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Lanny Lives On after Ron Rash’s “Speckle Trout”

In Ron Rash’s “Speckle Trout,” the protagonist Lanny strikes a cursed green gold when he begins stealing a well-known brute’s marijuana crop and reselling it to a local dealer. By the end of the story, Lanny has paid the price for this repeated transgression by way of falling victim to a simple bear-trap. Leading up to the end of this parable, the reader is continually presented with the details of Lanny’s gruesome situation and the threatening yet soothing presence of that brute Linwood Toomey. Just after this rather dark picture has been fully painted by the author, the fate of our protagonist is left up to interpretation with a most open-ended expression of epiphany on the part of Lanny. Given this short sequence, it is very easy for a reader to be convinced that Lanny has met his untimely end at the hillbilly hands of Toomey and his son. However, there stands a strong case for the contrary, provided by both the circumstances of the story and the lessons from the author.

There is much to consider when asking about the result of Lanny’s disposition at the end of the story. The reason it is so easy to assume Lanny’s passing is because the reader is provided with key details that would indicate impending doom at a first glance. An important soft detail described is Toomey’s unforgiving nature, which is delivered with gory illustrations of tales wherein he “once used his thumb to gouge a man’s eye out in a bar fight” (Rash 178) and “opened a man’s face from ear to mouth with a broken beer bottle” (Rash 178). Not only does this show Toomey to be a violent man, but more specifically it shows him to be a violent alcoholic. Closer to the end, the author accounts Toomey ordering his son to “bring back them machetes” (Rash 190) so they can finish a job. However, with a positive approach to this reading, one can interpret that these things are not necessarily a stark endangerment to Lanny. For one, Toomey does not seem to be drunk in this scene. The reader has only been told of Toomey’s violence in alcoholic scenes, particularly in bars. For this reason, the reason can offer Toomey’s character the benefit of the doubt in consideration of his character. As for the machetes, it would probably not be a good idea to harvest the marijuana plants with bloodied blades for those who are worried that the machetes are meant to serve a more dire purpose. In addition, it does not make much sense that Toomey would offer whiskey to Lanny with such a casual “Here, son” (Rash 190) if he was going to allow Lanny to simply die, as it was already established by Lanny’s account that there was nobody else around to hear his painful screams. It makes sense to consider that Toomey simply gave Lanny the whiskey to help him manage the pain while Toomey and his son harvest all the marijuana crop. Finally, addressing the most important concern of the bear trap itself and the state of Lanny’s leg, it is important to note that the strong grip of bear traps prevent bleeding out. Additionally, the ankle is not a good location for high blood loss to occur. With these in mind, the reader can alternatively determine that Lanny is not in immediate fatal danger due to either Toomey or the bear trap.

The other facet to consider is the intentions of author Ron Rash. Tackling the author’s purpose in any story can be overwhelming, but given the repeated themes of rash decision-making and equivalent consequences, within both the timeline of the story and the histories of the older characters such as when Leonard Hamby was kicked out of law school “because he was stoned all the time” (Rash 180), the theme can be reasonably narrowed down to some variation of living with your actions for the rest of your life, just as old and cranky Leonard has to now. With this in mind, it does not seem fitting that Rash would kill off his protagonist. Rather, it seems more fitting that he would leave a permanent scar on our young adventurer, in the form of a mangled or decapitated leg, in order to convey this message.