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Ruthe's Secret Roses by Ruth Marlene Friesen

Publisher: <https://www.BookLocker.com> Genre: Spiritual fiction

When 18 year-old Ruthe, a small-town, Mennonite Christian, takes off for the big city to help keep her family afloat when her dad is out of work, things start to happen in a big way. Wanting to live out her faith, she goes looking for trouble, and with God's help, she finds it. In Kleinstadt, Ruthe is a mouse who struggles to fit into a family she feels doesn't (and never will) understand her. In the city, Ruth is an instrument of God's will, loved and understood by all she takes in hand on His behalf. Ruthe's secret roses are her new-found friends, those she brings into God's garden, there to be nurtured and cared for as God intended. Soon she has a garden of rare and colourful blooms. She, herself, however, longs to come out of the shade. Every garden has its weedpile, and Ruthe's family is hers.

It is clear that the author identifies herself with Ruthe, and she even alludes to this herself, in the introduction: "I have created a main character who shares many of my own interests and traits." Ruthe is an outsider and, indeed, she only really comes alive 'outside' her family: a typically enclosed Mennonite clan - a tension maintained throughout the novel.

Ruthe's adventures cover a wide variety of problems and issues - some are dealt with elegantly, others are a bit too pat to be credible. Nevertheless, for Christians seeking to live out their faith, or non-Christians seeking to understand the Christian walk of their friends, this could be an interesting and useful book. There's not a dark corner in this world, it seems, where Ruthe fears to tread, accompanied by her best Friend, Jesus: death, abuse, swearing, sex, self-loathing, boredom, suffering, loneliness, abortion, prostitution, jealousy, gossip and, similarly, there are few, if any, issues she fails to raise: faith in a living God, the true meaning of conversion, doubt, a transformed life, forgiveness, love, prayer, relationships, a matchmaker God, purpose in life, etc.

Ruthe's Secret Roses has the potential to be a great Christian novel. One-liners like:

"They can't take off their feelings like a coat and lay them in a trunk like souvenirs.;" or "*His loneliness ached vicariously in her heart, just as it had done for others.*"; and (Speaking about sex) "It's no new soft drink, you know..." or the eminently recognisable emotion of "That sentence prayer did nothing miraculous for June. She only felt more mixed up. It seemed all her orderly pigeon-holed emotions were flying about her head now: she didn't know their names and they would not let her stuff them away."

Unfortunately, the many gems in this book are smothered by an overabundance of tales. At 560+ pages, the novel is over-long, especially for an ebook. Ruthe's 'secret roses' would certainly benefit from some judicious editorial pruning. The whole build up of Ruthe's secret life on the streets loses its power in

the murder mystery of the second half, quite simply because the novel is too long and the reader begins to lose sight of her characters. An easy cut-off point could have been made with the wedding, and a new start made with the entry of the Clarke family into the tale. A shame, then, that RMF felt she had to cram all her experiences between one cover.

Wilma Clark, eBook Reviews Weekly

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(Note: The eBook is 560+ pages if printed as set up. The softcover is 467 pages).

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