just as Grandpa is about to say something about the hair and grease, Billy slips out of the tent. He knows Grandpa isn't mad at him, but he doesn't want to be around him at the moment. Billy feeds Old Dan and Little Ann. One hunter comes up to him and asks him if it is true that his dogs have really treed six coons in one night. Billy knows this is not true, because his dogs have only treed three coons in one night. He knows that it is just Grandpa bragging and exaggerating a little bit.

Chapter 16

The judge introduces himself and then Billy, Papa, and Grandpa head downriver with Old Dan and Little Ann to begin the hunt.

The dogs tree their first coon and everyone is excited, especially Grandpa. He runs so fast that he gets caught in the brush, losing his glasses and hat in the process. They skin the coon and move on to their next coon. The next coon leads everyone across the river, where Grandpa falls in. The dogs catch the coon, it is skinned, and a fire is made. Grandpa sits by the fire and dries off. Seconds later, Old Dan darts off with Little Ann. They are on the trail of their third coon. The judge, Billy, Papa, and Grandpa make their way over to where Old Dan is barking "treed," but when they get there, there is no coon. The coon appears to have pulled a trick on the dogs. The judge and Grandpa suggest going somewhere else to hunt, as this coon seems to have fooled the dogs, but Billy insists they stay. He is very confident in his dogs:

"Regardless of all the discouraging talk, the love and belief I had in my little red hounds never faltered. I could see them now and then, leaping over old logs, tearing through the underbrush, sniffing and searching for the lost trail. My heart swelled with pride. I whooped, urging them on." Chapter 16, pg. 188

Topic Tracking: Love 8

Topic Tracking: Determination 8

Papa and Billy are nervous because daylight is approaching and that means the night of hunting will soon come to an end. Within seconds, they hear the bark of Little Ann. She treed the third coon. Billy says to wait for Old Dan to get to her so the coon won't be tempted to jump out of the tree. They catch and skin their third and final coon of the night. The judge explains how the coon was so tricky. The coon climbed the tree and then swung from branch to branch all the way down through the river bottoms. He says that he has never seen anything like Billy's dogs before and he thinks Billy has a good chance of winning the cup. Billy is so proud of Little Ann, but the words can't even come out because of the lump in his throat.

They all go back to the campground, where they are greeted with cheers from the other hunters. Apparently, they had seen Little Ann and Old Dan chasing the coon all the way through the campground and said it was absolutely beautiful. Billy can barely sleep from Grandpa's snoring, so he leaves the tent to sleep in between Old Dan and Little Ann. The next day, there are only three sets of hounds left in the runoff. Billy's dogs are one of them and the final competition will be tonight. The hunters are taking bets and collecting a jackpot for the winner to give along with the gold cup. A hunter comes up to Billy's family and tells them that all of the hunters are rooting for Billy, but that he has a lot of competition, for he will be going up against four of the best hounds there are. Papa assures the hunter that anything is possible, even for little dogs.



Grandpa and Billy discuss where to hunt for the coons that night. They agree to go to the swamp, as it is directly in between the mountains and the river. Billy, Papa, Grandpa, and the judge arrive at the swamp with the dogs. Billy sets them loose and he can tell that they know how important this hunt is. In minutes, the dogs are barking "treed." Everyone runs over to see and before they know it the coon heads straight for the river. The dogs jump in the river and get into a fight with the coon. Papa goes to shoot his gun, but Billy grabs it for fear that he will accidentally shoot one of his dogs. Finally, after the wrestling match in the water, the coon runs out and Old Dan catches it just as it is about to climb a tree. The coon is skinned. The judge is in awe over Little Ann licking Old Dan's cut on his ears. Billy is not surprised at all; he says they always do that, and when she is finished, he will lick her cuts. The dogs finish cleaning each other and then walk away into the darkness. Everyone follows.

Chapter 17

A bad storm is approaching and everyone thinks they should turn around and head back for the buggy except Billy. He hears that his dogs are on the trail of a coon and wants to go forward. It starts to sleet and the judge, Papa, and Grandpa want to turn back. Billy insists on looking for his dogs; he refuses to leave them out in the storm because he knows that Old Dan would die before he came inside from a storm: *"I've been out in storms like this before, all by myself. I've never left my dogs in the woods, and I'm not going to now, even if I have to look for them myself."* Chapter 17, pg. 199

Topic Tracking: Love 9

Papa agrees to go look for the dogs with Billy, and the judge and Grandpa follow behind them. They slip and fall all over the place as the sleet is piling up. Billy gets the idea for Papa to fire his gun. He thinks if Little Ann hears it, it will scare her and she will find Billy. He is right and out of the storm, Little Ann comes running. Billy is so happy to see her. He ties a rope to her and has her lead them to Old Dan. The men think they have gone too far into the woods and start to wonder if Little Ann really knows where she is leading them. Just as the men say they are giving up, Billy prays for Old Dan to bawl one more time and he does. Little Ann leads them right to him. He is covered in ice and bawling "treed." Billy wipes some of the ice away. When he gets back to Papa, he learns that something has happened to Grandpa - he is lost. Little Ann runs away and lets out a loud bawl. She finds Grandpa. He had fallen, twisted his ankle, and gotten knocked unconscious. They all try to revive him and it works. Billy suggests going down into the gully, where they found Old Dan, and building a fire to warm up by. And in the meantime, someone can go for help. Grandpa doesn't like this idea. It is almost morning anyway and he says that someone can go for help when daylight arrives.

They build a large fire and remember the coon. The dogs are at the tree where they left the treed coon, about thirty feet from the fire. Papa, Billy, and the judge go over to the tree and see that it is hollow. Papa decides to cut it down. He needs more wood for the fire anyway, and the coon will probably run out of the tree once it is down. When the tree comes down, three coons run out of it. Old Dan goes after one and Little Ann goes after another. The third coon gets away. When the two coons are finally killed, Papa asks where the third coon went. Billy points into the woods, and with that, Old Dan and Little Ann dart into the woods in search of the third coon. The judge is amazed at how smart they are and how they just read Billy's mind. But Billy cries at the thought of his dogs freezing in this weather. Grandpa assures him that everything will be fine. It is almost daylight and Billy can go and look for them soon. Once the coons are skinned, Billy takes one of the skins, warms it by the fire, and wraps it on Grandpa's sore ankle. Grandpa is thankful.

Chapter 18

The storm is worsening and all Billy wants to do is find his dogs. He hears whooping and realizes it is the other hunters. All of the other hunters came looking for them in the storm. Mr. Kyle takes control of the situation. He tells some of the hunters to make a stretcher for Grandpa and to carry him back to the campground. Meanwhile Mr. Benson appears out of the storm and tells them that he found the dogs; they are covered in ice, but they are alive. Billy starts to cry. Mr. Benson leads the way and they find the dogs. They look like "white wolves," as Billy says. They have a coon treed and it is a good thing, because Billy needs one more coon to win the hunt. Apparently, one of the other teams caught three coons just before quitting because of the storm. The dogs are covered in ice from head to toe and are walking around in a circle, not only to keep the coon from coming out of the tree, but also to keep from freezing to death. They are smart dogs and everyone is impressed. Perhaps they are the most impressed that Old Dan and Little Ann stayed by the tree in a freezing storm. Mr. Benson asks why they would do that and Mr. Kyle answers him:

"Men," said Mr. Kyle, "people have been trying to understand dogs ever since the beginning of time. One never knows what they'll do. You can read every day where a dog saved the life of a drowning child, or lay down his life for his master. Some people call this loyalty. I don't. I may be wrong, but I call it love - the deepest kind of love."

Chapter 18, pg. 214

Topic Tracking: Love 10

One of the hunters shoots the gun and the coon jumps out of the tree. The dogs kill it and the men head back to camp. All of the other hunters are gone and the only tent up is Grandpa's. He is inside resting his ankle and he wants to see Billy's dogs right away. Everyone is in good spirits and finally, the prize is given to Billy. Along with the gold cup, the men collected a three hundred dollar jackpot. Billy is speechless; this is more money than he has ever seen. He hands it over to Papa.

Topic Tracking: Maturity 9

Grandpa goes into town with Dr. Latham. Dr. Latham does not want to wait to treat his ankle. Meanwhile, Papa and Billy drive the buggy home. They promise to take care of Grandpa's store for the night. After stopping at the store, Billy and Papa head straight home. Billy is excited to show off his gold cup.

Billy and Papa arrive home and are greeted by Billy's sisters and Mama. Billy gives the silver cup to his older sisters and the gold cup to his younger sister, just as promised. Mama is glad to have Billy and Papa finally home. When Mama sees the money, the color drains from her face. She is so thankful and says that God answered her prayers.

That night in the house there is a huge celebration. A delicious dinner of ham, fried potatoes, hot corn bread, fresh butter, wild bee honey, and huckleberry cobbler is

served. Papa and Billy share their hunting adventures. Later, when Billy is about to go to sleep, he sees a light in his window. He sees Mama bringing the dogs a huge plateful of food. She pets them and says a prayer. Papa joins her. They are thankful for what the dogs have brought them. Billy hears his parents talking about how Grandpa is going to need help around the store because of his bad ankle. Billy thinks Mama and Papa want him to help Grandpa and that is fine with Billy. He turns over and goes to sleep.

Chapter 19

It is three weeks after the contest, and Billy is still hunting. He takes his dogs out for a hunt and Old Dan immediately finds a trail. Billy follows his dogs. When he arrives at the tree, he notices something is different. Old Dan's fur is sticking up and he stops bawling. Billy knows what is in the tree and this frightens him. It isn't a coon - it is a mountain lion. The lion darts out of the tree at Old Dan. Little Ann jumps into the fight. The lion is tearing them up. Billy cries and jumps into the fight with his ax. Just as the lion is about to attack Billy, Old Dan and Little Ann save him. They put themselves in between the lion and Billy. The fight continues all the way down the mountain. It is a hideous sight. The lion has Old Dan by the throat and Little Ann hangs off of the lion in an attempt to get it off Old Dan's throat. Billy jumps in and smashes his ax right into the back of the lion. It releases its grip from Old Dan's neck. At this point, Old Dan and Little Ann are cut up badly, but they still try and suck the life out of the cat. Slowly, the cat loses its life, but Old Dan still will not let go. Billy sits down to pull himself together. He looks at the ax covered in blood and can't help but think of Rubin Pritchard. He says that in all evil there is a little bit of good.

Topic Tracking: Maturity 10

Billy finally pulls Old Dan away from the lion. He inspects both Old Dan and Little Ann's wounds. Little Ann is ok, except for one long cut in her shoulder. Old Dan is bleeding from wounds all over the place. Billy thinks he is bleeding to death. He mixes some of Old Dan's blood with some dirt and patches up his wounds so as to stop the bleeding. Billy finds his lantern and gets his bearings. He thanks his dogs for saving his life:

"I knelt down and put my arms around them. I knew that if it hadn't been for their loyalty and unselfish courage I would have probably been killed by the slashing claws of the devil cat. 'I don't know how I'll ever pay you back for what you've done,' I said, 'but I'll never forget it.'" Chapter 19, pg. 230

Topic Tracking: Love 11

They start to make their way home, but along the way Billy hears a cry. It is Old Dan. Billy and Little Ann run back to find him. The sight is too much for Billy to take. Old Dan's entrails are out of his deep wound and they are entangled in the brush. Billy helps him free and wraps him up. He leaves his ax and lantern behind and carries Old Dan home. Mama doctors the dogs' wounds. Billy tells everyone what happened. His sisters are especially upset. When he tells them that the dogs saved his life, Mama can't stand it anymore. She can't stand knowing how close Billy came to death. They are all worried about the dogs and wonder if Old Dan is going to die. Papa says that all they can do is wait.

A short while goes by and Old Dan dies. Papa carries him out onto the porch. Billy is shaken up and Mama is so upset she doesn't even know what to say to him. Papa tells him not to think about it too much because he still has Little Ann.



That night Billy decides to sit up. He can't sleep anyway. He hears a whimpering sound and thinks it is Old Dan. But when he goes out onto the porch to see, he sees Little Ann lying next to Old Dan. She has never slept apart from him. The sight is too much for Billy to bear and he runs down through the fields as far as he can until he falls and hits his face on the river's bank. He cries until he can't cry anymore and when he finally wakes up, it is morning. Billy goes home and prepares a box to bury Old Dan in. Papa offers to help, but Billy wants to do it by himself. He buries Old Dan up on the hillside where beautiful wild mountain flowers will grow in the spring. He also chooses the spot because from this hillside, a view of the whole countryside can be seen. Billy thinks that maybe on moonlit nights, Old Dan will be able to hear the baying of hunting hounds. Billy sits down at his grave and thinks back to all of the memories. He says that it was worth it and in the grave is man's best friend.

Two days later, Mama tells Billy to find Little Ann because she hasn't been eating. He finds her under a blackberry bush and the life is almost drained out of her. Billy tries pouring liquid down her throat but it does no good; she has no will to live without Old Dan. Billy is miserable. He lays Little Ann on the porch where he laid Old Dan. That night, she leaves and goes to Old Dan's grave. Billy runs there and finds her dead with her head on his grave. She used the last ounce of energy to drag herself up the hill. Billy cries. He doesn't understand why this had to happen to his dogs. Mama comes to the grave and consoles Billy. Papa calls them to the house. Supper is ready and Mama tells Billy that they should leave. Billy feels badly about leaving Little Ann, so he makes a bed of leaves for her and will come back to bury her in the morning.

Billy and Mama go back to the house. Papa tries to make Billy understand that he needs to be a man now. He tells him that everything happens for a reason. Papa goes into the bedroom and when he comes out he has Mama's shoe box that she keeps her valuables in. Papa opens the box. With the money from the coonskins and the prize money from the contest, the family now has enough money to move to town and for the children to have a better education. The dogs helped answer Mama's prayers. Papa explains to Billy that when they finally had enough money, they decided to move to town, but because they didn't want to separate Billy from his dogs, they were going to leave him to live with and help take care of Grandpa. Papa says that because God doesn't like to see families separated, he took Billy's dogs away, but it is because of the dogs that they are able to move to town. Billy does not like this explanation.

After dinner, Billy goes to bed, but he doesn't fall asleep. Mama tries to console Billy again, but it is no use. He doesn't fall sleep. Instead, he gets up and stares at the lonely, empty doghouse. Mama comes in only to find Billy crying. She wishes she could do something to help him, but he insists that no one can do anything. He feels badly for making her feel bad, but he just can't help it.

The next morning, he makes a box for Little Ann. His sisters start to help him, but they end up running into the house crying. He buries Little Ann next to Old Dan. Billy finds a stone and carves their names in it. He asks Mama if God has a place in heaven for dogs where they can hunt. She assures Billy that they have much more in heaven than

they do here on earth. Billy cries again, but tells Mama that he feels a little bit better now. Mama is happy to hear this, as she hates to see her son so sad.

Chapter 20

The following spring, Billy and his family move out of the Ozarks. Everyone is in high spirits. Billy goes to see Old Dan and Little Ann's grave one more time before he leaves.

When he gets to their graves, he sees that a wild bush grew over their mounds. At first he is mad and goes to cut it down, but then he realizes something. As he gets closer to the bush, he sees it is a red fern. The red fern sprung up between the two graves and grew out in arches over each mound. Billy is astonished as he recalls the old Indian legend of the red fern. The legend is about a little girl and a little boy who got lost in a blizzard and froze to death. In the spring, when they were found, a beautiful red fern had sprung up between them. The fern is thought to be sacred, as only an angel can plant the seeds, and once they are planted, the fern will never die.

Billy calls Mama over to come and look. Mama, Papa, and the girls rush to see what is the matter. They are all in shock at the red fern, especially Mama. Papa says that maybe this is God's way of helping Billy understand why his dogs died. Billy agrees. They leave Billy alone to say his final goodbye to his dogs. He says goodbye and that he will never forget them or the red fern.

As Papa is driving away, he stops and they all look back at the beautiful sight. They can see the red fern standing tall in the distance. Billy vows to never forget these hills. His sisters cry and they all drive away.

Billy, as an older man, says that he has never been back to the hills, but someday he would like to go back. He would like to walk along the trails once more, to touch a sycamore, to see his house and the barn, to find an ax and a lantern somewhere in those woods, and to see his dogs. He knows the fern is still there and has probably grown completely over the mounds:

"I'm sure the red fern has grown and has completely covered the two little mounds. I know it is still there, hiding its secret beneath those long, red leaves, but it wouldn't be hidden from me for part of my life is buried there too. Yes, I know it is still there, for in my heart I believe the legend of the sacred red fern." Chapter 20, pg. 249