

# HOME COMING ✓

(Short Story)

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The woman in the faded gray dress moved about the room quietly. She was not yet forty-five, but the tired look that fell into set lines in her features made her look over fifty. Her face bore traces of sorrow and pain, want and suffering that she must have continuously borne. Yet, the firm set of her jaw belied the fact that she had really suffered. Instead, it gave her face a queer sort of strength and character.

She moved about the room with a feeling of suppressed excitement. She patted the shabby cushions in place and tried vainly to make them stand stiff and straight. Making a mental note to stuff them with new cotton "one of these days," she walked to the window and pulled the curtains open. Her curtains never failed to give her pleasure and satisfaction. In a place where living standards ran strictly to bare necessities, her curtains seemed the very last note in elegance and high living.

There was not a sign of his coming home yet. The road stretched out in the cool rays of the late afternoon sun—dim, dusty and parched. The acacia trees on both sides stood mute and tall, giving a look of peace and quiet to the whole countryside and at the same time adding to it a rustic and tranquil note. She watched the road from her window with a sense of peace and contentment. She felt a curious sense of happiness flooding her whole being; she knew that tears were beginning to form behind her eyes. Her son was coming home at last for a much-needed rest cure. She knew that he would stay for a long time, long enough for her to try to lift the veil that had shrouded their lives.

She pulled her favorite chair by the

window and smiled fondly as she began to recall the days when he was just a toddling infant. Her first and only child, he had been pampered altogether too much, she was afraid, although she would never have admitted this to herself, much less to her husband. Sonny's upbringing had been the constant source of her frequent quarrels with him. The most serious they ever had made her remote and unyielding. Till the day he died, which was shortly afterwards, there grew an unseen barrier of icy coldness between them which had separated them completely.

She felt a sense of being forsaken when her boy came home one day and asked her a question.

"Mother, does a girl really act different from what she feels?"

"What do you mean?" she asked with a sense of foreboding.

"My friends tell me that they play hard to get."

"Sonny, what are you talking about? You are hardly fifteen, child. Don't tell me you are already after a girl."

"And why not, Mother?" There was a strident note of defiance in his voice. "Not in the sense you mean, anyway," he continued. "I like Tita just as I would a sister, if I had one. More, perhaps—I do not know exactly how much. It's just I feel perfectly at ease with her. I love to watch her and listen to her gay prattle"

Suddenly, an ominous silence hung between them. The boy felt naked and silly before the silent intensity of his mother's eyes. He knew suddenly that he would not ask questions any more, not ever again. The mother sensed this sudden withdrawal and felt cold panic.

She remembered how easily barriers could be built and make complete strangers out of people.

"Sonny, go ahead and tell me more about this girl," she urged.

"She is not very unusual, Mother. Not unusual enough to talk about. Shall we eat soon? I think I shall take a shower first."

As the boy walked out of the room, she felt that it was more out of her life. The breach between them widened as the years passed, and she visibly suffered. In vain did she try to recapture their gay comradeship. Whenever she tried to draw him towards her, she sensed at once his sudden withdrawal and his attitude of defense.

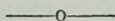
She felt lonelier when he left for the city. His home visits were brief and perfunctory, and when he finally finished his studies and found work, even his very rare visits stopped. Only his brief letters with the monthly checks kept coming—the single fact that persistently reminded her she still had a son.

Stripped now of all vestiges of possession and coddling, she prayed earnestly that they find each other again. She vowed she would not commit the same mistake again.

When she received the telegram from him, telling her that he was coming home for a rest, she felt humbled in the belief that her prayers had been answered at last.

"Please, God, give me another chance that I may have him back," she prayed tearfully.

When finally her son stood before her—frail, thin, and wasted, she hesitantly clasped his hands, carefully, lest he shy away again. The kiss that she felt on her brows was like a benediction, and it was strange that she did not feel the triumph and exultation that the kiss signified. In her heart, she knew that the kiss was neither a surrender nor a truce. Rather, it was the symbol of the bond and alliance with him that she had lost. She had it now and she would not lose it again.



## "3 SWEETEST WORDS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE"

DOROTHY DE ZOUCHE

"We ought to ask questions. We might learn some surprising facts if we did. Teachers crawl too much. Anyone who crawls on his stomach long enough will get to look like a worm and what is more terrible, to think worm thoughts."

"Teachers must stop being concerned only with the educational and salary problems in the community in which they teach. All educational problems (and all other problems) belong to all of us. We should be ashamed to say, 'That problem does not concern us here

in Beaver City.' We must learn now that only so far as the entire group progresses do we progress as individual teachers. Whatever does injury to any group of teachers or to an individual teacher hurts all of us whether we think so or not. If any teacher in New York City or Prairie Center is treated with injustice or indignity, I am the loser; and by whatever good comes to a teacher whose path I shall never cross or whose name I shall never hear, I shall have gained a step upon the way."