

KERRYGOLD and the KITTENS

ONE FINE MORNING ON THE FARM, AS KERRYGOLD - "THE PRETTIEST COW IN IRELAND" - WAS GRAZING PEACEFULLY IN THE SUNSHINE, HER FRIEND MATILDA THE CAT CAME OVER. MATILDA HAD A VERY WORRIED LOOK ON HER FACE.

"GOOD MORNING, MATILDA," SAID KERRYGOLD. MATILDA DIDN'T ANSWER, JUST SIGHED. THIS WAS UNUSUAL BECAUSE MATILDA WAS ORDINARILY A VERY FRIENDLY CAT, EVEN AROUND BRAN THE WOLFHOUND AND LAD THE COLLIE.

"WHAT'S WRONG?" ASKED KERRYGOLD. "IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN HELP YOU WITH?" "I HOPE SO, KERRYGOLD," MATILDA SAID AS SHE RUBBED UP AGAINST ONE OF KERRYGOLD'S LEGS, PURRING QUIETLY. "IT HAS TO DO WITH MY KITTENS ..."

KERRYGOLD KNEW THAT A FEW WEEKS BEFORE, MATILDA HAD GIVEN BIRTH TO A LITTER OF SIX BEAUTIFUL LITTLE KITTENS. ALICIA THE PIG HAD TOLD KERRYGOLD JUST THAT MORNING THAT THE KITTENS' EYES HAD OPENED. "THEY'RE READY TO START SEEING THE WORLD," ALICIA HAD SAID WITH A LAUGH. "MATILDA IS CERTAINLY GOING TO HAVE HER PAWS FULL WITH THAT BUNCH!"

KERRYGOLD HOPED THAT THERE WAS SOMETHING SHE COULD DO TO HELP HER FRIEND, ALTHOUGH - BEING A COW - SHE CERTAINLY DIDN'T KNOW A LOT ABOUT KITTENS. KERRYGOLD HAD SEEN MATILDA'S KITTENS JUST AFTER THEY WERE BORN, AND THEY LOOKED ADORABLE, BUT KERRYGOLD KNEW THAT ALICIA THE PIG WAS RIGHT - THEY COULD CERTAINLY BE A HAND (OR PAW) FULL ONCE THEY GOT OLD ENOUGH.

"YOU SEE I HAVE TO LEAVE THE FARM FOR A FEW DAYS," SAID MATILDA. "I HURT MY RIGHT HIND LEG A WHILE BACK CHASING THAT FERRET AWAY FROM THE HENHOUSE - YOU REMEMBER?" KERRYGOLD CERTAINLY DID REMEMBER - IT WAS THE NOISIEST DAY THAT HAD HAPPENED ON THE FARM IN A LONG TIME, WITH CHICKENS SQUAWKING, DOGS BARKING, DUCKS QUACKING, ALICIA'S PIGLETS

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SQUEALING, FARMER SEAN SHOUTING ... YES, KERRYGOLD REMEMBERED IT WELL! AND SHE REMEMBERED THAT MATILDA HAD BEEN THE HEROINE WHO HAD CHASED THE FERRET OUT OF THE BARNYARD.

"I FEEL FINE NOW," SAID MATILDA, "BUT FARMER SEAN WANTS TO TAKE ME TO THE VET IN THE CITY JUST TO MAKE SURE MY LEG IS HEALING PROPERLY."

"I SEE," SAID KERRYGOLD. "AND YOU'D LIKE ME TO LOOK AFTER YOUR KITTENS WHILE YOU'RE GONE?"

"WOULD YOU PLEASE?" SAID MATILDA. "I KNOW THAT FARMER SEAN'S WIFE JENNY AND THE CHILDREN WILL TAKE VERY GOOD CARE OF THEM, BUT I'D BE HAPPIER IF YOU COULD JUST KEEP AN EYE ON THINGS ... AFTER ALL YOU CAN SPEAK CAT LANGUAGE, AND THE OTHERS CAN'T."

OF COURSE KERRYGOLD SAID SHE WOULD BE HAPPY TO HELP. MATILDA THE CAT WAS VERY PLEASED TO HEAR THIS. SHE HURRIED BACK TO THE FARMHOUSE TO EXPLAIN TO THE KITTENS WHAT WOULD BE HAPPENING WHILE SHE WAS IN THE CITY.

'MAMA, WHAT'S A COW?' SAID JAKE, THE LARGEST AND MOST CURIOUS OF THE KITTENS. HIS SISTER SAMANTHA RAISED HER PAW, LIKE YOU DO WHEN YOU WANT TO ANSWER A QUESTION IN SCHOOL. "I KNOW! I KNOW, MAMA!" SHE MEOWED. "IT'S A TINY GREY ANIMAL WITH FOUR FEET LIKE US BUT IT'S NOT A CAT AND IT HAS A LONG TAIL AND IT LIKES CHEESE IT SAYS 'SQUEAK' AND NOT 'MEOW' AND ..." POOR SAMANTHA WAS OUT OF BREATH. "ISN'T THAT A COW, MAMA?"

"NOT QUITE," MATILDA CHUCKLED. "BUT HERE COMES A COW TO SAY HELLO. HI, KERRYGOLD!"

THE CURIOUS KITTENS STOOD UP IN THEIR BOX AND PUT THEIR PAWS ON THE EDGE TO KEEP THEMSELVES STEADY. OF COURSE, BEING

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GOOD LITTLE KITTENS, THEY DIDN'T FIDGET MUCH. THEIR BLUE EYES WERE OPEN WIDE AS THEY LOOKED AT THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE BOX.

KERRYGOLD HAD COME INTO THE FARMYARD FROM THE PASTURE AND WAS HEADING OVER TO THE KITTENS' BOX. "SEE THAT?" SAID MATILDA TO THE KITTENS. "THAT'S A COW. A VERY NICE ONE WHO WILL HELP JENNY AND THE CHILDREN KEEP YOU OUT OF TROUBLE WHILE I'M AWAY FOR A FEW DAYS."

THE KITTENS LOOKED AT ONE ANOTHER. KERRYGOLD SEEMED ENORMOUS AND THEY WEREN'T SURE ABOUT HER HORNS. AND WHAT WAS IN THAT BIG BAG SHE CARRIED AROUND? DID SHE UNDERSTAND CAT LANGUAGE? THE WORRIED KITTENS MEOWED QUESTIONS AT ONE ANOTHER. THEY HOPED THEIR MOM WOULD COME BACK SOON!

MEANWHILE MATILDA HAD JUMPED OUT OF THE BOX TO WELCOME KERRYGOLD TO THE CATS' SIDE OF THE FARMYARD. THE KITTENS NOTICED THEIR MAMA AND KERRYGOLD CHATTING. THAT WAS GOOD BECAUSE IT MEANT THAT KERRYGOLD SPOKE CAT.

SOON KERRYGOLD CAME OVER TO THE BOX. "HI, KITTENS!" SHE SAID. THE DEEP VOICE WAS COW BUT THE WORDS WERE CAT. THE KITTENS WERE DELIGHTED.

"MY NAME IS KERRYGOLD. I'M A COW. I LIVE ON THIS FARM BUT I SPEND MOST OF TIME OVER IN A BIG GRASSY FIELD CALLED A PASTURE. MY JOB IS TO GIVE MILK TO FARMER SEAN SO HE CAN MAKE BUTTER AND CHEESE AND ..."

"... AND CREAM?" ASKED JAKE. "DO YOU HAVE CREAM IN THERE TOO?" HE WAS POINTING WITH HIS PAW AT KERRYGOLD'S UDDERS.

MATILDA WAS A LITTLE EMBARRASSED, BUT KERRYGOLD LAUGHED. "YES, CREAM TOO! I THINK KITTENS LOVE CREAM, DON'T THEY?"

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A CHORUS OF HAPPY MEOWS CAME FROM THE BOX. THEN QUESTIONS: "DO COWS LIKE TO PLAY WITH BALLS OF TWINE?" SAMANTHA ASKED. "DO YOU LIKE CATNIP?" ASKED ANOTHER. "DO COWS PURR WHEN THEY'RE HAPPY LIKE WE DO?" ASKED ANOTHER. MATILDA WAS VERY HAPPY TO SEE HOW WELL THINGS WERE GOING.

MATILDA AND FARMER SEAN LEFT FOR THE CITY EARLY THE NEXT MORNING. KERRYGOLD CAME OVER AFTER MILKING TO SEE HOW THE KITTENS WERE DOING. THEY CERTAINLY WERE GETTING A LOT OF ATTENTION FROM JENNY AND THE CHILDREN!

KERRYGOLD MOOED "HELLO" AND THE KITTENS CAME BOUNCING OVER TO GREET HER. "I SEE YOU ALL KNOW ONE ANOTHER!" LAUGHED JENNY. THE KITTENS RUBBED AGAINST KERRYGOLD'S LEGS LIKE THEY WERE ALL OLD FRIENDS. KERRYGOLD WANTED TO LICK THE KITTENS BUT SHE WASN'T SURE THEY'D LIKE IT.

IN THE EVENING, KERRYGOLD AND MARIA THE MARE WERE STANDING CLOSE TO ONE ANOTHER GRAZING IN THE PASTURE. MARIA'S FOAL JUNIOR WASN'T FAR AWAY. IT WAS A LOVELY SPRING EVENING. THEN MARIA AND KERRYGOLD HEARD A SOUND. THEY LIFTED THEIR HEADS FROM THE GRASS AND LOOKED AT ONE ANOTHER.

"DID YOU HEAR THAT?" MARIA ASKED. "YES," SAID KERRYGOLD. "WHAT DID YOU THINK IT WAS?" "I'M NOT SURE," SAID MARIA, "BUT IT SOUNDED LIKE A VERY TINY MEOW." "THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT TOO," SAID KERRYGOLD WITH A WORRIED LOOK ON HER FACE.

SURE ENOUGH THERE WAS ANOTHER SOUND, DEFINITELY A MEOW THIS TIME - TWO MEOWS, IN FACT. "IT'S COMING FROM OVER THERE," SAID MARIA. SHE WALKED CAREFULLY OVER TO A SMALL BUSH WHILE KERRYGOLD AND THE FOAL WATCHED. "OH MY GOODNESS," THEY HEARD MARIA SAY. "THERE ARE TWO KITTENS OVER HERE AND ONE OF THEM IS CAUGHT ON A BRIAR!" SHE PUT HER MUZZLE INTO THE BUSH AND SHOOK IT GENTLY, AND AFTER A FEW SECONDS TWO KITTENS CAME JUMPING OUT. KERRYGOLD RECOGNIZED JAKE AND

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SAMANTHA! "WHAT ARE YOU TWO DOING SO FAR FROM THE FARMYARD?" ASKED KERRYGOLD. "YOU COULD GET INTO TROUBLE OUT HERE!"

"WE DID GET INTO TROUBLE OUT HERE," SAID SAMANTHA. "WE WERE DOING FINE UNTIL MY BROTHER GOT HIS TAIL CAUGHT IN THE BUSH. THANK YOU FOR RESCUING US," SHE SAID POLITELY TO MARIA. "NO TROUBLE AT ALL, MY DEAR," SAID MARIA. "BY THE WAY THIS IS MY FOAL JUNIOR." "HOW DO YOU DO?" SAID SAMANTHA TO JUNIOR. SAMANTHA WAS DOING ALL THE TALKING WHILE JAKE TRIED TO LICK HIS TAIL CLEAN OF THORNS AND LEAVES.

THE SUN WAS SETTING RAPIDLY. KERRYGOLD KNEW THAT SHE'D HAVE TO GET THE TWO ADVENTUROUS KITTENS BACK TO THE FARMYARD BEFORE IT GOT TOO DARK. BUT IT WAS A LONG WAY AND SHE DIDN'T WANT THEM TO GET INTO ANY MORE TROUBLE.

"I HAVE AN IDEA," SAID KERRYGOLD AT LAST. "IF I CAN GET THESE KITTENS ONTO MY BACK THEY CAN RIDE TO THE FARMYARD THAT WAY!"

THE KITTENS THOUGHT THAT WOULD BE GREAT FUN. KERRYGOLD BENT HER NECK AND TOLD THE KITTENS TO JUMP ON. "OUR CLAWS WON'T HURT YOU?" ASKED JAKE. "NO, THE SKIN ON MY NECK IS VERY THICK," SAID KERRYGOLD. "I WON'T FEEL A THING. I'LL STAND VERY STILL UNTIL YOU GET INTO THE BROAD FLAT PART OF MY BACK WHERE YOU CAN RIDE SAFELY."

AFTER TWO OR THREE TRIES AND A LITTLE HELP FROM MARIA, THE KITTENS MADE IT UP ONTO KERRYGOLD'S BACK. IT WAS HIGHER OFF THE GROUND THAN THEY HAD EVER BEEN, SO THEY WERE A LITTLE FRIGHTENED AT FIRST AND LET OUT A FEW LOUD MEOWS. FINALLY THEY SETTLED DOWN. MARIA AND JUNIOR STAYED VERY CLOSE WHILE KERRYGOLD SLOWLY MOVED OFF IN THE DIRECTION OF THE FARMYARD.

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IT TOOK A WHILE BUT COW, HORSES, AND KITTENS ALL ARRIVED SAFELY AT THE FARMYARD. THE SUN HAD GONE DOWN. JENNY AND THE CHILDREN WERE WAITING. THE CHILDREN CHEERED LOUDLY WHEN THEY SAW THE MISSING KITTENS ON KERRYGOLD'S BACK.

JAKE AND SAMANTHA WERE VERY TIRED AND VERY HAPPY TO BE BACK IN THEIR BOX WITH THEIR BROTHERS AND SISTERS. SOON ALL THE KITTENS WERE SOUND ASLEEP.

'THANK YOU ALL FOR GETTING THEM HOME SAFE," SAID JENNY TO KERRYGOLD AND THE TWO HORSES. "I DON'T KNOW WHAT MATILDA WOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF US IF SHE FOUND OUT THAT TWO OF HER KITTENS HAD ESCAPED. WE'LL KEEP A BETTER EYE ON THEM FROM NOW ON!"

THE CHILDREN RAN INTO THE BARN AND CAME OUT WITH THREE BIG RED APPLES, ONE FOR KERRYGOLD, ONE FOR MARIA, AND ONE FOR JUNIOR.

MILKING TIME FOR KERRYGOLD, HAY-TIME FOR THE HORSES , AND SIX LITTLE KITTENS SOUND ASLEEP IN THEIR BOX. WHAT A GREAT WAY TO END A BUSY DAY!

THE END