



Winter Run (Shannon Ravenel Books)

Robert Ashcom

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There are certain special—and rare— books that refresh our understanding of how children see the world. This is one of those books. It's the story of a boy growing up in a lost time in an idyllic place—rural Virginia of the late 1940s.

Charlie Lewis is the only child of city people who, after the war, choose to live at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains on a "gentleman's farm" near Charlottesville. Six years old when his family settles in the renovated corn crib on old Professor Jame's place, Charlie grows up in his personal version of heaven. His innocence is, of course, lost in the process. And so is his version of heaven.

But, as the old saying goes, still waters run deep, and Charlie runs deep, with a natural (almost supernatural) affinity for the land and its animals. For knowledge, he instinctively turns to a group of older black men, some of whom work the farm, others who are neighbors. Jim Crow laws and "the curse left on the land by slavery"—as old Professor James puts it—are still very much in evidence. Even so, Charlie's passions endear him to these men. They understand that he is lonely even if he does not. They watch out for him. And more—they love him.

Winter Run is a story that lets us escape for a moment our own noisy and complicated contemporary lives. Like *The Red Pony*, like Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals*, it takes us back to the joys of childhood's unrestricted enthusiasm and curiosity.

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