Illustrated excerpts from chapters 19-21 of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’ *The Yearling*

The hurricane and its aftermath
The fall fruits were not yet ripe, papaw and gallberry and persimmon.

The mast of the pines, the acorns of the oaks, the berries of the palmetto, would not be ready until the first frost.
The deer were feeding on the tender growth, bud of sweet bay and of myrtle, sprigs of wiregrass, tips of arrowroot in the ponds and prairies, and succulent lily stems and pads.

The type of food kept them in the low, wet places, the swamps, the prairies and the bay-heads. They seldom crossed Baxter's Island. They were hard to hunt in the boggy places.
In a month, Penny was able only to bring down one yearling buck. Its spike horns were still in the velvet. They felt like a coarse rough wool.

Shreds hung, where the yearling had rubbed them against saplings, to ease the itch of growth and hurry their hardening.
Ma Baxter ate them boiled, saying they tasted like marrow.

Penny and Jody had no taste for them.
They could see too plainly the big eyes under the new horns.
The Baxters watched the quartering of the September moon anxiously. Penny called his wife and son when the first quarter appeared. The silver crescent was almost perpendicular. He was jubilant.

“We’ll git rain soon, shore.” he told them. “If the moon was straight acrost, hit’d push the water out and we’d not git none. But look at it. Hit’ll rain to where you kin hang your clothes right on the line and the Lord’ll was ‘em.” He was a good prophet. Three days later every sign was of rain.
Passing by Juniper Springs from a hunt, he and Jody heard the alligators bellowing. Bats flew in the daytime. Frogs caah-caah-caahed steadily at night. The Dominick rooster crowed in the middle of the day. The jay-birds bunched and flew back and forth together, screaming as one. Ground rattlers crawled across the clearing in the hot sunny afternoon. On the fourth day a flock of white sea-birds flew over. Penny shaded his eyes against the sun and watched after them uneasily.
Jody felt a lift of spirit like the sea birds. He loved storm. It swept in magnificently and shut the family inside in a great coziness.

Work was impossible and they sat about together and the rain drummed on the hand hewn shingles. His mother was good-natured and made him syrup candy, and Penny told tales. He said, “I hope it’s a pure hurricane” Penny turned on him sharply. “Don’t you wish sich as that.”
A hurricane flattens the crops and drowns the pore sailors and takes the oranges offen the trees. And down south, why, boy, hit tears down houses and cold-out kills people.” Jody said meekly “I won’t wish it agin. But wind and rain is fine. “All right wind and rain. That’s another thing.”

The sun set strangely that night. The sunset was not red, but green. After the sun was gone, the west turned gray. The east filled with a light the color of young corn. Penny shook his head. “I don’t like it. Hit looks mighty boogerish.
In the night, a gust of wind moved through and slammed both doors. The fawn came to Jody’s bed and poked its muzzle against his face. He took it up to bed with him. The morning, however, was clear, but the east was the color of blood.
Penny spent the morning repairing the roof of the smoke-house. He brought drinking water twice from the sinkhole, filling all available buckets. In the late morning, the sky turned gray and remained so. There was no air stirring.
In mid-afternoon the skies turned so black that the chickens went to the roost. Jody drove in Trixie and the calf and Penny milked early. He turned Old Caesar into the lot and put a forkful of the last remaining hay in his manager. Penny said, “Git the eggs outen the nests. I’m going to the house. Hurry now, else you’ll get ketched.”
Suddenly, in the false twilight stillness, he took alarm. A great roaring sounded in the distance. All the bears in the scrub, meeting at the river, might make such a roaring. It was wind. He heard it come closer from the northeast as plainly as though it come on vast webbed feet, brushing the tree-tops in its passing.
It seemed to leap the cornfield in one gust. It struck the yard trees with a hissing, and the mulberries bent their boughs to the ground, and the chinaberry creaked its brittleness. It passed over him with a rustle like the wings of many geese, high-flying. The pines whistled. The rain followed.
Wind had been high overhead. The rain was a solid wall, from sky to earth.

Jody struck it flat, as though he had dived against it from a great height. It hurled him and threw him off balance.

A second wind seemed now to reach long muscular fingers through the wall of rain and scoop everything in its path. It reached down his shirt and into his mouth and eyes and ears and tried to strangle him.
He dared not drop the eggs in his shirt. He kept one arm cupped under them and put the other over his face and scuttled into the yard.

The fawn was waiting, quivering. Its tail hung wet and flat and its ears drooped. It ran to him and tried to find shelter behind him.

He ran around the house and to the back door. The fawn bounded close behind him the kitchen door was latched. The wind and rain blew so hard against it that he could not swing it open. He beat on the thick pine.
For a moment he thought he was unheard in the tumult and that he and the fawn would be left outside to drown, like biddies. Then Penny lifted the latch from the inside and pushed the door open into the storm. Jody and the fawn darted inside. Jody stood gasping. He wiped the water from his eyes. The fawn blinked.
I’d not sign no papers on it, but generally the first September storm be a three-day nor’easter. The whole country changes. I reckon, one way or t’other, the world.

I’ve heered Oliver Hutto tell o’September storm as fur off as China.
Ma Baxter asked, “Why ain’t he come to see us this time? Grandma shocks my modesty, but I do like Oliver.”

“They’ll not fight without he acts quarrelsome, will they? The fiddle cain’t play without the bow.”

“I reckon mebbe he’s had enough o’ the Forresters for a while and jest ain’t travelin’ this road.”

“I’m feered the Forresters, leastwise Lem, ‘Il romp on him ary time they come up with him. Until they git the gal business settled.”
“Sich doin’s!
Nobody acted that-a-way when I were a gal.”

“No,” Penny said, “I was the only one wanted you.”

She lifted the broom in pretended threat.

“But sugar,” he said, “the rest jest wasn’t smart as me.”
The rain drummed on the roof.
The wind whistled under the eaves.

Old Julia stretched out on the floor near the fawn.
The storm was cozy as Jody had hoped for. He made up his mind privately that he would wish for another in a week or two.

Now and then Penny peered out of the window into the dark. “Hit’s a toad-strangler of rain,” he said.

The day continued as stormy as it had begun. The rain fell in sheets and the wind whipped it in the eaves, so that Ma Baxter set pans and gourds to catch it.

The rain barrels outside were overflowing and the rain from the roof gurgled into their fullness.
Old Julia and the fawn had to be turned out by force. They were both back at the kitchen door in a brief time, wet and shivering. This time Rip was with them, whining.

Ma Baxter protested, but Penny admitted the three.

Jody dried them all with the crocus sack rug from in front of the hearth.

Penny said, “We’re about due for a lull.”
The lull did not come. Now and then there seemed to be a few moments when the wind and rain were less intense and Penny rose hopefully from his chair and peered outside. But he had no sooner decided that he would risk going out to cut wood and see to the chickens, than the deluge came again, as violent as before.
In the late afternoon he went again to milk Trixie, to feed and water Caesar, and to feed the chickens, huddled and frightened and unable to scratch for their living.

Ma Baxter made him change his wet clothes immediately. They steamed and dried by the hearth with the sweet, musty smell of wet cloth.
Supper was not so ample. Penny was not inclined to tales. The dogs were allowed to sleep in the house and the family went to bed early. Darkness had come at an unseemly hour and it was impossible to tell the time. Jody awakened at what would ordinarily have been an hour before daylight. The world was dark and the rain was still falling, the wind still blowing.
The change of wind came. The gray sky turned green. The wind roared in from a distance, as before. When it came, it was not from the northeast but from the southeast, and it brought more rain.

Penny said, “I’ve never seed sich a thing.”
The rain was more torrential than before. It poured down as though Juniper Creek and Silver Glen Run and Lake George and the St. John’s River had all emptied over the scrub at once.
The wind was no fiercer than before, but it was gusty. And there was no end to it. It blew and rained and blew and rained and blew and rained.

Penny said, “This must be the way the Lord made the blasted ocean.”

Ma Baxter said, “Hush. You’ll be punished.”

“Cain’t be no worse punished, woman. The ‘taters’ll be rotted and the corn flat and the hay ruint, and the cane.”
The yard was afloat. Jody looked out of the window and saw two drowned biddies floating about with upturned bellies. Penny said, “I’ve seed things in my time, but I’ve never seed a thing like this.”

Jody offered to go to the sink-hole for drinking water.

Penny said, “Hit’ll be nothin’ but rain-water, and riled to boot.”

Morning brought no abatement. Penny paced up and down the kitchen.

He said, “My daddy told of a storm in the ‘50’s was mightly bad, but I don’t reckon all Floridy history has had sich a rain.”
The days passed on with no change. Ma Baxter usually left the weather in Penny’s hands, but now she cried, and sat rocking with her hands folded.

On the fifth day, Penny and Jody made a rush to the pea-field to pull enough cow-peas for a meal or two. The peas were flattened. They pulled whole vines with their backs to the rain and wind.
The morning of the sixth day was exactly like the others. Since they would be drenched in any case, Penny and Jody stripped to their breeches and went to the field with sacks. They worked until noon in the down-pour, pulling the slippery pods from the bushes. They came in for a hurried dinner and went back again without troubling to change their clothes.

They covered most of the field. The hay, Penny said, was a total loss, but they would do what they could to save the peas. Some of the pods were mature. They spent the evening and late into the night shelling peas, sticky and mouldering. Ma Baxter built up a slow fire on the hearth and spread out the peas close to the heat to dry. Jody was awakened several times in the night by the sound of some one going out to the kitchen to replenish the fire.
The morning of the seventh day might have been the morning of the first. The gusty wind whipped around the house as though it had always blown and always would blow. The sound of the rain on the roof and in the rain-barrels was now so familiar that it was not noticed.

At daylight, a limb of the chinaberry crashed to the ground.

The Baxters sat silently at breakfast. Penny said, “Well, Job takened worse punishment than this. Leastways none of us ain’t got risin’s.”
Penny said, “If they ain’t no change by mornin’, we jest as good to quit fightin’ and lay down and die.” Jody had never heard his father speak so disconsolantely. It froze him through. Flag was showing the effect of short rations. His ribs and backbone were visible. He bleated often. Penny had given up all attempt to milk the cow, for the sake of the calf.
In the middle of the night Jody awakened and thought he heard his father about. It seemed to him that the rain was falling less violently. He was asleep again before he could be certain.
He awakened on the morning of the eighth day. Something was different. There was silence instead of tumult. The rain had stopped. The long winds were still. A light the color of pomegranate blossoms sifted through the gray, wet atmosphere. Penny flung all the doors and windows wide open. “Tain’t much of a world to go out to,” he said, “but let’s all go out and be thankful there’s a world at all.”
The second day after the storm, Buck and Mill-wheel Forrester came riding to the island to see whether all was well with the Baxters.

They had come straight from their own work of caring for the stranded livestock.

Along the main trail the sights, they said, were new in their generation. The flood had played havoc with the small animals.

It was agreed that the four of them, Buck and Mill-wheel and Penny and Jody, should make a tour of exploration for some miles around, so that they know what to expect, in the immediate future, of the movements not only of the game, but of the predatory creatures.
The Forresters had brought two dogs, and an extra horse, and asked to have Rip and Julia join them.

Jody was excited that he was to be taken. He asked, "Kin Flag foller along, too?"

Penny turned on him sharply. "This is serious," he said.

"I'm carryin' you with us to learn you. If you figger on frolickin', you kin stay home, too."

The road dipped sharply between Baxter’s Island and Silver Glen. The flood had washed down it with such volume and such force that the flat sand road was now a narrow ravine.

Rubbish of all sorts was caught in the lower branches of the close-growing scrub pines.

Farther down the road the toll of small animal life began to show. Skunks and ‘possums seemed to be the heaviest sufferers. Their bodies lay by the dozens on the ground, where the waters, receding, had deposited them, or hung with the trash on the limbs of trees.
To the south and east there was a great silence. The scrub was always silent, yet Jody realized now that there had always been an undertone of cry and movement, where the creatures called and stirred, no more discernable than the wind. To the north, where high scrub land was dense with thin pines, there was a unusual rustling and distant chattering. The squirrels has evidently taken up residence here in droves, driven, if not by water, at least by hunger and fear, from the swamps and hammocks below them.
Silver Glen had overflowed and backed up and the flood waters had rushed down to join it and make a greater havoc.

Dead animals drifted around in the backwash. Penny said, “I didn't know there was that many snakes in the world.” The bodies of highland reptiles were as thick as cane-stalks. There were dead rattlesnakes, king snakes, black snakes, coach whips, chicken snakes, garter snakes and coral snakes.

At the thin edge of the receding water, cottonmouth moccasins and other water snakes swam about quickly. Buck said, “I don’t understand that. Ary snake kin swim. I’ve met a rattler in the middle o’ the river.”

Penny said, “Yes, but the land snakes likely got ketched up in their holes.
They could go no farther east and turned north, skirting the low waters. Where there had been a swamp, there were ponds. Where there had been hammock, there was a swamp. Only the high infertile scrub had turned aside the devastation. Even here, pines were up-rooted, and those that had stood, all leaned to the west, bowed down by the week-long weight of wind and rain.
[upon arriving at Doc’s house]

Water stood ankle deep around the house. The blocks on which it rested showed that the water had at one time been over the floor. The boards of the broad veranda were warping. They waded to the front steps, eyes open warily for coiled moccasins.

A white pillowslip was tacked across the front door. A message was printed on it with ink. The ink had run but the letters were plain. Buck said, “Us Forresters cain’t read good. Read it, Penny.”

Penny spelled out the liquid words:

“I have gone toward the ocean where this much water ain’t so peculiar. I mean to stay drunk until the storm is over. I will be somewhere between here and the ocean. Please don’t come after me unless it’s a broke neck or a baby.

   Doc.

P.S. If it’s a broke neck no use anyway.”
At first Jody could see nothing. Then when Penny pointed to this tree and that, he was able to make out the forms of animals. They rode close. The creatures seemed unafraid. A fine buck stared at them. The shot was irresistible. Buck brought it down. They rode closer.

Wild-cats and lynxes peered visibly from the branches of trees. The Forresters urged their killing. Penny said, “Hit’s a pity we should add to their troubles. Seems like there’d ought to be room enough in the world for folks and creetur’s, both.” Mill-wheel said, “Trouble with you, Penny, you was raised by a preacher. You look for the lion and the lamb to be layin’ down together.

Penny pointed to the high earth ahead of them. “Well,” he said, “the deer and the bob-cat—there you be.”
The evening was clear and rosy. The sun was drawing water. Shadowy fingers reached through the luminous sky to the sodden earth. The wet leaves of the scrub oaks, the thin needles of the pines, glittered, and he forgot his distress. There was much to be done to make camp.
Jody put his arms under his head and looked up into the sky. It was as thick with stars as a pool of silver minnows. Between the two tall pines over him, the sky was milky, as though Trixie had kicked a great bucket of milk foaming across the heavens. The pines swayed back and forth in a light cool breeze. Their needles were washed with the silver of the starlight.

Smoke from the camp-fire eddied up and joined the stars. He watched it drift through the pine tops. His eyelids fluttered. He did not want to go to sleep. He wanted to listen. The hunting talk of men was the finest talk in the world. Chills went along his spine to hear it. The smoke against the stars was a veil drawn back and forth across his eyes. He closed them. For a moment the talk of the men was a deep droning against the snapping of the wet wood. Then it faded into the sound of the breeze in the pines, and was no longer sound, but the voiceless murmur of a dream.
The sun did not seem to rise, but to sweep forward through a gray curtain. The curtain began to part its folds for the passing. The light was the thin pale gold of his mother’s wedding ring. It grew brighter until he found himself blinking into the very face of the sun. The light September fog clung tenaciously a little while to the tops of the trees, as though resisting the tearing and destructive fingers of the sun. Then it too was gone and the whole east was the color of ripe guavas.
Jody would not have recognized the prairie. It was a flat body of water, where even a crane might hesitate to wade and wander.

Farther south was scrub again, then gallberry flats and bay-heads. But where marsh should be, was a lake.
They reined in the horses. It was as though they had camped over night on some strange borderland and had now come into another country.

Fish were leaping in the air from water that a week ago had been land.

And here, after all the miles were the bears-- They were fishing with an abandon that made them unaware of, or indifferent to, the approach of horses and riders.

Two or three dozen black forms moved through the waters, belly-deep. Fish jumped ahead of them. Penny called, “Hit's mullet!”
He had thought that he wanted to hunt forever. But when the tall trees of Baxter's Island drew in sight, and he passed the path to the sink-hole and came to the split-rail fences of his father's fields, he was glad to be coming home.

The fields were desolate from the waste of waters. The yard was swept barren. But he was coming in with meat that he killed for the family, and Flag was waiting.
The prairie waters had receded and left no trace of the fish except their stench.

Even Jody, whom few odors offended, was sickened. The smell of death lay everywhere.
Penny said uneasily, “Somethin’s wrong. That stink’s due to be done with. Things is yit dyin’.”

A month after the flood in October, he returned with Jody in the wagon beside him to Mullet Prairie to gather the cut and cured hay.
Rip and Julia trotted along, behind the wagon. Penny allowed Flag, too, to follow for he had begun to make a great commotion whenever he was shut up and left behind in the shed.

He ran, sometimes ahead of old Caesar, sometimes, when the road was wide enough, beside him.
Now and then he dropped back and frolicked with the dogs. He had learned to eat green stuff and he stopped occasionally to nibble a tender bud or sprout.
“I’ve never knowed what give the black tongue. Mebbe hit’s the flood water, full o’ dead things, has got pizenous.”

A fear shot through Jody like a hot knife.

“Pa—Flag. He’ll not get it, will he?” “Son, I’ve told you all I know.”
Against the uncomfortable and alarming things that happened, he balanced Flag. His Father, too, of course. But Flag lived in a secret place in his heart that had been long aching and vacant.

If Flag were not stricken with plague, the flood, he decided, would be interesting.
If he lived to be as old as Penny, as old as Grandma Hutto and Ma Forrester, he would never forget, he knew, the fright and enchantment of the endless days and nights of the storm.

He wondered if the quail would die of the black tongue. In another month, his father had told him, he might make a trap of crossed twigs and catch a few for eating.
Shot was too valuable to be wasted on such small mouthfuls.

But Penny would not allow them to be trapped until the covey was full-grown, and he insisted each year that two or three pairs of cocks and hens be left for seed.

And would the turkeys die, and the squirrels, and the wolves and the bears and panthers? Speculation absorbed him.