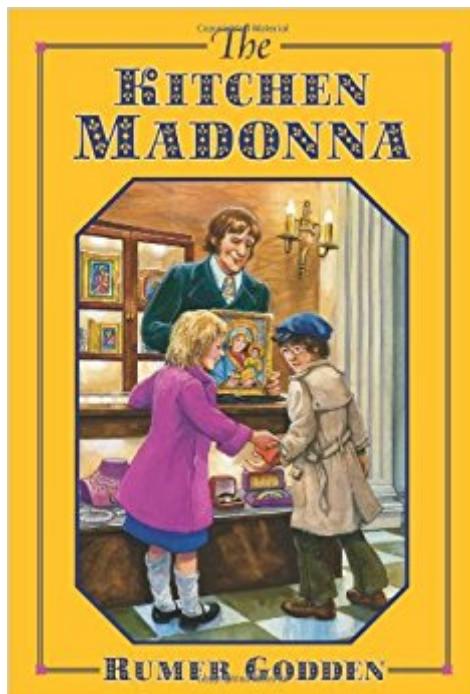


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# The Kitchen Madonna



## **Synopsis**

Marta is unhappy. For quietly aloof Gregory and his sister Janet, Marta, with her thick Ukrainian accent, her good cooking, and her stories, is the anchor of the house. Mother and Father, both busy architects, are gone all day and sometimes at night. Marta is always there; and the children, sensing her unhappiness, do not want her to go away. When they find out that Marta desires a good place in the kitchen, nine-year-old Gregory, with precocious young Janet in tow, sets out to find her a Ukrainian icon in busy, modern London. Master storyteller Rumer Godden deftly brings to life a portrait of a lonely boy discovering the creative power of love.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Margaret Rumer Godden, born in 1907 in Sussex, England, spent most of her younger years in India, where her parents gave her and her two sisters many opportunities to mingle with Indian people while educating their daughters at home. Both parents' gift of storytelling would kindle similar gifts, developed even further, in their children. In those early years there was all the time in the world to think, Rumer Godden said. Even our lessons were at a slow pace. \*Later, in England, young Miss Godden was encouraged in her writing talent by perceptive instructors at a school called Moira House. Having taken training in dance, Rumer Godden returned to India and opened a ballet school for both British and Indian children. After an unhappy marriage that left her in financial debt she and her daughters retreated to a cottage in the mountains of Kashmir. There she worked hard writing novels, drawing from the many experiences of both her worlds, European and Indian.

By the 1940s Rumer Godden was becoming an acclaimed author. In the course of a lifetime she would write over 60 books and be named a Member of the Order of the British Empire. In the 1940s Rumer Godden returned to England. Here she began to write books for children with all the craftsmanship she dedicated to her adult novels. She is perhaps best known for her stories about dolls, a series, that is, according to May Hill Arbuthnot, unsurpassed in variety and charm, for her dolls have distinct personalities and in her books they talk and act in character (Children and Books). In The Kitchen Madonna we see Miss Godden's perennial interest in those individuals with a special contribution to make who do not fit easily into simple categories. Ruth Hill Viguers writes, Rumer Godden's intuitive understanding of children that gives such special life to her books about children was never more evident than it is in The Kitchen Madonna (A Critical History of Children's Literature). Continuing to write, and succeed, in many fields including adaptation to the screen, Miss Godden remained in the British Isles, becoming a Roman Catholic, marrying happily a second time, and retiring eventually in Scotland. She died in 1998. \* Information and quotations, except where noted, are drawn from the profile in Major Authors and Illustrators for Children and Young Adults Vol 3, Detroit, Gale Research, Inc, 1993; and from the profile by Jean Russell in Twentieth Century Children's Authors, Chicago and London, St James Press, 1989.

Excellent, wholesome, engaging story about two children's desire to create a Madonna icon for a "good place" in their kitchen for their Ukrainian house maid/nanny. Several characters become better people when they are drawn into this experience. This book is easy for a fluent reader, yet also a really nice bedtime read-aloud for the whole family, even the little ones. Good choice for a young ladies book club, too. With so much garbage on the book store shelves these days, this older text is well-worth it! Enjoy!

I loved this book years ago and bought a used copy of my own recently, the spell of it was that strong. I re-read it yesterday and it still moved me to tears. It is a kindly book, as one reviewer so aptly says, but also a story about a young person becoming immersed, joyfully possessed, and finally transformed by the process of creating something beautiful to make someone else happy. Everyone wins, but not in an icky sticky way.

"Nothing less than the whole is good enough for God." That sums up this book and "In This House of Brede". Only after reading both of them dozens of times, did I realize that "The Kitchen Madonna" could be considered "Brede for Kids". They're both about learning to give, love and give some more.

Both are stellar pieces of art woven together as only Rumer Godden can. I can't recommend either of them both more highly than that.

Good experience!

Warm and lovely read.

Arrived as described on time

Rumer Godden's *THE KITCHEN MADONNA* wraps the reader into the (apparently) 1960's existence of a London family with two busy architects as parents of a nine-year-old boy named Gregory and a seven-year-old girl named Janet. Gregory and Janet aren't sappy or spoiled. They are a bit neglected by their parents though and as a result are remarkably self-reliant and what we now call "proactive." The children, especially Gregory, are worried their current maid/cook/etc., an immigrant from the Ukraine called Marta, isn't happy and will leave, as so many of the previous "help" did. Marta thinks their modern kitchen is rather cold and she tells the children of the custom in her Ukrainian home to have a devotional nook with a special kind of icon. Gregory, who is a withdrawn, aloof young fellow, decides to find a picture for Marta like she had at home. He and Janet range farther afield in London than they have parental permission to do. They visit museums and shops to further this quest. They suffer some setbacks and have to stretch their ingenuity. Gregory is the artistic one while Janet provides back-up for her usually reticent brother and sometimes suggests practical ways to overcome a hurdle. Gregory's determination to give something truly special to Marta transports him from his isolation to a more social orientation. He learns that giving is loving and that creating something beautiful and meaningful requires commitment and sacrifice. *THE KITCHEN MADONNA* is a forty-five-year-old tale that has lost none of its charm and purity. Told unsentimentally but with precision and a touch of urban enchantment, it is as much, if not more, for adults as for children. It illuminates, as so many of Godden's books do, a resounding goodness that human beings carry inside but need a prod to develop. This is a golden piece of fiction. By the way, I read the edition with the original drawings by Carol Barker, and I thought they flawlessly, colorfully accompanied the text.

gift

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