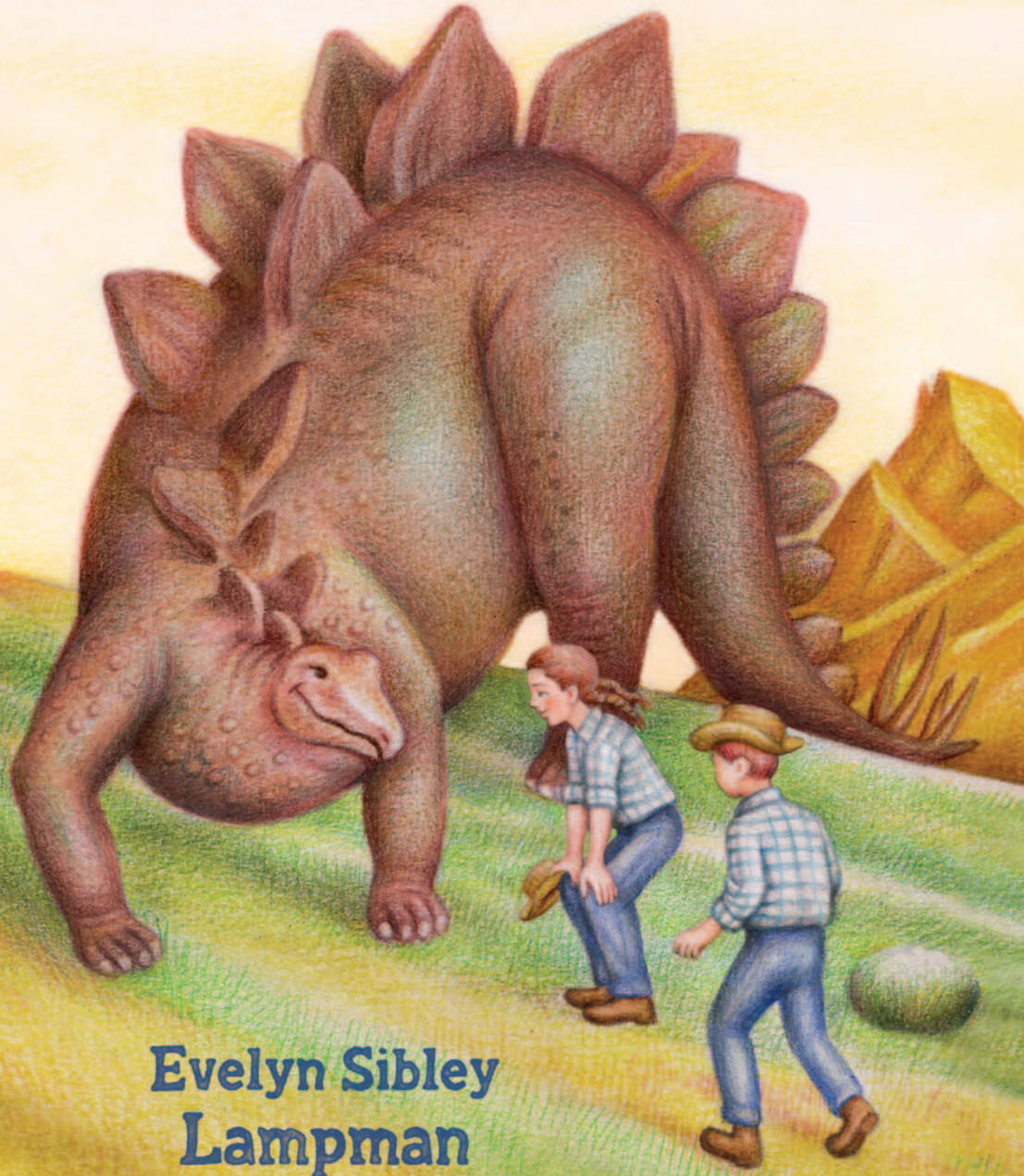


# The Shy Stegosaurus of Cricket Creek



**Evelyn Sibley  
Lampman**

**The Shy Stegosaurus  
of Cricket Creek**

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# The Shy Stegosaurus of Cricket Creek

To Peggy and Naomi—  
who like dinosaurs.

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Summary: Joan and Joey Brown went hunting for dinosaur fossils and found a real dinosaur, genus stegosaurus! George (as they called him) was very shy. He was a loyal friend though, helping the twins raise money for their mother's ranch on Cricket Creek.

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# Chapter 1

**J**OEY! JOAN! The professor's forgotten his lunch again. You'll have to harness up Daisy Belle and take it to him."

Mrs. Brown opened the back door a small crack to call. Heat pushed against her face eagerly, and she stepped outside, closing the door behind her. She just couldn't seem to get used to this weather. At this time of day, when there was no breeze, it was wisdom to keep the doors and windows tightly closed. It kept what cool air there was inside and warm air out.

Down by the long-unused corral she caught a glimpse of faded blue, strangely out of place against the pounded brown of the earth. Blue was one of nature's colors reserved solely for the sky above Cricket Creek and the surrounding countryside, so she stepped to the edge of the porch and called again.

"Joey! Joan!"

The splotches of faded blue seemed to grow larger as Joey and Joan, who had been crouched in absorption over something on the ground, stood up. The children were dressed alike in much-washed blue jeans and cotton shirts. On their heads they wore large straw hats. One of them waved to Mrs. Brown enthusiastically.

"We found a funny bug, Mom. When you poke it, it curls up and rolls."

"Better leave it," called Mrs. Brown, shading her eyes from the glare. "The professor forgot his lunch."

Instantly both of the blue-clad figures began running toward the house. They were evenly matched, and the race ended in a tie.

"Mercy," said Mrs. Brown in alarm. "I should think you'd get a sunstroke, tearing around that way in all this heat."

"What heat?" demanded Joey in surprise. "It's been lots hotter than this. This is a pretty nice day."

"Did the professor really forget his lunch again, Mom?" asked Joan, beaming with delight. "He's just like the professors you read about, isn't he? Absentminded. I'm glad he's that way."

"I'm not," said Mrs. Brown, shooing them before her into the house and closing the door quickly behind her. "He's a nice man, and I'm thankful for his board money, but he's a great responsibility. He's so thin now that you'd think a hard wind would blow him away, yet when he forgets his lunch, as he's forever doing, he won't take time to come back after it."

"What he's doing is important," Joan told her wisely. "He's looking for dinosaur bones."

"It's important to us too," Joey added quickly. "Because, don't forget, if he finds them on our land he says he'll pay us money for them."

"Bones!" said Mrs. Brown wearily. "The only bones he's likely to find around here are those of some old cow that got caught in a winter blizzard, or maybe a coyote that somebody took a pot shot at."

The twins regarded their mother with round blue eyes in troubled faces. They were amazingly alike, despite the difference in their sexes. Both had red hair, although Joey's was cut shorter than his sister's. Both had small upturned noses, covered with freckles, and wide mouths which

generally turned upward at the corners. Their mouths were not smiling now. They were straight and drooped ever so slightly as they remembered the family Problem.

Joan was the first to put it from her mind.

"If we're going to take the professor his lunch, we'd better get going," she said brightly. "It's close to three miles, and Daisy Belle doesn't go very fast."

"It's there on the table." Mrs. Brown nodded. "And after this let's all of us watch to make sure he doesn't forget again. I hate to have you riding in this heat."

"We'd be out in it anyway, Mom," said Joey reasonably. "So we might as well be riding as not."

They got the tin lunch pail from the kitchen table and went back to the barnyard where Joey put a blanket, in lieu of a saddle, on Daisy Belle, slipped the bit into her mouth, and led her over to the fence where it was easier to climb on.

"If we do have to go back to town," said Joan, suddenly returning to the Problem, "what would happen to Daisy Belle? We couldn't take her with us."

"Why couldn't we?" demanded Joey loudly.

"They don't allow horses in town. You know that. Besides, she belongs here. She was here when we came. I expect she's always lived here."

"I guess she has," agreed Joey.

He suddenly remembered the day, only three months ago, when the truck had brought them and their household goods to the ranch on Cricket Creek. They had expected so much of the ranch before they got here. It had seemed like something out of a fairy tale the day the lawyer had told Mom her great-uncle Henry had left it to her. A ranch of their own! Mom could quit her job. Mrs. Hedgepeth, the cross housekeeper, wouldn't come any more, for there would be

enough money if they lived on a ranch for Mom to stay home. They'd get a cow, and chickens, and grow their own vegetables, and have horses!

Joey looked around the barnyard with disillusioned eyes. The ranch house was in a little valley between two hills, the unpainted buildings and fences weathered gray and seeming to sag noticeably from their yearly strain against the winter's storms. Cricket Creek threaded a sad, dry path of saffron dust across one side of the ravine, for at this time of year it was a creek in name only. Between the barn and the house a vegetable garden panted under the sun, the growth wilted and stunted despite the many buckets of water which the twins carried daily from the well. A solitary chicken, all that remained after a coyote had raided the chicken house one night, clucked and scratched across Joey's line of vision, and he scowled even harder.

"Come on," ordered Joan. "Daisy Belle can't stand here all day."

He climbed up in front of his sister and took over the reins.

"Get up, Daisy Belle," he commanded affectionately.

Good old Daisy Belle! She had been the only one there to greet them when they arrived. Old and considered worthless by everyone else, she had been overlooked when the other horses were sold to pay for Great-Uncle Henry's funeral. The twins had found her patiently waiting for someone to open the barn door, and they had adopted each other immediately.

Daisy Belle plodded slowly, panting already, for the climb was steep. Abrupt slopes dropped down into the valley, brown, dry, dotted with sagebrush. Once they reached the top, rolling plains spread roughly before them, but hemmed in, even on this higher level, by rimrock cliffs to the north

and south. A gravel road cut through the desert-like expanse, running from east to west, but after following it a little way Joey turned Daisy Belle to the left.

"Tire marks going off here," he said wisely. "The professor will be digging over against that cliff most likely."

"You don't mean digging," Joan reminded him. "He doesn't use a shovel."

"He will if he finds a really big one," insisted Joey. "I asked him. And I hope he does find a big one. I hope he finds the biggest whopper of a dinosaur anybody's ever found yet. We need the money."

"I know," sighed Joan. "But even if he doesn't find any, his board helps a little."

It had seemed like a second miracle the day Professor Harris had driven his car into the yard and inquired if they had any objections to his searching for bones of prehistoric animals on their land. Mrs. Brown had said no indeed, go right ahead, and Joey had asked curiously, "What do you want with old bones?"

"If I find anything worthwhile it will go to the museum," answered Professor Harris, smiling.

"Are they very valuable?"

"Oh yes."

"Then if you find them on our land, they belong to us," said Joey quickly.

"Why, Joey," said Mrs. Brown in embarrassment, but he pretended not to hear.

The ranch hadn't brought them what they expected, but perhaps they hadn't expected the right thing. Now that he and Joan were twelve, Joey was beginning to understand about money. Money, or the lack of it, was their Problem. The arid ranch wouldn't support them after all. Mrs. Brown's small widow's pension wouldn't cover food and clothing too.

There was a reserve of five hundred dollars hidden away in an empty cookie jar, but Mrs. Brown had explained that five hundred dollars wasn't as much as it seemed. It wouldn't last any time at all if one of them got sick. Besides, there were such things as dentist bills, school books, and taxes which must be paid for somehow.

"Certainly they're yours," agreed the professor. "And if my theory is right, and I find what I'm looking for, I'll see that you're paid for them."

"Oh, Joey," said Mrs. Brown again.

"Not at all," smiled the professor. "The boy is right. And there is a fund for that purpose. Of course, I may be wrong. I may find nothing at all. But the formation, the sedimentary rock, the country itself—everything points to evidence that dinosaurs were once here in abundance."

"Where will you dig?" demanded Joan curiously. "May we watch you?"

"Now you children mustn't make a nuisance of yourselves," said Mrs. Brown hurriedly.

"They won't bother me at all," insisted the professor. "I thought I'd start on that rock formation to the left. Those cliffs a couple of miles from here. I'll pitch a camp and work out from there."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown. "It's so hot there. No shade at all."

"And no water," added Joey. "You'll have to come back here every day to get your water."

"You wouldn't mind?"

"You're welcome to all the water you need," said Mrs. Brown quickly, "for drinking, and cooking, and washing your clothes. The next ranch is a long stretch down the road. Ours will be the closest. It's only a couple of miles, as you say, from the cliff you're talking about."

"Hm," said the professor thoughtfully. Instead of thanking her for her invitation to make use of the well, he seemed to be absorbed with a thought which had just come to him.

"I wonder," he began haltingly, "if you would consider taking me in as a boarder while I am here? Since I will have to drive this far for water anyway, it would be a great convenience. I wouldn't have to cook for myself. I'm a miserable cook."

"Well—" Mrs. Brown hesitated, and both twins turned to her eagerly.

"Sure, Mom," cried Joey. "He can have my room."

"And I'll help with the extra work," offered Joan.

"Oh, I wouldn't need to take your room," put in the professor hastily. "I have a tent. I'd only need breakfasts and dinners."

"You'd need a lunch," said Mrs. Brown, glancing at the professor's thin, almost gaunt, frame. "I'd pack you a lunch. It's too long to go between meals otherwise."

And that's how Professor Harris came to the ranch on Cricket Creek as a boarder. His compact little tent was pitched on the shadiest side of the house, and his old car chugged slowly up the steep slope early every morning and returned a little after dusk each night. His board money was added each week to the sum already in the cookie jar, and for the time being Mrs. Brown said no more about the family returning to town.

Since it was not the first occasion on which the professor had forgotten his lunch and the twins had been sent to deliver it, they knew where to look. They saw him from a distance, a small figure which grew larger as they approached. He was climbing up and down the face of the cliff, moving slowly, and searching the deep-cut gullies on the surface.

"I should think he'd find a dinosaur bone there if there was

one to be found," said Joan thoughtfully. "I'm sure he would."

"Why?" demanded Joey.

"Because all those funny rocks look like they ought to be dinosaur homes. Look at them. Some are all jagged and pointed, and the tops of some look like they'd been sliced off with a knife. I wouldn't be at all surprised to see a dinosaur come crawling out of one of those cracks."

"You'd be more likely to see a rattlesnake," snorted Joey. "Dinosaurs have been dead millions of years. The professor said so."

"I know. But so long as they left their bones, and we get paid for them, it doesn't matter."

The professor was so absorbed in his work that he didn't see them until Daisy Belle came up to the beginning of the ravine on which he was working. When they called to him, he looked up, startled, then an expression of embarrassment crept across his face.

"I didn't do it again, did I?" he asked sheepishly.

They nodded, grinning, and he carefully climbed down to them.

Professor Harris was a small man and exceedingly thin. His hair was light, and under his broad-brimmed hat his face was burned scarlet from the sun. It never seemed to tan but burned and peeled, and the new skin burned all over again. It must have been painful, but he never mentioned it. He wore rather thick-lensed glasses, a long-sleeved plaid shirt, and high boots which laced nearly up to his knees. The boots were a protection against rattlesnakes which often sunned themselves on rocky ledges. From the back pocket of the professor's trousers protruded the handles of several chisels and the brush of a whisk broom, which might be needed to brush away sedimentary flakes and sand if he found what he was seeking and had to chip the fossil from a rock.

"Have you found anything?" demanded Joan eagerly.

"Not yet." The professor shook his head regretfully. "But remember, I've only just started."

"It's been three weeks," Joey reminded him.

"Only a start," insisted the professor. "Many scientists have been at it for years with no more results than I."

Joey scowled. It seemed to him a very slow way to make money.

"What makes you think any may be here at all?" asked Joan, sitting down in the small shade of a clump of sagebrush and holding out the lunch bucket.

"The conditions are right," said the professor thoughtfully. "This is sedimentary rock. The surface is cut into ravines and gullies and canyons. This is dry country. There's no vegetation to protect the soil from wind and weather. It's true that I have found no bits of bone to lead me into my search, but there are discolorations in the rocks themselves. And if I keep looking, I hope to find the existence of bones."

"I should think an animal of some kind, a coyote maybe, would carry the bones away and chew on them," said Joan.

"Not these bones," Joey reminded her superiorly. "They're turned to stone, aren't they, Professor?"

"That's right," the professor agreed, biting into a thick sandwich. "A fossil is made when the action of water dripping through removes the animal matter and replaces it with mineral. No coyote would tackle a fossil, Joan. It would break his teeth."

"It must take a long time to do that," she said thoughtfully.

"The last dinosaur lived sixty million years ago," agreed the professor.

The twins remained while the professor ate his sandwiches, and as soon as he went back to hunting fossils they started



home. It was now a little past noon, and the sun was almost directly overhead. It beat down on them unmercifully. Their cotton shirts clung damply against their skin, and little rivulets ran down their faces.

"I sure see why cowboys wear hats," said Joey grimly.

"Me too. We ought to make one for Daisy Belle if we're going to bring her out into the sun."

Today Daisy Belle seemed to suffer from the heat even more than they. Her head drooped, and she seemed scarcely able to lift one foot after another.

"Let's walk awhile," suggested Joey. "It's mean to make her carry us when we've got legs."

"All right," agreed Joan. "Only I don't know how far I can walk without sitting down to rest. The sun seems to make spots in my eyes, and when I look out there at those heat waves dancing across the ground I get dizzy."

"Don't look at them then," advised Joey. "Look at the cliffs instead. It's better that way."

"How can I look at the cliffs when they're going to be behind me?"

"They don't have to be," pointed out Joey. "Not right away, anyway. We can walk along the side of them instead of cutting across to the road the way we came."

"We'll have to cut across sometime," Joan reminded him, but she followed along without further argument.

Joey walked ahead, leading Daisy Belle. He kept as close to the edge of the rimrock cliffs as he could, holding a westward course which ran parallel with the road almost a mile to his left. He kept his eyes on the ground, shaking his head from time to time to rid himself of a fresh trickle of perspiration running down his face. It was too much effort to take out a handkerchief and wipe it off.

He was not sure afterward how it happened, but suddenly

he felt the leather strap with which he had been leading Daisy Belle jerk out of his hands. He sensed, rather than saw, her rear in alarm and give a whinny of fright. At the same moment he heard the brittle rattle from his right, and even before he turned he knew what it was. A rattlesnake! Exactly what had alarmed the reptile he could not be sure, but that dry warning meant only one thing. The rattlesnake was going to strike.

Both twins realized instinctively that they ought to get out of the way. They ought to race after Daisy Belle across the dusty plain. Neither could move. They stood, too frightened to stir, staring down at the rocky ledge beside them where the snake was coiled. Then, as they looked, the rattlesnake was gone, covered completely by something round and padded and big as a large dishpan.

Their eyes moved upward from the round cover, and they saw that it continued into a leg, a stout, short leg that was joined onto the body of the most curious and frightening animal they had ever seen. He was larger than the biggest elephant, but, unlike an elephant, he was not all gray. He seemed to be many colors, browns and tans, grays and yellows which deepened in places into orange. He was, in fact, so nearly the color of the rimrock cliffs, and his shape was so jagged and irregular, that when he stood against the rocks he blended in such a way as to make him almost invisible. Along his backbone ran a double row of sharp-edged, triangular horns, the largest of which were two feet high, and the long, ten-foot tail which trailed behind him bore four upright spikes made of horn, each of which was about three feet tall. Moreover, this tail was not stationary but moved constantly from side to side, so that one moment they had a glimpse of the formidable spikes from one side of his body, the next moment they appeared from the other. His front legs, one



of which still remained on the lifeless rattlesnake, were considerably shorter than the back ones. This gave him the appearance of being humped up behind and brought his low-hung head closer to the children. It was really a very small head, with a mouth that slightly resembled a parrot's beak and tiny, bright, unblinking eyes.

Joan moaned with fright, and the animal looked in her direction. The whole head turned with the eyes as it did so.

"You should say thank you," said the creature. His voice, like his head, seemed much too small for the body. It was just an ordinary voice, such as you would expect to hear in any human being, but there was no inflection of words. They all came out in the same tone.

"Thank you," answered Joan automatically. Then she remembered that animals, except parrots and magpies possibly, don't speak English, and her mouth fell open in even greater amazement.

"A-are you a dragon?" stammered Joey.

"No," said the creature without surprise. "I don't know what that is. I am a stegosaurus."

"And I don't know what that is," admitted Joey boldly. "Stego— What was it you said now?"

"Steg-o-sau-rus," repeated the creature, pausing a long time between each syllable. Then after a moment, "I'm a dinosaur."

"But there aren't such things," denied Joey. "At least, not any more."

"So far as I know, I am the only one left," admitted the stegosaurus. "I assure you, it is a lonely life."

"Are you going to eat us?" quavered Joan. It was all very well to stand and hold polite conversation with this dreadful dinosaur, but she preferred not to be kept in suspense.

"What do you take me for?" demanded the stegosaurus

sharply, and the giant tail stopped moving from left to right. "Tyrannosaurus? Or Allosaurus? Certainly not. I am a vegetarian. You do not appeal to me in that way at all. And, if you're going to be insulting, I shall just go away. I wondered at the time if it wasn't a mistake showing myself just to save your lives."

"Oh, please don't," cried Joey.

"I'm sorry," said Joan quickly. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

"You must be very careful," said the stegosaurus. "I know I'm stupid. Everyone says so, so it must be true. But I am sensitive, and I do get my feelings hurt easily."

"I won't do it again," she promised.

Slowly the spiked tail began to move once more. Gently at first, then faster until it was swinging back and forth like a clock pendulum. Why, he wags it like a dog, thought Joan. When he's pleased about something, his tail wags to show that he is.

"How come you can talk?" demanded Joey.

"Can't everything?"

"Oh no. Only people."

"Perhaps I'm a people," said the stegosaurus slowly. He seemed to consider this, for the motions of the tail grew slower for a moment. "No," he decided finally. "I'm sure I'm a dinosaur and a stegosaurus. I suppose I must have been born knowing how to talk, since I'm too stupid to learn. Perhaps people are stupid too."

"Some of them are," agreed Joey.

"Good," said the stegosaurus, his tail flashing fast from side to side. "We have something in common. I'm so glad now that I did come to your rescue as I did. That was instinct, you know. No one taught me to do it. If I had thought about it, I probably wouldn't have. Then I wouldn't have had this

nice chat with you two. You have no idea how lonely I've been all these years with no one to talk to. No friends at all. You see, I'm shy."

"We'll be your friends," promised Joan, anxious to make up for the careless remark which had hurt the reptile's feelings.

"Thank you. Thank you," accepted the stegosaurus. "Then you must call me by my first name, and I'll call you by yours."

"All right," agreed Joey promptly. "I'm Joey. And she's Joan. What's your name?"

The stegosaurus stepped forward eagerly, then halted. The tail stopped, poised in mid-air, and the tiny head moved from side to side ponderously. After a long moment it turned from one child to another, the bright beady eyes staring as though in an appeal for help.

"I don't know," it admitted. "It has been so many million years since anyone called me by my name, I've forgotten what it is."

"That's too bad," sympathized Joey. "But when you think about it, it will probably come back to you."

"But that's just it. I can't depend on it. My brain is too small to be of any use. I'll never know my name again."

"Then why don't we give you a new one?" said Joan quickly. "Unless you'd rather be called Stegosaurus."

"Only for formal occasions," said the dinosaur quickly. "And not by my friends even then. Oh, please give me a new name. A pretty one."

"Our horse is named Daisy Belle," said Joan thoughtfully. "Of course, she's a lady."

"And you're a man, aren't you?" added Joey. When the stegosaurus nodded, he began reciting all the men's names he could think of. "John, Peter, Dick, Bob, Paul, Roger, Jim, Steve—"

“Something a wee bit longer,” urged the stegosaurus. “With more depth.”

“Horace, Percy, Clarence, Andrew,” suggested Joan.

“Milton, Harold, Richard, Victor, George,” interrupted Joey, when he himself was interrupted in turn.

“George!” decided the stegosaurus. “I like that. I like the sound of it against my teeth. Any time you want me, just call ‘George.’ I’ll know that it’s my two friends calling, and I’ll come.”

He stepped back against the face of the cliff. Although they were watching every moment, the colors blended so completely with the rocks it was as though he had vanished. They could not see which way he went.

**S**uppose you were hunting around in the desert for a fossil and instead you found a real (and very large) dinosaur, genus *Stegosaurus*. Joan and Joey Brown did! Nobody believed they had found one, which was just as well because George (as they called him) was very shy.

He was a loyal friend, doing his best to help the twins make money to finance their mother’s dry little ranch on Cricket Creek. George ate sagebrush, looked for fossils, and fought an plane (which he thought was a pterodactyl) with faithful enthusiasm, but his walnut-sized brain often made him more hindrance than help. Especially when he went after the bank robber!

This story is told so convincingly that you’ll be looking for dinosaurs around every mesa. And who knows? Maybe you’ll find one!



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