

"The Trunk in the Attic"

A short story

by MaryAnn Diorio

Dinah Mayberry was already ninety-two years old when I first met her. My husband Rick and I had just moved into the renovated Victorian house in the middle of the block. It was a move I badly needed at that time in my life. Now that I faced an empty nest after having raised four children, the bottom had fallen out of my world. I needed a new project to give meaning to my life. To restore purpose to it.

To heal my grieving heart.

It was then my husband suggested that we move.

At first, I balked at the idea. I loved the home we'd lived in for twenty years. The home in which we'd raised our kids. But that home had become a mountain of memories that only fueled my grief instead of alleviating it.

And so it was that we ended up in the 105-year-old Victorian house on Maple Avenue in the tiny town of Willow Bend in the lovely state of Ohio. And so it was that I met Dinah Mayberry.

I was outside on a bright Monday morning, sweeping my wrap-around front porch, when Dinah sauntered onto hers.

"Howdy!" She shouted across the narrow strip of grass that separated her house from mine.

"Welcome to the neighborhood! My name's Dinah."

I stopped sweeping and smiled. "Why, thank you! That's very kind of you." I gave her a warm smile. "And my name is Katie. Katie Nicholson."

"Nice to meet you, Katie. You're only the second family to live in ole Miz Potter's house. I think you're gonna like it real good."

"How long have you lived here?" I asked.

She chuckled. "I was born in this house, married in this house, and had my babies in this house. That covers all of my ninety-two years."

Intrigued, I moved closer to the railing. "You must know a lot about my house then."

"Well, let's say I remember when your house was built. I was a tyke of about six years old." She measured a small child's height with her wrinkled hand. "I still remember when they brought in the lumber and piled it high on the front lawn."

How amazing! To have lived nearly a century in one place. I smiled. "Maybe you'd like to come over for tea some afternoon. I'd like to learn more about you—and about my house."

"Sure thing. Your house has a story hidden under its rafters."

"Really?"

Miss Dinah nodded knowingly.

"A good story, I hope."

"A bittersweet story." Miss Dinah sighed. "But one I think will make you appreciate your new home." She gave a little wave goodbye. "Well, I best be goin' inside. Time for my afternoon Bible-readin'."

My heart warmed at my newly found friend. "Thanks for reaching out."

"My pleasure. My late Mama used to say, 'Half the world is waitin' for the other half to say hello.'" She shuffled toward her front door, opened it, and disappeared into her house.

I quickly finished sweeping the porch and headed inside to start dinner. Rick would be home from the office in less than half an hour.

Miss Dinah's words swam through my thoughts. What story could be hidden under the rafters of our new home? Was it a story I wanted to know, or a story I would be better off not knowing? Only time would tell.

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