

Mildred D. Taylor

Prequel to Newbery Medal Winner *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

The LAND



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—SLJ

Mitchell

I loved my daddy. I loved my brothers too. But in the end it was Mitchell Thomas and I who were most like brothers, with a bond that couldn't be broken. The two of us came into Mississippi together by way of East Texas, and that was when we were still boys, long after we had come to our understanding of each other. Seeing that we were a long way from our Georgia home and both of us being strangers here in Mississippi, the two of us depended on each other and became as family.

But it wasn't always that way.

In the beginning the two of us didn't get along at all. Fact to business, there was a time it seemed like to me Mitchell Thomas lived just to taunt me. There were other boys too who picked on me, but Mitchell was the worst. I recall one time in particular when I was about nine or so and I was reading beside a creek on my daddy's land, and Mitchell came up from behind me and just whopped me on the head. For no reason. Just whopped me on the head! Course I jumped up mad. "What ya do that for?" I cried.

"Felt like it," he said. That's all; he felt like it. "Ya wanna do somethin' 'bout it?"

I was looking for complete and absolute revenge, and I figured Hammond at eighteen and George at sixteen could provide that for me. "Put the fear of God into 'em!" I declared.

Hammond smiled; so did George. Robert, though, nodded solemnly. "We can do that." Robert was nine, same age as me. Of my brothers, I was closest with Robert. I suppose, in part, being the same year's children made us close, but there were other things too. We had been together practically since birth, and we always took care of each other. When I got into trouble, Robert was there to pull me out of it if he could, or at least to see me through it, and I did the same for him. More than one time when one of us would be getting a licking from either my mama or our daddy, the other would jump in to try to stop it and we'd both get whipped. We shared everything together. Back then, Robert was always on my side. "They got no business beating on you," Robert said, expressing my sentiments exactly.

"That's what I figure too," I said.

"We'll take care of 'em tomorrow," Robert promised.

"Now wait a minute," said Hammond. "I don't know if that's such a good idea."

"What's not good about it?" I asked. "Mitchell and those other boys been beating on me for the longest time, so y'all go beat on them awhile and they'll stop."

Hammond was quiet a moment, then said, "Well, I don't know if that's quite fair."

"Sounds fair to me."

"Me too," said Robert.

"But George and I are older than Mitchell and those other boys, and we'd have the advantage," said Hammond.

"Well, that's the point of the thing!" I said.

Hammond shook his head. "'Sides that, they live here on our place, and if we get into it with them, it'll look like we're bullying them—"

“Well, they’ve been bullying me!”

George looked at me dead center. “You tell our daddy about this?” One thing I liked about my brother George was that he laid things right on the line; he said exactly what was on his mind. On the surface he was an easygoing sort of boy with a body that seemed to hang in a lazy fashion, such as always having one leg dangling over the arm of a chair when our daddy wasn’t around. But the truth was, he had himself a fierce kind of temper when baited and a steely right hand to match. He had never used either against me. I always told him the truth. “I told him, all right,” I replied in answer to his question.

“Well, what’d he say?”

I didn’t speak right up.

“Well? I know he said something.”

“He told me he wasn’t getting into it. He told me to stop it, so that’s what I’m trying to do.”

George laughed. “Yeah, you trying to stop it, all right. You trying to get us to stop it for you.”

“Same thing,” said Robert. Those were my thoughts exactly.

“Look, Paul,” said Hammond. “I’ll have a talk with Mitchell, but I’m not going to go beating up on him for you. Understood?”

I looked at Hammond and nodded solemnly, but I was figuring the only thing Mitchell Thomas would ever understand was a good whipping.

That very next morning Robert and I, sitting behind Hammond and George on their bays, went over to the patch of ground Mitchell’s family tended. Now, the Thomases, like all the other families who lived on my daddy’s land, were sharecroppers, and because of that fact, they were obliged to take heed of whatever my daddy or my brothers said. Miz Thomas was sure enough taking heed right now.

“Edna,” said Hammond as Mitchell’s mother stood in her

*When I was little, I figured to
always be on my daddy's land.*

The son of a prosperous landowner and a former slave, Paul-Edward Logan is unlike any other boy he knows. His white father has acknowledged him and raised him openly—something unusual in post-Civil War Georgia. But as he grows into a man he learns that life for someone like him is not easy. Black people distrust him because he looks white. White people discriminate against him when they learn of his black heritage. Even within his own family he faces betrayal and degradation. And when a rash act of youthful rebellion forces Paul-Edward to leave his home behind forever, he has nowhere to go except toward the only dream he has ever had: to find land every bit as good as his father's, and make it his own.

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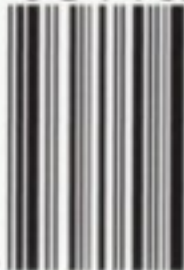


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