

# The Houses at the Heart of THE HOUSE OF GRASS AND SKY



## A Note from Author Mary Lyn Ray

On an old New Hampshire farm is an old house where, thirty-five years ago, I found I'd come home. This story is my valentine to it—and to every house that waits.

Though there were many books I loved growing up far from New England, the first book my mother read me when I was barely born became the one I loved best. *Snow Before Christmas* by Tasha Tudor was about another old house on another old farm in New Hampshire, and I returned again and again to its spell. In time I began to imagine a similar house and farm I belonged to. I was certain they waited somewhere. And here, long years later, I found them.

When I noticed in one room that a small drawer built into a wall had something written on the bottom in pencil, I looked closer and saw two letters: *M.L.* It seemed the house had known my name before I came. Like the family who arrives in the story, I felt as if maybe I had been expected.

This Greek Revival cape (not unlike, though not identical to, the house that E. B. Goodale has so wonderfully brought to this book) is now nearly a hundred and eighty years old. When I came, no one had lived here for forty years and the house needed extreme repair. In addition, it had never had heat beyond woodstoves, or electricity or indoor plumbing. I would add those, but I wanted to keep it an old house, with old memory in it. I wanted to preserve its repose. And I wanted to honor what someone who built it understood and got right. I didn't want to change it. I would fit myself to the house instead, letting it teach me how to be here. And it continues to.

But it wasn't only home that had waited. It's here I also found my way to story and learned to call myself a writer. Before, I'd thought that story had to be, somehow, willed from nothing. Now I know that clues are everywhere and anywhere. But, for me, they are especially *here*.

## A Note from Illustrator E. B. Goodale

When I first read *The House of Grass and Sky*, the story immediately reminded me of my grandmother's house: a small quirky farmhouse built in the middle of nowhere New Hampshire in the late 1700s. I knew I wanted to spend some time in an old house to work on sketches, so I sought out a rental house in Vermont that reminded me of my grandmother's. We got there and the owners lived just up the road on their sheep farm. The property had been in their family for some years, and they had been friends with the family that owned it previously.

The house was filled with the idiosyncrasies that come with a house that has been used, loved, and changed to fit the needs of families for over two hundred years. This house had worked hard. As my family and I lived in the house for a week, we cuddled under the rafters and went sledding down the big hill, and my son even fed a baby sheep who had been cast off by its mother.

To my absolute delight, on a shelf tucked into a corner of the house, I came across a small stack of old photo albums going back a hundred years. The photos were filled with the warmth of a family that lived and worked in the house for generations. There were babies, dogs, birthday parties, and grandmas and grandpas reading books to children in their laps. These photos served as a lens into the past, allowing me to feel the house breathing around me. I was so moved by these photo albums that I decided to incorporate the use of photos as a storytelling device in the illustrations. I hope I did justice to the little old house and the families that loved it, somewhere in Vermont.



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