

Name _____ Date _____

The Fuss about the Ferret

When I was a little girl, fifty years ago, my grandmother ran our family. In it, she was The Law. I know now that the “grand” in grandmother just means the mother of your mother or father. In those days, I thought it meant important, stately, dignified in short, grand. She was all of those things. She was tall. She had silver white hair, and it was fifty years ago. Remember, she wore dresses so long that they swept the floor behind her.

Grandmother often said that she “knew her own mind.” The rest of us knew her mind, too. She made sure of that. As I said, she was the law. Since she was the law, she made the rules. She dealt with anyone who broke them. In general, grandmother knew everything that happened and none of us could get away with a thing, but once in a while there’d be something she didn’t find out. It didn’t happen very often, but when it did, it was like a birthday present.

That’s probably why I remember the fuss about the ferret so well. I had been bad. I should have been scolded and sent to bed or worse, but instead well, this is what happened. Somewhere, my father and my uncle had bought a ferret. They said they were going to hunt rabbits with it. A ferret is an animal about the size of a cat, only with shorter legs. It has black and white fur and sharp teeth, and it is very good at going down burrows. Ferrets are supposed to be mean, but ours was as sweet as a kitten.

I loved that ferret. My grandmother did not. The ferret lived in a cage in our barn. It was not allowed in the house, so I spent hours in the barn. Late one winter afternoon I was there playing with the ferret as usual. Even though it was curled round my neck like a fur collar, I was getting cold. I thought about our cheerful kitchen with its fire burning in the old-fashioned stove. The corner next to the stove was the place I liked best on a chilly day. The colder I got, the more I thought about the fire, so I went in. Somehow, I just didn’t take off my ferret collar. There was no one in the kitchen. The ferret and I settled down by the stove and I fell asleep.

Grandmother’s voice in the next room woke me. “The cage is empty,” she was saying crossly, “and if that ferret is in this house, I know how it got here, and she said that whoever brought it in will be sorry indeed!” I was already sorry. I would have run for the barn and put the ferret back, but it was gone. The ferret was missing.

Suddenly my grandmother swept into the kitchen. She marched through it - without seeing me - and swept out again. Before she vanished, I saw something I couldn’t believe. There clinging to the back of her long skirt with its little teeth, all four paws spread out and eyes shining, having a wonderful ride on the smooth floor was the ferret.

Fear (of grandmother) and laughter (at grandmother) almost choked me. I could hear her storming on into the front of the house. then the ferret came scampering back alone. A minute later it was safely in its cage.

At dinner that night the ferret was not mentioned. When the meal was over, my grandmother gave me a sharp look and said, “It’s a wise person who knows that the way to stay out of trouble is never to try the same trick twice.” I gulped and slipped out of the room as quickly as I could.