



# Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

## Ruth's Christmas

*Abbie Phillips Walker*

There was just one thing that Ruth wanted for Christmas, and that was a mother. Her father had smiled and then looked sad when she told him.

"Daddy, I want a mother for a Christmas present. One just like the children in the next house have. She tucks them in bed at night and tells them stories. I can see her from my window. I hide behind the curtains after Nurse puts me to bed and watch. And sometimes, when the windows are open, I can even hear her telling them stories. Won't you please, Daddy dear, give me a mother for a Christmas present?"

"Mothers are not easy to get," her father explained.

"But Daddy, you're rich, and you can buy anything! I heard Nurse tell Cookie so," said Ruth. "Mothers can't cost so much, for lots of poor children have them."

"You try and think of something else," said her father. "I can't explain, but a mother is something you cannot buy."

"Can't you?" asked Ruth. "Then how do children get mothers? Do they find them?"

"Yes, I think they do," said her father, glad to end the questioning.

This, however, did not end Ruth's thinking—or her wishing—for a mother for her Christmas present.

One day, when the Nurse was busy talking with Cookie in the kitchen, Ruth slipped out of the door to look for a mother. A long, long distance she walked, and by and by, she came to a house with flowers growing in little brown pots in the window.

Ruth stopped, opened the gate to the yard, and walked in. She did not see a button to push, and as that was the only kind she knew about that made a bell ring, she did the next best thing—she turned the knob of the door. The door swung open, and then someone opened the door in the hall. Ruth saw a sweet-faced lady standing there.

She was not quite as young as Ruth had pictured a mother should be, but she liked her face.

"I haven't any mother. I'm looking for one," said Ruth.

"Daddy said he couldn't buy me one—that children found their mothers," she added.

The pretty lady laughed and then hugged Ruth close to her.

"But tell me where you live, dear. Your father will be worried. He will think you are lost," she said.

"I live in a big house, very much bigger than this," said Ruth. "But it is not so pretty inside. We haven't any flowers growing in little bowls like yours. Can you tell me a story?"

"Yes, baby, I can tell you a story," said the pretty lady. "And I will, if you will tell me your Daddy's name so we can find him."

"Oh, his name is just Daddy," said Ruth.

"But what do other people call him?" asked the lady.

"Nurse calls him 'Sir,' and so does James," said Ruth. "Please tell me a story. Are you anybody's mother?" she asked, looking alarmed.

"Oh dear, no!" laughed the pretty lady.

"Then it is all right. If you can tell a story," said Ruth.

"What is all right, dear?" asked the pretty lady.

"Why, you're my Christmas present," said Ruth. "You can be my mother, can't you? You don't belong to anybody else."

Ruth snuggled close, and the pretty lady began to tell a story, "Once upon a time..." Soon, Ruth was sound asleep in the pretty lady's arms.

When Ruth woke, the pretty lady still held her. For fear it all might be a dream, Ruth kept her eyes closed and lay very still.

The pretty lady was talking to her mother.

"Don't you worry, Mother dear," she was saying. "I'll find work somewhere. I know someone must need me, or I would not be in need of work."

"But you will not have any Christmas at all, my dear, and I can't bear to think that I cannot give you a present or cook your Christmas dinner," said the sweet-faced lady's mother.

"There is just one way we can have a dinner. I have the pearl earrings—your father's last gift to me. I had always thought of you wearing them on your wedding day. We will sell them, and then we can have a dinner and have some

money left," the older woman said.

"It can't be done, Mother darling," said the pretty lady. "There are no stores open where we could sell them. It is too late in the day. Don't you worry about me. We will have the nicest dinner tomorrow you ever ate! I'll make a salad of what we have, and we will have popcorn—and I think we can make some fudge."

Ruth opened her eyes, feeling that somehow her new friends were in trouble.

"I'll show you where I live," said Ruth. "You pack your trunk and call for the car, and we will go home now I have found a mother."

"We will take the trunk later," said the pretty lady, laughing. "And I am afraid, Ruth dear, we will have to walk. You see, I have no car."

Just then, Ruth looked out of the window.

"Oh, there is my Daddy!" she cried, running to the door.

"Daddy, Daddy!" she called. "Come in here! I have found a mother!"

By the time Ruth's father came in, he soon had her in his arms and was asking how she came to be so far from home. The pretty lady and her mother explained how Ruth had come to their door and that they couldn't figure out where she lived.

"Daddy, Miss Mary wants to go to work!" said Ruth.

"Perhaps I can help you," said Ruth's father. "What sort of work can you do?"

"I thought of office work and bookkeeping. I wanted to teach, but there is no opening at present," said Miss Mary.

"Why not teach Ruth? I shall have to look for someone next year anyway, and you two could get acquainted before that time," said Ruth's father.

"But my mother—I could not leave her alone. I would have to go home at night," said Miss Mary.

"Daddy, Miss Mary can tell stories just like a mother!" said Ruth. "I want her to tuck me in at night, just like the mother in the next house does."

They all laughed at this, and Ruth's father said, "I guess we can arrange that by taking your mother along, too. I need a housekeeper the very worst way."

Before Ruth and her father left that afternoon, it was arranged that Miss Mary and her mother would take Christmas dinner with them the next day.

The next morning, a big box was left at the door of Miss Mary's house. Inside were two nice coats with fur collars—a gift from Ruth to Miss Mary and her mother.

That evening, Ruth told her father how she had heard Miss Mary and her mother talking about the shabby coat Miss Mary had worn.

One day, her father asked Ruth about the wonderful secret she and Miss Mary had been keeping.

“I want Miss Mary for my mother,” Ruth confessed. “I found her, and you told me children found their mothers. Why couldn’t I have Miss Mary for mine?”

“Go ask her and see what she says,” said her father.

So Ruth did.

Miss Mary’s cheeks turned pink and then red when Ruth asked, “You’re my mother, aren’t you, Miss Mary? I found you, and Daddy told me that was the way children got their mothers. Please, Miss Mary, say yes.”

“Yes, please do, Mary,” said Ruth’s father.

“Well, as you both urge me so, I will say yes,” said Miss Mary.

And then Ruth’s father kissed Miss Mary and Ruth, and Ruth kissed Miss Mary.

And they all lived happily ever after.



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