

ANGELA

(Written for "The Listener" by
RACHEL M. WHEELER)

"HER name," Grandfather said firmly, "is Angela." "Why Angela?" we protested in chorus. Anything less like an angel would be difficult to imagine.

She was a Holstein, broad and stolid, as unremarkable a cow as you could find anywhere, but the lady had character.

Grandfather had gone to the saleyards for no definite purpose except that he liked going there. He liked to watch the animals and the people, to lean over the rails and share the excitement and rapid fire of the auction.

And so, like the Jack and the Beanstalk story in reverse, he had returned with Angela. He explained that it would be good for us children to learn how to look after animals, cheerfully disregarding each year's troupe of pet lambs, the angora rabbits, the two pups we were bringing up for the man down

the road, and the ponies on which we were forever sneaking rides.

But Angela was different. Apart from her uses as an educator, she had definite material advantages. We had been getting our milk from the farm next door, an unsatisfactory business because sometimes it was forgotten and often it looked thin and rather pinched. Angela looked like a good milker, Grandfather said, and besides it was time we learned to milk: as necessary an accomplishment to a country girl as dancing to a debutante.

I wasn't so sure. I could see disadvantages looming up as thick as beans at a beanfeast. So being the youngest, I stood politely aside and suggested that the others should learn first. They acquired the knack easily enough but somehow I could never get beyond the

dribble-up-the-sleeve, drop-the-bucket stage. After a while they gave up bothering about me and, gloating, I remained forever uninitiated.

But I wasn't allowed to escape entirely. On Saturday mornings it was my job to hitch a rope to Angela and graze her in the orchard, on the long grass that grew there, lush and plentiful. Normally there was sufficient feed for her in the paddock, but when the grass was drying up, Grandfather conceived the brilliant notion of letting her clean up the orchard, which she did in more ways than one.



With Grandfather she was a model of docility and eager co-operation, but with me she behaved like a fiend. Those Saturday morning sessions! Two hours is an eternity when you're small, and the sun is shining, and there's a host of things you're aching to be doing, but to be moored to a cow for two hours, and that cow Angela, was sheer torture.

She would wait till everyone was out of earshot, then she would suddenly toss her head and bolt through the orchard, the rope burning as it tore through my hands. Then she would wind herself, rope and all, round one of the precious trees, or she'd tangle herself up in the wire-netting and stand there, feet planted firmly on her rope, head lowered, daring me to do anything about it. Once she had actually cleared the fence and landed in the vegetable garden, trampling over Grandfather's peas and broccoli. On such occasions, panic-stricken, I'd stand there, bawling lustily, till at length someone came to the rescue. Then Angela would shake her head apologetically and meekly disentangle herself, while Grandfather would mutter that he didn't know what children were coming to these days, they'd no animal sense, and when he was a youngster, etc., etc.

In other ways, too, Angela was a trial.

On mornings when we were late she would be particularly perverse. We all



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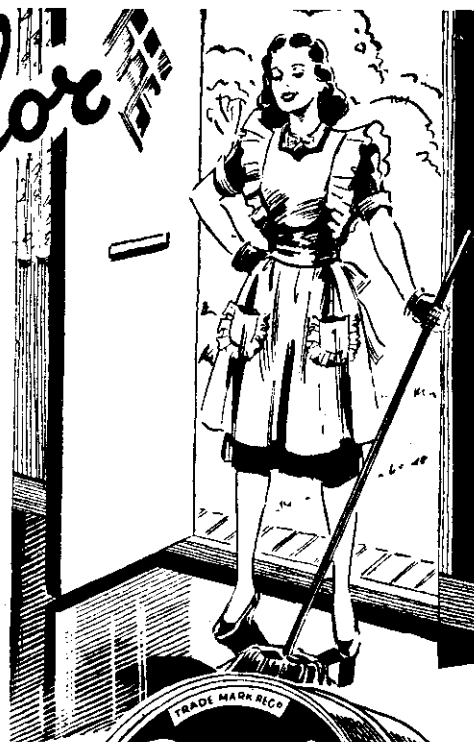
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