

THE CATS OF CEDAR HOLLOW

*J. W. "Bill" Firey, Jr.
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One day many years ago, a half-starved dog came to our place. He was probably six months old at the time. He was black and white spotted and he was so poor and weak, he could hardly walk. He probably hadn't eaten anything in weeks. I didn't have any dog of my own, so I started feeding the little dog and he soon got fat and pretty. I named him Spot. Spot turned out to be the best little rabbit dog that ever was. I must have been around 14 years old. Now my brother, Kenneth, had a dog which was part hound and was a good hunting dog. We called him Red. We also had a bigger dog and his name was Jack. He was really Dad's dog but Dad never hunted, so we claimed him as our dog because we hunted with him all the time. Of course we lived in the country and had hundreds of acres of land to hunt on. We could hunt for miles around and we hunted and trapped a lot in those days. We hunted wild cottontail rabbits, and fur bearing animals such as skunk, possum, civet cat and coon. We trapped some mink and quite a few muskrat. We would earn money by selling their hides. Kenneth was really a good hunter. Many nights I would get lost and didn't know where we were at. But I never knew of Kenneth ever getting lost at night or any other time. He had a great sense of direction and it always worked for him, even on a dark and foggy night. We would walk for miles over the rough old hills and through the dark hollows with only a dim lantern light to see by. We would hear many strange sounds out there in the night. Some were night birds of some kind, but some of the sounds we didn't know. It may sound a little strange, but we didn't seem to be afraid. Many nights our hunting dogs would come running to us barking, growling, showing their teeth, with their tails tucked between

their legs, and the hair on their backs standing straight up. We both knew there was something big out there in the dark. We were sure it was a panther or cougar because at different times we had seen one now and again crossing the road in front of the car's headlights at night. After Kenneth went into the Coast Guard service, I kept on night hunting by myself. I sure missed Kenneth a lot. He was a much better hunter than I was. After he left, I was always afraid of getting lost on those dark nights, for I had always left knowing where we were to Kenneth. One very dark night I went hunting up a little creek, which led to a place called Cedar Hollow. Now I had been to Cedar Hollow a few times in the daylight, but never at night. It was really a pretty place with a lot of big rocks standing tall in the air. There was a big, tall ledge that went all the way around, except on the east side where I came in from. There was this high bluff on three sides with lots of pretty cedar trees and a little water fall. This is where the creek began. I had our three hunting dogs with me,; old Jack, Red and Spot. It was probably around 11 o'clock at night. I had an old kerosene lantern for my light and a little chopping axe. I was about 3 1/2 or 4 miles from home. I had only walked a little ways in the canyon when I began to smell the odor of a wild animal, like maybe a big cat, panther or cougar. As I walked on up the canyon, the smell got much stronger. About that time, the dogs came running into me. There were terrified with fear. They were barking and growling with their hair on their backs sticking straight up and tails tucked between their legs. I knew then that this must be where the big cats lived and raised their young. I knew I had to get out of there fast. Just about that time I heard the most blood

curdling scream I had ever heard, just a few feet away. Well, that almost did me in, for I was never so afraid in my life! I started running and ran over some big rocks and bushes, fell down and knocked out the light in the lantern. I got the lantern lit again. Then, I heard another blood curdling scream high on the rocks just above me. I was running as fast as I could but it was very rough country out there. The dogs were crazy with fear and so was I. It seemed like it took me forever to get out of that canyon. I soon got into the open field, which was about a quarter of a mile away. A big cat followed me for at least two miles screaming every now and again to let me know they were still out there. Their screams sound a lot like a hysterical, shrill scream of a woman and the sound seems to carry so far out into the night. Finally the big cat did not sound as close to me. I had walked right into where they raise their young, and this was a very dangerous thing to do. I never made that mistake again!

I kept on night hunting in the years that followed, and I heard the big cats' screams at different times off in the distance. I never went back to Cedar Hollow anymore at night.

