

## **Come Home**

Creative Writing p.8

Mr. Schreurs

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Four years ago Derrick was staring down an aisle waiting for his life to begin. Just four years ago, but it felt like five years or maybe twenty. Veronica had given him what felt like a lifetime. He wasn't usually a romantic, but sitting there in their one bedroom apartment with its leaky faucets and scratched up floors, he felt like the luckiest man in the world. He was eager to tell Veronica the good news because he knew it would make her eyes grow wide and a smile inch across her face. After he got off the phone with the publisher he started thinking of ways to tell her. Did he just come out and say it, or should he allude to it by saying that they could start a family now?

He checked his phone every second, just waiting for her name to pop up. He almost had everything ready, but he was waiting to light the candles and put the potatoes in the oven until she called him. He wanted to be good enough for her, that's all he ever wanted.

He let himself get distracted by a book on his desk. It was one of those old, dusty manuscripts that gave off a distinct scent. His collection was his pride and joy. His phone started dancing across his desktop, and his heart jumped. He picked it up on the third ring, "Hello?" and heard Veronica's voice on the other end.

"Hey, I'm heading out in a minute, but I have to stop and get something on the way. Does that sound okay?"

"Sounds perfect. I'll leave the door unlocked for you. Love you. Be safe." He hung up and set his phone back down on the desk. It was time for all the finishing touches.

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She felt sick to her stomach. It all started a week ago with the drowsiness. No matter how much sleep she got, she was always tired. She was bothered by smells that she wouldn't

normally be bothered by. It was like being kicked in the face by your neighbor's dirty sock. Then she had started getting nauseous.

At work today, Diane had found her sitting on the bathroom floor and finally said what she had been thinking for the past week, "Veronica, sweetie, do you think you may be pregnant?" Well, she didn't know for sure, but it sure seemed like it. Derrick and she had wanted a family, just not right now. The thought was terrifying, so if she was going to tell him she had to be sure.

She pulled into the gas station and stepped out of her car. A wave of dizziness came over her, and she thought she might faint, but it passed after a moment. She was going through all the other possibilities in her head as she wandered the aisles searching for the tests. She could be seriously ill or have a raging case of stomach worms. If the test was negative she would have to go to a doctor. There were three different tests, but they all seemed to be pretty much the same. She grabbed the blue one because she had seen it on a commercial once.

The cashier rang it up and handed it to her. He didn't give her much of a look; after all she was thirty. She walked toward the bathroom sign and locked herself in. The test stick was wrapped in some kind of foil paper so she tore that off and then removed the cap. She wasn't quite sure how these things worked though. Did she just pee on it or was there some kind of technique? The test said to put it "directly in the urine stream". Well alright.

Three minutes. That wasn't so bad. Three minutes and her life may be changed. Of course, if she was pregnant her life had already changed. Two minutes forty-five seconds. *Thump.* She could hear what sounded like a body hit the wall outside the door. Two minutes thirty seconds. She crept up to the door, undid the dead bolt, and slowly cracked the door open.

She heard what sounded like a man's voice yelling directions. She pushed the door open a little farther and locked eyes with a burly man in a black ski mask.

Quickly, she slammed the door closed and switched the dead bolt into position. Instinct took over, and she used her body to try to hold the door in place. Her weight wasn't enough, though, and she knew that. It was ridiculous but she couldn't seem to think of anything to do. There was no surge of heroic adrenaline, or a brilliant plan of action. She simply froze.

One minute thirty seconds, and the door continued to thud against her back. She could feel the wood start to split. He would tire out eventually right? What if he didn't? What if- *Thud!* The door came crashing in on her and she was thrown against the floor. The momentum made her wrist pop and her knee hit the tile hard. The man was on top of her before she got the chance to scream out in pain. He had one hand over her mouth and the other pressing down on her shoulder.

"You are going to get up nice and easy now okay? I'm going to take my hand away from your mouth and if you scream, I shoot. Got it?" His voice was like gravel and his eyes had a manic look to them. Veronica nodded her head because there was no other option. She was defenseless. Twenty seconds.

He removed his hand and grabbed her wrist. He yanked her onto her feet and started yelling at her to move into the front of the store. As they walked by the main counter, Veronica saw the cashier sprawled out on the ground. "Oh God, is he dead?" She held her free hand over her mouth and let out a small shriek.

"Shut up! Don't talk. Don't move. Don't even sneeze unless I give you permission. Got that?" Veronica stood perfectly still and said nothing. "Good. Now, you're going to sit with your back against the counter while I load up my bag. Don't do anything stupid."

He threw her on the ground and made a point of showing her his gun. It wasn't a large gun. *Just a pistol* she thought. She didn't know anything about guns except that one could kill her. No time left. The test would be completed now. She wondered whether it was a plus or a minus. She wanted to know whether she should be afraid for more than just her own life.

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Smoke was filling up the kitchen and the fire alarm was going off. Derrick wanted everything to be perfect, but somehow he had burned potatoes. He saw flames licking out from the top of the oven and he grabbed the pitcher of water he had set on the table. He faintly heard his phone start to buzz in the other room, but the matter at hand was more pressing.

He finally put all the fire out and sat on the floor. How could he burn potatoes? It should have been so simple. How could he screw it up? He knew Veronica would find it endearing, but he wanted her to see him in a new light tonight. He wanted her to see him as a provider, as a successful man at the very least.

He would clean up the kitchen and forget about the potatoes all together. The roast would be enough, and she loved simplicity. He got off the floor and set about making things right.

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"Hey! What are you doing? Who did you just text?"

"No one. Just my husband. It's okay. I just told him I loved him."

"Give it to me." He bent down and grabbed my phone. *Damn it.*

"I'm being held hostage at the USTOP on 57<sup>th</sup>, send help.' I told you not to do anything stupid! I told you!" The man started shaking and waving the gun around while he paced.

I could tell he was scared, maybe even more afraid than I was. “What am I supposed to do now? He probably called the cops. This is all your fault!” He pointed the gun at me, and I started crying. I couldn’t help it. “Shut up! Just shut up and stop crying!” The man was starting to lose it, I could tell. His eyes betrayed his tough demeanor, and I could see his total lack of confidence in what he was doing. I wondered for the first time why he was doing this. His hand shakes. He starts to lower the gun, but then the cashier jumps over the counter and, next thing I know, there is the deafening sound of a gun being shot. Something pierces my skin, and I start to go numb. I hear the gun clatter to the ground somewhere nearby, or somewhere very far away. My eyes feel heavy, and I start thinking of Derrick. How he would have loved to read a book with this much action...

### Author's Note

This is the final draft of “Come Home”. My short story is about a couple on their anniversary. It isn’t a happily ever after story, and for that I am not sorry. I wanted to write a story that provoked questions and emotion. Derrick has news to tell Veronica so he planned a romantic dinner for the two of them. It also happens to be their anniversary, so Veronica doesn’t suspect a thing. Little does Derrick know that Veronica may be pregnant. The couple had wanted a baby for a few years but hadn’t been able to afford one. Out of the two characters I struggled more with Veronica. I didn’t know how to make her naturally relatable. I’m not sure whether her personality adds to the story or not. I think that depends on who the reader is. I love Derrick’s character and I am really happy with how that part of the story turned out. I am also very satisfied with the element of suspense, and how fast paced my piece is.

I didn’t have a specific audience in mind when I started writing this story, but I think women ended up being the target demographic. I ended my story the way I did to provoke thought. I didn’t want to give the reader an ending; I want them to think of one on their own. Is Veronica Pregnant, or not? Is she even still alive? Where did the bullet pierce her? Does Derrick ever read the text? What happens? That’s all for the reader to decide. There is no right answer.

### Grade Rationale

I am not going to plead my case for an A+ on this story. Considering my target audience ended up being women, I don’t think this piece will affect you as much as it might affect other people. I do think an A- would be fair. I wrote a short story that is clear cut and focused. I think I followed all the guidelines that were given to us, and I tried to incorporate all of the helpful articles you told us to read. Do I think mine is the best short story on the planet? Not by any

means, but I do think it is a solid story. It conveys the emotions I want it to, and it provokes questions. I am very satisfied with the final product.