



THE JUG AND THE SIXPENCE

Margaret smiled as Silky the cow lifted her head when she opened the gate. As she walked across the field, the cows fell in line and followed her into the shippon. When they were tethered, she sat beside Silky, breathing in the smell of hay and clover, and began to milk her.

The warm milk was streaming into the pail when she heard a tiny clink. Turning her head she saw a shiny silver sixpence on the floor a few feet away. Next to it sat a tiny cornflower blue jug. Clearly someone wanted milk. She took the jug and dipped it into the pail. Placing it gently on the floor next to the sixpence, she turned back and closed her eyes tight, listening.

She could hear a blackbird singing outside and the soft breathing and shuffling of the cows inside. After a few moments she half opened her eyes and looked. The jug had gone. The sixpence hadn't, but sixpence seemed a great deal to pay for such a little milk and she couldn't bring herself to take it.

The next day it was still there. Margaret leant into Silky's side and began milking. A few minutes later she heard it. There was the small blue jug and two sixpences. She filled the jug, set it down and looked away. When she looked back a moment later, the jug had gone. She ran to the door, shielding her eyes from the sun and scanned the fields. A blackbird cocked his head, watching her from the hawthorn hedge. Back inside, she looked at the sixpences. Clearly they were meant for her. She picked them up and dropped them into her apron pocket.

Every day she filled the jug and kept the sixpence. It

was her secret. After a few weeks she threw away her old apron and bought a new one. A month later there was a new shawl around her shoulders. A few days after that, Tom, the shepherd boy, caught up with her as she crossed the field.

"You're looking mighty fine these days. What's going on?" He grinned at her, "You got some fancy man buying you presents eh?"

Margaret stopped and stared, her face going bright red.

"How dare you?" She glared at Tom, who looked a bit sheepish,

"I'm sorry. I only meant...well...that you look great..." Margaret walked away, hiding her face, blushing for quite a different reason now. They were almost at the shippon.

She stopped.

"Alright, come in and I'll show you what happens. Sit next to me and Silky, and listen carefully."

They sat and listened, but there was no clink. Silky became restless. Margaret looked around. There was no jug. No sixpence. She buried her face in Silky's coat. The cow turned its head and nuzzled her arm, but it was no use.

She never saw the tiny jug and sixpence again; but some time later, the sixpences she had collected paid for her wedding to Tom, along with a beautiful cornflower blue jug and their own cow, which she called "Silky".