



Rusty

and Ryan

Click! The lid of the metal mailbox snapped shut, and Ryan grinned. He loved putting envelopes into the mailbox for Mother. He looked at the letters on the side of the mailbox. Mother had read them to him once. They said, “The Martins, 167 Horseshoe Street.”

Ryan lived on a small farm with his mother and father. He liked to play with his toys and help Father take care of the animals. They had goats, chickens, a pig, and a steer. Ryan gathered the eggs. He also helped Mother dry the dishes and set the table. But Ryan still got lonely because he had no brothers or sisters.

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Sometimes Ryan tried to play with the animals. That did not work. The chickens squawked and pecked if Ryan tried to hold them. The goats butted his knees. The pig did not smell good. So he had to be content to help his parents and play by himself.

Ryan ran up the lane from the mailbox. He dashed into the house and let the screen door bang shut.

Mother looked up from mending a sock. "Ryan," she said, "soon you will be seven years old. Is there anything special you want for your birthday?"

Ryan ran his fingers through his brown hair. "Yes," he answered. "I want a puppy to play with me."

"I'm sorry, Ryan," Mother said with a sigh. "Puppies cost too much money. We can't buy one right now. Can you think of something else?"

"Not really." Ryan shook his head. Suddenly he thought of something. "Could Jesus send me a puppy, Mother?"

"Of course He could, Ryan," Mother said. "Why don't you ask Him?"

So Ryan did. Every night at bedtime, he prayed, "Dear Jesus, please send me a puppy for my birthday if it is Your will. Thank you. Amen."

Ryan's birthday came and went. He got a new toy dump truck, but no puppy. Still Ryan kept praying. *Maybe it will come later*, he thought.

One evening there was a sound at the door. *Scratch! Scratch!*

"Father," Ryan called, "something is scratching on the door!"

Father opened the door, and in bounced a little puppy. He had brown and white fur and a wagging tail. "Oh, look, my puppy came!" Ryan cried. He gathered the wiggling puppy into his arms.

"Wait," Father said. "The puppy is probably lost. We will try to find the owner."

Ryan felt a lump in his throat. He looked at the puppy in his arms. "Could we keep him, please?"

"No, Ryan." Father's eyes were sad too. "Some boy or girl is probably sad right now

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because this puppy is missing. It would not be right to keep it.”

“Okay.” Ryan squeezed the puppy. “Can I keep it if nobody claims it?”

“We’ll see,” Father said with a smile. “But we should put an ad in the newspaper to see if we can find the owner.”

Ryan helped his mother gently brush the dirt from the puppy’s fur. It happily licked



his hand. "Please, Jesus, let me be able to keep the puppy," Ryan prayed quietly.

But the evening after the ad was in the newspaper, the telephone rang.

Father answered it. When he hung up again, he said, "I'm sorry, Ryan, but a man is coming soon to look at the puppy. He thinks it might be his."

Ryan brushed tears from his eyes and buried his face in the puppy's soft fur. "Oh, I was hoping so much that I could keep you!" he whispered in its ear.

A little later the doorbell rang, and Father opened the door. Ryan saw a tall man standing on the porch. He was wearing a striped shirt and dusty pants. "Hello," said the man. He smiled at them. "My name is Mr. Smith. I came to see the puppy."

"Come right in," Father invited.

Mr. Smith stepped inside and closed the door. He looked at the puppy that Ryan was holding. "Why, that's my lost puppy!" he exclaimed. The puppy jumped out of Ryan's arms and ran to Mr. Smith.