

Playing Possum

by Kevin Myrick

If there was one thing Will couldn't stand, it was wildlife rooting around his backyard, driving Roscoe crazy. He'd seen raccoons a number of times hiding in the bushes and shooed them away with a broom. But this later invader, the possum, was another animal entirely. The coons might have been bold, but the possums were smart. They knew when to run and hide and to come back to knock over the trash cans and feast on the smelly leftover Chinese food was when Will was good and drunk and in for the night. He tried leaving the light on, but that did no good. He realized this was going to require cunning and skill - bolder measures - and possibly a B.B. Gun.

Andrea told him he was nuts.

"I'm going to get that son of a gun with my trusty red rider."

"Seriously? You can't kill the possum. He's like our mascot."

"He's going down. Nothing you can do about it."

She mumbled something under her breath about not going down on him, but he ignored it. "I tried to do the right thing!" he yelled back as she took her plate to the sink.

"Your turn to do the dishes," was her only reply before climbing the stairs to the bedroom. She watched TV and fell asleep as he scrubbed the marinara sauce from the pan and thought about the task before him. He had his trusty Red Rider, all primed and oiled and ready to go. He'd practiced in the backyard with freshly drunk beer cans to make sure he could hit the broadside of a barn. Andrea had watched him from the window and shouted out as she chopped onions next to the sink. "You'll shoot his eye out Will."

"Will not!"

"You just wait."

"You're going to have to call me 'dead eye' after I get this possum."

"And you're going to have to sleep on the couch." She slammed the kitchen window shut. He sat in the backyard and finished another beer for target practice. Later he heard the front door slam and her car come to life as she sped away.

"It's just a possum," he said.

The BB's thudded as they pierced holes in the beer cans. He looked over at his previous, humane attempt to get the possum that sat on the ground empty. He'd trapped two cats, but no possum. The beast with its rat tail and beady eyes taunted him every night and left him a mess to clean up in the morning, even though he left well cooked beer can chicken inside the trap on a plate. The Allendale Animal Control people wanted their trap back, and they would get it. That's why he got the pellet rifle.

He sat outside with a folding chair and the cooler of beer and picked off the cans throughout the evening. His neighbor Doobie Brother came over with a beer in his hand and asked what he was up to out here in the dark with a rifle.

"It's not a rifle Doobie, it's a Red Rider single action carbine rifle."

Doobie snorted and laughed. "What the heck does that mean?"

"You ain't ever seen A Christmas Story when they show it all day on TBS at Christmas?"

"Nah man, I don't like them movies."

Will took a swig of beer, threw the can in the yard and popped it with the gun when it landed. "I'm getting pretty good at this," he said.

He reloaded and took another shot. Doobie laughed as the can rolled across the yard when Will hit his target.

"Don't be pointin' that thing near me," he said. "You're liable to shoot my eye out."

"The only thing whose getting a BB in the eye is that dang possum back here," Will said. "Its gonna die my friend."

"What, you mean that possum?" Doobie said and pointed straight pass Will, where it ran into the underbrush and up a tree.

"Dang it!"

"Heck man, you're too drunk to hit him? Here, give it to me."

Doobie took the rifle and aimed. When he fired, he hit a metal fence post instead of the possum which laid on its back as if it were already dead at the commotion. The BB ricocheted back toward the pair that stood no more than 20 paces away and hit Will in his left eye.

"Jesus Christ that hurts!" he yelled as Andrea drove him to the hospital. He was surprised she took his phone call.

"I told you this would happen," she said.

"I didn't shoot myself in the eye, Doobie shot me. Hit the fence post."

"Whatever. I still told you so."

She poked him in the ribs and he smiled. "Let the possum be," she said. "I think he deserves to live after all this trouble."

Maybe so, Will thought. But now it was personal. He had blood in the game, and he didn't think he could let this slide. Maybe after his eye healed he could get back to his post, defend his turf.

"Maybe so," he lied.

