

A LAND REMEMBERED by Patrick D. Smith

CHAPTER ONE

Miami, Florida 1968

The silver Rolls-Royce glided off Key Biscayne as smoothly as a dolphin cutting the green water of the bay. Solomon MacIvey sat on the back seat, staring intensely at each house they passed, at the spotlessly manicured lawns, as if seeing these things for the first and last time. As they neared the causeway he muttered, "For what this one island is worth today my pappa could have bought the whole damned state back in 1883 when I was born. Folks has gone as crazy as betsy bugs."

"That's right, Mister MacIvey," the driver agreed. "They all gone plumb crazy."

When they came to a park bordered by stately royal palms the old man squinted his tired eyes at the entrance sign: "Solomon MacIvey Park." Then he leaned forward, shook the driver's shoulder and said, "You see that, Arthur. Bought that fifteen acres back in oh-nine for forty-seven dollars and fifty cents. Can you imagine it? And some folks thought I'd been skinned for paying that much. Bet not one damned soul who uses the park can say who Solomon MacIvey is or could care less. Probably cuss me as some empire-building bastard who stole everybody blind back in the old days and then gave this park to salve his conscience."

The black driver nodded in agreement as he turned from the Rickenbacker Causeway and headed up Brickell Avenue. "You sure you want to go through with this, Mister MacIvey?" he asked, knowing what the answer would be but feeling he should ask again for the last time. "I could turn around and go back right now if you'll change your mind."

"I'll not change my mind," MacIvey grunted, "and there'll be no turning back. I don't want to see that big house again. Not ever! Not a single MacIvey died in a fancy place like that, and I'm damned if I'll be the first. We'll go to Punta Rassa as planned, but first I want you to drive up Miami Beach. I want to see it one more time."

"Yes sir, Mister MacIvey. I'll turn across the MacArthur Causeway." As they crossed the causeway they could see cruise ships making their way into the port, their masts decorated

gaily with multi-colored banners. Then the Rolls turned left onto Collins Avenue and moved slowly up South Miami Beach.

The streets here were lined with shabby, rundown apartments and hotels, porches filled with old people sitting in cane-bottom chairs, staring at nothing, some asleep and others perhaps even dead and as yet unnoticed, men and women who had retired from the harsh climate of the North and ended up trapped in the rococo world of South Miami Beach.

"It ain't nothing but a walking cemetery," MacIvey said, staring through heat waves that already drifted up from sultry sidewalks. "Should be turned back to the gulls and terns."

As they continued up Collins Avenue it suddenly changed, as if a boundary line had been drawn across the island, the beach now lined with majestic hotels, one after the other, interspersed with towering condominiums, a concrete and glass canyon blocking the view of the ocean except for those willing to pay to see it from a balcony.

And then they came to the La Florida Hotel, sitting like a stuffed frog, rising boastfully above all of them, thirty stories, with the letters MCI blazoned across its top. The old man said, "I hope someday the son-of-a-bitch gets blown down. I should 'a never built it in the first place."

From this point north the avenue was lined with motels and cocktail lounges and fast food emporiums and souvenir stores with their display windows stuffed with junk, some of it authentic Florida souvenirs made in Hong Kong.

MacIvey then said, "That's enough, Arthur. I'd rather try to remember it like it was when I first saw it. Get us off here at the very next exit."

The driver turned left onto the Julia Tuttle Causeway leading to the mainland. The old man said, "You know who Julia Tuttle was, Arthur?"

"No sir, I sure don't."

"Hell, I do! My mamma visited with her first time we came here in 1895, a few months after the big freeze. She lived in a part of old Fort Dallas. I think Mamma and her had tea together, or maybe it was fruit juice. When the freeze killed everything in Florida except for here, Julia Tuttle sent old man Flagler some orange blossoms up to Palm Beach, just to show

him they were still blooming at Fort Dallas. And that's how come he ran his railroad on down to Miami, 'cause the freeze didn't kill the orange trees. Mamma liked her, but she never got to see her again. And I'll bet ole Julia Tuttle would throw a tissy fit if she could see what this causeway leads to now. She'd probably want her name off of it."

They turned left again at the mainland, cruising down Biscayne Boulevard, its northern section jammed with more motels and junk food shops, service stations, massage parlors, porno movies, bars, adult book stores, the sidewalks empty in the early morning sun but teeming at night with prostitutes and junkies and winos and professional muggers. Then they came into the downtown business section of Miami, passing the MacIvey State Bank Building with the letters MCI across the front entrance, then Bayfront Park with more winos and junkies and panhandlers and muggers.

The driver slowed and said, "What you want me to do now, Mister MacIvey, head out Highway Forty-one?"

"Not quite yet," he responded. "Before we leave I want to see one more thing. I want you to drive through the area where they had the riot."

"What?" the driver questioned, not sure he had heard right. "How come you want to do that? I've heard it's not all over yet."

"Dammit, you heard me, Arthur!" the old man snapped. "I want to see! Drive through there!"

"Yes sir, Mister MacIvey," he responded, shaking his head in disagreement but following orders.

He turned left at the next intersection and followed another boulevard, and soon they came to an area of gutted buildings, boarded up store-fronts and burned automobiles not yet removed from the streets. People standing idly along sidewalks stared with hostility as the Rolls ambled by.

"They did a pretty good job of it," MacIvey commented as they moved out of the area. "But this isn't the end of it. You mark my words, Arthur, there'll be more, and the next one will be even worse. You bring this many different kinds of people together it's like throwing

wolves and panthers into a pen full of cows. The fur never stops flying."

As they moved slowly through the congested traffic of the lower Tamiami Trail, the old man shook the driver's shoulder again and said, "You know, Arthur, I don't know why some folks was so shocked by the riot. Hell, this whole state was born of violence. You can't go anywhere without stepping on the skull of some man or animal that was killed. The whole damned place is littered with bones."

The driver had heard it all before, but he listened attentively as the old man continued, "What I haven't seen myself I've read about. During these past fourteen years I've holed up in that house alone, I've read enough books to fill up Biscayne Bay. I know about those bloodthirsty Spanish conquistadors who came here with their crosses and killed everything in sight in the name of Christianity. Narvaez cut off the nose of chief Ocita and set greyhounds on the chief's mother. And he stood there and watched as the dogs ate the old woman alive, declaring it a miracle of Christ. They eventually wiped out all the Indians, the Timucuan, Ais, Calusas, Apalachees, Jeagas, Tekestan. Menendez lopped off the heads of two hundred Frenchmen who came here, and he did it just because they were Huguenots. A British general named Moore took a sweep down here from South Carolina two hundred fifty years ago and killed over six thousand cows and seven thousand Indians just for the hell of it. The Seminoles went through it three times, and the third war with them was started because some men in an army survey crew got bored and used ole Billy Bowlegs' pumpkins for target practice. After they shot up his pumpkins they pulled up his beans and squash and chopped down his banana trees, and when he complained to them for what they'd done, they told him if he didn't like it he could stick it. And there it went again. Another war. And there ain't no telling how many men in my pappa's time was bushwhacked or knife-gutted or hung on account of fighting over wild cows. Then later it was over the land itself and the putting up of fences. It went on and on, and it hasn't stopped yet, and most likely never will. You won't find the name of MacIvey in history books, Arthur, but they were right in the thick of it. And I mean the thick! We scattered a few bones too."

"Yes sir, Mister MacIvey. I know what you say is the truth."

By now they had left the city and entered the Everglades with its endless stretches of open

sawgrass dotted with distant hammocks of hardwood and palm. The road and both shoulders were littered with the decaying bodies of small animals struck by automobiles. Buzzards flapped out of the way as the car approached, and then returned to the carnage as soon as it passed.

Soon they came to the Miccosukee Indian Reservation bordering the highway, an area lined with airboat rides and tourist villages and craft stores, and after this they entered the Big Cypress Swamp. The road here was stained even worse with the blood and guts of more small animals crushed flat into the steaming asphalt.

The old man studied the passing landscape carefully. "Slow down, Arthur, so I can get my bearings," he cautioned. "It's been a while since I've been here."

After another three miles he said, "Turn right at the next dirt trail."

The tires on the Rolls made crunching sounds as it glided slowly along a sandy road heavily lined with palmetto and pond cypress. A mother raccoon with her brood of babies scurried out of the way as they made a sharp turn and came into the edge of a clearing. MacIvey said, "Stop here and wait. It could be we'll have another passenger."

Several chickee huts were spaced at random around the clearing, and beneath one of them an old woman stirred a cooking pot with a wooden spoon.

MacIvey approached her and said, "I'm looking for Toby Cypress."

Without speaking she pointed toward a chickee at the far side of the clearing.

MacIvey hesitated for a moment, looking around the Seminole village, remembering the first time he had come here over seventy years ago, seeing that nothing had changed except faces. Then he walked to the chickee and found an old man sitting beside it, his hair solid white, his sun-baked skin as wrinkled as cypress bark. He seemed to be asleep as MacIvey said, "Toby Cypress?"

The old Indian squinted and said, "Yes. I am Toby Cypress. What is it you wish of me?"

"Don't you know who I am?"

Toby Cypress pushed himself up and looked closer, and then he smiled.

"Sol MacIvey! It has been many decades now, and age has ravaged both of us, but I would still know you. It is only a MacIvey who is so tall and lanky. Sit here with me and tell me why you have come back to the village after all this time."

MacIvey settled himself to the ground in front of Toby Cypress and said, "You haven't changed so much, Toby. Do you still ride a marshtackie like the wind?"

"No, Sol. I have not been on a horse for so long now I don't remember. All I do is sit in the chickee like an old woman. I am growing tired of it."

"We sure used to ride, didn't we?" MacIvey said, remembering fondly. "And we had some good times together, too. I've thought of them often. And I've kept track of you through the years although I haven't been back here. I know you served for a long time as tribal leader and did many good things for your people."

"Yes, this is so. We now have two reservations, but I've never lived there. I would rather stay here in the swamp where I belong. But many of my people live there, and we have cattle once again. But tell me, why have you come back now like a ghost from the past?"

"I'm on my way to Punta Rassa, to live my last days at the cabin Pappa built there. I've left my house in Miami and will never return to it. I would rather see things as they once were."

"There is no more Punta Rassa as you knew it," Toby Cypress said, his eyes reflecting sadness. "It is all gone, Sol, just as Lake Okeechobee as we once knew it is gone, and the custard-apple forest is gone, and the bald cypress trees are gone. You are trying to capture the fog, and no one can do that."

"The cabin is still there, as good as ever, and the land too. I came to ask you to go with me. We can hunt and fish, and plant a garden, and be close like we once were."

Toby Cypress picked up a stick and scratched in the dirt, and then he said, "There is a Seminole legend that says when an old man knows he is going to die, he goes off alone into the woods, searching for the place of his birth. That is what you are doing now, Sol. I will make the same journey very soon. But we must each do it in our own way. I cannot go with you to Punta Rassa."

"I suppose not, Toby, but I just thought I'd ask. But I do want to part with you this last time

as friends and as a brother, like it used to be. I'm sorry we broke away in anger those many years ago."

"I am sorry too, and I am no longer angry at you for destroying the land as you did. But Sol, it could have never been different with us. We are brothers only because we had the same father. My mother was Seminole, and yours white, and we were born to live in different worlds. There was no other way. We have each lived our lives as we had to, and now we depart in different ways. But know this, Sol. I have always loved our father, Zech MacIvey, just as my mother loved him. And I have loved you too. I have no hatred in my heart. Believe this now, and we will go in peace."

"That's what I wanted to hear," MacIvey said, his face relieved. "I have no children, Toby, and I am the last of the MacIveys. It ends with me, and that is my biggest regret from the way I messed up my life. But the MacIvey blood runs on in the veins of your sons, and I want you to know I'm proud of this. Pappa would be proud too. And there's another thing I want you to know. All the land I still own that hasn't been turned into concrete, and there is a great deal of it, including the

land south of Okeechobee and along the Kissimmee River, I am turning into a preserve where the animals can live again as they once did."

"That is good," Toby Cypress replied, pleased, "but do it soon before there are no more birds in the sky and no more creatures on the land."

"It's already done. And all the money I leave behind will be spent to buy more land for preserves. It's the least I can do now to make up for the bad things I've done in the past. Things I'm not proud of, Toby. And there's a great deal of money to do this, more than you can imagine." He then got up and said, "It's time for me to go now, Toby. We won't see each other again, so I'll say farewell – and happy hunting."

Toby Cypress pushed himself up slowly then he grasped MacIvey's hand.

"Goodbye, Sol. Brother. We are both part of a time that is no more, and it is good that it ends soon for both of us. I hope you capture the fog and find a small part of it again in your last days."

The two old men stood facing each other, Solomon MacIvey gripping the wrinkled brown hands tightly; then he turned and walked away. He did not look back as the Rolls retraced its way down the sandy trail.

Just before noon they came to the southern outskirts of Naples and into a logjam of traffic, cars and trucks moving slowly bumper to bumper, impatient drivers blaring horns and shaking fists at each other in anger. Both sides of the highway were lined solidly with fast food joints and service stations and shopping centers. When they stopped for a traffic light the driver said, "You want to stop now and get something to eat, Mister MacIvey? And it's time for your pill."

"Damn the pill!" MacIvey snapped. "And we'll wait till we get there to eat. All we'd do here is choke to death on carbon monoxide."

The trip became slower and slower until finally they turned from the main highway and followed a two-lane road leading toward the Gulf. It skirted the south bank of the Caloosahatchie River and then turned back inland.

Once again the Rolls glided down a sandy road lined with palmetto, and presently they came to a locked gate. After opening the gate the driver moved the car into a one hundred fifty-acre jungle of cabbage palms and hickory and oaks surrounded by a cyclone fence topped with three strands of barbed wire.

The cabin, located in the center of the forest, was made of cypress boards weathered black but still sturdy and well preserved. The open area around it was freshly mowed. At the edge of the clearing, directly behind the cabin, there was an outhouse and a storage shed.

MacIvey got out of the car and said, "This cabin is older than I am, Arthur, but it's still as good as it was when Pappa built it. They don't make lumber like that no more. And this is one piece of land that'll never feel the bite of a bulldozer blade. I've seen to that."

As soon as everything had been carried inside, MacIvey said, "Fetch us a couple of cans of beans and some beer, Arthur. We'll eat at the table out here."

The driver hesitated, and then he said, "You know you not supposed to drink beer, Mister MacIvey. And you still haven't taken a pill. I put your pill bottle on the stand beside the bed."



"You can just take the damned thing back to Miami with you!" the old man said defiantly. "I'm not taking any more pills! And I'm not having some damned crabby nurse hovering over me all the time, telling me what I can eat and drink and what I can't! Why the hell you think I came up here?"

The driver said gently, trying to calm the old man, "I'm just trying to help, Mister MacIvey. You done had two heart attacks, and you know what the doctor said about the pills."

"I know what he said, and I don't want to hear another damned word about it! Now you go on and fetch us something to eat like I said!"

"Yes sir, Mister MacIvey."

The two of them sat at a cypress table facing each other, eating from the cans with spoons.

MacIvey took a huge bite, washed it down with beer and said, "That's good, Arthur. Nothing's more fittin' for a man than beans, but the doctor says I can't eat them no more. Causes too much gas. I'll have 'em again for breakfast in the morning. Hell, I've eaten enough beans to bury that doctor and I'm still here. I'll bet I'm the only eighty-five-year-old cracker left with all his own teeth. Wasn't for this bad heart I could go another eighty-five years. But I wouldn't want to, not the way things are now. I've seen too much as it is. My pappa and my grampy would have strokes if they could see what's happened since they left.

That road we came over today, Arthur, with the fancy name of Tamiami Trail. Before it was finished back in twenty-eight, it took ten days to cross the Everglades to Miami, and we made the same trip this morning in three hours. But my pappa wouldn't want to see it. He'd rather go by horse and canoe and take the ten days. He'd say, 'Hell, what's the God awful hurry?' " He suddenly changed the subject. "How long you been working for me, Arthur?"

The black man scratched his gray temple and tried to think, counting on his fingers. He finally said, "'Bout thirty years, Mister MacIvey. Ever since I wandered into your place broker than a haint and you gave me a job tendin' the yard."

"You like to drive that Rolls, don't you?"

"Yessir, I sure do. It beats those clunkers we had back during the war. But they was all we could get then."

"Well, that one is yours now. I've already had the title changed. You can do whatever you want with it."

Surprise flashed into Arthur's face, and then pleasure. "I rightly thank you, Mister MacIvey! I never thought I'd own a car like that. But you didn't have to do it."

"I know I didn't have to!" MacIvey shot back. "A man my age don't have to do anything, including worrying about what he puts in his belly. I did it because I want to. I've also set up a trust fund in your name that will give you all the money you need for the rest of your life. The attorney will tell you about it when you get back to Miami. You can take off that damned chauffeur suit whenever you want to and throw it right into the middle of Biscayne Bay, and you can go down to the social security office and tell them to kiss your butt."

"Lord God, thank you, Mister MacIvey!" Arthur exclaimed, his voice trembling. Then he reached over and grabbed the old man's hand.

"I was worried sick about what I'd do when you left! I don't know what to say, Mister MacIvey!"

"Then don't say nothing. And don't get carried away and slobber on me. I can't stand to see a man slobber. And it's about time you headed back to Miami."

They got up and walked to the car together. MacIvey said, "You can come back in a week and bring more grub. And beer too. The grounds keeper is out here every morning checking on things, so don't worry about me. And don't tell a damn soul where I am. You understand?"

"Yes sir, I understand. I won't tell a soul." He suddenly grabbed MacIvey, hugged the frail body tightly and said, "I thanks you again, Mister MacIvey! God bless you!"

"Damn, Arthur!" the old man roared. "I done told you not to slobber on me! Now git!"

He watched briefly as the Rolls turned around and headed back along the sandy lane, then he muttered, "Folks nowadays think a old man can't take care of himself and make it alone. I never knew a MacIvey to need a nursemaid, and I don't either. Hell! I'll throw them pills out for the buzzards to eat."

Then he went inside the cabin and slammed the door.

## CHAPTER TWO

La Florida 1863

“Damn!”

The sound of it boomed across the small clearing and seemed to rattle the palmetto trees just beyond. A startled rabbit jumped straight upward and then bounded off into the brush.

“They done it again!”

This second outburst caused a flight of crows to change course abruptly and shriek loudly in protest.

Tobias MacIvey kicked at the dry dirt with his worn brogan shoe. His blackbearded face showed sweat beneath the protection of a wide-brimmed felt hat, and his slim six-foot frame was encased in a pair of badly faded overalls.

Just then Zechariah MacIvey came out of the brush, running as fast as his six-year-old legs would carry him. He scurried through the split-rail fence and shouted, “What’s the matter, Pappa? What is it?”

“Them wild hogs done pushed through the fence again and got in the garden. Just look at that! Everything I planted is rooted up, and I ain’t got no more seeds. Guess we’ll have to eat acorns this winter right alongside the squirrels. From the looks of this mess them hogs ain’t been gone from here more than a half hour. Maybe we can at least get some meat out of it. Run fetch my shotgun while I fix the fence and see if I can save anything.”

“Yessir, Pappa. I’ll run fetch it and be back real soon.”

Tobias was on his knees, trying to straighten a collard plant when the boy returned. He staggered as he half-carried and half-dragged a double barrel ten gauge shotgun that looked to be as long as the trunk of a cabbage palm. He also had a shell sack around his neck.

Tobias took the shotgun and lifted it to his right shoulder, and then Zech followed as the gaunt man left the garden and followed a trail southward into thick woods. Tobias studied the tracks carefully, and then he said, “Looks to be about six or seven of them. They’re heading for the creek to wash down my vegetables. You be careful of snakes. In this heat, they’ll be laying up under bushes. I wish them hogs would eat snakes like they’re supposed to and leave

the garden alone.”

They moved silently past a thick stand of hickory trees; then the man motioned for the boy to stop. “You be quiet from here on,” he cautioned. “They’re just up ahead. We don’t want to come on them sudden like and have ’em turn on us. Then you’d really learn how to shinny up a tree in a hurry.”

Once again they moved forward slowly, the shotgun now pointing to the ground. Tobias suddenly stopped and lifted the gun to his shoulder. Fifty feet ahead the seven hogs came out of a clump of palmetto and faced him. All were boars, and each had tusks that formed a complete circle. The hogs looked ready to charge when Tobias pulled the trigger, sending forth a tremendous boom followed by a thick cloud of smoke and fire.

For a moment neither man nor boy could see through the smoke, and the sound of animals running frantically overwhelmed the echo of the shotgun. Then the wind whisked the gray cloud away, and before them one boar ran in a close circle, the entire top of its head missing, blood spewing over the ground in a flood. The animal’s brains had splattered across the trunk of a tree fifteen feet from where it had been hit. Then the boar fell to the ground, kicked wildly for a moment, and lay still.

Tobias said, “You see where I shot him, Zech. Right in the head. You gut shoot a wild boar, he’ll run a hundred yards after he’s hit, and tear your leg off with them tusks. Always shoot him in the head so he can’t see you and come after you. You best take note of this.”

“Yessir, Pappa.” the boy said, his voice quivering. The sight of so much blood was making him sick. He forced himself to watch as his father slit the boar’s throat to make sure it was dead.

Tobias then ran the knife blade down the hog’s stomach, dumping the entrails onto the ground. He said, “There’s my collards, right in his belly. He won’t eat nothing of ours no more. He’s a big one, over two hundred pounds, and he’s sure too heavy for me to tote back to the house. You wait here while I got and get one of the oxen. Then we’ll drag him back.”

The boy sat down reluctantly beside the bloody carcass as the man walked away quickly.

Tobias MacIvey was thirty years old and had been in the Florida scrub for five years. He had come south out of Georgia in 1858. In his horse-drawn wagon there was a sack of corn and a sack of sweet potatoes, a few packets of seeds, a shotgun and a few shells, a frying pan, several pewter dishes and forks, and a cast-iron pot. There were also the tools he would need to clear the land and build a house: two chopping axes, a broad axe foot adz, crosscut saw, auger bite, a fro and drawing knife.

His wife Emma, five years younger than he, held the baby as gently as possible as the wagon bounced over an old Indian trail that skirted to the east of the Okefenokee Swamp and then turned due south.

Tobias had owned forty acres of red Georgia clay when he tried to farm and failed. When he sold the cabin and land he had enough money to buy only what was in the wagon.

When they crossed into Florida and reached Fernandina, Tobias traded his horses for a pair of oxen which Zech named Tuck and Buck. Included in the trade was a guinea cow, a strange-looking little Spanish animal with a small body that stood only one foot from the ground. But she had a huge udder and would provide milk for all of them.

The rumble of a coming civil war had already been felt in Georgia when Tobias left the clay hills and headed south to seek a new life in a virtually unknown land. He knew it was just a matter of time. He also thought the war would not affect Florida as it would Georgia, and if he went into the eastern scrub area, he would be left alone for a long time, perhaps forever. There was nothing in the Florida wilderness worth fighting over. And his guess had been right. The war thus far touched only the coastal areas of the state, and because his homestead was so isolated, he knew little of what was happening. Occasionally a stranger would drift by and give him the news. He would also hear of the war when he made trips to a small settlement on the St. Johns River to trade animal hides for supplies.

The first two years in Florida had been a time of near starvation. He cleared a garden and planted his precious seeds, but the poor sandy soil offered little in return. And the wild animals were a constant problem when plants did break through into the sunlight. Deer, turkey, and hogs were plentiful in the woods, but shells were so hard to come by that he could kill only when it was an absolute necessity to survive. Also during the first year, panthers

killed the guinea cow and left only a pile of shattered bones.

During this time they lived in a lean-to made of pine limbs and palmetto thatch. There was nothing to ward off the summer mosquitoes and the roaming rattlesnakes and the rain and the biting winter cold. Emma feared for the safety of the baby, and they finally made a crude hammock so that she could at least keep him off the ground.

In the second year, Tobias started building the house, cutting the logs in a nearby hammock and dragging them to the site with the oxen, shaping the logs and lumber by hand, building a wall one torturous foot at a time. The roof was of cypress shingles, and devoting what time he could to produce them, he made twenty-five each day. It took more than five hundred to build the roof.

More than a year of sweat and pain went into the rugged structure before it was complete enough for them to move inside. Yet ahead of him was the task of building beds and tables and chairs and completing the mud and store fireplace.

There were many times when Tobias thought otherwise, but they did survive.

He learned many things by trial and error, and passing strangers told him of others. He learned that he could plant a wide-grained rice in rows on sandy ridges and that it would grow without irrigation, depending solely on the natural elements. Some of the seed had been given to him by a family heading south in an oxen caravan. When the first crop came in they whisked off the stalks by hand and then beat them inside a wooden barrel, catching the grains in a cloth sack.

He also found that nothing would grow on pine ridges but many food plants would survive in hammock ground, and after the second year he moved his garden away from the house area and into a nearby hammock.

A man in the St. Johns settlement told him that twenty miles to the west there was a herd of wild cows. They were too wild for anyone to ever catch without dogs and horses, but in one grazing area, they had littered the ground with manure. Tobias went there with his wagon and brought back a load of manure for the garden, and each spring he would return for another load of the life-giving fertilizer.

Gradually, he made chairs from sturdy oak and wove cane bottoms onto them, and he fashioned a table from cypress. He trapped enough raccoons to trade their furs for a coal oil lamp so they could have light at night. Brooms were made from sage straw, soap from animal fat and lye; meat was preserved by smoking, and what few vegetables they did harvest were canned or dried for the winter. Emma learned to make flour from cattail roots and they used wild honey as a substitute for sugar. What they all missed most were milk and butter, and there was no substitute for them. He vowed that someday he would own another milk cow, and this time he would protect her better.

The one thing Tobias feared most was the abundance of predators that roamed the land: bears, panthers, and wolves. Nothing was safe from them, and he dared not go into the woods without the shotgun. Darkness was when the predators roamed freely, and he kept the oxen locked inside the small barn each night, even during the hottest part of summer.

Tobias came into the clearing leading the ox with the hog tired behind with a rope. Zech was riding the lumbering animal, kicking his feet into its sides and whooping loudly. The ox paid no heed to the boy as it ambled to the side of the house. Emma came outside at the sound of the commotion.

She was a robust woman dressed in an ankle-length gingham dress and high-topped laced shoes patched with deer hide. Almost as tall as Tobias, she was big-boned and brawny, and her raven-black hair was tied in a bun. Before marrying Tobias she spent her youthful days in cotton fields where her father worked as a sharecropper, and she knew work from the moment she was strong enough to carry a water bucket from well to kitchen. She was the personification of strength, and it affected all those around her.

Emma looked at the hog and said, “He’s big, but he sure is scrawny. Not an ounce of fat for lard. I’ll have to boil him down good before I can do anything with him, else he’ll be tough as shoe leather. Maybe we can grind up some for sausage. Slice off a few thin strips of the loin and I’ll fry it for supper.”

Emma turned and went back inside the house as Tobias said, “Put ole Tuck back in the barn, son, and I’ll start the fire.” First, he would scald the hog in the huge black pot, then he

would scrape the hide and cut the meat into sections.

What they could not eat before it spoiled would be cured in the smokehouse Tobias built beside the barn. The skin Emma would make into cracklins.

Soon the clearing was filled with smoke as a fire came to life beneath the cast-iron pot. Then the smell of seared flesh permeated the surroundings.

Late that afternoon, they sat down to a meal of fried pork and a pot of boiled poke Emma gathered in the woods behind the barn. There was also a loaf of flat bread made from the cattail flour.

Tobias said, "Lord, thank Ye for the vittles. Amen." Then he said, "Ain't much to be thankful for, is it?"

"It's food," Emma said. "But I sure wish we could get some cornmeal. A pone of corn bread would go good with some fresh swamp cabbage."

"What I hanker for is beef," Tobias said, chewing hard on the tough pork. "A roast as big as a saddle blanket. Zech's done growed up without tasting beef, and a boy like him needs beef to make him strong."

"Hog is fine for me, Pappa." Zech said, helping himself to another spoonful of poke greens.

"That's because you ain't had nothing better. If I had knowed it would be so hard here I might have stayed in Georgia. We got to get us a catch dog. If I just had a catch dog, I could round up some wild cows and start a herd. I need a horse too. A horse ain't worth nothing in pulling a wagon through this sandy soil, but you sure can't catch cows without a horse and a dog. And a dog would help keep the varmints away from here at night."

They ate in silence for a moment, and then Emma said, "It will all come in time, Tobias. We're not that bad off. We can make do till times get better for us. The Lord will look over us."

"Well, I don't believe the Lord would like to live all winter on nothing but coon meat and swamp cabbage. I got to have a horse and a dog. And some more powder and shot to make



shells. I can trap coons and trade the hides, but I can't trap a 'gator. You got to shoot him. And the man at the trading post told me he would pay a dollar fifty for alligator hides. I bet there's a thousand of them in the creek just waiting to be shot and skinned."

"Maybe we could kill them with an axe," Zech said, becoming excited at the thought of hunting alligators.

"Son, you hit a 'gator on the head with an axe, he'd just grab the handle and eat the whole thing. Then he'd finish up his mean with both your legs. You got to shoot a 'gator to kill him. So, for now, we'll have to make do with the coon hides.

Maybe I've got enough of them tacked to the barn to get us some real flour and some cornmeal too. And also a pound of coffee. I done forgot how it tastes. I'll go over to the trading post the end of the week and swap all I have. Tomorrow I'll cut some cypress poles and start building a pen for the cows. Somehow or other I'm going to get me a dog and horse."

>>> This was Chapter 1 and 2 of *A Land Remembered*, by Patrick D. Smith. Order the book at [PatrickSmithOnline.com](http://PatrickSmithOnline.com). Use code Chapter1 upon checkout when ordering and you'll get 10% off!