

Black Thunder



Chapter Five – by Kay Hively

Joey stuck his head out from under the bedcovers and opened his eyes. He could see daylight through the window in his room. Throwing back the heavy quilts, he jumped out of bed and landed on a cold floor. Outside there was snow on the ground.

Pulling his old brown sweater over his head, Joey thought it was going to be a great day to cut the Christmas tree. Making his way into the kitchen, he backed up to the cookstove. He could smell biscuits in the oven, and the hot stove warmed his cold legs.

Joey helped his mother set the kitchen table. Soon it was filled with sausage, biscuits, gravy, fried eggs, and the plum jelly his mother had made last summer. Mr. Cooper said his usual prayer and then Joey filled his plate. He finished eating long before his father took his last sip of coffee.

Finally, Mr. Cooper rose from the table, thanked his wife for a good breakfast, and walked toward the back door. Joey put on his coat and followed his father outside.

Mr. Cooper took an axe from the barn and started for the pasture. Because he had no gloves, Joey stuck his hands into his coat pockets. Along the little creek where they had fished last summer, he and his father found a row of pine trees. Mr. Cooper told Joey to pick out the tree.

Joey walked up and down the row, looking for a tree that was straight and tall. At last he chose one that had only one crooked branch. Joey stood back a safe distance while his father chopped the tree down. It only took about 10 strokes to cut through the trunk near the ground.

Taking a rope, Mr. Cooper wound it around the tree trunk. Then he handed one end of the rope to Joey and took the other end himself. Together, father and son began their walk back to the house with the Christmas tree in tow.

Except for the crunching sound of the snow under their feet, it was quiet in the pasture. Joey imagined how he and his mother would decorate the tree. In a magazine at the library, he had seen Christmas trees with lights. Joey looked back at the little tree he was pulling. He tried to image it filling up the living room and glowing like a full moon. Maybe some day his family would have electricity and they could have lights on their Christmas tree.

As he and his father came around the corner of the barn, Joey looked toward the house. His eyes popped wide open. Waiting on the back porch was a handsome young man in a uniform. Joey dropped the rope and raced across the yard. Tommy opened his arms and scooped up his little brother.

Even though Tommy was wearing a brown uniform, not a red one, Joey thought he looked as good as Santa Claus.



Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Missouri. Produced in partnership with this newspaper and the Missouri Press Foundation. Copyright 2004.

Classroom Extensions

Things to Think About and Do –

- If you were Joey's friend, what would you give him for Christmas? In a newspaper, look for pictures of things that Joey might like for Christmas. Should you give Joey an electric train? Why not?
- We know what the Cooper family had for breakfast. Make out a menu for their lunch and their dinner. Then prepare a menu for their Christmas dinner.

Next Week: Chapter Six – A New Hero