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The Piggy Girl

Louise M. Alcott

"I won't be washed! I won't be washed!" screamed little Betty, kicking and slapping her mother.

"You'd better go and live with the pigs, dirty child," said her mother, scrubbing away at two very grubby hands.

"I wish I could! I love to be dirty,--I will be dirty!" roared Betty, throwing the sponge out of the window and the soap under the table.

Her mother was tired, so she bundled her into bed half wiped, telling her to go to sleep right away.

"I won't! I'll go and live with Mrs. Gleason's pigs, and have nothing to do but eat and sleep, and roll in the dirt, and never, never be washed any more," said Betty to herself.

She lay thinking about it blinking at the moon for a while; then she got up very softly, and crept down the back stairs, through the garden, to the sty where two nice little pigs were fast asleep among the straw in their small house. They only grunted when Betty crept into a corner, laughing at the fun it would be to play piggy and live here with no mamma to wash her and keep saying,--

"Put on a clean apron, dear!"

The next morning she was awoken up by hearing Mrs. Gleason pour milk into the trough. She lay very still till the woman was gone; then she crept out and drank all she wanted, and took the best bits of cold potato and bread for her breakfast, and the lazy pigs did not get up till she was done. While they ate and rooted in the dirt, Betty slept as long as she liked, with no school, no errands, no patchwork to do. She liked it, and kept hidden till night; then she went home, and opened the little window in the store closet, and got in and took as many good things to eat and carry away as she liked. She had a fine walk in her nightgown, and saw the flowers asleep, heard the little birds chirp in the nest, and watched the fireflies and moths at their pretty play. No one saw her but the cats; and they played with her, and hopped at her toes, in the moonlight, and had great fun.

When she was tired she went to sleep with the pigs, and dozed all the next day, only coming out to eat and drink when the milk was brought and the cold bits;

for Mrs. Gleason took good care of her pigs, and gave them clean straw often, and kept them as nice as she could.

Betty lived in this strange way a long time, and soon looked more like a pig than a little girl; for her nightgown got dirty, her hair was never combed, her face was never washed, and she loved to dig in the mud till her hands looked like paws. She never talked, but began to grunt as the pigs did, and burrowed into the straw to sleep, and squealed when they crowded her, and quarrelled over the food, eating with her nose in the trough like a real pig. At first she used to play around at night, and steal things to eat; and people set traps to catch the thief in their gardens, and the cook in her own house scolded about the rats that carried off the cake and pies out of her pantry. But she got too lazy and fat to care for anything but sleeping and eating, and never left the sty. She went on her hands and knees now, and began to wonder if a little tail wouldn't grow and her nose change to a snout.

All summer she played being a pig, and thought it good fun; but when the autumn came it was cold, and she longed for her nice warm flannel nightgown, and got tired of cold victuals, and began to wish she had a fire to sit by and good buckwheat cakes to eat. She was ashamed to go home, and wondered what she should do after this silly frolic. She asked the pigs how they managed in winter; but they only grunted, and she could not remember what became of them, for the sty was always empty in cold weather.



One dreadful night she found out. She was smuggled down between the great fat piggies to keep warm; but her toes were cold, and she was trying to pull the straw over them when she heard Mr. Gleason say to his boy,--

"We must kill those pigs tomorrow. They are fat enough; so come and help me sharpen the big knife."

"Oh, dear, what will become of *me*?" thought Betty, as she heard the grindstone go round and round as the knife got sharper and sharper. "I look so much like a pig they will kill me too, and make me into sausages if I don't run away. I'm tired of playing piggy, and I'd rather be washed a hundred times a day than be put in a pork barrel."

So she lay trembling till morning; then she ran through the garden and found the back door open. It was very early, and no one saw her, for the cook was in the shed getting wood to make her fire; so Betty slipped upstairs to the nursery and was going to whisk into bed, when she saw in the glass an ugly black creature,

all rags and dirt, with rumpled hair, and a little round nose covered with mud.

"Can it be me?" she said. "How horrid I am!" And she could not spoil her nice white bed, but hopped into the bathtub and had a good scrubbing. Next she got a clean nightgown, and brushed her hair, and cut her long nails, and looked like a tidy little girl again.

Then she lay down in her cosy crib with the pink cover and the lace curtains, and fell fast asleep, glad to have clean sheets, soft blankets, and her own little pillow once more.

"Come, darling, wake up and see the new dress I have got for you, and the nice ruffled apron. It's Thanksgiving day, and all the cousins are coming to dinner," said her mamma, with a soft kiss on the rosy cheek.

Betty got up, screaming,--

"Don't kill me! Oh, please don't! I'm not a truly pig, I'm a little girl; and if you'll let me run home, I'll never fret when I'm washed again."

"What is the dear child afraid of?" said mamma, cuddling her close, and laughing to see Betty stare wildly about for the fat pigs and the stuffy sty.

She told her mother all about the strange time she had had, and was much surprised to hear mamma say,--

"It was all a dream, dear; you have been safely asleep in your little bed."

"Well, I'm glad I dreamed it, for it has made me love to be clean. Come, soap and scrub as much as you like, I won't kick and scream ever any more," cried Betty, skipping about, glad to be safe in her pleasant home and no longer a dirty, lazy piggy girl.

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