

GRANDPA DUNHAM'S HOUSE

To everybody who has known and loved the home of Grandma and Grandpa Dunham these pages are humbly dedicated, but they have been especially written for my mother, who spent the happy days of her girlhood in this house.

Charlotte Hamilton Rice

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For people who cannot remember their grandparents I have the sincerest sympathy. They have missed something which in childhood would have been for them a keen delight, and now in their maturity a lovely memory.

In the last few years one of my most choice mental treasures has been the picture of my mother's girlhood home - Grandpa Dunham's house. Situated down in Maine in the little village of West Paris, it stood by the side of a dusty road - a big brown house of uncertain architecture - hardly old enough to claim antiquity now sufficiently modern to be artistic; but it was a homely, comfortable, friendly house, resting quietly on the edge of the little village in the shadow of the Oxford County hills. I can see it now so plainly - the neat, grassy yard guarded by two shimmering poplar trees; the big bay window almost hidden by sunflowers and golden glow; the broad, substantial door rock; the back porch rather dark and damp from the shade cast by heavy shrubbery - and then the kitchen doorway.

Compared with modern workshops of her granddaughter's days - so bright and colorful and so completely equipped with the latest electrical appliances - Grandma's kitchen could have made apologies, but in spite of any short comings I am sure that even now it would hold fascination for us all. As I sit here trying to make for myself a true picture of that good, old fashioned room, I recall the red secretary in the corner - the woodbox which Grandpa so faithfully filled, and the dinner table pushed up against the wall all set for the next meal but covered with a cloth to protect it from stray flies and summer dust. It was a dark

room somewhat inclined to smell of food and the smoke of a wood fire. And - even darker than the kitchen was Grandpa's little bedroom leading out of it with its four-poster bed and the hand-woven coverlet. In the morning, however, sunshine filled this end of the house. There was a snap and crack of a wood fire in the little low stove, the sound of spluttering oatmeal and boiling coffee - and the smell of golden graham rolls made in an iron gem pan. The table was laid with a red and white cloth and dishes of a brown pattern with tall heavy goblets and a still taller cream pitcher. I recall how Grandma Dunham would bustle into the dark cellarway to appear with a plate of fat, squatty doughnuts which she kept in an ancient stone crock. In those days people knew little or nothing of vitamins or mineral salts and they would have smiled at Tomato juice as an introduction to the morning meal; yet at Grandpa's house, sliced tomatoes fresh from the garden were often on the table at breakfast time. Meals were somehow very easy occasions and long after everybody had ceased to eat, we sat about the board. An adage often quoted by Grandpa Dunham, "Let your victuals stop your mouth" was more or less adhered to by him, but he did like to linger at the table and munch a bit of cheese, and when he finally saw fit to enter into conversation, I remember there were inclined to be long arguments between him and his better half as to the identity of Seth Benson's second wife, or the age of Levi Washburn when he died.

There were no other rooms downstairs which remain as vivid in my memory. The sitting room was pleasant with its bay window of blossoming plants and its outlook down the street, but we never seemed to sit there excepting on rainy days. Grandma's little bedroom, which opened out of

the sitting room, was cozy and cunning. The furniture was painted a pretty blue with bunches of pink flowers to add a decorative note, but My Lady's Chamber always bore the strong smell of medicine and I somehow stood in fear of it.

The parlor was another room which was awe inspiring. The shutters being always closed, it was a very dark and gloomy place. The chairs and sofa were Gothic in style and upholstered in dark red plush, the type of furniture one sees in the pulpit of an old New England church. Sometimes my mother would sit down and play "Star of the East" upon the sweet, plaintive little organ, and then I would ask her to show me the exact spot where she and my father had stood when they had taken their marriage vows and had become as one. Certainly had they been wed in a cathedral, the setting could not have been more dignified and solemn. Even as a small child, I used to be thrilled at Mother's account of her wedding, for - as I would stand out in the hall and look up the long stairway, it seemed as if I could see the bridal pair descending arm-in-arm, while Jennie Brown played the strains of Lohengrin upon the little organ - my father so proud and handsome and my mother a lovely young bride - her dark eyes shining with happiness.

As I grew older I became interested in the bed chamber over the kitchen - the place where my eyes saw the first light of day. It was indeed a strange room, for it had been originally designed for the kitchen of a two-family house. The bed was painted a dull Quaker gray with a stiffly starched valence of white. There was a lovely big bureau which a modern antique dealer would have seized upon with avidity, and an enchanting little recess made by a dormer window, but the most distinctive feature was the big iron sink and the black pump - the one

trace of the room's former identity as a kitchen, although I must not forget what had once been the pantry or storeroom. That was a long dark entryway lined with shelves upon which Grandma kept all manner of interesting bags and boxes. Just beyond it was the queerest place - a sort of upstairs shed with a floor so rickety and unstable that I was almost afraid to step upon it.

The downstairs shed, however, was an altogether delightful place, the haunt of stray black cats and little girls who liked to play hide-and-go-seek. In one dark corner where Grandma gathered chips to build her fire there was a chair with one rocker broken off. In the hollow of its seat was a soft cushion stuffed with feathers, which peeked out in the worn places. Grandma had never made the acquaintance of half of the cats who napped there - but they slept on undisturbed. "Tramp cats" she called them, and she saw to it that there was always a cracked saucer on the back porch filled with milk and scraps of meat for these stragglers, who were so wild I could never get my hands upon them. The unpainted floor of the shed was warped and when you jumped upon it there was the delightful rattle of flower pots, trowels, washtubs, tin ovens and old china. A chair-table painted a dark red always held a bushel basket upon it, and the place seemed to smell of apples the whole summer long.

By the shed door which faced the north was an enormous rain barrel from which Grandma filled her washtubs on Monday morning - much preferring the soft water of the clouds to that which came from a cold spring. Standing on the steps by the rain barrel one saw a most beautiful view of hills covered with broad maple trees, big boulders and low stone walls. The last pasture which one could see ended in a bold, overhanging bluff called

Berry's Ledge. Thunder showers lived somewhere behind it, and black ugly looking clouds used to come up into the sky just as if they were tired of their quiet home down in back of the bluff and longed to go on a boisterous adventure. It was always a desire of mine to find myself standing on Berry's Ledge - but I might as well have wished for the moon. As I remember it, we stayed very quietly at home. To be sure there were excursions to the depot twice a day at mail time; an occasional jaunt down Pioneer Street to the clothes pin factory; a trip to North Paris on the stage behind Uncle Hite's black horses, Mack and Maude; a walk up to Jennie Brown's, and once a journey to Bryant's Pond to camp meeting. But Grandpa Dunham's house was such a pleasant place in which to stay that those who tarried there lost all wanderlust and were content to spend long, old fashioned hours "far from the maddening crowd".

Everyone in the village liked to drop in to call, and it seems as if there were always visitors. Even the dirty gypsies who came every year passed by house after house until they came to the big brown one at the foot of the hill. Not until then would they stop to water their tired horses from the big tub by the stable door.

The stable was perhaps the most unique and picturesque part of Grandpa Dunham's establishment. The first thing a passerby saw when he looked into the yard were the sunflowers and golden glow blossoms which lifted up their heads against the bay window of the sitting room; the next thing was the big stable door, which was open from seven in the morning until ten at night. The stable was Grandpa and Grandma's summer house. Horses and cows could claim it no longer, for it had become an out-of-door sitting room. The walls were lined with straight even piles of birch wood, the pride of Grandpa Dunham's heart. A fire would never

see a single one of these sticks. They had been there for years, and there they would remain until Grandpa's house should be his no longer, for he dedicated this wood pile to his friends - it was his autograph album. Every caller who came to the stable was invited to write his name upon the smooth end of some stick of wood with the promise that only time should erase the signature. The birch made a clean, woodsy aroma and from the loft up above came the sweet smell of meadow hay. A gray rag carpet, Grandma's handiwork, was spread over the floor to protect us from the roughness of splinters. Big Piazza chairs with white tidies and turkey red cushions were everywhere, while across one corner was hung a hammock, an odd squeaky hammock made of a network of yellow hemp. A little drab footstool belonged to me, and by it was kept a small tin trunk which contained the things my mother had played with as a little girl. Curious things they were - a tiny bow and arrow which an Indian youth had made for her, a pair of Roman gold bracelets, little black mitts for her doll's hands, and a small red wooden cradle. Grandpa used to amuse children with two large wooden hoops which he kept over in the horse stall. He would sit in his big piazza chair, holding the hoops between his legs. Then with his long precise fingers he would give them a gentle push. Out of the stable they would bump and rattle, down past the watering tub and the hitching post; sometimes they almost reached the poplar trees before they wobbled and fell. One always beat the other - that was the game. It was as exciting as a horse race, and the stable was a cool and comfortable grandstand.

On warm days the stable's big black door used to be open and a refreshing breeze blew through. Nothing seemed hot but the long buzzing whir of the saw mill, which sang all day across the river.

When sundown came it ceased and the silence of a summer twilight fell. Bare fotted boys came whistling along the dusty road on their way to the hill pastures, and when they came down again there was a jingle of cow bells and a winding procession of cattle. Bedtime for me arrived not long after. The kitchen used to be so dark and quiet when my mother went to light the lamp. The clock on the shelf was slowly ticking away the minutes and hours of the evening, and the water flowing into the tank by the sink gurgled into bubbles as I stood on tip toe and filled the glass mug with the picture of a reindeer upon it. The hum of voices sounded from the stable as we passed through the sitting room. I hated to enter the gloomy hall and to pass by Grandpa's iron safe and the front door, which was never open night or day. But at the head of the carpeted stairs was my own snug little room with its one window which looked out upon the cherry trees.

When my mother had tucked me in the trundle bed and had gone back to the stable, the whip-poor-wills up in the hill pastures began to sing. I did not like to hear them; they brought strange thoughts to me. Perhaps to my subconscious mind came forebodings of the future - a vision of the time when Grandpa Dunham's house would be to all of us nothing more than a dear, sweet memory. But the whip-poor-will's song did not disturb this tired little girl very long. Snuggling down into my trundle bed, I closed my sleepy eyes, knowing that daylight would soon come. A few hours of dreaming and I would awaken to a golden Maine morning. The sunbeams would flicker through the dancing leaves of the cherry tree, and the stable door would rumble as Grandpa Dunham opened it for another day. The whip-poor-will's evening song would be forgotten as we would again



enter into our daily round of living, just as if these pleasant days at Grandpa Dunham's house were to go on and on forever - an eternal summer holiday.