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Mildred Mills  
Judged by Etruscan author Stephen Benz

*Daddy's House: A Place to Run Away From*

When I think of Daddy's house, I remember concrete porches. The little porch is a gateway into the home from the field and backyard; it leads into the girls' bedroom, where a roaring fire in a potbelly stove greets you in winter. The screened-in back porch is the pathway to the kitchen where Mama makes magic like golden fried chicken and buttermilk biscuits. The front porch stands majestically, leading into the living room where tattered hand-me-down furniture like sharp springs from a rundown sofa might spear one's backside. So many porches, only two bedrooms.

It's been two months since my eighteenth birthday, a week after high school graduation, just one day before leaving home for good—and the first time since I was five that I don't have to work in the cotton field on a workday. Now, I sit alone on the little porch perched like a cat with a fresh bowl of milk. I lock my fingers behind my head, close my eyes, and lean against the cinderblock wall of the only home I've ever known. I say to the rising sun, "Kiss my face." I reach my hands to the sky and shout, "These legs are made for running. Baby, I'm ready to go."

Shivers of excitement pinch my nipples, as I watch sparrows soaring and bumblebees buzzing—unrestricted. Today I am free from Mama, Daddy, and my fifteen brothers and sisters.

The stench of chicken shit, hog pens, and the maggoty red outhouse spread its arms like a greeting committee whenever I step outside the house. Beyond the pigpen, where the soil is rich and black, the sweet smell of honeysuckle blossoms and cultivated fields ease into my bloodstream, intoxicating my soul like a glass of homemade wine. It's springtime, a time to blossom in early June 1969. My home is a place of confusion; I can't decide whether to love its beauty or hate its stench.