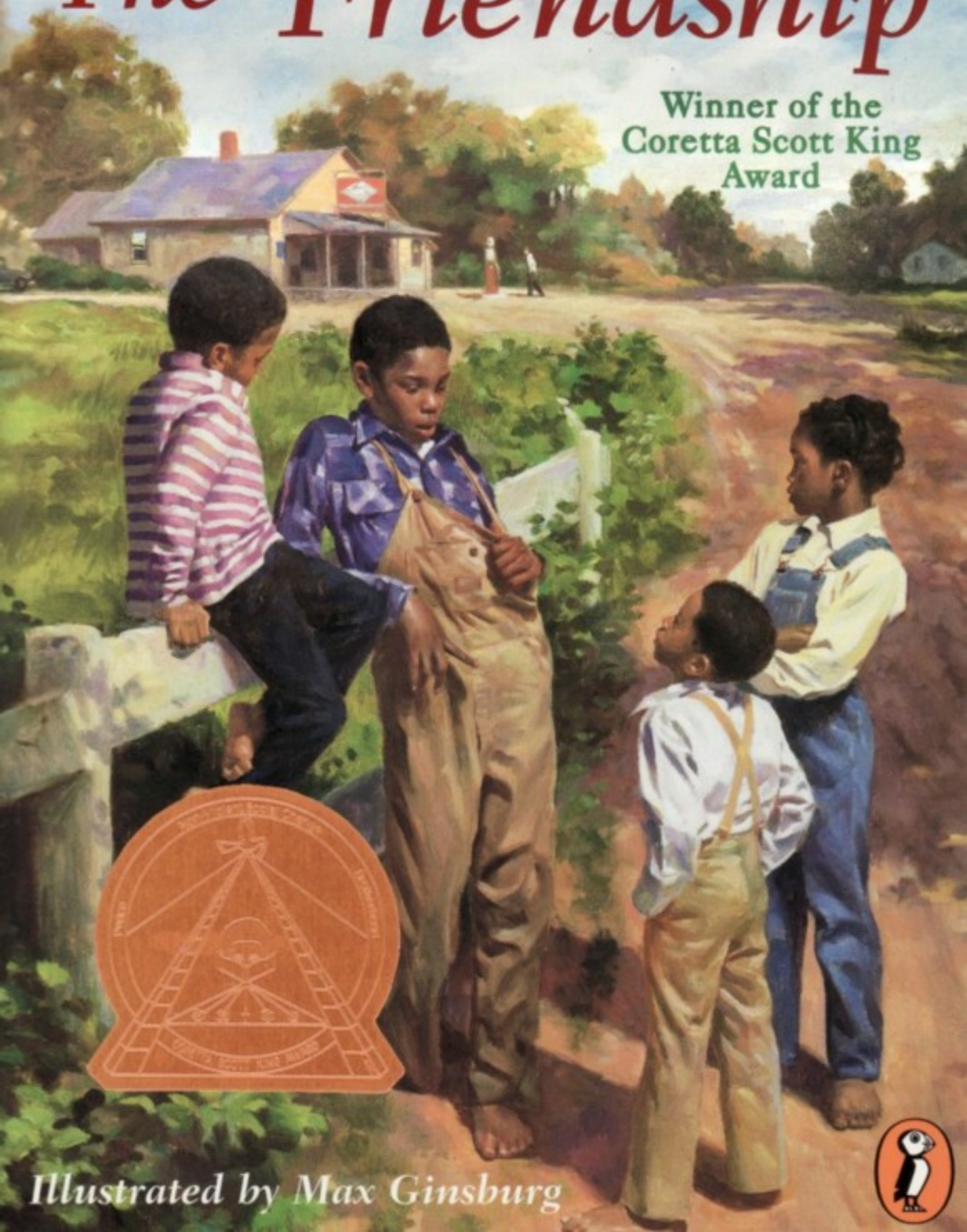


Mildred D. Taylor

Author of Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

The Friendship

Winner of the
Coretta Scott King
Award



Illustrated by Max Ginsburg



“Now don’t y’all go touchin’ nothin’,” Stacey warned as we stepped onto the porch of the Wallace store. Christopher-John, Little Man, and I readily agreed to that. After all, we weren’t even supposed to be up here. “And Cassie,” he added, “don’t you say nothin’.”

“Now, boy, what I’m gonna say?” I cried, indignant that he should single me out.

“Just mind my words, hear? Now come on.” Stacey started for the door, then stepped back as Jeremy Simms,

a blond sad-eyed boy, came out. Looking out from under the big straw hat he was wearing, he glanced somewhat shyly at us, then gave a nod. We took a moment and nodded back. At first I thought Jeremy was going to say something. He looked as if he wanted to, but then he walked on past and went slowly down the steps. We all watched him. He got as far as the corner of the porch and looked back. The boys and I turned and went into the store.

Once inside we stood in the entrance a moment, somewhat hesitant now about being here. At the back counter, two of the storekeepers, Thurston and Dewberry Wallace, were stocking shelves. They glanced over, then paid us no further attention. I didn't much like them. Mama and Papa didn't much like them either. They didn't much like any of the Wallaces and that included Dewberry and Thurston's brother, Kaleb, and their father, John. They said the Wallaces didn't treat our folks right and it was best to stay clear of them. Because of that they didn't come up to this store to shop and we weren't supposed to be coming up here either.

We all knew that. But today as we had walked the red road toward home, Aunt Callie Jackson, who wasn't really our aunt but whom everybody called that because she was so old, had hollered to us from her front porch and said she had the headache bad. She said her nephew Joe was gone off somewhere and she had nobody to send to the store for head medicine. We couldn't say no to her, not to Aunt Callie. So despite Mama's and Papa's warnings about this Wallace place, we had taken it upon ourselves to come anyway. Stacey had said they would understand and after a moment's thought had added that if they didn't he would take the blame and that had settled it. After all, he was twelve with three years on me, so I made no objection about the thing. Christopher-John and Little Man, younger still, nodded agreement and that was that.

"Now mind what I said," Stacey warned us again, then headed for the back counter and the Wallaces. Christopher-John, Little Man, and I remained by the front door looking the store over; it was our first time in the place. The store was small, not nearly as large as it had looked from the

*"The Wallaces don't
treat our folks right...."*

Cassie Logan and her brothers have been warned never to go to the Wallace store, so they know to expect trouble there. What they don't expect is to hear Mr. Tom Bee, an elderly black man, daring to call the white storekeeper by his first name. The year is 1933, the place is Mississippi, and any child knows that some things just aren't done....

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