

A DOCUMENTARY
NOVEL OF THE LANDMARK
CIVIL RIGHTS CASE

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LOVING vs. VIRGINIA



by PATRICIA HRUBY POWELL
illustrated by SHADRA STRICKLAND

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LONG VIEW: NEGRO

Emancipation: **1865**

Sighted through the

Telescope of dreams

Looms larger,

So much larger,

So it seems,

Than truth can be.

But turn the telescope around,

Look through the larger end—

And wonder why

What was so large

Becomes so small

Again.

—LANGSTON HUGHES



1865

1870

1880

1890

1900

1910

1920

1930

1940

1950

1952

Emancipation Proclamation takes full effect, slaves are freed

VIRGINIA HEALTH DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BULLETIN

Vol. XVI.

MARCH, 1924.

Extra No. 2

The New Virginia Law To Preserve Racial Integrity

W. A. PLECKER, M. D., *State Registrar of Vital Statistics, Richmond, Va.*

Senate Bill 219, To preserve racial integrity, passed the House March 8, 1924, and is now a law of the State.

This bill aims at correcting a condition which only the more thoughtful people of Virginia know the existence of.

It is estimated that there are in the State from 10,000 to 20,000, possibly more, near white people, who are known to possess an intermixture of colored blood, in some cases to a slight extent it is true, but still enough to prevent them from being white.

In the past it has been possible for these people to declare themselves as white, or even to have the Court so declare them. Then they have demanded the admittance of their children into the white schools, and in not a few cases have intermarried with white people.

In many counties they exist as distinct colonies holding themselves aloof from negroes, but not being admitted by the white people as of their race.

In any large gathering or school of colored people, especially in the cities, many will be observed who are scarcely distinguishable as colored.

These persons, however, are not white in reality, nor by the new definition of this law, that a white person is one with no trace of the blood of another race, except that a person with one-sixteenth of the American Indian, if there is no other race mixture, may be classed as white.

Their children are likely to revert to the distinctly negro type even when all apparent evidence of mixture has disappeared.

The Virginia Bureau of Vital Statistics has been called upon within one month for evidence by two lawyers employed to assist people of this type to force their children into the white public schools, and by another employed by the school trustees of a district to prevent this action.

Entered as second class matter July 28, 1908, at the Postoffice at Richmond, Va., under the Act of July 16, 1894.

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LOVING VS. VIRGINIA

A DOCUMENTARY NOVEL
OF THE LANDMARK CIVIL RIGHTS CASE

by Patricia Hruby Powell

artwork by Shadra Strickland



CHRONICLE BOOKS
SAN FRANCISCO

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Powell, Patricia Hruby, 1951- author.

Loving vs. Virginia : a documentary novel of the landmark civit rights case /
by Patricia Hruby Powell ; artwork by Shadra Strickland.

pages cm

Summary: Written in blank verse, the story of Mildred Loving, an African American
girl, and Richard Loving, a Caucasian boy, who challenge the Virginia law forbid-
ding interracial marriages in the 1950s.

ISBN 978-1-4521-2590-9

1. Loving, Richard Perry—Trials, litigation, etc.—Juvenile fiction. 2. Loving,
Mildred Jeter—Trials, litigation, etc.—Juvenile fiction. 3. Interracial marriage—
Law and legislation—Virginia—Juvenile fiction. 4. Virginia—Race relations—
Juvenile fiction. 5. Virginia—History—20th century—Juvenile fiction. [1. Loving,
Richard Perry—Trials, litigation, etc.—Fiction. 2. Loving, Mildred Jeter—Trials,
litigation, etc.—Fiction. 3. Interracial marriage—Fiction. 4. Race relations—
Fiction. 5. African Americans—Fiction. 6. Virginia—History—20th century—
Fiction.] I. Strickland, Shadra, illustrator. II. Title. III. Title: Loving versus Virginia.

PZ7 .5.P69Lo 2016

813.54—dc23

[Fic]

2014045089

For all those who struggle with injustice —P. H. P.

Manufactured in China.



Design by Jennifer Tolo Pierce.

Typeset in Eames Century Modern, Futura STD, Brandon Printed, and Toronto Gothic.

The illustrations in this book were rendered in TK.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Chronicle Books LLC

680 Second Street

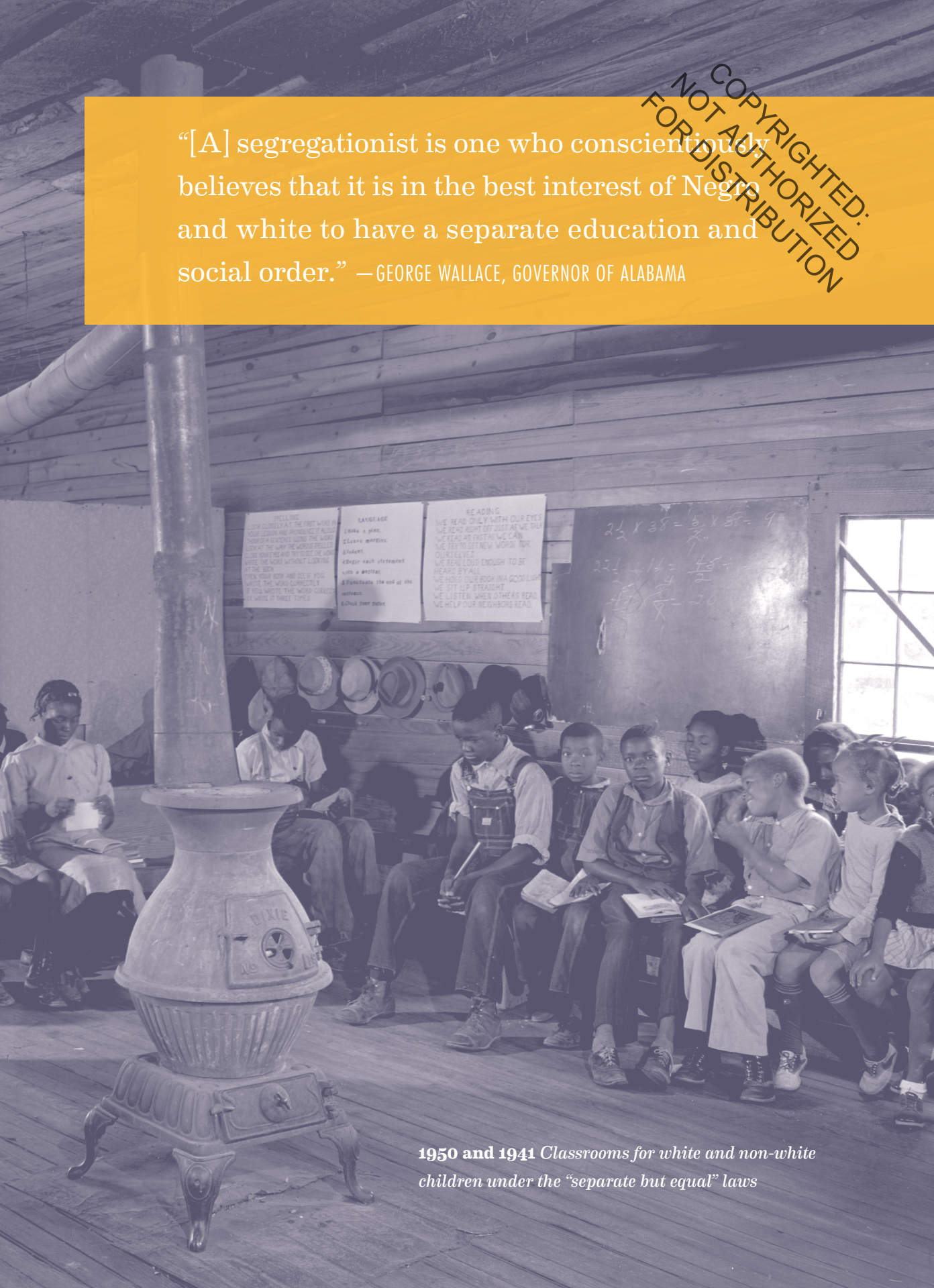
San Francisco, CA 94107

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“[A] segregationist is one who conscientiously believes that it is in the best interest of Negro and white to have a separate education and social order.” —GEORGE WALLACE, GOVERNOR OF ALABAMA

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1950 and 1941 Classrooms for white and non-white children under the “separate but equal” laws

MILDRED

CENTRAL POINT, CAROLINE COUNTY, VIRGINIA

— FALL 1952 —

Garnet and I walk in the grass
alongside the road
to keep our shoes clean,
but Lewis doesn't care.
He's shuffling through dust
in the middle of the road.
Garnet's
hand-me-down lace-ups
have the most life
left in them,
so they're the best.
She gets the best
'cause she's oldest
and has the feet
to fit them.
I wear
her way wore-out saddle shoes
from last year
but painted and buffed
till they nearly glow.
To me, they're the best—
being saddle shoes—
even though I can feel every
stick and pebble
through the thinned-down
soles.
Lewis wears boots so wore-out—
looks like Nippy

chewed them soft
out in the barn.
Being the youngest
of seven brothers—
no telling who wore
those boots
before him.

Lewis is right down in the truck ruts
kicking up dirt and stones
onto my white polished shoes
till I have to say,
"Just quit it."

So he says,
"MAKE ME."

I say,
"You know I can, Pipsqueak."
He's just eight and this is a truthful
description of his size.
I grab him around
his scrawny middle.

He hollers,
"Don't touch me, you,
you STRING BEAN."

He's laughing hard
cause he knows I won't
really whup him
cause I'm five years older
and five years bigger.

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Now I'm laughing
hard enough I could just about
choke

but I manage to say,

"Don't you EVER call me

String Bean,

you Pipsqueak."

And I yell to Garnet—
who's walked ahead
because she is just too old
for this nonsense—

"Help me, Garnet."

Well maybe not too old
'cause Garnet comes and
grabs hold of Lewis's elbow
and I hoist the other
and we fly Lewis over
that dirt road
with him pedaling mid-air
and hollerin'
and that's how we arrive
at Sycamore School.

We are all in Miss Green's class—
Lewis at the bottom
in first grade,
so Miss Green directs him
to the front row.
Garnet's at the top,
in seventh,
she's in the back.

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I'm across the aisle
being in sixth—
all in one room, one teacher
for everyone.

Miss Green hands each of us
older kids a sheet of paper
and pencil and says,
 "Put your name in the top-right corner
 and write what you did
 during summer
 vacation."

Didn't she keep
last year's report?

I write, "Mildred Jeter"
and my paper tears.
I lift it and see that
my desk is a very sad
excuse for a desk.
Carved into the wooden top
are initials—
J. J.—
which most likely was
dug out by
my much older half brother
James Jeter
and I bet he got a thrashin' for that.

And there's P. F. and E. J.
and even a heart with
R. G. and A. M., and I try
to figure which of
my brothers, cousins, or neighbors
belong to those initials.

But Miss Green says,
 "Mildred? Is there a problem?"

"No, ma'am," I say.

I lay my paper back down,
and no sooner set my pencil to it
when it tears again.
I lift my desktop to see if there's
more paper inside and there isn't.
Inside me
something hard and tight
makes me
slam that desk
shut.

"Mildred," growls Miss Green.

"Miss Green, ma'am," I say,
in my most polite voice,
 "This is a mess of a desk. It is
 all carved up."

Miss Green comes over and
hands me a reading book
with a broken spine, says,
 "Put your textbook under your paper
 and try again."

I take the book,
open it up
to see *Edward Jeter*
(another half brother)—
written sloppy
and then crossed out
and *George Jeter*

also written sloppy,
crossed out,
and plenty of other names
crossed out.
You'd think it would
be a comfort—
knowing my big old brothers
read these very pages,
these very stories,
but what I see is all those
many names—
CROSSED OUT.
I know my lower lip
is jutting way forward
the way it does
when I am peeved.
My eyes sting
so I suck my lips into
my mouth to keep
from crying.
My desk is rotten
and I want a brand-new reader
that smells like ink and glue
rather than this one that
reeks of grime and mildew
and has been in the
germy hands
of many boys.

At that moment,
Garnet leans across the aisle
and touches my wrist.

I don't dare look at her
or surely I will cry.
She hands me her paper,
I set it on the old reader
and focus on it hard
so I won't cry.
Still,
one tear plops onto the paper.

I write this (around the teardrop):

*This summer vacation
was pretty much like
last summer vacation.
Garnet and I galloped
through the woods
playing horses.
I pulled weeds out from between
the turnips, collards, and mustard greens.
I piled straw around potatoes.*

*The whole family went to
Bowling Green for the carnival.
I threw a ball, hit the bull's-eye,
won the tiniest little doll
you ever saw—no bigger than
a clothespin, wearing gingham
and an apron.*

*Friends and cousins came over
to our house.
We stayed up late.*

My page is filled so
I just sit and daydream
while Miss Green teaches
the little kids their ABCs.

With so many brothers
I am grateful to have my big sister
Garnet.

We run up and down hills
climb trees
catch tadpoles with our cupped hands
from out of the creek.
Daddy and my brothers—
they hunt squirrels and rabbits
with a shotgun.
They fish for perch and shad
in the streams.
My mama cooks those fish up fine.

Our Jeter ancestors have lived here
in Central Point
for centuries,
hunting and fishing.
Daddy and Mama
are both part Indian.
We are also descended
from African slaves.
And their owners.

Our section—
our rolling hills and woods—
threaded with creeks
is the most beautiful
in the whole wide world.

Besides the greens,
last spring
Garnet and I
helped plant corn
string beans
and turnips
in the side garden.

We'll keep on
hoeing and harvesting
all through the fall.
We'll help with hog-killing
later this season.
Neighbors will come by to help
slaughter, butcher,
hang meat in the shed.

We all milk the cow,
make our own butter.
We wring the necks
of our chickens.
Mama can do two
at a time—
one in either hand,
holdin' 'em by their necks,
she whorls 'em around
a couple times—
they never feel a thing.

Miss Green says,
“Scholars, hand in your papers.”
Garnet turns in a page
so she must
have found another
sheet of paper.

Miss Green hands out math books—
the same text I had last year
but I'm further along,
tells me to read on page 265
and do the problems.
Turn decimals to fractions—
not TOO hard.
Garnet gets a different
old book, writes her name in it.
Miss Green explains
greatest common factors
and sets her to work.
At the end of the day
Miss Green says,
 "Good work, Scholars."
We put our books in our desks.
We never take them home.



Come Saturday,
folks drop by
our house—
young, old,
and everything in between.
This weekend
the big boys come over—
friends of my big brothers.
Theo goes into the refrigerator
looking for food.
Mama shoos him out.
But then adults come by—
out comes
macaroni cheese

hot dogs
potato chips.
And one unfortunate chicken—
who didn't feel a thing
and who I plucked—
gets dropped
into the boiling pot.
When the chicken is cooked
we all eat.
The boys eat too, of course.
We ALL do,
crowded around the table
eating
talking
laughing.
Mama nods and
Garnet and I clear the dishes.

On a blue homespun napkin
Mama sets out
apple pie
still warm from the oven.
Garnet and I
carved out the worms, cored,
sugared those apples—
that is,
after climbing the tree,
shakin' 'em down
pickin' out the best—
Mama calls that
talkin' like a farmer—
shakin' pickin' laughin' talkin'
but aren't we farmers?
Yes we are.

Mama made that pie.
We all dig into our slice,
lean forward and say,
 “One two three” (all together)
 “WHAT A TERRIFIC CRUST.”

Which is what
we always say.
And everyone
at the table knows
Mama won’t make
the next pie
unless we tell her
how good this one is.
She grins.
Then we lean back
so full we can hardly stand it.
Till Mama nods again.
Garnet and I push from
the table and clear away
all the dishes.

Then another family comes by
and they got little kids.
So Garnet and I go into
our room
quick
and each of us
hides our doll
deep in the corner of the closet—
this is not the itty-bitty doll
I won—
this is my just-about life-size
baby doll.
My itty-bitty doll

is living in the woods
in a hollowed-out tree trunk.

Mama sends all us kids
outside anyway.
The boys play catch
but we girls want
to play kickball.
Home plate is the bare spot
behind the shed.
The old plum tree stump
is first base.
The gnarly apple tree
is second.
Third is the rock.
I’m up
and I kick the ball right
through the branches
of the apple tree.
One of the big boys catches it.
He’s not even in the game.
He throws it to the pitcher,
she throws it to first.
Too bad, I’m already at second
on my way to third
but I yell bloody murder
at that big boy
’cause he’s not part of our game.

Because of him
I don’t get
home.
I backtrack fast to third.
He’s laughing like a hyena.

The game's over anyway
'cause the grown-ups want to
play softball with us.
And that's fun.
So we cross over to the field
where there's plenty of space
and the tall grasses
are trampled down.
I'm on a team
with Daddy, Otha,
and two of my much older
half brothers.
What makes them half brothers
is their mama, Daisy,
she died.
And then Daddy married
our mama.
Anyway, Eddy and Button
and a whole lot of more folks—
little and big—
are on our team.



Garnet's on the other team.
She hits a high ball
and I catch it on the fly.
Sorry, Garnet,
you're out.

She yells,
 "NO-O-O" real loud.

But she's a good big sister.
She says,
 "Nice catch . . .
 String Bean."

I don't mind her calling me
String Bean.
Because she said
it was a nice catch.
And it was.

Still, we lose.
But the best is yet to come.

More and more people come over.
They bring food too.
When it starts to go dark
Daddy brings out his banjo
and starts strummin' and pluckin'.
So Theo joins in on his guitar.
Eddy, Button, Doochy, and Dump—
That's all o' my big half brothers—
They all play fiddles and mandolins.

Really they are
Edward, Richard, George, and James.
The Jeters always play music
in the neighborhood
and make jokes—
make people laugh.
And DANCE.

One of the fathers calls
a square dance
and everyone joins in.
Otha dances
Mama dances
Lewis dances.
I surely dance.
Some of the big boys dance.
Mr. and Mrs. Loving—
eyes fastened on each other
even when they've been passed
to the next person—
their names are
Twilley and Lola.
I love their names.
But we call them
Mr. and Mrs. Loving
of course.
And they pretty much are.

If I stop and watch
I see young and old—
Indians, Negroes, Whites—
all mixed together.

Everyone likes each other
in our neighborhood.
Everyone dancing
TOGETHER.

Whites and coloreds—
we go to different schools—
to different churches,
drink from different water fountains.
But our section is different.

My world is right here
in Central Point.
That's what it's called.
Central Point,
the center
of my universe.
My family.
My world.

RICHARD

FALL 1952

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Saturday morning,
I was under the hood screwing with the carburetor
of my '41 DeSoto.

Ray drove up. Looked over my shoulder, said,
Your car it been loadin' up on fuel.
I'd adjust that on the lean side.

Yeah, yeah, I say. That's what I did.

He said,
It's the weekend. Let's go.

So we drove in Ray's car over to Jeters'
to see Doochy and Button and the rest.
They was sure to have good food.

We ate, played some ball.

I caught a kickball that went flying behind their apple trees
and their little sister went bananas.
Seeing her catch on fire was almost worth the hell
Doochy fired at me.

I didn't mean anything by it. Just having a little fun.
I apologized to the kid, though.

Then on Monday, me and Ray were driving the hardtop
toward home.

Here comes the flashing red light,
the wheezing of that siren.

Yep, Sheriff R. G. Brooks.

Ray stopped, of course. Sheriff is the law.

Let me see your license, Boy.

Called him *Boy*. Hell, Sheriff calls Ray's father *Boy*.

I saw Ray roll his eyes—but Sheriff don't see it.

Ray's license, it says "COLORED." Sheriff hates "coloreds."

Sheriff—nasty as anything ever been—

leaned in the car, saw me, said,

What're you doin' here, Son?

Not Boy. I'm SON.

Thank God, not his.

I am coming home from work, Sir, I say, slow and careful,
so he don't misunderstand any part of it.

What Sheriff means is

Why is a white boy in this car with a colored?

We never went to school together—Ray and me.

Before he dropped out

Ray went to Union, for coloreds.

I went to Caroline, for whites.

Before I dropped.

I hate this bastard sheriff.

But I make him think that ain't the case.

No use having the law on your tail.

I said,

*I was walking down the road, Sir, and my friend here
he offered me a ride.*

Sheriff nodded his ugly mug, sneered like a toad.

Stared up into the air.

I looked over at Ray. He was seething, but got it all corked up
like he can do.

Sometimes.

Lookin' cool. Me too, I can be cool.

Me, I'm white, but my daddy,

he drives a truck for P. E. Boyd Byrd—

maybe the richest roundest jolliest "colored" farmer in the section.

In other parts, a white man working for a colored man—

that would be unusual.

But that's how it is here in Central Point.

Sheriff don't like this one lousy bit.

White man puts hisself beneath a colored man?

Workin' for him?

Worse than being colored, right, Sheriff?

'Course, I didn't say that.

Just thinkin'.

Sheriff looked like he was chewin' on his teeth,
kept turnin' over that itty-bitty license,
trying to figure out what mean thing he could do to us.
We wait quiet
while he walked back to his car.

To Sheriff Brooks there are only two races—
white and colored.
In all of Virginia, just two races—
white and colored.

We know Sheriff ain't done with us,
but he let us go for now.

BROWN VS. BOARD OF EDUCATION

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MAY 1954

In **1951**, thirteen parents filed suit against the Topeka, Kansas, Board of Education, protesting the policy of racial segregation. The Kansas District Court ruled against the plaintiffs.

The parents appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. In **1954**, the Supreme Court gave its verdict, banning racial segregation in schools.

"WE CONCLUDE THAT, IN THE FIELD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION, THE DOCTRINE OF 'SEPARATE BUT EQUAL' HAS NO PLACE. SEPARATE EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES ARE INHERENTLY UNEQUAL."

—U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren, Brown vs. Board of Education verdict

Even so, it would be **MORE THAN FIFTEEN YEARS** of struggle and protest before the last American school desegregated.