

The Yearling as a Found Poem

Part 3, Chapters 25-33

25

November slid into December
The fawn was growing fast with light spots
The emblem of deer infancy has disappeared
Christmas is not far away
Frost everywhere
The family feasted that night
There was not much wasted on Baxter Island
The family agreed to go to Grandma Hutto's
Ma would not go empty handed even to the house of an enemy
Such a life was quite without freedom

26

There was little talk at the house except of the coming Christmas
Old Slewfoot had visited again
And killed a 250 pound blue hog
Penny oiled his bear trap 6 feet in width and weighed nearly 6 stone
The calf was gone
There was not the joy of the chase; this was hate and revenge
They ate without speaking; the lunch seemed almost savorless
The game was the same
Casually or with a desperate intent
The strong sweet trail and a fight to the end

The black morning was bitter; tomorrer's Christmas Eve
He would miss the Doings
They were out to kill Old Slewfoot
The trap was as they left it
The track was still fresh
Julia was snuffing silently
Penny began to run...Git him gal...hold him...Yippee
Penny lifted his gun and shot twice
You kin go home; I tol' you I'm git that bear
You figure he come back by here...no, not him

Tracking...charging...attacking...killing
Red coat of summer
Now
Winter's grayness

Their breaths hung like frosty clouds
The air was like ice
Jody was cold with more than the evening's bitterness
He brought his thoughts back to Flag
He pictured him lost and hungry
He was lonely without him

Boggy and treacherous between Lake George

Penny halted to take his bearings

Great tracks imprinted solidly in muck

“Looks like he’s got a ticket to Jacksonville”

The chase continued...his scent found

Julia nipped at his flank...Rip rounded him

Steady aim and fire

His killing days were done

Yippee

Dead weight impossible to pull

Help

Walk to Ft Gates...half-forgotten tales of lore

The Forresters...drunken and noisy

A promise of meat

“You lucky son of a preacher.”

A passenger got off...a Forrester left

A rumor spread...a rivalry kindled

A fire ignited...a house burned

And a family disappeared in the ashes

27

On a cold dawn

Saying farewell

The Baxters leave the Huttos behind

Traveling on the cold day

Jody cherishes the gunpowder parcel Twink gave him

Catastrophe is for other people

Eager to see Flag, Old Slewfoot’s carcass, the cabin, the smoke-house

But especially Flag

Flag

28

The sun a cold red stillness

Life quieted along with the weather

Drunken Forresters had set fire

Their guilt incontrovertible

Became one with the stories of distant places

Penny plowed fields

Cotton...tobacco...cow peas sparingly...extra land in corn

Ma complained bitterly...she wanted a ginger bed

Hunting was poor...deer was scarce...lean and shabby

Jody loved jaunts for wood as a hunt

Cold bright night...Jody lingered outside

Strange dog romping

He caught his breath

A gray wolf, lean and lame

Had plainly played before

The visitor was crippled in one hip...clumsy

“Piteeful, aint it...the last one?”

They squatted together caught up in the sadness

And strangeness

Flag had been spared desolation in the forest

Had eased a loneliness that harassed him

In the very heart of his family

29

February sun is high

Penny laid up with rheumatism...not ready for spring planting...unable to work

Jody should have a childhood

Jody is in charge of plowing

And out hunting in the woods

He sees Flag

On a high ridge...silhouetted against the February sky

He will grow horns in early June

In-between a yearling and a buck

Flag has a taste for trouble

He has eaten the tobacco plants

The February sun goes down

The night is young for the Baxters

30

The yellow jasimine bloomed late and covered the fences

The March sun grew strong in mid-morning

But a fresh breeze grew

The soft rain had stopped; the morning was dewy

The fields were rosy dipping into lavender at the far misty edges

Mockingbirds made a musical din along the fence rows

I love settin plants; there was no hurry

Penny rested, a wistful look in his eyes, studying the young deer

You're a pair of yearlin's; Hit grieves me

The year's living depended on the results

Penny dropped to the ground and stirred in agony

31

Penny did not recover...he lay suffering

The ride for Doc Wilson not allowed

All the corn had been pulled and Flag's traces were clear

Eight feet high the fence is

Flag cleared it like a mockingbird

Jody was not prepared for his father's works

"Take the yearling out to the wood, tie him up and shoot him."

32

Jody wandered west with Flag beside him...his heart beat and stopped and beat again

"I'll not do it. I'll jest not."

He hated them...he fought them in his mind...it was no time to cry

He turned up the road to the Forrester's...his throat was dry

"The hull passel of 'em has rode off to Kentucky"

They too were a stone wall

Flag was docile...Jody found himself tired

He wanted to get away...he fell asleep drugged with misery

When he awakened, Flag was gone

He turned back to the road toward home...too weary to think

A candle burned in the kitchen...he felt like a stranger and a thief

He went to the corncrib, made a bed and slept with Flag beside him

He awakened at sunrise...Flag was gone

He heard his mother's voice

She flailed him with her tongue
 His father's face was drawn...Penny lay silent
 "Go into your room and shut the door"
 He heard voices...he heard steps...he heard a shot
 His mother stood on the stoop; the gun smoking
 Flag lay floundering
 Jody ran to Flag...the yearling heaved then stumbled away
 Penny dragged himself from bed "Go finish him, Jody."
 He snatched the gun..."I hate you. I hope you die. I hope I never see you again."
 He ran after Flag
 The yearling made it to the edge of the sinkhole...he rolled down the side..he lay beside the pool
 He opened great liquid eyes turned with a glazed wonder
 Jody pressed the muzzle of the gun barrel at the back of the smooth neck and pulled the trigger.
 He retched and vomited...he clawed the earth...he beat it with his fists
 The sinkhole rocked around him...a far roaring became a thin humming
 Flag lay still.

33

Flag is dead...Pa betrayed him
 His plans were clear...he was going to Boston leaving his betrayal behind him
 He needed a boat...he had not eaten in two days...he was not hungry
 Flag was dead...Pa went back on him
 Without Penny there was no comfort...a fresh wave of loneliness
 He had lost Flag and his father...he cried himself to sleep
 Now he knew... "we will all go hungry" ... the humming snapped
 It was dark and he was lifted
 He went back to Baxter's Island...he told himself he did not mean to go home
 'Tis April; he missed his family...he saw Pa
 "Jody, you're alright; not dead"
 "I wanted it easy for you; I wanted you to frolic with your yearling
 But every man's lonesome...what does he do...he takes it for his share and goes on"
 Jody goes to bed and dreams
 A boy and a yearling ran side by side and were gone
 Forever



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