



## "porch, either in the hammock..."

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See

porch, either in the hammock or the slanty wooden swing, even when it rained. Her parents, Luther and Ida, worked two jobs each—Ida picking cotton in the day and sweeping the lumber shacks in the evening. Luther and Uncle Frank were field workers and very happy to have jobs since most of the young men around there had enlisted in the war and when it was over didn't come back to work cotton or lumber. Then Uncle Frank enlisted too. He got in the navy as a cook and glad about that because he didn't have to handle explosives. But his ship sank anyway and Miss Noella hung the Gold star in the window as though she, and not a Salem ex-wife, was the honorable mother who had lost a son. Ida's job at the lumber yard gave her the asthma that finally killed her, but it paid off because at the end of that year they were able to rent a place from Old Man Shepherd who drove in from Jeffrey every Saturday morning to collect the rent money.

See remembered the relief and the pride they all took to be in their own house. There they could let Mr. Haywood put them on his

monthly list of people who needed supplies from the general store in Jeffrey. Sometimes he would bring back chewing gum and mint balls, free, for the children. Jeffrey had the sidewalks, running water, stores and a bank and a school. Lotus was separate with no sidewalks or indoor plumbing, just houses and two churches, one of which a teacher used for reading and arithmetic. See thought it would have been better if there were more books to read—just Grimm's Fairy Tales, a book of Bible passages for young people.

That, she mused, was the reason she married a rat. If she hadn't been so ignorant living in a no-count, not-even-a-town place with only chores, church, and nothing else to do, she would have known better. Watched, watched, watched by every grown up from sunrise to sunset, when she and a few other girls reached fourteen and started talking about boys, See was prevented from any real flirtation because of big brother, Frank. The boys knew she was off limits because of him. That's why when Frank reached

eighteen, enlisted and left town, she fell for what Noella called the first thing she saw wearing trousers instead of overalls.

His name was Principal but he called himself Prince. A visitor from Atlanta to his aunt's house, he was a good-looking new face with shiny, thin-sole shoes. All the girls were impressed with his big city accent and what they believed was his knowledge and experience. See most of all.

Splashing water on her shoulders, she wondered why she didn't at least ask the aunt he was visiting why he was sent to the backwoods instead of spending the winter in the big, bad city. But feeling the space where her brother had been, she had no defense. That's the bad thing, she thought, about having a smart, tough brother close at hand to take care of and protect you—you are slow to develop your own brain muscle.\* So if Prince said she was pretty, she believed him. If he said at fourteen she was a woman, she believed that too. And if he said I want you for myself, it was