



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Was it the field fairy?

Abbie Phillips Walker

Jack and his sister Nina were two little orphans who had to beg from door to door for their food and a place to sleep. One day a man named Simon told them if they would work for him he would give them a home. Jack and Nina thought Simon must be a very kind-hearted man to offer them a home, so they worked as hard as they could to repay him. But in this they were mistaken, for Simon was a very greedy, hard-hearted man and only offered to take the children so he got their work for nothing.

Jack did all the chores on the farm and Nina took care of the house, although they were both much too small to do such hard work. In return Simon gave them a place to sleep on the floor of the attic and very little to eat. If he had Nina cook meat for his dinner he would sit by the stove and watch that she did not eat any of it, and when he had eaten all the meat he would leave the bones and gristle for poor little Jack and Nina, who were half starved.

One day Simon told Jack he was going to sell the Cow to the butcher and that he was to drive her the next day to the town, a few miles away. Jack and Nina were very fond of Cow and wept bitterly when they heard this. They begged Simon not to let the butcher have her, but he told them he would not listen to any such silly chatter and for Jack to be off the next morning bright and early.



Nina put her arms around Cow and cried when Jack was ready to lead her away and watched them down the road; but her tears blinded her so she could not see far, and she went back to get Simon's breakfast with a sad heart. When Jack came to the woods he led Cow to a stream to drink, and while he sat on the bank, waiting, he was surprised to see a Fairy slip out of a lily as it opened.

"I thought you were never coming," said the little creature.

Jack thought she was speaking to him, but to his surprise Cow answered.

"We had to wait for daylight, you know," she said.

"Yes, I know; but the sun will soon be up, and I must get home before that," said

the Fairy. "Now what can I do for you?"

"Save my life! I am on the way to the butcher now," replied Cow.

"You told me that day I did not eat the field flower in which you were sleeping that you would help me if ever I was in need of help," said Cow.

"Of course I will help you," said the Field Fairy. "I will change you into anything you like. What shall it be?"

"There is another thing, good Field Fairy," said Cow. "This poor boy will be punished if I am not carried to the butcher and the money he gets carried back to Simon. This boy and his sister have been very kind to me. They never forgot to bring me water and gave me salt many times when their master did not know. I don't want to get them into trouble, even to save my life."

"Oh, don't worry about us," said Jack, who at last was able to speak. "Nina and I will not mind being punished if only you can escape the butcher."

"I have thought of a plan," said the Fairy, "that will save you from the butcher, and will not cause your two friends harm, either. It is this: Instead of changing you into some other shape, why not change your master into a kind and good man?"

"Oh, that would be best of all," said Jack, "that is, if Cow does not object to remaining a cow."

"I would rather be a cow if I can be sure I am going to live," replied Cow. "But you can understand, of course, there can be no joy in life for me with that butcher staring me in the face."

"Well, that is all settled, then," replied the Fairy, "and though the sun is rising I think I can get to your master without letting the old Sun Man see me, for it is cool and shady along the road to the farm. You two wait here and see what happens."

Jack wondered what the Field Fairy intended to do, but he would not be surprised now at anything, so he began to pick some berries, for he had not had his breakfast, and now Cow was sure she was not going to the butcher. So she began to eat the sweet grass by the stream. Jack thought she might speak again and he patted her sides and nose, but the only answer Cow made was to rub her nose against him and moo.

After a while Jack heard some one calling his name and running down the road. It was Nina. "Oh, I am so glad I have found you!" she said. "Come quickly; something has happened to Simon." Jack let Cow take care of herself and hurried after Nina, wondering what the Fairy had done to Simon. But it seemed that Simon had brought on his trouble himself by trying to save the wood that

morning when Nina told him she needed more wood for the fire. Instead of giving her more wood he had poured on some oil and the flame had blazed up and burnt him.

When Jack and Nina reached the farmhouse Simon was on the floor, groaning with pain. Forgetting all the unkindness they had received at his hands, Jack and Nina lifted him from the floor and placed him on his bed. Then they did all they could to relieve his sufferings. Nina bathed his face and hands and Jack bandaged them, and then he fell asleep. When he woke up he asked for some oatmeal and then he remembered Cow.

"Poor creature!" said Simon. "I wish I had kept her even if she was getting old; but it is too late now, for, of course, the butcher has her."

Just then, "Moo, moo!" was heard outside, and for the first time since he left her at the stream Jack thought of Cow.

"Why, there she is now!" he said. "I did not get to the butcher's this morning because Nina called me before I had gone beyond the woods."

"I'll never sell her," said Simon. "Go out, Jack, and give her a good dinner, and tonight see that she has a nice bed of straw in the barn."

That day for dinner Simon told Nina to have a good meat stew and that Nina and Jack were to eat all they wanted. Jack told Nina what had happened at the stream in the woods and asked her if she thought the Fairy had anything to do with the accident that happened to Simon.

"Of course not," said Nina. "Fairies always do good, not bad things, and, besides, Simon must have been burnt at the very time you saw the Fairy, and I wonder if you really did see a Fairy, after all. Are you sure you did not fall asleep and dream it all?"

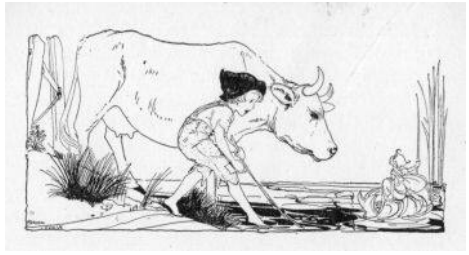
Jack was quite sure he did not dream it, but never again did Cow speak—at least, Jack never heard her if she did. But when Simon recovered from his burns and was quite well again something did happen, and whether the Field Fairy and Cow had anything to do with it Jack and Nina never knew. Simon was a changed man, that was sure. He would not let Nina do the work any more, but sent both of the children to school. He fixed up the house and bought new furniture, and, best of all, he bought nice clothing for Jack and Nina.

"And if you don't mind," said Simon to Jack and Nina one day, "I wish you would call me Uncle Simon."

He even bought a nice horse and carriage for the children to drive to school; in fact, everybody thought Simon must have lost his mind, he was so changed.

"It must be the work of the Field Fairy," said Jack when he and Nina were talking over what the neighbors said about Simon. "She said she would change him into a kind and good man."

"Perhaps she came and found him burnt and thought she would wait and see what happened to him," said Nina, "but I think you fell asleep that morning, Jack, while you were waiting for Cow to drink at the stream."



"Cow saw the Fairy. Didn't you?" asked Jack, as Cow came up to the stone wall where Jack and Nina stood.

Cow looked over the wall straight at Jack and answered, "Mo-o-o."

"It does not matter, Jack," said Nina, with a laugh, as she patted Cow on the nose. "It has all turned out so well and Uncle Simon could not be kinder or nicer to us now if he were our father. Sometimes I think it is all because when he was so sick and helpless that we were kind to him and did all we could even though he had almost starved us and made us work so hard. I think he is sorry for it and is trying to do all he can now to make up for his unkindness and make us forget it."

"Perhaps you are right, Nina," said Jack, "so we will forget it, but I am sure about the Field Fairy, and Cow knows it is true, for it was the Fairy who saved her from the butcher."

But all the answer Jack could get from Cow was "M-o-o-o!"

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