

# SOLOMON'S PORCH by Janet Morris Grimes

## EXCERPT

Time.

Solomon was running out of it.

He rarely made wise choices when pressed for time.

He ached to get home in time for dinner. Sweat trickled from his forehead as he battled the stifling beat-down of the afternoon Georgia sun. At the ivy-covered iron gates to the cemetery, he shielded his eyes and considered his options.

From either direction, the route led home. He was sure of it.

*Why couldn't I find their tombstones today?*

Tombstones and rituals were all he had left.

*Except for Sadie Beth. I must hurry!*

He loosened his bow tie as he thought about a tall glass of Sadie Beth's sweet tea. She would be getting worried soon. He checked his watch. The second hand hadn't circled the dial in years. Still, he couldn't force himself to remove the timepiece. Sadie Beth had surprised him with it when he'd dropped her off at college.

*Always on my mind. Love, Sadie Beth.*

He smiled as he remembered the engraving.

As a shiver ran up his spine, he realized the sun had dipped low in the sky. He wiggled his cap back on his head and gripped his cane, using his finger to trace the names etched into the handle. Winnie on one side. Silas on the other. Another gift from Sadie Beth.

*Better hurry. Sadie Beth will be waiting.*

He winched himself up from the bench and took off at a pace he couldn't handle. Soon, each breath brought an intense wheeze.

A shiver ran through him.

The paved driveway led to the street, he knew that for certain.

At the end of the drive, he expected to see a stop sign to his left. To the right, down the road a piece, should be the water tower which boasted the high school football legacy of the Ginger Ridge Eagles, state champions from 1997 through 1999. Visible from any direction, he trusted the beacon of the water tower to guide him to Main Street.

But the tower was nowhere in sight.

Solomon chose the road to the right, though it proved more winding and narrower than he recalled. Still, he felt certain the turnoff ahead would fork to the left halfway down the hill, past the faded billboard that read:

**GINGER RIDGE – HOME OF FORT BRYCE**

**WELCOME HOME, SOLDIERS!**

**WE’VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU!**

Ginger Ridge deserved an updated sign. Fort Bryce shut down a decade ago.

Solomon’s heart climbed out of his chest, pounding hard.

“I’ve got to get home in time for dinner.” Solomon’s raspy words dissipated into the weight of the late summer humidity. “Sadie Beth will be mad as a hornet if I’m late again. I’ll stop at the pay phone on the corner to call home.”

The last rays of sunlight took a nosedive behind a thick row of pines. Deep shadows dominated this stretch of road, and darkness was never kind to Solomon.

He groaned and patted his pockets for the flashlight he kept with him.

Nothing.

*I must have left it on my dresser.*

A whimper escaped his throat. He pressed on, his strength and determination draining with each step.

A rock wedged into one of Solomon’s loafers, biting him in the foot. He braced himself against his cane to check his shoe. His ankle cracked, and a couple toes wiggled through a hole at the edge. He pried the rock out with his finger.

*I need to polish these shoes first thing in the morning.*

He zig-zagged to the center of the lane and took off as fast as his gimpy legs could carry him in a desperate hunt for the blasted water tower.