

THE STORY OF THE BOTTLED KISSES





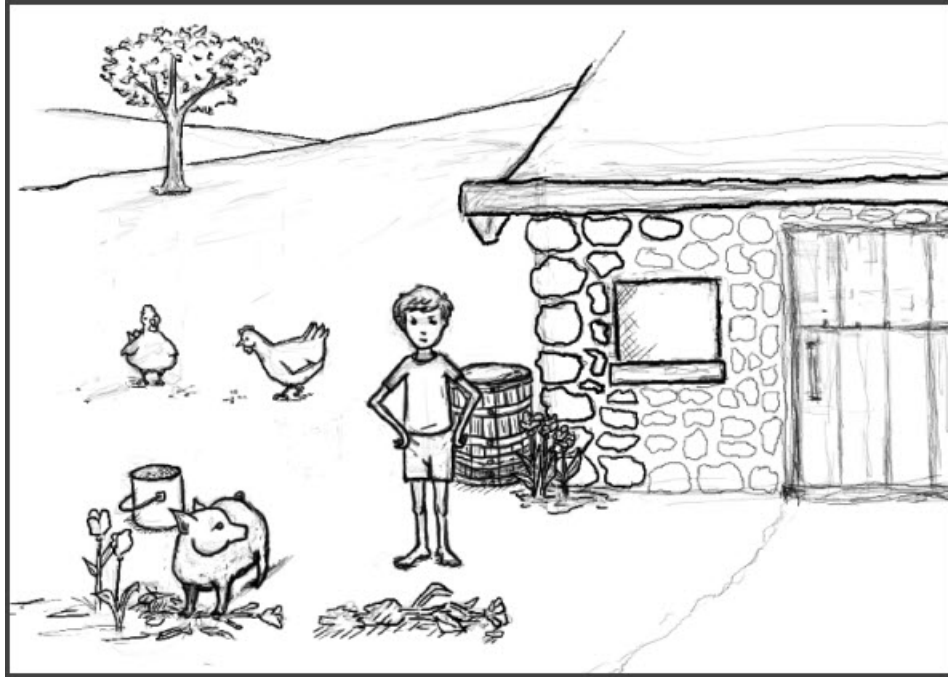
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THE STORY OF THE BOTTLED KISSES

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The Story of the Bottled Kisses



Pinky the Pig At It Again! Digging That Pig

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MORNING CHORES

It was some time ago, when creatures called dragons still lurked in remote forests, that there lived a boy called Jody. He was of the gangly sort, knobby knees and all, and his hair had limited encounters with a comb (much to his mother's dismay).

Jody and his mother lived on a tiny farm in the countryside. The two shared their abode with an array of some of the most mischief making barnyard animals that you would ever have the pleasure of meeting. And it was their duty to keep Jody on his toes while his mother worked at her spinning wheel weaving brightly colored coats and coverlets.

This particular day, Jody was in a hurry to do his morning chores because it was market day for him and his mother. The poor cow did her best not to flinch as Jody tugged hastily at her udders. Then Jody quickly moved on to collect some eggs from a group of objecting, clucking chickens despite their protest.

"All right, time for breakfast," called out Jody, which is music to any pig's ears.

Pinky the pig watched and waited while Jody tossed corn and hay to the others. His little, curly tail began to wag furiously as soon as he saw the slop bucket in Jody's hands, and he ran immediately

to his feeding trough. But Jody, being occupied with his hurry, accidentally poured the slop directly on the pig's head instead of into the trough.

"Oh, Pinky! I am sorry about that," said Jody, giving Pinky a gentle pat on the rump.

But Pinky was delighted, as apparently there is no wrong way to feed a pig.

About that time, Jody's mother began to call him. It was time for them to go to the marketplace, where Jody would help his mother sell her beautiful silken coats and warm woolen coverlets. They set off with a neatly packed cart and hopes for a good day of business.

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The Evil Tax Collector Admires the Beautiful, Silken Coat

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Jody Sees the Ruby Ring

THE TAX COLLECTOR

Strolling through the marketplace that day there happened to be an evil tax collector who liked nothing more than to use his influence to swindle the local merchants. From the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of a coat that lay atop of Jody's cart. The tax collector cooly walked over and handled the coat.

Jody could see by the man's clothing that he was of some great importance. And his smugness was just as note worthy as the glittering red ruby he wore on his left hand.

"Hmm," began the tax collector to Jody's mother. "This is a fairly interesting coat. How much will you take for it?"

"Thank you, sir," started Jody's mother, then replied, "Four pieces of silver."

"That might be what you would ask of others, but what about me? Surely you have a different price altogether for me," said the tax collector.

"I'm sorry to say, but no," said Jody's mother as soothingly as she could, for she could see by the look on the tax collector's face that he was not accustomed to paying a proper price for anything.

"What?" said the tax collector, his eyes beginning to bulge and redden. "Do my ears deceive me? Are you not aware of who I am, and the power I hold with the king?"

"I know of you, sir. But you must understand that this coat is made from the finest silk and the richest purple, with many hours of labor. I should think you would not begrudge a widow with a small child a fair price," said Jody's mother while trying to appear unshaken by the tax collector's reddened (and now, twitching) eyes.

The tax collector cared nothing for a widow's plight, and he cared even less for children. And now he was truly outraged and said, "You are very bold to answer so," he fumed. "I should say that you would have felt honored indeed that one such as I would even so much as look into your cart of useless vestures. Why, you're nothing more than a peddler of ill quality, poorly made..."

As the tax collector ranted on, he was picking up and throwing down every coat and coverlet in the cart. He saw to it that he said something insulting about each one in turn before tossing it aside. When there was nothing left to insult he turned to go. He had only taken several steps when his lust overtook him.

Suppose someone else is foolish enough to buy that coat, he thought to himself. A purple vesture of pure silk. I could not bear to see someone else draped in that coat. It should belong only to me!

The tax collector quickly returned to the cart, glared into Jody's mother's eyes and said in a quiet voice as if to reveal a secret, "You are a very simple minded woman. You have only done yourself harm by your stubbornness. Here be your four pieces of silver – time will tell what your greed will give you."



With that, the tax collector threw the silver pieces into the cart, hastily rummaged through the crumpled heap of garments, grabbed the silken coat and stormed away.

Jody loved his mother very much, and he wished that he had done something to defend her. He looked around at the mess about the cart and scowled. Picking up a coat, he began, "I wish I were as Father was, don't you? I mean, strong and brave?"

"Don't fret yourself, Jody," said his mother. "You are very strong. And brave? Why, who kills all the spiders in the house, me? I should say not!"

The two shared a smile, and then began to refold their goods and tidy up the cart.

Suddenly, Jody's mother gasped.

"Mother? What's the matter?" asked Jody.

"It's the... in the cart! It must have fallen off his... his...," whispered Jody's mother.

"What? What are you saying? What's in the cart? What fell off what?"

Jody's mother picked something out of the cart and cupped it in her hands. Jody saw a crimson glitter between her fingers. Finally, she was able to say it. "It's the tax collector's ring!"