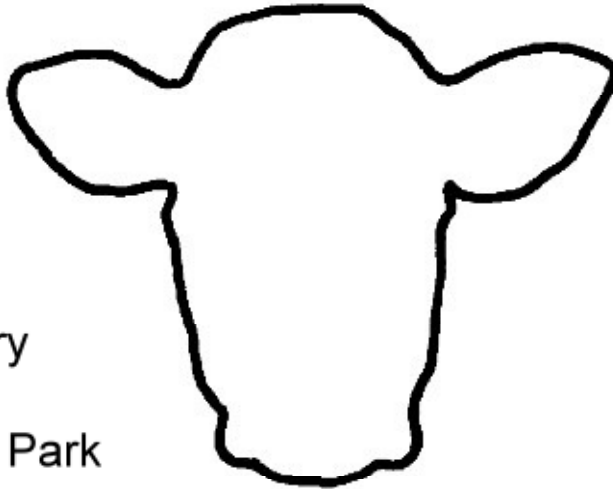


THE Encownter

A short-story
by
Mary Margaret Park



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The Encownter

In spiraling sheets of gray the rain falls; a harsh wind blows across the south pasture, tearing at the grass and trees. Lester glances out the window -- then goes back to gathering eggs. He winces as a jagged thunderclap reverberates through the barn. When he was getting ready for work this morning, he slipped and fell in the bathroom; his head making contact with the sink. "Oh well, perhaps you've knocked some sense into that brain of yours." his mother used to say. He finishes collecting eggs, then goes to the other side of the barn and checks on several sick cows; they'll be separated from the rest of the herd until the vet figures out what ails them.

The buzz of flies is thick here...they circle and land in lacey black clouds. A hen waddles and pecks its way along the barn floor, gathering seeds and bugs. A gust of wind batters the barn's side; the rafters scream in protest. Lester glances at the cross hatch of old boards supporting the roof; his face drawn and thoughtful when he hears a low rolling moo.

"It isn't natural, taking our milk."

He turns towards the stall. Unperturbed, the cows continue chewing their cud. He scratches his head. "Huh?"

The cow to his left moo's and stomps the side of the stall, "Humph... you think this is strange? Try having cold metal attached to your nipples...now that's weird...and besides, it's downright rude.....dude."

Lester's eyes grow wide. He steps towards the stall. -- "What...?" The cow narrows its Elsie-like eyes. "You heard me, rude, rude, and more rudely...stealing our calves and then our milk..." -- "You put us on a carousel with milking machines then, round and round we go; in an endless circle of hormonal bliss, blah. More like PMS I'd say."

"She's right you know?" another cow chimes in.

Lester leans his bulky waist further over the stall door.

"Ah, well, I mean, hmmm...I never thought of it that way I suppose? You've got a point?"

He takes a big gulp of air. The humidity of the thunderstorm has dampened his shirt; he tugs at his collar -- then rolls his eyes...shaking his head in disbelief.

The structure groans and the windows rattle; a gust of wind presses firmly against the southern wall. Lester glances out the window then at the cows, slowly blinking his eyes. The sky has grown angry green. It's pouring now with sheets of rain tapping against the tin roof. "It could be worse. We could be out in the rain." Lester mutters. Elsie-eye's utters a low moo.

"It could be worse yes, like my cousins Fric and Frac. Nice normal cows one day and then with a slice, poof...steers. The whole family shuns them you know; we just don't agree with the transgendered lifestyle."

Another cow loops its tail over its rump, lassoing several flies. "You forgot Uncle Bill, they locked him in a steel cage, force-fed him milk, and changed his name to veal. He's probably a main entree for one of these Lester

Beasts by now.”

Lester places one hand on his hip, the other cuts through the air.
“Don’t be ridiculous, I don’t even like veal; don’t believe in it, it’s not natural.”

The hen waddles across the room, settling next to Lester’s shoes; his forehead creased, he glares at her, “What do you want?”

The hen clucks and pecks at his shoes. He does a little dance to dodge her sharp beak. The cows erupt in laughter as he hops on a bale of hay.

“What are you laughing about?”

“Can’t you guess?” Elsie-eyes chuckles

With renewed vigor, his head starts to thump; he rubs his left temple, “What?”

“You’ve stolen her eggs and she’s not happy about it...” another cow replies.

Lester glances at the wire basket of eggs nearby, picks it up and returns them to the hen house.

“Now, what can I do for you?” he asks upon returning.

Elsie-eye’s ponders for a moment...

“I don’t know...you can’t put our eggs back...”

The cows erupt in laughter. As the stir quiets, the cow on the left flaps her ears up.

“Well...maybe you can you tell us what’s wrong with those guys from the sky that keep burning crop-circles?”

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