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Poor Cow

by Maureen Marsh

Rebellion meant a look in the eyes, an inflection of the voice, at most an occasional whispered word. There was no space for anything but acquiescence to all demands, no matter how painful or strange. This is how it was with the apes in clothes.

I learnt this very early on, perhaps it was the only thing I learnt about the apes in clothes. Flora was the first experience of true acceptance and compassion I had experienced since my arrival on the farm. A large brown beauty with soulful eyes and the wisdom of a heart many times broken but never obliterated. I was a few months old, confused, scared, in need of a mother, and a mother she has been to me. Licking my face that first morning out in pasture. Licking away the tears and the dust. Flora does not talk a lot but you feel her presence somewhere deep in your heart, like a warm sunbeam, like a hug and a kiss and a blanket.

Flora has stood beside me at all the key points of this existence. She comforted me after the apes in clothes thrust me in an iron cage and forced an arm inside me. It was painful and confusing. I asked Flora why? She calmly sighed that it was so that I would have a baby and give the apes milk. Flora stood next to me when the apes in clothes stole my baby from me before my baby had time to properly suckle. I ran the length of the pasture up and down crying and crying. Flora stood next to me quietly, not speaking but being there so that I was not alone in my despair.

Flora is our leader our here in pasture. There are 25 of us. Dee Dee is a skittish newbie who reminds me of myself not so long ago. She is in love with life and chases butterflies. "she is young....that won't last" says Edie. Edie is angry and taciturn in equal measure. She has had 3 babies stolen from her and now lives with a heavy heart.

Every day we are taken to be milked until our nipples are red raw or bleeding. Once, early on my arrival and soon after the apes in clothes had started stealing my milk, I saw an older cow Bathsheba shake and fall to the ground in exhaustion. I heard the apes shouting in agitation, and then several of them came in and dragged her shaking body away. We never saw Bathsheba again.

It is not all sad, however, there is still beauty in this life. The warmth of the sun when it catches your back. The taste of the grass and the companionship of dear friends. Some of us tell stories of apes that are kind and take you to beautiful places where you are loved and taken care of and never have to lose another baby. Edie scoffs at such tales "Impossible...the apes have no hearts...there are no good apes, and there are no old cows....why is that do you suppose?" I turn to Flora for counsel..."I once met a good ape" she says...he would come and sit with us and read from his book. He had a dog called Bella and Bella told me he was a peaceful ape and was reading from his book of Love"

It is a strange thing that I never understand what the apes are saying, even though I understand every other animal including the bees and Butterflies. Flora says its because I have been hurt by them and my heart can no longer hear them.
Flora tell me a beautiful poem from the good apes book of love

In the end these things matter most
How well did you love?

I think about this and know that I loved my baby beyond words and would have given my life for her if it had been an option.

How fully did you live?

Yes, to breathe, to feel that sky above you and the beauty that is always there at the heart of all things...

And what was the last line? I look over at Flora. She has not been herself of late. A little shakier, a little sadder....she reminds me of Bathsheba just before she went down...but I dare not contemplate that....or Edies words " there are no old cows....because I know the truth of them...what was the last line?...Oh yes...

How deeply did you let go?