



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Cherry Pie

Unknown writer

"Well, it isn't such a bad house," said little Elsie Perch to herself, gazing up at the tall tenement building where she lived. "To be sure, there are a good many folks in it — Grandpa and Grandma Perch, and Grandpa and Grandma Finney, and Uncle John's family, and us — and *her* house hasn't got anybody in it but them. But it's a good enough house. I'm not going to cry because that little girl from Sunday school has nicer clothes and lives in a nicer house. She hasn't got a cherry tree, anyway!"

Elsie spoke those last words with great triumph, because right there in the back yard of her home stood a tall, generous cherry tree. Looking at it now in the gray quiet of a December twilight, she had to use some imagination to bring back the luscious red fruit it had borne last summer, and the cool shade of its glossy green leaves — but Elsie was quite equal to the effort, especially since tomorrow was Christmas Day. There was to be a wonderful Christmas dinner at Grandma Perch's on the lower floor, with Uncle John's family and Elsie's parents and both sets of grandparents all gathered round. And the crowning glory of Christmas dinner with the Perch family was always the cherry pie.

True, it was made from canned cherries — but nobody could put up cherries the way Grandma Perch could, tasting just as fine in winter as in summer. And nobody else knew exactly how much sugar to add, or how to make such flaky, perfect pie crust.

All of this came pleasantly to mind as Elsie ran up and down the front walk in her warm hood and cloak and mittens. There was a small cloud of discontent, it's true, when she thought about the velvet clothes and other fine things belonging to the girl from Sunday school — but it faded as she ran, and faded further when she glanced down toward the square below and saw how much more cramped and cheerless the buildings looked down there. She felt a grateful warmth knowing her home was better, and that her papa and Uncle John never came home in a harsh, frightening state the way some fathers did in that square.

"Pretty good times at Christmas!" Elsie said aloud, hopping merrily and forgetting her discontent entirely. "Why, there's Millie!" She ran across the street toward a little girl who had just come out of the tall house opposite. Millie looked very forlorn.

"What's the matter?" asked Elsie.

"Mamma says I can't have any Christmas present," said Millie, beginning to sob. "She was expecting some work, but it didn't come, and the rent's overdue, and — and I can't have a thing!"

"That's too bad," said Elsie. "I'm going to have lots — and we're going to have cherry pie for dinner."

"Oh, my!" cried Millie, drying her tears to contemplate this wonderful future. "Cherry pie! It must be so good! It sounds good."

"Didn't you ever have any cherry pie?"

Millie shook her head.

"Oh, it's splendid!"

Millie's eyes shone.

Just then a small group of thin, poorly dressed children from the square below came running up the walk — two boys named Sammie and Luke, and two girls named Lizy and Sally. They were shouting and racing, but stopped to listen. The word "Christmas" loosened their tongues at once.

"I'm going to our Sunday school for a Christmas tree," said Sammie.

"I can't go to Sunday school," said Lizy, near tears. "I haven't got any clothes fit to wear."

Elsie's heart reproached her sharply for her covetous, ungrateful thoughts of a few minutes before. The reproach grew stronger still when Millie announced proudly to the little crowd that Elsie Perch was going to have cherry pie for her Christmas dinner.

"Oh, my!" "Is she?" "Isn't that fine!" cried one and all.

"Yes," said Elsie, her heart swelling a little with pride. "My grandma always makes a cherry pie for Christmas."

A hush fell over the small group — and into that hush came the light, quick patter of footsteps around the corner. There appeared a little girl from the street above: little Maude, the very girl Elsie had been envying. She wore a broad gray hat with a lovely red feather and a matching red velvet cloak and leggings, carried a pretty muff, and led on a silken cord a small white dog dressed in a buff-and-silver blanket.

"Oh!" cried this charming little creature, bounding toward Elsie. "There you are! I saw you come this way after Sunday school and I've been looking for you everywhere. See my new little dog! He's a Christmas present — he came early,

yesterday. Is this where you live?" She glanced up and down the narrow street, a little uncertain about the neighborhood. "And are these your brothers and sisters?"

Elsie laughed and said no.

"What do you think?" said Lizy, quite seriously, her large wistful eyes and pale face giving an unexpected gravity to her words. "This girl here" — she pointed at Elsie — "is going to have cherry pie."

"Is she?" said Maude. "How nice. I like cherry pie, but we never have it in winter."

"We do," said Elsie proudly. "My grandma puts up jars of cherries when our tree bears, and at Christmastime we have cherry pie — and sometimes cherry sauce for tea when we have company."

"I'd love some cherry pie," said Maude, with the easy confidence of a child who usually got what she asked for. "Can we have some of your cherry pie?"

The little group of children pressed close around her. Elsie was just beginning to explain that the pie was really Grandma's and not hers to give — when a bell rang in the distance and Maude darted away.

"That's for me," she called, tugging the little dog along. "Goodbye! I do wish I could have some of that cherry pie!"

She went tripping away down the side street, and the children watched until she was out of sight.

"I suppose," said Luke, with a small sigh, "she has dinner every day."

"I have dinner every day," said Elsie.

"Do you?" said Lizy, looking at her with big, wistful eyes. "I don't. Oh — I'd love some of that cherry pie."

Just then Elsie spotted her father coming up the street and ran to meet him, while the others turned toward their homes below.

The next morning there was such excitement that Elsie forgot entirely about Millie, and Maude, and the children from the square — until Christmas dinner was nearly finished and the cherry pie came to the table.

"Oh!" she cried. "Grandma, you don't know how much everyone wants some of your cherry pie."

"Do they?" said Grandma kindly. "Well, I do hope it's turned out well."

Elsie noticed that after everyone had been served, there was still some pie left. A bright idea flashed into her head, and she was out of the room in an instant. On went her cloak and hood, and she dashed around the corner to find Maude. There she was, playing with her blanketed dog on the sidewalk.



"Come!" cried Elsie, catching hold of Maude's hand. "Come quick! There's lots of cherry pie — come and have some!"

As they passed Millie's house, they found her on the front steps, and she was easily persuaded to join them.

"Now," said Elsie, running ahead, "let's find Sammie and Lizy and the others!"

They flew down the street and quickly found what they were looking for. The watchword — "cherry pie" — was enough, and in moments they were all at Grandma Perch's door.

It was only then that Elsie felt the first flutter of doubt. Perhaps there wasn't enough pie to go round. And what would Grandma say?

She marched bravely in all the same, her eager little crowd at her heels.

"See here, Grandma," she said. "Here are a lot of children who'd like some cherry pie."

"Dear heart!" exclaimed Grandma, looking at the motley group with wide eyes. "Why, Elsie! There's hardly enough left for three small pieces — but bless them all!" The look on some of those thin, hungry faces went straight to Grandma's heart, in the middle of her own abundant, cheerful Christmas Day. "I'll have a cherry pie made for them in no time. There's pastry already in my pan and the oven is hot — just go outside and play, children, and I'll call you in presently."

And "presently" they were called back in to find a magnificent cherry pie, baked in a great tin pan, and they had just as much as was good for them — even Maude's little dog got a taste. Maude left first, for she wasn't really hungry and knew her mother would be wondering where she was — but the children from the square below stayed a long while. To tell the truth, Grandma didn't stop at cherry pie. There was turkey, and mashed potatoes, and turnip, and hot coffee too.

"I can't often give," Grandma said afterward, "but we've been blessed this year, and I can't bear to see anyone go hungry on Christmas Day."

After they had all gone home, Elsie sat rocking quietly in her little rocking chair, her heart full of a still, gentle happiness. She was thinking, in a vague way, about the envy she had felt toward Maude, and her general feeling of discontent. At last she said to Grandma, who was sitting nearby:

"Most everybody has things that some other folks don't have."

Grandma understood her perfectly.

"Dear heart!" she said, smiling. "That's just right. There are mercies for everyone, if they'd only stop to count them — and Christmas Day is the very best time to remember it."

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