

## The old cow

It was one of those mornings when you woke up drowsy, feeling you hadn't slept, with dreams still running circles around your head and a song ringing in your ear. Usually it was one you didn't really like. This morning it was a nursery rhyme. There was an old woman who swallowed a fly.

Breakfast dragged on. A cock crowed. Birds sang. Her brothers went off to play football in some one day tournament. Burnt toast hung out defiantly. Her parents were sitting at their desks reading and writing, unnoticing. They had wanted a peaceful holiday in the country. A break from the city. Ok, but there wasn't all that much to do.

Rosalita wasn't even sure she could remember the whole song, but she thought it ended with the woman swallowing a cow. And she is dead of course. You would be if you ate a full cow. Whole.

There was no wi fi or anything similar. Not even cable TV. Rosalita decided to go for a walk. Sheep stared at her longingly, as if they too were bored, and just wanted a social life that would solve all their problems.

There was an old woman who swallowed a dog to kill the cat to eat the fly. All jumbled up, but Rosalita couldn't get the lyrics out of her mind. If she had internet she could have googled or youtubed it and found out what the real words were.

She swallowed a cow. She's dead of course.

But she isn't.

Her wellington boots sucked up mud, clogged in water and snuggled up to the glistening grass. Rosalita had learned to ignore sheep. They ignored her too. But that big cow over there had a woman's head. She wasn't dead at all. She was alive and well, spread out comfortably, lying, chewing her cud, her stomach full of spiders, cats, dogs and god knows what more. She gazed

through the electric fence enticingly, hinting at a life beyond eternity, the endless fawning of eyes which would never betray.

She wasn't dead of course. That old cow of a woman was alive and well and staring Rosalita in the face. Awkward. Not good for a summer holiday. If they had only gone to the beach.

A few years ago Rosalita had run from the cows thinking they were all bulls, but now she was older, and her grandfather had shown her the difference. Rosalita held her stare, eyes unflickering in the challenge.

The wind rustled her hair, strands hung out in her eyes pretending to be teardrops. It was bitter, cold air, an ice-cream in motion. Rosalita squinted in the damp sunlight. Rosalita didn't move. She caught those sorrowful eyes, headlight on. And held out the palm of her hand.

The old cow swayed her head, opened her mouth, seemed to yawn. She was wearing glasses. She was looking very well for someone who had swallowed all those animals. Rosalita sighed. It wasn't easy being an adolescent. She'd stopped understanding kids and refused to think too much about adults. The old woman's stomach must be rumbling. But Rosalita couldn't hear anything beyond the silence of the morning, the roar of a distant tractor, the rustle of sheep shearing through the grass, one after another, the bitter breeze hanging in from the north. They could have gone to the beach. But that would have been too nice, too generous, too simple. Adults were just big animals: made to freak out teenagers and put them in their place.

Rosalita took a step forward. The old woman shook herself and stood up. She moved her flanks, swirled her tail. Flies fled. Rosalita knew this was a sign she was healthy: her grandfather had taught her how to wake up animals and judge how they responded to the call. The old woman hadn't died. She wasn't going to die. She was just fine. Rosalita held out her hand again. The old cow stared and took a step closer.

Rosalita caught her eyes and felt sorry for the poor old woman who had to swallow so many things just to make a song rhyme. A tune that wouldn't leave her head. Their heads. They swung in unison. There was an old woman ...

The old cow approached and Rosalita could soon feel her breath on her face, rippling the skin. Gently, with no sudden moves to frighten, Rosalita offered the palm of her left hand closer, expecting the rough twitch of a harsh tongue against her finger tips. Rosalita was prepared. She'd done it before. Her grandfather had taught her how to deal with cows.

The mouth opened. Rosalita could feel hot steam eat beneath her fingernails, bellows of chewed cud ruminating around her nostrils. Then the tongue lunged forward.

It was all soft and warm. No sandpaper rasping.

She was an old woman. Just hidden in that cow. The tongue said it all.

Could you feed cows milk Rosalita wondered. She would like to give that old woman a source of comfort, take her home, put her on the sofa in front of the TV after all those verses surviving the routines of such a harrowing song. But that wouldn't work. It was nearly lunch time. Rosalita turned around and walked slowly back to the farmhouse, without looking behind. She was still humming the song as she entered and asked her mummy what was for lunch. Roast beef was the answer. Rosalita shivered. She promised herself she would never become an old woman.

By: E. F. S. Byrne

CONTACT:

Enda Scott

José Maluquer, 15 Blq 7 3-D

41008 Seville,

Spain.

[efs@scottboardman.com](mailto:efs@scottboardman.com)

<http://eflbytes.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.scottboardman.com/lit>