

When Ruth Was Hero.

"Mother may I go up and stay all night at grandma's?" Ruthie's mother laid down her work and thought for a moment. It was what Ruth called one of her "nice, comfortable ways." She never said "no" without being very sure that there was some good reason for doing so; so that when it was "no," Ruthie understood perfectly that that ended the matter.

"Why, yes, dear," she replied, presently. "I think it will be a very good plan. You can carry up the yarn she asked me to get for her when I was up there yesterday, and you might take her a loaf of my fresh, sweet bread. Grandma always thinks that things taste better that have not been made in the house. It is pretty cold, but you can wrap up and walk fast. You will have plenty of time to get there before sunset."

So Ruth put on her warmest coat and her gay little hood, which made her look for all the world like another Little Red Ridinghood, particularly when she had hung her basket over her arm, and kissing her mother good-bye, started off on her two-mile walk. "I'll come down to church with them in the morning," she said, turning back as she reached the door. And then, waving her hand, she ran gaily down the path, and went skipping off up the road toward the village.

"How I do love unexpected things!" she said, giving herself a little hug of satisfaction. "It's lots more fun than knowing long beforehand. Grandma will be glad to see me," she went on, musing as she trudged over the frozen snow, "and that will be nice. Then Grandma's things always taste so good, and Aunt Clara will be sure to let me choose the preserves I like best, and after supper I will get Uncle Charley to crack nuts. He does know how to crack them better than anybody I ever saw. I'm real glad that Aunt Clara married him! Dear me, it is cold!" And she thrust her hands deeper into her muff, and ran all the way down the hill and through the village and half way up the next hill before pausing again. She had reached the church by that time, and as she stood there in the biting wind to regain her breath, she heard the sound of the organ from within.

"Why, there's Mr. Mace practising!" "I must slip in just a moment and warm my toes a bit at the same time. I hadn't any idea it was so cold!" And opening the door she stepped quietly in, and curled up in one of the first pews, closing her eyes as she often did while listening to music, which she dearly loved. The church was perched half way up the hill, and some little distance from the nearest house in the village below. People used to laugh about its being hung up there, and would give strangers who asked the reason all sorts of funny answers; but the real reason was that the queer old gentleman, who had given most of the

money to build it with, long ago, when Ruth's grandma was a little girl, insisted that it should be in just that spot, because he liked the view, and said that the air was better up there, which perhaps it was.

To Ruth, curled up in the pew, with closed eyes, a funny thing happened; she fell asleep. Coming from the cold and wind into the warm, comfortable church, and listening to the low, soothing music, had sent her off into dreamland before she was even conscious of being sleepy. The music rose and fell and died away. Mr. Mace closed to organ, and, leaving the church, locked the door behind him, never guessing that he had left a little prisoner fast asleep within. Half an hour, an hour, two hours passed, and still Ruth slept on. The sexton came and tended the fire and went away for the night, and she never moved, then, or for a long time after. The sun was still shining when she went into the church; something, not the sun, was shining when she finally opened her eyes—something big and red, and it glowed at her through the surrounding darkness. What was it? What could it mean, where was she? Not at home, not in her bed! and yet it was dark, save for that great, glowing eye! Surely the sun must have set!

Ruth sat up and looked about her, bewildered. What was that high thing yonder? It looked like a pulpit—it was a pulpit! Ah, yes, she remembered it all now! She must have fallen asleep while listening to the music, and the red light was the glow from the great stove. But she must get out and go on to grandma's at once! And jumping to her feet she walked as quickly as possible, for she was stiff from her cramped position, down to the door and tried the knob. It was locked fast, and running back into the church, the startled little girl glanced up at the clock, which hung within the light from the fire. Ten o'clock! Then she must stay there all night alone!

To say that Ruth was frightened expresses her condition. She was terrified. The great silent church seemed suddenly filled with strange and startling sounds; and the huge, glowing eye, staring at her through the darkness, cast the corners into deeper gloom, and invested them with imaginary horrors.

But, suddenly, as she stood there in the long aisle, a thought occurred to her. She could ring the bell as she had often seen the sexton do, and that would certainly bring someone to release her. Springing back into the vestibule she pulled open the door of the closet beneath the stairs and grasped the dangling rope. But before she had pulled it once there came a second thought. If that bell sounded it would rouse the neighborhood for miles around, for it was understood that the ringing of the church bell meant fire. Should she, for a little discomfort to herself, disturb and worry so many persons on this wild win-

ter night? For a moment she stood there, fighting with herself against herself as she had never fought before. Then, dropping the rope, Ruthie went slowly back into the church. If she could only have convinced herself that it was her duty to let someone know where she was! But her mother thought her safe with her grandmother, who, in her turn, had no other idea than that she was snugly tucked up in her bed at home. No, there was no one to worry about her. But what should she do. How could she endure it? Why had God let this dreadful thing happen? She had flung herself down on the cushions of one of the pews and with her face buried in her folded arms, lay there, shaking with terror, as she listened to the wind howling about the church, and flinging the bare branches of the trees against the window panes, with a weird, unearthly sound. But with that last exclamation came another thought; a beautiful, comforting, soothing thought: She was not alone; God was there with her as surely as though she had been in her bed at home, and she breathed a little prayer that he would take the fear and loneliness away; and almost instantly the answer came. For a few moments she lay there wondering at the sweet peace that had come into her little heart. Never in all her life before had God seemed so near. She sat up and glanced about her, astonished to find that she could look even into those dark corners without shrinking. Then presently she made another discovery, which was that she was very hungry, and that reminded her of the sweet loaf in her basket. Eating some of it would help pass the time.

As she sat breaking off little bits and eating them, she remembered how she had said the afternoon before—how long ago it seemed—that she liked unexpected things. "I am sure I ought not to complain," she said, with a little laugh, "for this is the very most unexpected thing that ever happened to me. How glad I am that I did not ring that bell! If I had, by this time there would have been a hundred people hurrying here out of their warm beds into that dreadful cold. How nice and warm it is, and how pretty the shadows on the ceiling are!" She had laid her head back against the top of the pew, and was gazing up at the roof, where the glow from the fire cast a bright reflection. And sitting thus, little by little she drifted away again into dreamland.

An hour, two hours passed. The wind howled, rising higher and higher; but still Ruthie slept. It shook the church, it blew down the chimney, and presently a wilder gust loosened the imperfectly fastened door of the stove and flung it open, allowing some of the red hot coals to fall to the floor and roll beyond the zinc. Ruth slept on, but no longer quietly. She dreamed that she was Mary, Queen of Scots, and that her head