

PRINCE GEORGE COUNTY, VIRGINIA

It was a small house set back from the road, with a huge lawn in front that I mowed each week to earn my allowance. On Saturdays I pushed the lawnmower across the green expanse to form narrow parallel lanes, listening to the spin of metal blades, breathing in the sweetness of freshly cut grass. There were fields upon fields in all directions, no fences, only a line of woods in the distance. The closest structure was directly across the road, an abandoned one-story clapboard building on a flat dirt lot. It had once been a church, and our house had been built for the parson. Someone, perhaps the parson's wife, had planted forsythia by the mailbox, at the juncture of driveway and road. On April mornings it was intoxicating to stand beside the blaze of yellow forsythia and wait for the school bus, the branches of tiny clustered flowers and an endless sky all around me.

My favorite room was a large attic space above the kitchen. It had one window, and through it I could see the weathered shed behind the house, a stretch of land, and the woods, gray in winter, blurred with color in the spring. The attic was the best place to be when it rained. I listened to the music of water falling on the tin roof, and dreamt of all I would do in the wider world beyond those fields. Outside, it was the garden that my mother planted at the side of the house that I loved most. While she tended the green life of the earth, I sat in the dirt and dug my hands into the rich dark loam. Let it sift through my fingers. I felt a sense of peace there unlike any other I have ever known. When I want to remember what it is to feel completely safe, at one with everything, I return in my mind to that warm tilled soil, and my mother's voice in the blue air.

Cristina White. "Prince Gorge County, Virginia"
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