

Mad Cow

A short play

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Ghost enters..

BILL

I'm here tonight because Hell refused to take me. The Devil himself told me to walk the earth and "Get even! Then come back." I was betrayed and killed by my niece's worthless cow. I gave the girl a home, but the selfish child had to have her way in everything. She hand raised that cow. She must have been whispering in its ear with every swallow of milk, "Kill my uncle someday." I was a happy dairy farmer living by myself not far from here, when Elizabeth, twelve years old, arrived with a letter from her parents' attorney, saying her parents had died in a boating accident. I was her only living relative and they wanted me to care for her until she married or came of age. I hated my overbearing stuck-up sister. She had married a banker and moved to San Francisco. I never saw her again. I was about to tell the driver, "Take her to the orphanage," when I noticed a draw of \$500, which would come every month.

I asked her if she knew what was in the letter. She had no idea and where was her room? Just like her mother, knew nothing, but wanted everything. I told her she was penniless and if I kept her, she would have to earn her keep. Soon I had her milking the cows, caring for the chickens, keeping house and the vegetable garden.

When she was almost 16, one of the cows died while giving birth to a sickly female calf. The calf was only good for slaughter, but Elizabeth was going to save it. I was mad that she wanted to waste her time, which was my time, and take up space with that worthless hungry calf that would consume gallons of milk. I got out my knife to slit its throat, but she grabbed a pitchfork and demanded I get out of the barn. My sister's brat had turned into a full scale witch. She screamed, "You'll die if you touch that orphan!" I left the barn, figuring the calf would be dead by morning. She named her Mabel.

She didn't die that night and with Elizabeth's 24 hour constant care she was out of danger in two weeks. Mabel was a runt, but perky. This foolishness had gone far enough.

Everything must earn its keep. The day Elizabeth went back to school, I put a rope around Mabel's neck and pulled her out behind the barn where I butchered stock. She knew what I intended. She fought against the rope until she fell exhausted on the ground. That was when I turned my back to open the gate, she silently got up and butted me against the fence with her hornless head, but it knocked the air out of me. Quickly, she took off running and did not reappear until Elizabeth returned home.

When Elizabeth saw Mabel with the rope around her neck she guessed what had happened. After that she took Mabel to school with her and slept in the barn next to her. Mabel had free run of the farm. She followed Elizabeth like a puppy. She would often stare at me. I knew she was daring me to try it again.

When Elizabeth was seventeen, a young Irish immigrant courted her. His business was hauling freight, like oranges to the packing houses or train depot. People liked him and called him "Mister Kelly". I hated him, because Elizabeth was charmed by him.

He and Mabel followed her around. You would of thought she was the queen of heaven. I feared this was the beginning of the end of my monthly checks.

He asked for her hand in marriage. I told him to get off my property. He said his business was doing well and he would soon have enough to buy a home. I went to get my gun. He said Elizabeth and he loved each other and he would marry her with or without my permission. I told him she was penniless and she would never be in my will. It didn't matter to him. He shouted for Elizabeth to come with him right now. She came running out of the house with her suitcase. She said, "Wait, I've got to get Mabel. He will kill her."

She ran to the pasture gate. I followed her, shotgun in hand. Shooting Mabel was a better idea then shooting Mr. Kelly. She called Mabel from the pasture. She came running, I aimed the gun at Mabel. Elizabeth charged at me, grabbing the shotgun, and we struggled. She kicked me in the shin and the gun fell to the ground. I bent down to pick it up. At the same moment, Mabel came rushing from the pasture, knocked me over, and stepped on my chest as she ran by, crushing my ribs and lungs. I couldn't get a breath. Elizabeth screamed at Mr. Kelly to fetch the doctor. He hurried away. I died listening to Elizabeth hysterically apologizing, that she never meant for me to get hurt, she thanked me for all I had done for her, sharing my home and how sorry Mabel was. If only I had breath to tell her to "Cut the crap." And Mabel was not sorry. I saw her smiling.

I was dead before the doctor arrived. His report said my death was an unfortunate farming accident. Elizabeth had put the gun away and neither she nor Mr. Kelly mentioned our struggle. Soon after my death, Elizabeth found out how wealthy she was. I never made a will and Elizabeth got my farm, too. She decided to never marry. Inspired by her love for Mabel she turned my farm into a cow haven for orphaned and unwanted calves or old, crippled cows that no one wanted. Mabel was a contented cow. When she wasn't grazing she would sit by Elizabeth, chewing her cud. She lived to be twenty-two years old. Mr. Kelly continued with his freight business, eventually married, bought a farm, had four children and lived happily ever after.

I stayed on and haunted Elizabeth. She knew I was stalking her, but she would laugh and call me a pitiful old ghost who had learned nothing in life.

She wasn't scared of me. I couldn't drive her, nor even Mabel crazy. Mabel took no more notice of me then she did of the wind in the grass or a creak in the rafters. I couldn't get revenge and Hell won't take me. I wander this valley, no place to go. If only she hadn't arrived on my doorstep. If only, if only...

He wanders off stage