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# Homecoming

Guinn Vanzant

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*The sweet fragrance of Mama*

# Homecoming

By Guinn Vanzant

Mama was home. I came in from school and potatoes were frying, cornbread baking, and beans bubbling in the pot because Mama was home. We filled our plates again and again and told about school and funny Mrs. Martin and how many trips we made to the principal's office. Mama smiled and shook her head from side to side, but we just giggled and ate more cornbread and beans because it was all right with Mama.

On cold winter nights the quilts were warm, thick, soft, and clean-smelling. I snuggled down deep inside those quilts — all snug and warm while the wind whistled and howled outside all night long. I heard the sounds of Mama working in the house, getting things all done up and ready for tomorrow: the cabinet doors opening and closing, the clanging of pots and pans and the clash of utensils, and Mama humming the amazing grace of Jesus our Lord. I was lulled to sleep by the swish of mama's apron and the shuffle of her feet as she went from room to room checking doors and windows. I knew we were safe for the night because Mama was home.

When my eyes burned and my throat ached, Mama rubbed my chest with salve and kissed me on my cheek. It made it so much better, and I smelled Mama all night long and felt her warm kiss. She dabbed a cool, wet rag on my fevered brow, and I dozed with Mama near. I knew I'd be all right because Mama was home.

The bacon sizzled in the big iron skillet and my nostrils woke the rest of me up. I smelled Mama's coffee, and I lay there listening to the sounds of morning and of breakfast. It made me get up out of that warm bed and scurry across the cold hardwood floor to the warmth of the kitchen and to Mama. Morning was morning and breakfast was breakfast because Mama was home.

I wore my best dress and shoes. I fixed my hair in its most becoming way. I had butterflies in my stomach, and Mama told me I would have fun in spite of it all. She told me about her first date, and we laughed and Mama made it easier for me to wait. Then when he stood me up and I cried like a baby, Mama held me in her arms again. And somehow it was all right because Mama was home.

Mama cried at my wedding and she held me close to her and said if I ever needed her she would be there for me. Then she threw the rice and waved goodbye.

I walked through the doors with the sound of the choir still buzzing around inside my head. My gaze went from the empty cookstove to the quilt folded up in the corner to the heavy ceramic mug hanging from the hook by the coffeepot. I lifted the bright red rose to my cheek and its sweet fragrance filled the room — because Mama, my sweet Mama . . . was home. (winner of the Alpha Chi Award at ECOSU in Ada — Spring, 1984). ●