



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Open Gate

Maud Lindsay

One bright summer afternoon, Fleet, the good old shepherd dog that helped to take care of the farmyard, decided that he would step into the barn to see his friend Mrs. Muffet and her two little kittens, for he had not been able to chat with them for some time.

On his way, Fleet looked around to see that all was right. The weather was warm and the hens were taking a dust bath under the apple tree, and the brindle calf was asleep in the shadow of the barn. The ducks and geese were at the pond, the horses were at work in a distant field, the cows and sheep were in pasture, and only the brown colt kicked up his heels in the farmyard; so Fleet barked with satisfaction, and walked into the barn.

Inside he found Mrs. Muffet washing her face, while her two little kittens slept in the hay; and she gave Fleet a warm welcome.

"Good evening, Mrs. Muffet," said he.

"Good evening, Friend Fleet," answered she.

"How are the children?" asked the good dog, "and do they grow?"

"Grow?" said Mrs. Muffet. "You never saw anything like them! and such tricks as they play! Tittleback is the merrier, and will play with his own tail when he can find nothing else; but Toddlekins can climb in a way that is astonishing. Why, he even talks of going to the top of the barn, and no doubt he will, some day."

"No doubt, no doubt," said Fleet. "Children are so remarkable now."

"But what is the news with you, Friend Fleet?" inquired Mrs. Muffet.

"Nothing at all," said Fleet. "The barnyard is as quiet"—but just as he spoke there arose such a clatter outside the door that he sprang to his feet to see what was the matter, and the two kittens waked up in alarm. Outside, the yard was in a commotion. Everybody was talking at the same time. The hens were cackling, the roosters crowing, the ducks quacking, the calf crying, and the sound of flying hoofs could be heard far down the road.

"Pray, what is the matter?" said Fleet to three geese, that were hurrying along, with their necks stretched out.

"The gate is open, the brown colt's gone, the brindle calf's going and we are thinking about it; quawk! quawk!" said the three geese, Mrs. Waddle, Mrs. Gabble, and Mrs. Dabble.

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Muffet, putting her head out of the barn door.

"Out into the world," said the three geese together.



"You'd better go back to your pond," barked Fleet, as he bounded off to help the cook, who was waving her apron to keep back the brindle calf, while the milkmaid shut the gate, and little Dick ran down the road after the brown colt.

The brown colt kicked up his heels, and did not care how fast Dick ran. He had all the world to roam in, and the green grass was growing everywhere; so he tossed his head and galloped away toward the blue hills.

After a while he looked to see whether Dick was still following him, but nobody was in sight; so he lay down and rolled over among the daisies; and this was such fun that he tried it again, and again, until he was tired.

Then he nibbled the grass awhile, but soon decided to take another run; and he raised such a dust, as he scampered along, that the birds peeped down from the trees to see what it was, and a little rabbit that ran across the road was so astonished that it did not take breath again till it reached its greenwood home.

"Hurrah!" said the brown colt, not because he knew what it meant but because he had heard Dick say it. "Hurrah! maybe I'll never go back!"

Just then there came an awful screech out of a neighboring field, and, although it was only the whistle of a threshing machine, the brown colt was terribly frightened, and jumped over a fence into a cotton field.

"Oh!" thought he, as he tore his glossy coat on the sharp barbs of the wire fence and cut his feet as he leaped awkwardly over, "Oh! how I wish I could see Dick now."



But Dick was at home. He had run after the brown colt as fast as his feet could carry him, and had called "Whoa! Whoa!" but the brown colt would not listen; so Dick had gone home with his head hanging down, for he was the very one who had forgotten to shut the farmyard gate.

Mother was at home, and she felt very sorry when she heard about it, for she knew how dear that colt was to her careless little boy; and when father came in from the fields, too late to look for the runaway, he said that big boys and little boys and everybody else must take care of the things they wanted to keep; and Dick cried, but it did no good.

The cows came home when father did, and the brindle calf was glad that she had not gone away from the farmyard when she saw her mother come in from the clover lot. The chickens went to roost, and the horses were fed; but no brown colt came in sight, although Dick and Fleet went down the lane to look, a dozen times.

"He's sorry enough," said Friend Fleet to Mrs. Muffet, as they ate their supper; and Mrs. Muffet told Tittleback and Toddlekins all about it, when she went back to the barn.

Poor little Dick! and poor brown colt! They thought about each other very often that night; and early in the morning the man who owned the cotton field, drove the brown colt out.

"I'd like to know," said the man, as he hurried him along, "what business you have in my cotton field!" But the brown colt hung his head, as Dick had done, and limped away.

The long pike road stretched out, hard and white, before him, and the birds, chattering in the bushes, seemed to say:—

"Is this the same brown colt that raised such a dust yesterday?"

Oh! how long and weary the way was, to his limping feet! But at last he reached home, just at milking time; and when the milkmaid saw him standing at the gate, she gave a scream that brought the household out.

Dick and the cook and Fleet tumbled over each other in their surprise, and the barnyard was in such an excitement that one hen lost her chickens and did not find them all for fifteen minutes.

"What did you see?" cried the brindle calf.

"What made you come back?" asked the geese; but Dick and Friend Fleet asked no questions, because they understood.

That was a long time ago, and the brown colt is a strong horse now, and Dick a tall boy; but neither of them will ever forget the day when Dick was careless and did not shut the farmyard gate.

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