

Printed in *The Searcher*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Spring 2014): 54-55.

GENEii

Category 1

Finalist

Homegrown Love

by Sylvia Ney

"I can't believe you're dumping me at Granny's for a whole week while you go off on your honeymoon."

It wasn't like I minded Mom getting remarried. Ken was great and I was actually very happy for her. I was not, however, happy about being left for a week while she went on a cruise.

"Stop acting like you're a child and it's the end of the world. You're twelve and you always like visiting your grandmother."

"I've never stayed for a whole week."

"We lived with her for months when we first moved here."

"Yeah, but I wasn't ALONE with her. She lived next to other kids I could play with. Now she's moved out to the middle of nowhere. What am I supposed to do?"

My mother rolled her eyes as we pulled into my grandmother's driveway. I grudgingly hunkered down in the backseat prepared to fight. Then I realized my mom was going in without me. With a final huff I opened the door and hefted my suitcase out behind me.

"Go ahead and take your stuff to the bedroom in the back while I find your grandmother."

Still grumbling, I drug my suitcase down the hall and threw it on the bed. I stared at the small room which smelled of moth balls and my grandfather's cigarettes.

"Yay, a whole week." I mumbled before heading back outside to find everyone.

My grandmother was sitting on the back porch shelling beans.

"Hey granny," I said kissing her cheek. "Where's grandpa?"

"Hi, honey. He's in the garden. You came at the perfect time of year. We have so much pickin' to do this week."

"Great," I said, while trying to use my eyes to plead with my mom.

"It'll be so much fun," she said before giving me a big hug. "I've got to go now. I'll miss you."

"Not as much as I'll miss you."

I wanted to cry as I watched her drive away.

"Here," Granny said handing me a large bucket full of beans. "I'll show you how to shell these peas."

I watched her pop the end off and pull the string down the length to the other tip. She then pried the two halves apart and ran her finger down the inside of the skin to dislodge all the beans. I watched them fall and heard them hit the pile of already shelled peas.

It was surprisingly easy to copy the motion.

I watched the two collies playing in the yard as I began on my own bucket. It wasn't long before I reached in to grab the next pod only to find I had shelled them all.

"Done already?" my grandmother laughed. "You could win a contest. Beginners luck."

My chin rose at the challenge. "I can do more if you need them."

"That's all I've picked so far. We'll pick some more if you're ready?"

"Sure." What else was I going to do?

She handed me another bucket and we headed to the garden.

"Granny, why do you have a garden when you can just buy food at the store?"

"Food is cheaper and tastes better when you grow it yourself."

"Really?"

"Of course."

"What else do you have in the garden?"

"Oh, we've got some other beans, peas, tomatoes and okra. Of course you'll need to wear gloves if you're gonna help me pick the okra."

"Why?"

"The leaves and pods of okra are covered with tiny spines that will make you itch."

"Eww. Don't you grow anything besides vegetables?"

"Well, I've got some fresh blackberry vines all along the fence and tree line over that way."

I turned to look in the direction she pointed. "I've never had blackberries. Do they itch when you pick them?"

"No, but you'll have to decide if you like 'em enough to fight through the thorns."

"I'll pass."

My grandmother laughed again as she opened the fence to the garden area. I could see my grandfather at the far end of one row. He had a bucket on the ground at his feet. As I watched, he wiped sweat from his brow and stared further into a field.

"What's grandpa staring at?"

“Oh, I imagine he’s wondering if the watermelon are ready. He’s been hankering for a nice ripe, juicy one.”

“You have watermelons?”

“Yep, some nice yellow ones.”

“Yellow?”

“Yes, the yellow ones are sweeter than the pink. Some people even say they taste like honey.”

“You’re joking.”

“Nope. Ah, looks like he found a ripe one.”

I looked again at my grandfather as he headed our way carrying not one, but three large melons. He had the largest smile I had ever seen on his face.

“How about a watermelon break?” he asked me by way of greeting. He never even slowed as he passed us heading back to the porch.

My grandmother and I followed at a slower pace. By the time we reached the patio, he had already returned from the house with plates and utensils. I watched as he sliced into the melon spraying juice all around. Then I watched in astonishment as the rind fell open to reveal a deep yellow flesh. My grandfather cut off a slice and handed it to me.

I stared at it and then at him. Something just didn’t seem right about yellow watermelon. Everyone knew they were supposed to be pink or even red. I scrunched my eyes and nose as I raised the slice to my lips. I took a quick whiff. It smelled like watermelon. I hesitated one last minute and took a quick bite.

The instant the flavor hit my tongue my eyes popped open in shock. This was the best watermelon ever; so sweet and juicy. I wasn’t a huge fan of watermelon, but I must have devoured a third of one all by myself that day.

If this was what homegrown watermelon was like, I couldn’t wait to try some of the other foods my grandparents were growing. That night, my grandmother taught me how to cook some of her produce and how to properly freeze anything that wouldn’t be used quickly.

We made a salad with the best tomatoes I have ever tasted. They were sweet and tart at the same time.

The next day, I ventured into the black berry bushes for the first time.

“You want to reach into the gaps, so you don't touch the thorns.” My grandmother explained. “A ripe blackberry is deep black with a plump, full feel. It will pull free from the plant with only a slight tug. If the berry is red or purple, it's not ripe yet.”

I must have spent several hours every day that week in those berry bushes, always bringing home less than I ate.

My grandmother taught me a lot about food in that one week. I learned how to plant, care for, pick and even cook what you wanted to eat. I also learned a lot about my grandparents in that week that passed more quickly than I wanted it too.

It's been 20 years since then. We lost my grandfather a few years ago, but I'm still learning about food and love from this very strong and intelligent woman; my grandmother.